AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP
GROUPE DE LA BANQUE AFRICAINE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT

2025 AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK GROUP ANNUAL MEETINGS

Harnessing Civil Society's Role in Making Africa's Capital Work Better for Inclusive Development

2025

26 MAY

CSO Civil Society Société Civile event











EVENT CONTEXT

During the 2025 African Development Bank (AfDB) Group Annual Meetings in Abidjan, a high-level side event was convened to explore the pivotal role of civil society in steering Africa's capital—both human and financial—toward inclusive and sustainable development. The session took place in the iconic Majestic Cinema, a venue symbolically charged with meaning. As the audience settled in, the moderator Luther Yameogo set the tone with a powerful message: "Today, Africa continues the dream of its structural transformation—by Africans, for Africans, and on African soil. And what better place than a cinema to build a dream? Let this Majestic room give us a happy ending!"

With nearly 500 seats filled to capacity and 23,718 online participants connected across all the Bank's digital platforms, the atmosphere was both cinematic and magical—on-site and online alike. Participants were not mere spectators, but active contributors, co-directors, and co-creators of the Forum's unfolding story. The setting was not a coincidence—it echoed the vision of Africa crafting its own narrative, of development not scripted from abroad, but produced and owned by its people. The décor, the lights, and the resonance of the room helped frame the conversation with gravitas and inspiration.

The session emphasized the crucial and catalytic role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in shaping homegrown strategies to unlock Africa's potential. A central theme was the urgent need to shift away from a dependency on external financing, and instead leverage domestic resource mobilization, institutional innovation, and citizen participation to sustain economic growth. The event also stressed the importance of amplifying youth and women's voices, recognizing them as indispensable agents of transformation.

In this symbolic and dynamic environment, the conversation took on a powerful dimension—not just discussing Africa's transformation, but embodying it.

WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS

The session unfolded in the Majestic Cinema Room of the Sofitel Hôtel Ivoire, a venue whose very name evoked grandeur, storytelling, and transformation. Against this evocative backdrop, Mr. Luther Yameogo took the stage as moderator, extending a warm and spirited welcome to a diverse audience—comprising civil society leaders, development practitioners, youth delegates, and senior Bank officials. His opening remarks set the tone for what would become one of the most memorable sessions of the Annual Meetings.

He formally launched the discussion by unveiling the session's theme:

"Harnessing Civil Society's Role in Making Africa's Capital Work Better for Inclusive Development."

This theme was not merely conceptual—it was a call to action. It emphasized the strategic urgency of unlocking Africa's internal capacities, particularly through domestic resource mobilization, while ensuring that development outcomes are equitable, people-centered, and owned by communities.

Framing the moment with conviction, Mr. Yameogo underlined that Africa's transformation would not be outsourced, and that civil society stands as a critical engine to translate local knowledge into structural impact. He connected the venue's symbolism with the session's ambition, noting that in a cinema, dreams take shape—and today, Africa was scripting its own development success story.



He then walked participants through the agenda, outlining each key segment and the logic behind the structure, from high-level interventions to intergenerational dialogue. He also informed the audience that simultaneous interpretation in English and French was available, ensuring that all stakeholders—whether in the room or joining virtually—could fully engage and contribute.

Welcome & Opening Remarks



Africa doesn't lack wealth - it lacks the will to allocate it justly. Civil society must be the conscience that redirects capital to where it heals and transforms.

Executive Director of the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD).

Ms.Catherine Mithia

The Civil Society statement was presented by Ms. Catherine Mithia, representing Mr. Jason Rosario Braganza, the Executive Director of the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD). Her statement established the foundational context for the discussions, reaffirming the commitment of civil society organizations throughout the continent to actively engage in financial governance, resource mobilization, and fostering inclusive development in collaboration with the African Development Bank and other relevant institutions.

She highlighted that Africa possesses significant resources, but it is the lack of political will and strategic governance that hinders the equitable distribution. She reaffirmed the critical function of Civil Society as a "moral compass that guides financial resources toward initiatives that foster healing and transformative change within communities". Specifically, she highlighted the vital roles that civil society organizations (CSOs) play in making Africa's capital work for inclusive development, which included the following:

- Advocating transparent and sustainable debt management.
- Ensuring transparency in tax regimes and calling for equitable fiscal policies that reduce inequality.
- Mobilizing a Pan- African push for reformed global financial architecture
- CSOs serve as crucial intermediaries between governmental financial institutions and the citizenry, facilitating reforms that are rooted in genuine societal needs and expectations. Their role is pivotal in ensuring that policy implementations align with the realities of the communities they serve.
- Promoting alternative models, such as those from social enterprises to corporate savings schemes, and decentralizing financial inclusion.

Dr. Beth Dunford



Dr. Beth Dunford, the Bank's Vice President for Agriculture, Human, and Social Development, delivered a statement underscoring the indispensable role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in advancing good governance, social inclusion, and community resilience across the continent. She emphasized the need for strategic and structured partnerships between CSOs, governments, and development institutions to form a coherent, unified front capable of harnessing Africa's human and natural capital for inclusive growth.

In a particularly resonant moment, VP Dunford warmly acknowledged the presence of 54 university students from Université Nord-Sud and ISCM, whose attendance aligned perfectly with the event's theme—highlighting youth and women as key drivers of Africa's transformation. The student delegation was marked by gender parity, exemplifying the inclusive and forward-looking approach advocated by the session. Their active presence added vibrancy and authenticity to the dialogue, symbolizing the very essence of the next generation's readiness to carry forward Africa's development agenda.

Dr. Dunford emphasized that sustainable progress cannot be achieved without directly addressing the needs of marginalized populations. She reiterated the Bank's commitment to ensuring that development efforts are not only technically sound but also socially anchored, with CSOs serving as critical bridges between institutions and grassroots realities.

Her remarks echoed the session's core message: Africa's development must be inclusive, equitable, and led by those who live its daily realities—a mission to which youth, women, and civil society are central.

High-level Panel discussions: Unlocking Africa's Domestic Capital: The Role of Civil Society

During the session, Mr. Yameogo facilitated the introduction of the esteemed panelists. The panel included Nancy Ndi Saiboh, the Founder and Executive Director of Actions for Development and Empowerment, as well as the Country Director for Follow the Money in Cameroon. Joining her was Nanna Sylla Coulibaly, the Vice President of the Women Investment Club in Côte d'Ivoire.

Nanna Sylla Coulibaly, speaking on financial inclusion, advocated for Women-led initiatives, which redefine women as builders, not beneficiaries. As an experienced chartered accountant, Nana highlighted the impact of community-based financing and participatory budget monitoring. She emphasized that the challenge is not a lack of resources, but rather women's limited access to existing resources. Therefore, building the capacity of women to access investment opportunities across the continent is essential. She also emphasized the importance of data and persistence gaps in its availability, in highlighting development issues. She urged international institutions to support women-led innovation and inclusion in financial systems.

During the panel discussions, Nancy Saiboh, speaking on governance, emphasized the crucial role of transparency and accountability in effectively "following the money". She also underscored the pivotal role of grassroots networks in promoting transparency and fostering trust between governmental bodies and the public. Nancy further emphasized the importance of adopting a bottom-to-top approach, where citizens are at the center of every conversation. She specifically pointed to her organization's initiatives in public expenditure tracking. She advocated for the systematic incorporation of civil society organizations (CSOs) into national policy formulation processes and frameworks for debt sustainability.



Nancy also underscored the critical importance of investing in women's development across Africa, highlighting their role in driving economic growth and fostering resilience, leadership, and intergenerational transformation. By empowering women and including them in the conversations, economies can leverage their potential to generate sustainable capital and facilitate progressive societal change.

The panelists reached a consensus underscoring the advantages of collaborative approaches to enhance development efficacy. They emphasized the critical roles of financial inclusion and participatory governance as integral mechanisms for fostering empowerment and accountability in development processes.

Dr. Akinwumi Adesina

Institutional Commitment to Civil Society Engagement



"The insights you bring from the field are not just heard—they are felt at the highest levels of the Bank."

President of the African Development Bank Group

Announced by moderator Luther Yameogo as an unrevealed surprise, the arrival and speech of Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank, enchanted and electrified the room, creating a palpable magnetism among the nearly 500 participants present—with hundreds more joining virtually via the Bank's platforms. As the only side event he chose to attend during the Annual Meetings, his presence alone marked the high strategic importance of civil society in the Bank's development vision.

Dr. Adesina delivered a heartfelt keynote address that transcended institutional protocol. His message resonated deeply with the audience, reflecting not only his unwavering commitment to inclusive development, but also his personal connection with civil society actors. In a tone both candid and visionary, he referred to CSOs as "integral partners and co-creators of Africa's development".

In a memorable moment of mutual recognition, the President seized the occasion to express his profound gratitude to civil society for the "osmotic" collaboration they've shared throughout his presidency. He lauded the 2024–2028 Civil Society Engagement Action Plan as a legacy document—a testamentary milestone that will carry forward the depth and dynamism of this partnership into the future.

He also unveiled a flagship initiative—a $500 million facility to support smallholder farmers, with the potential to leverage up to $10 billion in co-financing. In doing so, he emphasized the ethical responsibility to prioritize communities that are often adversely affected by development, affirming that “no one should be left behind.”

“The insights you bring from the field,” he declared, “are not just heard—they are felt at the highest levels of the Bank.” He further emphasized the One-Bank approach, aimed at harmonizing all Bank operations to foster a more responsive and synergistic engagement with civil society. This, he affirmed, is essential to anchoring development interventions in real needs and ensuring lasting impact.



To crown this historic moment, a giant group selfie and an inclusive photo with the entire audience were taken with the President—now considered among the most iconic highlights of these Annual Meetings.

Youth and Gender Inclusion

The session showcased the fruitful partnership between the African Development Bank and “Leaders de Demain,” a dynamic youth-led movement that embodies the aspirations and resolve of Africa’s next generation. In one of the most emotionally charged moments of the event, Camille Été, spokesperson for the group, delivered a powerful and resonant Youth Declaration that electrified the room and gave voice to the over 400 million young Africans whose future is intertwined with the continent’s destiny.

Camille's address struck a deep chord with the audience. Her message was clear, bold, and filled with conviction: the time for youth is now. She declared that African youth are not just the future—they are the present. With clarity of purpose and unwavering self-belief, she affirmed that young people are a solid, strategic capital and that they are ready to lead, build, and hold themselves accountable.



She saluted the African Development Bank's programs that prioritize youth, recognizing their centrality in President Adesina's vision for a transformed Africa. She called for:

- Direct involvement in governance and budgeting processes
- Significant investment in education, innovation, and entrepreneurship
- Full representation at decision-making tables, not just as observers, but as contributors and leaders.

Quoting Frantz Fanon, Camille concluded with a poignant reminder:
"**Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it."**
She emphasized that this generation has discovered its mission—and is committed to fulfilling it.



The youth, through "Leaders de Demain," also pledged to monitor the implementation of their commitments and to engage the Bank in a mutual, constructive, and transparent dialogue. Their declaration was not just a speech—it was a commitment to action, and a reaffirmation that Africa's youth are ready, organized, and aligned with the continent's boldest ambitions.

Closing Highlights and Final Reflections

As the event drew to a close, a moment of deep recognition and heartfelt gratitude was extended by the Moderator, on behalf of the Organizers, to the Senior Bank officials whose leadership and commitment were instrumental to the success of the Civil Society Forum. Mrs. Marie-Laure Akin-Olugbade, Senior Vice President; Dr. Beth Dunford, Vice President for Agriculture, Human and Social Development; Directors Martha Phiri and Maria Mulindi; and Manager Zéneb Touré, alongside the entire Civil Society Division team—both in Abidjan and online—were warmly commended for their visionary stewardship and unwavering dedication to strengthening engagement with civil society.

Special appreciation was also given to the youth moderators, civil society mobilizers, and volunteers, whose energy and professionalism helped elevate the depth and dynamism of the dialogue. Their work behind the scenes and at the forefront of the discussions reflected the spirit of shared ownership and collective action that defined the entire forum.



The event culminated in a symbolic and emotional group photograph, featuring senior Bank officials, youth delegates, CSO leaders, and participants. This iconic image—both majestic and joyful—captured the vibrant unity of purpose that animated the week: a Bank and its people, together, charting a path toward a more inclusive, resilient, and African-led development future.

Final Words from Zéneb Touré – Division Manager, Civil Society and Community Engagement

In her closing remarks, Zéneb Touré delivered a message both powerful and promising. She reminded participants that this moment was not an end, but a new beginning—a renewal of the Bank's historic and expanding commitment to civil society. She called for sustained mobilization through upcoming regional forums, digital platforms, and permanent dialogue mechanisms that place citizens at the center of development strategies.

Mrs Toure emphasized the importance of co-creating solutions with civil society to strengthen financial accountability, democratic participation, and the oversight of public resources, ensuring that Africa's capital—human, moral, and financial—is invested where it matters most: in health, education, sustainable livelihoods, and resilient communities.



"Africa is not waiting for miracles from the outside. The miracles are within us."

Division Manager, Civil Society and Community Engagement of the African Development Bank Group

She concluded with words that echoed far beyond the walls of the Majestic Room:
"Africa is not waiting for miracles from the outside. The miracles are within us."
This resounding affirmation, coupled with the unprecedented presence of the Bank's President and the passionate commitment of youth and civil society, sealed the Forum with a note of hope—a hope rooted in action, ownership, and the belief that Africa's development will be achieved by its own people, united in purpose, confident in their destiny.

APPENDIX

Platform-wise Viewership Statistics:

Platform	Views
Vimeo	829
YouTube	1,611
Facebook	4,109
LinkedIn	13,665
Twitter	3,504

Session Link:
https://vimeo.com/1089435209



Album link:
https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjCfB2N

Groupe de la Banque Africaine de Développement
Division Société Civile et Engagement
Communautaire Immeuble CCIA, Avenue Jean Paul II B.P 1387 Abidjan 01 - Cote d'Ivoire Tel: +225 20 26 44 64 E-mail: civilsociety@afdb.org www.afdb.org