

African Regional Forum on People-Centered Justice

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

Session Concept Note

Building Bridges: Promoting Diverse Pathways to Justice through a People- Centred Approach

Date: **28 October 2025**

Time: **14:45–16:00 GMT (UTC+0)**

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 UN Asia-Pacific regional conference on people-centred justice (co-convened by IDLO with UNDP, UNEP, UN Women, World Justice Project, and others), and building on the momentum of the African Alliance on People-Centred Justice (AAPCJ), 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 co-located with 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. Given the salience of customary, community-based, and other informal systems not only for fostering access to justice and the rule of law but also social cohesion and sustaining peace, IDLO and UNDP will jointly convene a thematic session on this topic, reflecting their sustained engagement with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and commitment to advancing diverse justice pathways across the continent.

Background and Rationale

People-centered justice approaches recognize that justice systems must respond to the needs, experiences, and realities of individuals and communities, particularly those historically marginalized. Customary, community-based, and other informal justice actors and practices are critical components of the broader justice ecosystem. There is an urgent need to recognize, strengthen, and scale these efforts, building resilient and inclusive pathways to justice that leave no one behind. In this context, IDLO and UNDP will co-convene a **thematic session on diverse pathways to justice**.

Customary and informal justice systems play a crucial role in facilitating access to justice across Africa, where formal court systems often remain inaccessible to large segments of the population. These traditional mechanisms, which include traditional chiefly courts, customary mediation, processes rooted in diverse faith traditions, and the work of community-based dispute resolution mechanisms, provide immediate and affordable pathways to justice that operates in local languages and reflect shared values. Recent analysis by the World Bank indicates that these systems are **the main means of accessing justice for most people in Africa** and address up to 80% of justice problems in fragile and conflict-affected contexts¹. Meanwhile, challenges related to matters like inconsistent accountability or discriminatory norms highlight the continuous need for strengthening safeguards and ensuring a rights-based engagement with customary and informal justice providers. Notably, customary, community-based, and informal systems also serve as vital instruments for conflict prevention and peacebuilding by addressing grievances before they escalate, maintaining social cohesion through restorative rather than punitive approaches, and preserving the social fabric that binds communities together². Their emphasis

¹ See [World Bank \(2025\)](#)

² See, for example, [UN OSAA \(2024\)](#)

on reconciliation, compensation, and community healing rather than punishment helps prevent the cycle of revenge that can fuel broader conflicts.

One of the designated thematic focus areas of the African People-Centred Justice Forum in Oct 2025 is: “Strengthening customary, informal, and local justice systems while aligning them with human rights standards to ensure inclusive and trusted access to justice.” The thematic session will focus on how rights-based engagement with diverse pathways to justice can be a critical means of achieving **rapid, cost-effective improvements in access to justice in Africa**. It will share evidence-based solutions from across the region that can deliver at scale and options for sustainable financing, zeroing-in on approaches that enhance a meaningful interface and coherence with formal justice systems, promote responsiveness and accountability to excluded constituencies, and spotlight the role of diverse justice actors in enabling communities to enhance social cohesion and sustain peace. The session will highlight the importance of inclusive, culturally sensitive justice practices specific to the African context as well as the alignment of justice practices to human rights standards. It will encourage the sharing of good practices, innovative models, and community-led initiatives that advance equity, reconciliation, and social cohesion across diverse African communities. It will invite discussion on grassroots initiatives that prioritize the voices and needs of underserved communities, fostering equitable and accessible justice systems.

Session Objectives

- Share success stories from across the region that showcase the role of diverse actors and practices in achieving people-centred justice for all.
- Explore how improved interface and coherence between formal and customary, community-based, and other informal justice actors contributes to people-centred justice.
- Illuminate the intersections of CIJ with other efforts to sustain peace and enhance social cohesion in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
- Foster knowledge exchange and coalition-building amongst policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, strengthening substantive action.

Agenda

Time	Topic	Speaker(s)/Format
14:45-14:50	Welcome and agenda	Moderator, Victoria de Mello , Policy Specialist - Rule of Law, Security, Justice and Human Rights, UNDP Africa.
14:50-15:15	First round of panel discussion	Moderator, panelists: Dr Steve Akoth Ouma , Vice Chairperson of the National Steering Committee on Implementation of Alternative Justice Systems, Kenya.

Justice Omar Secka, Chairman of the Cadi Appeals Panel, The Gambia.

Ms Aicha Diarra, Project Manager, WILDAF-Mali.

Ms Yusfa Abdalla Said, Head of the Division for Legal Aid Management, Department of Constitution and Legal Affairs, Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, Tanzania.

15:15-15:40	Second round of panel discussion	Moderator, panelists: Dr Steve Akoth Ouma, Vice Chairperson of the National Steering Committee on Implementation of Alternative Justice Systems, Kenya. Justice Omar Secka, Chairman of the Cadi Appeals Panel, The Gambia. Ms Aicha Diarra, Project Manager, WILDAF-Mali. Ms Yusfa Abdalla Said, Head of the Division for Legal Aid Management, Department of Constitution and Legal Affairs, Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, Tanzania.
15:40-15:55	Audience Q&A	All participants
15:55-16:00	Takeaways, conclusions, and closing remarks	Moderator, Victoria de Mello , Policy Specialist - Rule of Law, Security, Justice and Human Rights, UNDP Africa.