

WORKING GROUP ON CUSTOMARY AND INFORMAL JUSTICE AND SDG16+

Global convening on strengthening customary and informal pathways to people-centred justice

World Justice Forum 2025

Side event concept note

Date and time:	June 27, 2025, 09:00-13:30 (CEST)
Co-hosts:	Working Group on Customary and Informal Justice and SDG16+ including African Centre of Excellence for Access to Justice; Cordaid; Hiil; Kituo Cha Sheria; GJN - Namati; Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies; Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG); The Tenure Facility; UNDP; UNICEF; UN Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions - ORLOSI; UN Women; World Justice Project; others to be confirmed
Location:	Warsaw, Poland

Game-changing action is urgently needed to **realize the promise of justice for all** embodied in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 16). At the landmark World Justice Forum 2025 (June 23-26), the global convening proposed here will be co-organized by members of the global Working Group on Customary and Informal Justice and SDG16+ to drive policy change and marshal resources for a transformative shift in advancing people-centred justice. A broad array of allies, including ministerial delegations, judicial leaders, representatives of intergovernmental agencies, civil society and grassroots justice defenders, and customary and informal justice providers, will showcase effective engagement between diverse justice stakeholders that enhances access to justice and the rule of law, sustains peace, and contributes to land and climate justice, and unite behind a bold shared vision to deliver cost-effective, people-centred solutions at-scale. The side event will serve as the public debut of the Working Group's global advocacy campaign on diverse pathways to people-centred justice.

1. Background

A decade ago, the international community committed to an ambitious agenda for sustainable development. As of 2025, few of the targets associated with SDG 16 have been achieved, notably including target 3 on ensuring equal access to justice for all. Realising the promise of SDG 16.3 on ensuring equal access to justice for all is critical to achieve progress on 2030 Agenda more broadly, yet recent data shows that most countries are experiencing a “rule of law recession”, with access to civil justice notably declining in 66% of countries.¹ **Game-changing action is urgently needed** to close the growing justice gap and accelerate progress toward ensuring justice for all.

The people-centred approach has emerged as a central conceptual framework for rule of law policy and programming at the global level, and a key response to the worldwide rule of law recession.² Notably, the global multi-stakeholder [Working Group on Customary and Informal Justice \(CIJ\) and](#)

¹ [WJP \(2024\)](#)

² For example, [USAID \(2023\)](#) and [OECD \(2021\)](#)

SDG16+ published a 2023 report, [Diverse pathways to people-centred justice](#), that maps out one potential route to realising the promise of that framework: **better interface and coherence with customary, informal, and community-based justice actors and practices.**

Customary, informal, and community-based systems are **used by the vast majority of justice seekers to claim their rights, seek redress for grievances, and resolve disputes**; these systems tend to be more affordable, faster, and more proximate than formal justice pathways, and usually enjoy high levels of local legitimacy. Mounting evidence³ suggests that effective interface and coherence between formal justice systems and customary, informal, and community-based actors and practices can deliver cost-effective, people-centred justice solutions, not only enhancing access to justice and the rule of law, but also contributing to conflict prevention and sustaining peace,⁴ and advancing land and climate justice,⁵ among other aims. Given the growing justice financing gap,⁶ this form of engagement may be one of the few evidence-based, scalable solutions for achieving justice for all by 2030.

Six years on from an expert group meeting on CIJ and SDG16+ at the 2019 World Justice Forum that led to formation of the Working Group, the **movement to bring CIJ to the centre of efforts to achieve justice for all continues to gain momentum**. The Working Group now includes a myriad of intergovernmental, civil society, and research partners, and its 2023 report was adopted as a key deliverable of the global [Justice Action Coalition](#). In order to accelerate transformative action in the final five years of the 2030 Agenda, the proposed global convening will bring together members of the Working Group and Justice Action Coalition with a diverse array of allies to drive policy change and marshal resources.

The global convening will be a **half-day event to precede or immediately following the landmark World Justice Forum 2025**, the premiere international gathering of rule of law policymakers and practitioners. The event will engage policymakers, thought leaders, and experts from the national and global levels in a dynamic dialogue on CIJ that centres sustained, rights-based interface and coherence with CIJ actors in the global justice agenda. It will aim to deliver:

- (1) A **call to action** articulating broad international political support
- (2) **High-ambition commitments** from diverse parties registered in an online platform⁷

The call to action will be a declaration by Member States recognizing **the centrality of CIJ actors and practices in achieving people-centred justice** and endorsing key actions intended to advance engagement with CIJ systems to achieve people-centred justice. It will be accompanied by the announcement of high-ambition commitments by key stakeholders, including legislative and policy changes, development and implementation of programmes, and substantial increases in public and donor funding to engagement with diverse pathways to people-centred justice. Commitment-makers will be encouraged to register their pledges on an online platform that will promote transparency, monitoring, and accountability. Taken together, commitments will accelerate the pace of progress toward the achievement of SDG16+.

The global convening will also serve as the **public launch of the Working Group's multi-level campaign**, intended to build policy consensus on CIJ and drive more relevant and effective justice investments. The campaign will catalyse uptake of the Working Group's recommendations in global, regional, national, and sub-national policy frameworks and processes, and in the investment decisions of governments and bilateral and multilateral donors. It will focus on policy influencing at global and

³ World Bank (2025)

⁴ [IDLO \(2022\)](#)

⁵ [Van Vollenhoven Institute \(2024\)](#)

⁶ [ODI Global \(2024\)](#)

⁷ Commitments may be registered in a new or existing platform, to be determined in due course

regional milestone events, coordinated country-level implementation in 3-5 countries, and forging of coalitions that build engagement with CIJ as a transecting enabler across key policy agendas (conflict prevention and sustaining peace, land and climate justice, etc.).

2. Objectives

The **main objectives** of the global convening will be to:

- (1) Spotlight practical insights on how improved interface and coherence between formal and customary, informal, and community-based justice actors contributes to people-centred justice
- (2) Stimulate concrete action to advance people-centred justice through engagement with CIJ systems, in the form of a political declaration (call to action) and public commitments by key stakeholders
- (3) Foster knowledge exchange and coalition-building amongst policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, strengthening substantive action

3. Speakers and target audience

Speakers will constitute a high-level ensemble reflecting gender and regional balance (see indicative speakers in annex 1), including:

- Ministers or members of ministerial delegations
- Senior representatives of the Working Group and Justice Action Coalition
- Civil society leaders and grassroots justice defenders
- Eminent customary, faith, and Indigenous leaders
- Senior jurists and legal professionals
- Academics and researchers
- Expert practitioners

The **target audience** for the event is policymakers and practitioners present in Warsaw for the World Justice Forum, including:

- Representatives of UN Member States, especially members of the Justice Action Coalition and OECD-DAC bilateral donors, and specifically personnel following SDG16+ implementation, the UN Secretary-General's New Vision for the Rule of Law and New Agenda for Peace, and related policy processes
- UN system, esp. UNDP, UN Women, OHCHR, OROLSI, UNODC, GFP for the Rule of Law, and the peacebuilding architecture (UNPBC, PBSO, etc.)
- National and global CSOs and networks focused on access to justice, rule of law, human rights, conflict prevention and sustaining peace, and land and climate justice

4. Format

The event **format** will be an in-person or hybrid series of addresses, moderated panel discussions, and informal exchanges, structured so as to maximize the participation of diverse voices (see indicative programme in annex 2).

Indicative programme

<u>Time</u>	<u>Session aim</u>	<u>Indicative speakers and moderators</u>
09:00-09:15	<i>Opening ceremony: Welcome and blessing from customary, faith, and Indigenous leaders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eminent customary authority ▪ Faith leader ▪ Indigenous leader
09:15-09:35	<i>Opening remarks: What's at stake and what works?</i> Addresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Representative of Poland ▪ Representative of WG on CIJ and SDG16+ ▪ Representative of Justice Action Coalition
09:35-10:35	<i>Spotlight session: Integrating customary and informal justice and promoting accountability</i> Panel format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Senior policymaker ▪ Senior expert practitioner ▪ CSO representative ▪ Academic or researcher <p><i>Moderator: Hiil</i></p>
10:35-12:00	<i>Commitment-making session: Practical actions for transformative change</i> Formal presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ministers and senior policymakers ▪ Senior representatives of the multilateral system ▪ CSOs and networks ▪ Representatives of the WG on CIJ and SDG16+ and allies <p><i>Moderator: Cordaid & Pathfinders</i></p>
12:00-12:30	<i>Closing ceremony: Symbolic celebration and issuing of the call to action</i> Addresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minister or senior policymaker ▪ Senior representative of the multilateral system ▪ Grassroots justice defender ▪ Eminent customary authority
12:30-13:30	<i>Networking lunch</i>	