



# CS-CON26

## The Civil Society Conference — Second Edition

*Localization, Community-Driven Development, and the Future of Civil Society in Africa*

**13–14 November 2026 | Buea, Cameroon**

**CALL FOR APPLICATIONS AND PARTICIPATION**

### 1. A Civil Society Platform for a Changing Africa

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Civil society in Africa stands at an important crossroads. Across the continent, communities continue to face complex humanitarian, economic, environmental, governance and social challenges, even as the institutions established to support them confront a parallel challenge of their own: how to remain locally legitimate, financially sustainable and strategically relevant within an increasingly uncertain development environment. Civil society organizations have become highly capable at implementing projects, yet implementation alone is not transformation. CS-Con26 is built around a deliberately uncomfortable question, one that frames the entire conversation the conference exists to hold.

***Are we doing the right thing, the right way, and for the right reasons?***

The Civil Society Conference is a civil society-led platform created to examine this question, and to explore what civil society in Africa must become if it is to remain rooted in communities while engaging meaningfully with governments, businesses, donors and international institutions. Following the inaugural CS-Con25 in Buea, CS-Con26 moves the conversation from reflection toward design, asking not only what is wrong with the current system, but what should be built in its place.

### 2. Why CS-Con26?

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For years, localization has occupied an increasingly prominent place in development policy and humanitarian discourse. Yet the distance between localization as a stated commitment and localization as lived practice remains significant. Communities are consulted but do not always decide; local organizations implement but do not always shape; African actors participate but do not always hold power. Civil society organizations, meanwhile, can become increasingly dependent on short-term grants, externally defined priorities and project cycles that leave little room for institutional autonomy.

CS-Con26 creates a space to examine these contradictions openly. It brings together experienced civil society practitioners, community actors, researchers, public-sector representatives, private-sector partners, funders and development leaders to consider how Africa can move from dependency toward greater ownership, resilience and agency. The conference is therefore not designed as another showcase of projects. It is conceived instead as a working platform: a space for ideas, for challenge, for relationships, and ultimately for designing what comes next.

### 3. From CS-Con25 to CS-Con26

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CS-Con25, held on 8 November 2025 in Buea, Cameroon, was the founding edition of the Civil Society Conference. It brought together more than twenty participants physically and online, following applications from over forty organizations both nationally and internationally. Participants included civil society and community-based organizations, humanitarian and development practitioners, youth- and women-led organizations, private-sector actors, government stakeholders, academics, researchers, media practitioners and students.

The first edition produced something more consequential than a conference outcome document: a shared willingness to question the way civil society works. Participants confronted the dependency created by some humanitarian interventions, examined the localization gap, explored alternatives to grant dependency, and discussed the need for stronger community ownership, institutional sustainability and cross-sector collaboration. CS-Con25 demonstrated that there was a genuine appetite for a different kind of conversation, and CS-Con26 builds directly on that foundation. Where the first edition primarily diagnosed, the second edition is designed to develop

pathways; where CS-Con25 created a community of conversation, CS-Con26 seeks to build a community of practice and action.

## 4. What CS-Con26 Will Deliver

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Over two days, CS-Con26 will bring together a curated group of experienced practitioners and decision-makers to examine localization beyond policy commitments, explore practical community-driven development models for rural and fragile contexts, and consider pathways toward greater financial and institutional autonomy for local civil society organizations. The conference will connect civil society with public- and private-sector actors, showcase Africa-tested solutions with potential for investment and scaling, build relationships between practitioners, funders, policymakers and private-sector partners, and generate ideas and frameworks capable of continuing beyond the conference itself. The programme combines keynotes, panel discussions, masterclasses and a Solutions Fair, striking a balance between reflection, debate, learning and practical opportunity.

## 5. Objectives

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- 1. Move localization from commitment to practice.** Explore how localization can translate into concrete changes in decision-making, financing, leadership, institutional design and accountability.
- 2. Strengthen community-driven development.** Surface practical models that place communities at the centre of defining problems, shaping solutions and owning development processes.
- 3. Explore pathways beyond grant dependency.** Expose civil society actors to alternative approaches to resource mobilization, social enterprise, partnerships, investment and sustainable financing.
- 4. Strengthen civil society autonomy.** Examine how African civil society organizations can become more institutionally and financially autonomous without becoming disconnected from global knowledge, partnerships and resources.
- 5. Connect solutions to opportunity.** Create a platform through which tested African solutions can connect with funders, investors, technical partners, governments and organizations interested in replication and scale.
- 6. Build a continental community of practice.** Strengthen relationships between experienced civil society leaders and actors across sectors and borders who are committed to building a more sustainable civil society ecosystem in Africa.

## 6. Expected Outcomes

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CS-Con26 seeks to generate a stronger shared understanding of localization, moving the conversation beyond terminology toward practical institutional and financing arrangements. It aims to create greater visibility for African-led solutions by providing a platform for tested approaches in localization and community-driven development, and to open new partnerships and investment pathways by connecting solutions, organizations and ideas with actors able to provide financing, technical support, policy engagement and opportunities for scale.

The conference further seeks to generate practical approaches to civil society sustainability, surfacing ideas around resource mobilization, partnerships, enterprise and institutional autonomy, while building a stronger cross-sector network connecting civil society with government, business, philanthropy, research and development actors. Ultimately, CS-Con26 is designed to establish a continuing platform, ensuring that the conference becomes a recurring mechanism for learning, collaboration and action rather than a once-a-year event.

## 7. Five Conversations at the Heart of CS-Con26

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- 01. Localization Beyond Policy.** What does localization actually look like when it changes who decides, who controls resources and who defines success?
- 02. Community-Driven Development.** How can communities move from being participants in projects to becoming authors and owners of their own development?
- 03. Resource Mobilization Beyond Grants.** What financing models can allow African civil society organizations to build resilience beyond traditional donor cycles?

**04. Civil Society Autonomy and Cross-Sector Integration.** How can civil society maintain its independence while becoming a stronger partner to government and business?

**05. The Future of Civil Society in Africa.** What should African civil society become over the next decade, and who should hold the power to shape that future?

## 8. The CS-Con26 Programme

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CS-Con26 expands the founding one-day conference into a two-day strategic convening, structured around four complementary formats.

| Format                | Content                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Keynote Addresses (4) | - CS-Con26 Vision and the Future of Civil Society Response;<br>- Localization Beyond Policies;<br>- Community-Driven Development in Rural and Fragile Contexts;<br>- The Future of Civil Society on the African Continent. |
| Panel Discussions (2) | - Enhancing Local Autonomy Without Diminishing Global Relevance;<br>- Resource Mobilization for Local Partners Beyond Grants and Gifts.                                                                                    |
| Masterclasses (2)     | - Developing a Resource Mobilization Pipeline Beyond Grants;<br>- Substantive Global–Local Engagement Beyond Grants and Projects.                                                                                          |
| Solutions Fair (1)    | A dedicated showcase of four Africa-tested localization and community-driven development solutions with potential for investment, partnership, replication and scale.                                                      |

## 9. Who Should Participate

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CS-Con26 is intentionally curated. It is designed for people who are not simply interested in civil society, but who are already doing the work, shaping institutions, leading communities, generating evidence, mobilizing resources or influencing systems. Applications and participation are particularly encouraged from the following categories:

- Civil society and NGO leaders
- Community leaders
- Humanitarian and development practitioners
- Localization and CDD practitioners
- Researchers and academics
- Public-sector and policy actors
- Private-sector and CSR leaders
- Funders, foundations and philanthropic actors
- Social entrepreneurs and innovators
- Development consultants and independent practitioners

Experience is not defined simply by years in the sector; what matters most is the quality, relevance and impact of the work a candidate has done.

## 10. Why Participate

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Selected delegates become part of a curated community working to rethink the future of civil society in Africa. Participation offers the opportunity to influence conversations shaping the future of localization, community-driven development and civil society practice; to learn alongside experienced practitioners, researchers, funders, policymakers and cross-sector leaders; and to connect with organizations and individuals working across Africa and beyond. Delegates may also showcase practical approaches, research, innovations and community-driven solutions; explore partnerships with potential funders, investors, implementers and strategic partners; and build practical knowledge and relationships capable of continuing well beyond the conference itself.

## 11. Participation and Sponsorship

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CS-Con26 is structured around three participation categories, designed so that geography and financial capacity do not become the primary determinants of whose voice contributes to the conversation.

| Category                                             | Coverage                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fully Sponsored — Cameroon-based delegates           | Transport, accommodation, feeding, and conference participation and related costs.                                   |
| Partially Sponsored — International delegates        | Accommodation, local transportation, feeding, and conference-related costs. International air travel is not covered. |
| Self-Funded — Qualifying delegates from any location | Participants cover their own attendance costs.                                                                       |

## 12. Inclusion

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CS-Con26 seeks meaningful diversity across geography, gender, professional background, institutional type and lived experience, with particular consideration given to ensuring representation from local and community-based organizations, youth-led initiatives, women-led organizations, rural and fragile contexts, underrepresented regions and communities, and emerging as well as established civil society leadership. The objective is not simply to bring different people into the same room; it is to ensure that different experiences have a meaningful influence on the conversation.

## 13. The CS-Con26 Solutions Fair

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One of the major additions to CS-Con26 is the Solutions Fair, which will showcase four practical solutions, models or approaches that have been tested in African contexts and that demonstrate potential for further adoption, investment, partnership or scaling. Eligible solutions may relate to community-driven development, localization, community participation, sustainable financing, social enterprise, humanitarian-development approaches, digital solutions, governance and accountability, peacebuilding and social cohesion, or other approaches contributing to stronger communities and civil society. The Solutions Fair is designed to move the conversation from naming a problem to demonstrating a tested response, the evidence behind it, and what it would take to carry it further.

## 14. How to Participate

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Interested individuals and institutions are invited to complete the relevant CS-Con26 application or expression-of-interest form. Applicants may be invited to participate as delegates, panellists, Solutions Fair exhibitors or presenters, or as partners and supporting institutions. Participation in all categories is subject to the relevant selection and confirmation process.

For Delegates:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeGmmYn7yonN6ywhuuJuURFOULNpS0T0KrrGDNGPnM6zyjgiQ/viewform?usp=header>

For presenters at solutions fair:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSealbSpPpmlw43hl0yJtlilH7BhvAFTiZ7P2MO8RgiK6hhcMw/viewform?usp=header>

## 15. Why Partners Should Engage

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CS-Con26 offers partners the opportunity to support a locally anchored platform working at the intersection of civil society, localization, community-driven development and sustainable development in Africa.

- **UN agencies, donors and foundations** — gain a direct connection to experienced local actors and practical conversations around localization, sustainability and community ownership.
- **Government and policy actors** — gain access to field-based perspectives and practitioners working directly with communities.

- **Private-sector partners** — gain a structured pathway into community development, social investment, corporate social responsibility and cross-sector partnerships.
- **African civil society** — gains something particularly important: a space to think about the future of the sector on its own terms.

## 16. Important Dates

| Milestone                                   | Date                                |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Applications / expressions of interest open | 1 September 2026                    |
| Application deadline                        | 3 October 2026                      |
| Selection / confirmation                    | 19 October 2026                     |
| CS-Con26                                    | 13–14 November 2026, Buea, Cameroon |

## 17. The Question We Are Carrying Forward

CS-Con25 asked whether civil society was still serving the communities it was created to serve. CS-Con26 takes that question further. If communities are to own their development, if local organizations are to become genuinely autonomous, if localization is to become more than a policy commitment, and if civil society is to remain relevant in a changing Africa, then the question that follows is what structures, relationships, resources and leadership must be built now. That is the conversation. That is the work. That is CS-Con26.

## 18. See You in Buea

CS-Con is not building another conference brand. It is building a platform for a more autonomous, dignified, community-driven and globally engaged civil society in Africa, one where local knowledge is not treated as anecdotal, where communities are not merely beneficiaries, where African civil society is not simply an implementing partner, and where partnership does not have to mean dependency.

### CS-CON26

*Localization. Community-Driven Development. The Future of Civil Society in Africa.*

**13–14 November 2026 | Buea, Cameroon**

*The conversation continues.*

**CS-CON**

CIVIL SOCIETY CONFERENCE