

Wednesday, 17 September 2025
A summary of the day's events

Day two of the dialogue focused on strengthening the relationship between legislatures and civil society, with discussions centred on the role of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP). Lessons from the previous session emphasised the importance of strategy, collaboration, and PAP's need to engage citizens more systematically.

Furthermore, on day two of the programme, the delegates formed a panel consisting of approximately four active members, and held two panel discussions. In the first panel discussion, the members namely comprised of: Ms Kgothatso Semela of South Africa, Mr Gitungo Wamere of the Mzalendo Trust in Kenya, Mr Benjamin Aryeh from the Parliamentary Network based Africa in Ghana and Mr Jacob Makambwe of Zambia. In said panel, there was mainly a discussion of combatting corruption and advancing sustainability goals (amongst other topics).

In the second panel discussion, the members were: Ms Mulenga Hlezipi Mapalo of Zambia, Ms Maria Baron of Argentina and Mr Osman Moalin of Somalia. Here, there was discussion of mainly monitoring the legislative process and handling challenges which arose from a civil war in the country (amongst other topics).

In the third and final session of the day's programme, the delegates were divided into three groups to hold a separate breakaway session in three various venues. The first group discussed the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in advancing open parliament. Discussions centred on the opportunities for AI to enhance information sharing, bill tracking, data management, and citizen access through digital toolkits and chatbots. Timothy Chemonges of Uganda described innovative applications such as finance trackers, debt monitoring tools, and digital performance assessments of Members of Parliament (MPs), emphasising that AI should be embraced to keep pace with global developments. However, he stressed that AI can only complement, not replace, human engagement, and that information must be localised to be meaningful.

The second group discussed the impact of political party dominance, coalition instability, monetisation of politics, and weak representation. Examples from Mozambique, Lesotho, Benin, Niger, South Africa, amongst others illustrated how electoral systems shaped governance outcomes. Across contexts, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were seen as crucial in raising awareness, lobbying donors, building coalitions, and sensitising citizens.

The third group discussed African elections and change, the role of data in advocacy. It was also mentioned that a study found that there was a strong trust deficit between the public and Parliament in many African countries, and a correlation with trust deficit and corruption among Members of Parliament.

Closing remarks stressed four lessons: elections have consequences, modalities of representation matter, South Africa's political shift demonstrated democratic resilience, and rising monetisation of politics required joint civil society and Parliament strategies to safeguard accountability and citizen trust.

Conference Day 2 — Session Overview and Reflections

1. Session Overview

The second day of the conference opened with a recap of lessons from the previous day, followed by participant reflections and two major panel discussions. The sessions explored how regional parliaments can engage civil society, the challenges of building open parliaments, and the role of technology in strengthening democratic accountability. The day concluded with breakaway sessions that allowed delegates to engage more deeply with practical issues such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), political party dynamics, and electoral change.

2. Key Discussion Points

Reflections

- A Ugandan participant stressed that civil society must approach parliament in a cooperative and non-hostile manner to build trust and ensure meaningful dialogue.
- A Somali participant questioned how the Pan-African Parliament could create a standardised continental strategy to strengthen civil society–parliament engagement.

Panel Discussion 1: Engaging Regional Parliaments

- Moderated by Lebogang Kenneth Mabotho (Executive Director, Southern African Council of Non-Governmental Organisations or NGOs).
- Highlighted the absence of regional parliamentary structures such as East African Legislative Assembly or EALA and the South African Development Community or SADC Parliamentary Forum, underscoring the need for renewed commitment to dialogue.
- Gotatso Simela (Open Government Partnership, South Africa) stressed structured mechanisms like thematic working groups, digital dashboards, and peer learning moments.
- Gitungo Wamere (Mzalendo Trust, Kenya) pointed to public debt monitoring portals and the need for stronger civil society in East Africa.
- Benjamin Aryeh (PNAfrica, Ghana) raised challenges of internal parliamentary bottlenecks.
- Jacob Makwabe (Zambia) emphasised bridging governance gaps, embedding citizen participation, and strengthening accountability.

Panel Discussion 2: The Challenge of Open Parliament

- Moderated by Caroline Gaita.
- Osman Moalin (Somalia) reflected on rebuilding parliamentary structures after civil war and the difficulty of ensuring accessibility.
- Mulega Hlezipi Mapalo (Zambia, Chapter One) stressed weak civil participation and inadequate civic infrastructure.
- Adjib Epsi (Benin) highlighted communication barriers as a major obstacle.
- Maria Baron (Argentina) shared Latin American perspectives, noting shrinking funding streams and the importance of regional advocacy networks.

3. Insights & Takeaways

- Cooperation, not confrontation, is key for civil society–parliament engagement.
- A continental framework could strengthen engagement but must adapt to local contexts.
- Regional parliaments face systemic challenges that mirror national dynamics.
- Open parliament efforts are constrained by weak communication, lack of funding, and limited citizen access.
- AI has transformative potential but must remain ethical, localised, and human-centred.

4. Recommendations / Action Points

- Encourage collaborative and solutions-focused approaches to engagement.
- Explore a Pan-African strategy for structured civil society–parliament cooperation.
- Build sustained systems and peer learning mechanisms to overcome high turnover in parliaments.
- Invest in ethical, locally relevant AI tools for governance.
- Strengthen CSO capacity to counter political dominance and monetisation of politics.

- Rebuild citizen trust through anti-corruption initiatives and stronger parliamentary accountability.

5. Audience Engagement

- Reflections sparked discussion on balancing national-level realities with continental strategies.
- Debate on AI focused on the risks of replacing human oversight with technology.
- Questions around electoral systems and political instability drew strong responses on the role of CSOs.
- Concerns about declining trust in parliaments resonated across multiple regions.

6. Breakaway Sessions

- **Group 1: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Open Parliament**
 - Explored opportunities for AI in parliamentary processes including information sharing, bill tracking, and summarising debates.
 - Timothy Chemonges (Uganda, Centre for Policy Analysis or CEPA) presented digital tools for finance tracking, debt monitoring, and MP performance assessment, stressing AI as complementary to human engagement.
 - Mohlatse Komote (Campaign on Digital Ethics, South Africa) raised risks of misinformation, data misuse, and embedded bias in AI, calling for ethical regulation and AI usage policies.
- **Group 2: Political Party Dynamics and Representation**
 - Discussed dominance of ruling parties, coalition instability, monetisation of politics, and weak representation.
 - Highlighted CSOs' role in awareness-raising, donor lobbying, coalition-building, and citizen sensitisation.

- **Group 3: Elections, Data, and Advocacy**

- Examined the role of data in advocacy and highlighted trust deficits between citizens and parliaments.
- Linked corruption among MPs to public distrust, underscoring need for accountability reforms.