

African Regional Forum on People-Centered Justice 2025

“Advancing People-Centered Justice in Africa: Building Just Societies for All”

Session Concept Note

Leveraging African Union (AU) and Regional Mechanisms to Strengthen Access to Justice for All

Date: **28 October 2025**

Time: **09:30-10:45 a.m. GMT (UTC+0)** (Placeholder)

Location: Banjul, The Gambia

Venue: **Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Center – Thematic Room.**
(alongside the 85th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights)

African Alliance FOR PEOPLE-CENTERED JUSTICE

Co-organizers:





Introduction

Drawing on inspiration from the successful 2024 United Nations (UN) Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on People-Centered Justice, co-convened by the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Women, the World Justice Project, and others, and building on the momentum of the African Alliance on People-Centered Justice (AAPCJ) since its launch in November 2024, the **African Regional Forum on People-Centered Justice** will convene diverse stakeholders to chart a path forward for people-centered justice in Africa. The Forum will be held alongside the 85th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Peoples and Human Rights (ACPHR) in Banjul, The Gambia, to leverage the presence of a broad spectrum of key stakeholders. This session will explore how the African Union (AU) and regional bodies like the ACPHR and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) can be instrumental in expanding access to justice across the continent. It will focus on how to align various like-minded interests to ensure equitable delivery of justice in Africa. The session will also highlight existing opportunities at a regional level for leveraging resources and partnerships to promote people-centered justice at the national level.

Background and Rationale

The African continent faces persistent challenges in ensuring equitable and accessible justice for all its citizens. Despite the existence of regional human rights mechanisms, such as the ACPHR, many countries struggle to effectively leverage these mechanisms to address domestic legal and human rights issues, including access to justice issues. National governments, regional bodies, and international partners must work collaboratively to strengthen the influence of these institutions, promote human rights, and improve access to justice, including reparative justice.

This session is designed to explore practical strategies for African nations to actively shape and benefit from regional human rights bodies, ensuring that they serve as catalysts for meaningful reform. They also aim to identify opportunities within regional leadership, such as the ECOWAS presidency, to elevate people-centered justice across the region, responding to the emerging need for inclusive, responsive, and sustainable justice systems. Furthermore, this session will highlight past successes in promoting legal reforms, access to justice, and human rights awareness through the ACPHR, while drawing attention to new and emerging challenges, such as the theme of justice for Africans and people of African descent through reparations. The session will investigate how a people-centered justice approach to reparations focuses on addressing the needs, voices, and experiences of impacted communities.

The focus on strengthening access to justice through the ACPHR's guidance and influence responds to the demand for practical tools and normative frameworks that can be adapted and implemented at the national level. Similarly, aligning donor programming with regional justice needs highlights the importance of coordinated efforts that prioritize localized solutions and sustainable development. Together, the session topics aim to foster a more responsive, participatory, and resilient regional justice landscape capable of confronting present and future challenges.

Session Objectives

- Explore mechanisms for effectively integrating ACHPR recommendations and frameworks into national laws and policies.
- Examine opportunities within Sierra Leone's ECOWAS presidency to prioritize and advance people-centered justice initiatives.
- Analyze how ACHPR's normative documents and decisions can be adapted to improve access to justice at the national level.
- Examine how donor initiatives can be strategically aligned with regional justice priorities to maximize the impact of people-centered justice programs.

Agenda

Time	Topic	Speaker(s)/Format
09:30-09:40	Introduction and agenda Opening Remarks and Aligning Donor Programming with Regional Justice Needs The moderator will discuss how donor agencies can strategically align their programs to support regional justice initiatives that prioritize people-centered outcomes or create adaptable and scalable interventions that enhance access to justice for all.	Moderator. Aimee Ongeso, Program Manager, Open Society Foundations
09:40-09:50	Utilizing Sierra Leone's ECOWAS Presidency to Promote People-Centered Justice in the ECOWAS Region The speaker will explore the unique opportunities presented by Sierra Leone's ECOWAS presidency to spearhead and scale initiatives aimed at promoting people-centered justice across the region. The speaker will also discuss how to set regional priorities that enhance justice accessibility and responsiveness to citizens' needs. Additionally, this intervention will cover strategies for engaging with regional stakeholders, including civil society and community leaders, to ensure that reforms are people-centered and widely supported. The speaker will further address the concept of reparative justice from a people-centered approach.	Hon. Alpha Sesay, Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Sierra Leone
09:50-10:00	How African Nations Can Shape and Benefit from the Work of the ACHPR The speaker will explore the avenues through which African countries, particularly Malawi, can actively collaborate with the ACHPR to promote access to justice. Emphasis will be placed on the mutual influence between the Commission and individual nations. The speaker will also address ways in which the Commission's frameworks and	Pacharo Kayira, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Malawi to the UN in Geneva

	recommendations can be effectively implemented at the national level to enhance access to justice, providing examples of good and effective implementation of people-centered justice approaches taking place in Malawi.	
10:00-10:10	UNDP Gambia’s Experience in Enhancing People-Centered Justice in The Gambia Through Strategic Partnerships and Collaborative Governance The speaker will share insights into UNDP’s strategic initiatives and collaborative efforts within The Gambia aimed at augmenting people-centered justice. The speaker will also explore how UNDP's approach in The Gambia in fostering partnerships with intergovernmental, governmental, and non-governmental organizations has been instrumental in advancing access to justice. Participants will learn about successful case studies, innovative frameworks, and lessons learned in addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities for justice reform. The aim is to inspire policymakers and stakeholders to forge stronger alliances for a future where justice is seen primarily from a people-centered lens.	Ms. Mandisa Mashologu, UNDP Resident Representative, The Gambia
10:10-10:20	Strengthening Access to Justice in African Countries through the ACHPR’s Guidance and Influence The speaker will examine how the ACHPR provides guidance and frameworks that can be utilized to strengthen access to justice in African countries and provide one or two case studies where the Commission’s involvement has led to significant advancements in legal reform and access to justice. The speaker will also address how national governments can integrate the Commission’s recommendations and regional normative instruments into domestic policy and law. Finally, the speaker will discuss how legal empowerment for the people historically most affected by injustices can help address the needs, voices, and experiences of impacted communities to promote equity and reparative justice.	Hon. Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, ACHPR Commissioner
10:20-10:35	Interactive Session with the Audience	All participants
10:35-10:40	Final word from the speakers	All the speakers
10:40-10:45	Takeaways, conclusions, and closing remarks	Moderator