

# **COMMUNIQUE OF THE REGIONAL DIALOGUE AND EXPERIENCE-SHARING WORKSHOP ON ECOSOCC-WEST AFRICA**

“ECOWAS of the People: Strengthening Citizens' Participation and Regional Integration through ECOSOCC Engagement in West Africa”

**Abuja, Nigeria | 3–4 August 2026**

**A collective call for a credible, inclusive, independent and effective mechanism for citizen participation in regional governance.**

**WADEMOS & PARTNERS**

## “ECOWAS of the People: Strengthening Citizens' Participation and Regional Integration through ECOSOCC Engagement in West Africa”

### 1. INTRODUCTION

We, representatives of civil society organisations, regional networks, community-based organisations, women and youth organisations, academia, media, governance and democracy practitioners, and other non-state actors from across West Africa, convened in Abuja, Nigeria, on 3-4 August 2026 for a Regional Dialogue and Experience-Sharing Workshop on the operationalisation of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of ECOWAS (ECOSOCC-West Africa).

The dialogue was convened under the theme, “ECOWAS of the People: Strengthening Citizens' Participation and Regional Integration through ECOSOCC Engagement in West Africa,” against the backdrop of profound political, economic, social and security changes confronting the West African region.

The two-day engagement provided an opportunity to examine the proposed ECOSOCC-West Africa model, reflect on the evolution and future of regional integration, learn from the experiences of the African Union ECOSOCC and United Nations ECOSOC, interrogate potential institutional and political challenges, and develop practical pathways for ensuring that ECOSOCC-West Africa becomes a credible, inclusive and effective mechanism for citizen participation in regional governance.

Participants welcomed the engagement by ECOWAS and noted the institutional efforts already undertaken towards operationalising ECOSOCC. The workshop recognised that the initiative is occurring at a critical moment for West African integration, when questions of institutional legitimacy, democratic governance, civic participation, regional cohesion and public trust require renewed attention.

### 2. RATIONALE

The establishment of ECOSOCC-West Africa is not merely an institutional reform. It is an opportunity to address a longstanding gap between regional institutions and the citizens whose lives are directly affected by regional policies and decisions.

Participants recalled that the 1993 Revised Treaty of ECOWAS provided for ECOSOCC as an advisory institution intended to contribute to regional integration and inclusive governance. The ECOWAS presentation further indicated that efforts towards its operationalisation have involved consultations within ECOWAS, with civil society, experts, member states and other stakeholders over several years.

The workshop observed that civil society actors have historically contributed to ECOWAS policy development, particularly in areas including peace and security, elections, democracy, women and youth participation and regional integration. The challenge, therefore, is not the absence of citizen expertise or willingness to participate, but the need to institutionalise and make predictable the pathways through which such participation can influence regional policy-making.

Participants further noted that West Africa is experiencing democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, youth disengagement, insecurity, economic pressures and declining confidence in public institutions. In this context, an ECOWAS that is responsive to citizens must provide mechanisms through which citizens can contribute evidence, articulate priorities, scrutinise policies and participate constructively in shaping the region's future.

The workshop therefore considers ECOSOCC-West Africa an important opportunity to translate the vision of “ECOWAS of the People” from an aspiration into an institutional reality.

Participants emphasised that ECOSOCC-WA must not become another bureaucratic structure with limited impact. It must be fit for purpose: independent yet collaborative, representative yet efficient, innovative yet accountable, and capable of translating citizens' voices into tangible policy influence.

### 3. COMMUNIQUÉ

Having deliberated extensively over two days, participants:

#### I. RECOGNISE THAT CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IS CENTRAL TO THE FUTURE OF ECOWAS

1. **Affirm** that sustainable regional integration cannot be achieved solely through intergovernmental processes and that citizens must be recognised as active stakeholders and co-creators of the West African integration project.
2. **Recognise** that the vision of an “ECOWAS of the People” requires permanent, structured and meaningful pathways through which citizens can participate in regional policy-making, implementation, monitoring and accountability.
3. **Acknowledge** the historical contribution of civil society, women, youth, trade unions, professional bodies, academia, private-sector actors and community organisations to the development of ECOWAS norms, policies and regional integration processes.
4. **Confirm** that the establishment of ECOSOCC-West Africa provides an opportunity to move from largely informal citizen participation towards a more predictable and institutionalised mechanism of engagement. Participants specifically identified policy-making as an area where civil society's contribution should be formalised.

#### II. CALL FOR THE TIMELY OPERATIONALISATION OF ECOSOCC-WEST AFRICA

1. **Call upon the ECOWAS Commission and relevant statutory bodies to expedite the remaining processes required for the full operationalisation of ECOSOCC-West Africa**, consistent with the legal and institutional framework of ECOWAS.
2. **Welcome** the consultations undertaken by ECOWAS towards operationalising ECOSOCC-WA and encourage continued engagement with civil society throughout the remaining stages.
3. **Urge** ECOWAS to provide stakeholders with clear information on the operationalisation roadmap, including outstanding institutional, legal, administrative and statutory processes.
4. **Call** for the establishment of ECOSOCC-WA to be accompanied by clear institutional safeguards that guarantee its credibility, effectiveness, continuity and meaningful contribution to regional integration.

Participants noted the ECOWAS position that ECOSOCC has a foundation in the 1993 Revised Treaty and that extensive consultations have already been undertaken. The workshop considered this an important foundation upon which the next stage of operationalisation should be built.

#### III. DEMAND REPRESENTATIVE, TRANSPARENT AND INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

Call for a transparent, merit-based and publicly accessible accreditation and membership system for ECOSOCC-WA.

1. Recommend that membership criteria recognise demonstrated constituency, integrity, organisational capacity, thematic expertise, regional relevance and commitment to democratic values.
2. Urge the establishment of mechanisms for independent verification of eligibility to reduce the risk of political patronage, capture or the arbitrary selection of civil society organisations.
3. Call for meaningful representation of women, youth, grassroots organisations, persons and communities traditionally excluded from regional decision-making, professional bodies, trade unions, academia, private-sector actors and other relevant constituencies.
4. Stress that representation must extend beyond established organisations in regional capitals and create pathways for grassroots perspectives to reach ECOWAS policy processes.
5. Recommend periodic rotation of representatives and appropriate conflict-of-interest safeguards to prevent permanent capture of ECOSOCC spaces by a small number of organisations.

Lessons from AU ECOSOCC particularly emphasised transparent membership, independent verification, merit-based appointments, conflict-of-interest provisions and leadership rotation.

## IV. ENSURE THAT ECOSOCC-WA COMPLEMENTS EXISTING ECOWAS INSTITUTIONS

1. **Affirm** that ECOSOCC-WA should complement rather than compete with the ECOWAS Parliament, Commission, Court of Justice and other specialised institutions.
2. **Recommend** the development of a clear institutional framework defining the relationship between ECOSOCC-WA and existing ECOWAS organs.
3. **Call for regular institutional dialogue** between ECOSOCC-WA, the ECOWAS Parliament and other relevant organs to strengthen policy coherence and avoid duplication.
4. **Encourage** the ECOWAS Parliament to view ECOSOCC-WA as a complementary mechanism for strengthening citizen participation and regional accountability.

## V. CREATE A CLEAR CITIZEN-TO-POLICY FEEDBACK LOOP

1. **Call for the creation of a formal feedback mechanism** through which citizens and civil society can submit evidence, proposals and recommendations and receive a documented response.
2. **Recommend** that ECOWAS establish a traceable pathway from citizen input to policy consideration, decision, implementation and feedback.
3. **Urge** ECOSOCC-WA to publish periodic reports showing how citizen and civil society contributions have informed regional policies, programmes and decisions.
4. **Recommend** the use of digital platforms to widen participation while ensuring that digital mechanisms complement rather than replace community-based, physical and other accessible forms of engagement.

Participants stressed that without a feedback loop, participation risks becoming symbolic. The AU experience presented at the workshop similarly identified clear feedback to citizens on how their input is reflected in policy as critical.

## VI. STRENGTHEN GRASSROOTS AND NATIONAL PARTICIPATION

1. **Call for national and regional mechanisms** through which grassroots organisations can contribute to ECOSOCC-WA processes.
2. **Recommend** that consultations not be concentrated exclusively in national capitals or among established regional organisations.
3. **Urge** ECOWAS and civil society networks to establish accessible channels for communities affected by regional policies on trade, migration, peace and security, climate change, natural resources, development and human mobility to contribute their experiences and evidence.
4. **Recommend** multilingual and accessible participation mechanisms reflecting the linguistic diversity of West Africa.

## VII. PROTECT CIVIC SPACE AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY

1. **Recognise that meaningful citizen participation requires an enabling civic** environment in which freedom of association, expression, peaceful assembly and participation are respected.
2. **Call** upon ECOWAS and member states to protect and strengthen civic space as a necessary condition for effective regional integration.
3. **Recommend** that ECOSOCC-WA be sufficiently institutionally autonomous to enable civil society actors to provide independent, evidence-based perspectives while maintaining constructive engagement with ECOWAS institutions.
4. **Reject** any model of participation that reduces civil society to ceremonial endorsement or limits participation to organisations aligned with governmental interests.

The workshop drew attention to the experience of AU ECOSOCC and the need to prevent political capture while maintaining constructive institutional relationships.

## VIII. MAKE YOUTH AND WOMEN CENTRAL TO THE ECOWAS OF THE PEOPLE

1. **Call for substantive, not tokenistic, participation of women and young people** in ECOSOCC-WA structures and processes.
2. **Recommend** dedicated mechanisms for youth and women's participation in policy dialogue, thematic committees, consultations and leadership.
3. **Encourage** ECOWAS and civil society networks to invest in civic education and leadership development that enables young people to understand and engage regional institutions.

## IX. STRENGTHEN EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY INFLUENCE

1. **Call** for ECOSOCC-WA to become a platform for evidence-based policy engagement, enabling civil society to provide research, community evidence, shadow reports, alternative perspectives and policy proposals.
2. **Recommend** partnerships with universities, research institutions and think tanks to strengthen the evidence base available to ECOWAS decision-makers.
3. **Encourage** the development of mechanisms for independent monitoring of regional commitments and programmes from citizens' perspectives.
4. **Urge** ECOWAS to create regular opportunities for civil society to contribute to policy formulation, implementation review and evaluation.

The workshop heard that structured engagement can enable civil society to provide evidence and alternative reports and strengthen monitoring and policy dialogue.

## X. BUILD A SUSTAINABLE ECOSOCC-WA

1. **Call for national and regional mechanisms** through which grassroots organisations can contribute to ECOSOCC-WA processes.
2. **Recommend** that consultations not be concentrated exclusively in national capitals or among established regional organisations.
3. **Urge** ECOWAS and civil society networks to establish accessible channels for communities affected by regional policies on trade, migration, peace and security, climate change, natural resources, development and human mobility to contribute their experiences and evidence.
4. **Recommend** multilingual and accessible participation mechanisms reflecting the linguistic diversity of West Africa.

## XI. STRENGTHEN COLLECTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTION

1. **Recognise** that the success of ECOSOCC-WA will depend partly on the ability of civil society organisations to organise themselves around shared principles and priorities.
2. **Call upon regional civil society networks to establish a coordinated advocacy mechanism** to support the operationalisation of ECOSOCC-WA.
3. **Recommend** the development of a common advocacy position and policy brief directed at ECOWAS decision-makers and relevant institutional stakeholders.
4. **Urge** civil society to engage strategically with the ECOWAS Parliament, member-state representatives, political leaders, regional institutions and other potential champions of ECOSOCC-WA.
5. **Call** for evidence-based advocacy rather than fragmented institutional lobbying, with clear messages addressing the concerns and interests of different ECOWAS stakeholders.
6. **Encourage** the identification and engagement of political, institutional and civil society champions who can advance the operationalisation process.

The workshop discussions stressed that operationalisation should not be assumed to be automatic and that sustained advocacy and political engagement would be necessary. Participants specifically identified the Authority of Heads of State and Government and the ECOWAS Parliament as important audiences for advocacy.

## **XII. COMMUNICATE ECOSOCC-WA TO THE PEOPLE**

1. **Call for a comprehensive public communication strategy** to explain ECOSOCC-WA in accessible language.
2. **Recommend** communication in ECOWAS's three working languages and through multiple channels, including digital platforms, radio, community engagement, media and other appropriate mechanisms.
3. **Urge** ECOWAS and civil society organisations to clearly communicate how citizens can participate, who represents them and how their contributions influence regional decision-making.
4. **Recommend** that public awareness be treated as a core component of operationalisation rather than as a post-establishment activity.

## **XIII. CALL FOR A CLEAR IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY ROADMAP**

1. **Call upon ECOWAS to develop and communicate a time-bound implementation roadmap** for ECOSOCC-WA.
2. **Recommend** that the roadmap identify milestones, responsible institutions, timelines, resources and mechanisms for stakeholder participation.
3. **Call for regular multi-stakeholder review meetings** to assess progress, identify bottlenecks and maintain momentum.
4. **Urge** that the outcomes of this workshop be formally transmitted to the relevant ECOWAS institutions and incorporated into the continuing process of operationalising ECOSOCC-WA.

## COMMITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

We, the participating civil society and non-state actors, recognise that the responsibility for building an ECOWAS of the People does not rest with ECOWAS institutions alone.

We therefore commit to:

- strengthen coordination among civil society organisations across West Africa;
- develop and promote a shared civil society position on ECOSOCC-WA;
- contribute evidence, research and grassroots perspectives to the operationalisation process;
- undertake constructive and strategic advocacy with ECOWAS institutions and member states;
- promote meaningful participation of women, youth and grassroots constituencies;
- support public education on ECOWAS and ECOSOCC-WA;
- share lessons, expertise and good practices across national and regional networks; and
- monitor progress towards the operationalisation and effective functioning of ECOSOCC-WA.

We further commit to ensuring that the demand for an “ECOWAS of the People” is not reduced to a slogan but becomes a sustained civic and institutional project.

## OUR CALL TO ECOWAS

We call upon the ECOWAS Commission, the Authority of Heads of State and Government, the ECOWAS Parliament, Member States and all relevant Community institutions to recognise that strengthening citizen participation is not a threat to regional institutions.

It is an investment in their legitimacy, resilience and effectiveness.

We therefore urge ECOWAS to seize the present opportunity to operationalise ECOSOCC-West Africa as a credible, inclusive, independent and effective mechanism for citizen participation.

An ECOWAS that listens to its people will be better positioned to understand the realities of the region.

An ECOWAS that responds to its people will be better positioned to restore trust.

And an ECOWAS that gives its people a meaningful role in shaping regional policy will be better positioned to secure the future of West African integration.

ECOWAS of the People must therefore mean more than participation in principle. It must mean participation with influence, representation with accountability, and dialogue that produces action.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The dialogue was convened by the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS) and its partners, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), CDD-West Africa (Nigeria), West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOF), CDD-Ghana, Campaign for Good Governance (CGG, Sierra Leone), StatsView International (Guinea), Yiaga Africa (Nigeria), Africativiste (Senegal), RFLD (Benin), Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI), among others.

WADEMOS is grateful to all the experts from the AU, ECOWAS, civil society and the media who participated in the workshop.