5th Annual Africa Parliamentary Engagement and Monitoring Organisations (PEMO) Conference

Location: University of Pretoria, Tshwane, South Africa

Theme: *"Getting Back on Track: Renewing the Dialogue Between Legislatures and Civil Society"*

Date and time: 16-18 September 2025, 09h00

Venue: Centre for Human Rights

Scribes: Mokheseng Moema, Phumzile Gubanca and Khanya Ntsulumbana

Participation: Delegates from **29 African countries** (including South Africa, Zambia, Namibia, Mozambique, Malawi, Lesotho, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Ghana, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Benin, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Niger, Liberia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania, South Sudan, Cameroon, Morocco, Ethiopia) as well as partners from **Argentina, Latin America**.

The Parliamentary Engagement and Monitoring Organisations (PEMO) conferences have evolved significantly:

- **2015 and 2021** – Accra, Ghana

- **2023** – Nairobi, Kenya

- **2024** – Kampala, Uganda

- **2025** – Tshwane, South Africa (largest convening to date, broadening scope beyond regional to continental scale)

And noting that the previous day, 15 September 2025, was International Democracy Day.

Day 1: 16 September 2025

1. Session Overview

The conference opened on Tuesday 16 September 2025 with a clear purpose: to build networks and strengthen the role of domestic and regional parliaments in advancing democracy across Africa. Central to this mission was the promotion of human rights and democratisation, and an exploration of the ways in which parliaments could reinforce both. These themes were framed against what the moderator, Ms Bonolo Makgale, described as the "death of democratisation" on the continent, highlighting the urgency of the discussions to follow. Ms Makgale also formally welcomed the Acting Director of the Centre for Human Rights (CHR), who played a key role in convening the gathering.

0. Key Discussion Points
- <u>Remarks from Prof Ebenezer Durojaye, CHR Acting Director</u>

Prof Durojaye opened by outlining the focus of the coming three days: a space to exchange thoughts and ideas on the state of democracy across Africa, with particular attention to regional variations and challenges.

- <u>Remarks from Mr Sammy Obeng, Executive Director of Parliamentary Network Africa</u>

  Mr Obeng followed by expressing gratitude to the Acting Director for coordinating, planning, and hosting the engagement. He explained that the Africa Parliamentary Monitoring Organisation (APMOM) was a continental network of civil society organisations dedicated to monitoring the work of parliaments at national, regional, and sub-regional levels. Beyond monitoring, said organisation also facilitated constructive engagements between civil society and parliaments. Through these efforts, APMOM both supported legislatures in strengthening their work and held them accountable to the public.

  Mr Obeng noted that this was the fifth APMOM conference. The first had taken place in Accra, Ghana, followed by a second session shortly after the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020, also in Accra. Subsequent conferences were held in Kenya in 2023 and Kampala, Uganda in 2024. The current 2025 conference hosted in Tshwane, South Africa was by far the largest; drawing representatives from 29 countries. Earlier conferences were more regional in character, but the scale and breadth of this gathering underscored APMOM's growing importance. He concluded by thanking the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) for its support in planning the event.

- <u>Remarks from Mr Rashaad Alli, Executive Director of PMG</u>

  Ms Makgale then introduced Mr Rashaad Alli, who underscored the timeliness of the conference, which followed closely on the heels of international discussions on the state of democracy. He reminded delegates that democracy was multifaceted and required open, continuous dialogue to restore trust, strengthen accountability, and ensuring citizens remained at the centre of governance. This conference, he argued, would provide a space for robust engagement, positioning legislators and civil society not as adversaries but as partners in democratic development.

- <u>Remarks from Caroline Gaita, APMON Chair</u>

  Ms Gaita offered her thanks to the hosts and extended a warm welcome to all delegates. She described the conference as the culmination of a journey that began in Accra and had now reached maturity in Tshwane. Its purpose, she explained, was to renew dialogue between legislators and civil society, and to reaffirm the commitment of parliaments to democratic values of openness and accountability.

- She drew on examples from Nepal and Kenya, where growing trust between civil society and legislators had created opportunities for more constructive engagement, whilst cautioning that such trust still required careful nurturing. Ms Gaita reiterated that citizens, particularly the youth, were increasingly linking positive democratic outcomes to improvements in socio-economic conditions. Their concerns, she warned, could not remain confined to dialogue; they must be addressed through tangible action.
- For parliaments to be meaningful, debates and resolutions must be communicated in ways that ordinary people could understand and see reflected in their daily lives. Yet the civic space across Africa, she noted, was under mounting threat from rising authoritarianism. Against this backdrop, the conference would focus on deepening knowledge sharing, strengthening inclusiveness, and promoting openness.
- Ms Gaita also paid tribute to Maria Baron of Argentina; who had long championed open parliaments. She recalled the 2022 launch of the Open Parliament Monitoring Tool in West Africa, which began in just three countries but has since expanded to cover thirty-three. This growth, she

suggested, demonstrated the transformative potential of sustained advocacy and collaboration between civil society and legislatures

● Reflections on Africa's Democratic Challenges

Ms Makgale reflected on the unprecedented challenges facing Africa, describing the current landscape as increasingly complex and fragile. She explained that this was precisely why the Former Minister of Justice of Namibia had been invited – to provide a deeper reflection on the nature of these challenges. She cautioned, however, that the conference should not fall into the trap of "analysis paralysis," endlessly dissecting problems without moving toward solutions.

0. Insights and Takeaways

Keynote Address: Our responsibilities in times of unparalleled crisis

Ms Yvonne Dausab, Former Minister of Justice of Namibia

The Former Minister of Justice, Ms Dausab, opened her remarks by painting a vivid picture of the turbulence in parliaments around the world, where chaos often overshadowed the fundamental duty of legislatures to represent the interests of the people. She pointed to the Open Parliament Tool as a vital instrument to track and analyse the performance of parliaments over time. Privileges and immunities, she reiterated, were sacred protections for legislators, but only when exercised in the service of citizens rather than as tools for political grandstanding. These protections existed to ensure that parliamentarians could speak without fear nor favour, always prioritising the public good.

Turning to what she described as an "unparalleled crisis," Ms Dausab highlighted a series of interconnected pressures: the rise of tribal and racial tensions, growing hunger, violence against women, and the worsening effects of climate change. She drew on the Namibian Constitution, which relied on three principles: that representatives must serve all Namibians, that they must be guided by the public interest, and that they must follow their conscience. This, she observed, was increasingly difficult under proportional representation systems, where party loyalty often supersedes personal conviction.

Drawing inspiration from Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, she reminded the audience that leadership was not confined to political elites: citizens too had a role to play. In her view, citizens must become more active participants in their democracies, not passive observers. Ethical and open leadership, she argued, required a collective consciousness that was grounded in the political and economic freedom of citizens. Without this, conversations about democracy would remain rhetorical exercises rather than catalysts for real change.

Ms Dausab posed a critical question: how much had Africans truly internalised the vision of a prosperous continent? While progress had been made, she acknowledged that the journey remained long and uncertain. For this vision to be realised, she emphasised the importance of tools which could monitor best practices and lessons from different parliaments. She also warned of the dangers of co-option and complicity, urging that these issues be addressed before they become entrenched features of political systems.

The relationship between citizens and parliaments, she noted, was inherently interwoven. It was therefore troubling that citizens still found themselves having to demand open and transparent legislatures. Quoting Chinua Achebe, she underscored Africa's vast diversity of cultures and languages, echoing the findings of the *Open Parliament 2023 Report*, which concluded that there could be no simple solutions to the continent's complex governance challenges. Nevertheless, she argued that the Open Parliament Tool provided a unique opportunity to strengthen openness and foster active citizen participation. Looking ahead, she called for new concepts, new laws, and innovative political mechanisms, suggesting that Hlumelo Biko's reflections on culture as a reference point in governance could provide valuable inspiration.

Returning to the discussion, Ms Makgale emphasised that citizen engagement lay at the very core of the conference. She questioned whether African political leaders would truly recognise the necessity of involving citizens in shaping the future of democracy. She concluded by reminding participants of their collective responsibility: the task of everyone in the room, she said, was nothing less than to change the world.

Engaging the Pan-African Parliament

Ms Makgale introduced the next session, which focused on the evolving role of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP). She reminded delegates that PAP was still a relatively new institution within the African Union architecture, but one that held considerable potential to influence governance and democratic consolidation on the continent.

Mr Obeng spoke first, reflecting on PAP's formative years. He described the institution as a 'work in progress'. One that was still defining its identity, functions and relevance in Africa's governance landscape. While PAP had made strides in creating a forum for dialogue among legislators from across the continent, challenges remained in ensuring that its resolutions translated into tangible outcomes for ordinary Africans. Mr Obeng reiterated the importance of strengthening PAP's links with both national parliaments and civil society, so that its work could resonate more clearly with citizens.

Mr Fortune Charumbira, the President of PAP, then took the floor, offering a candid assessment of PAP's current position and aspirations. He acknowledged that the institution's visibility and impact had sometimes been limited, but argued that its mandate was steadily gaining traction within the African Union. He highlighted PAP's role in promoting good governance, democracy, and human rights, and insisted that the body must become more than a symbolic assembly: it must be a driver of accountability and integration.

Mr Charumbira emphasised that PAP could succeed in isolation. Its ability to serve Africans depended on partnerships with civil society organisations, parliamentary monitoring groups, and networks such as APMOM. These collaborations, he explained, provided the evidence, public input, and citizen perspectives necessary for PAP to be effective. He urged delegates to view PAP not simply as a legislative chamber but as a continental platform through which Africa's citizens could shape their collective future.

In closing, the session underscored both the opportunities and challenges facing PAP. Delegates agreed that for the institution to fulfil its promise, it must strengthen its independence, deepen citizen engagement, and work collaboratively with non-state actors. In doing so, PAP could evolve into a cornerstone of Africa's democratic architecture.

Civil Society and the Pan-African Parliament: Building Bridges

Siphamandla Mhlongo of the Pan-African Civil Society Organisations (CSO) Forum outlined the Forum's mission to strengthen cooperation between CSOs and PAP. Established as a channel for marginalised voices, the Forum worked to ensure that citizens, particularly those excluded from decision-making, had avenues to influence policy. Its objectives included raising the visibility of PAP, widening engagement pathways for CSOs, and equipping organisations to advance democracy and civic rights alongside PAP.

He highlighted practical initiatives: engaging PAP committees on gender, international relations, and SADC; convening training on civic participation, illicit financial flows, and electoral transparency; and developing an advocacy toolkit aligned with PAP processes. In 2023/24, the Forum convened the first Civil Society Dialogue at PAP, which focused on human rights. Key lessons drawn included the importance of inclusivity for legitimacy, the necessity of trust and openness in partnerships, the need for adequate capacity and access, and the potential of technology to widen engagement.

The subsequent exchange between Mr Mhlongo and participants raised critical concerns. Delegates questioned how to prevent civil society forums from becoming mere rubber stamp exercises, whether Africa required its own definition of democracy rooted in local realities, and how regional bodies could improve the governance of resources. Others highlighted structural barriers, such as the digital divide, the high cost of data, and weak Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure, which continued to exclude poorer and rural communities from parliamentary processes.

Mr Mhlongo acknowledged the challenges of institutional gaps created by electoral cycles and the over-reliance on political parties, which weakened sustained citizen–parliament interaction. He stressed the need for civil society to remain independent, avoid co-option, and continue advocating for citizens' interests. Importantly, he noted that PAP's mandate to develop model laws provided a concrete avenue to embed civil society inputs in continental and national governance.

0. Recommendations/Action Points

Here below is an outline of all the Cafe breakaway sessions which took place on Day 1.

CAFÉ: BREAKAWAY SESSION (three rounds)
- The 'Chairperson' with the group of four was firstly appointed.
- Storytime group 1, writing on the sticky notes: In Botswana; the power of social media between the public and delegations. Spousal allowances for Members of Parliament (MPs') spouses; the public issued online statements against this which led to the motion being struck off. The legacy on expenditure; the new government who used the same trends as the previous government and the public protested against this practice on social media. Subsequently an apology was issued. Botswana's Parliament was more transparent. In Kenya; capacity building required an informed citizens. There were some issues with the website. Factors: Advocacy by local CSO. Simplified information in the form of brochures. Litigation; threat to bring lawsuit. Under said factors, the law was reviewed.
- Group 2: reflecting on the current context in relation to African Parliaments. Increased public education and engaging with the public, consensus, conflict resolution in a constructive manner. There was mention of the Invited space; created by the State, and the Invented space; which was an independent and autonomous space. There was a suggestion for regular capacity building for MPs, as well as obtaining buy-in, raising awareness with the public and providing information. There was mention of the use of emerging technologies in capacity building. Public education, using simplified language and multilingualism, to relate with the public. There was mention of Parliament and corruption in Sierra Leone. There was discussion of the hegemony of the upper middle class, and the politicians recruiting votes through making grandiose promises to the public. There was concern raised over the rapid spread of fake news and false information.
- Group 3: assessing ways to draw out the silenced voices, and how to implement this in our own Parliaments. The group discussed the inclusion of the marginalised communities into the legislative policies. In Lesotho; there existed a Bill which allowed youth to identify their own gender from age 21, the delegates reiterated that the laws must be passed with the inclusion of the public, failing which; Parliament could be brought to lawsuit. There was concern for the lack of access to certain Parliamentary Acts, one of the delegates promised to advocate for this upon his return. In Kenya; there was an emphasis on engaging personally with the communities. Creation of Parliamentary caucuses and dialogue spaces was also discussed, as well as affirmative action to include women through law; in the form of quotas. In Somalia; there was mention of the socially and politically marginalised communities, and an Inclusion Act which gave voice to the voiceless.

Parliamentary Engagement in Practice: Breakaway Reflections

The breakaway sessions allowed participants to compare national experiences and draw broader lessons about parliamentary engagement.

- In Ghana, the Coalition of Affirmative Action's negotiations with the parliamentary committee on gender illustrated both the progress and complexity of advancing women's representation. A dispute over the term *equality* led to the compromise use of *equity*, raising questions about how language shapes political consensus. Participants also reflected on the role of women in perpetuating patriarchal norms, underscoring the depth of cultural change required for meaningful equality.
- Namibia offered a more inclusive example, where parliamentary committees routinely conduct community consultations before passing bills. This practice was praised as a model for embedding citizens' voices in legislation. By contrast, Liberia revealed the opposite challenge, with engagement between citizens and parliamentarians virtually disappearing after elections, thus weakening accountability and trust.

From these case stories, a unifying theme emerged: the centrality of consultations between parliament, civil society, and citizens in creating legitimacy and sustaining democracy.

- Further rounds of discussion raised broader systemic concerns. Participants expressed surprise that in some countries parliaments were legally required to engage with non-state actors, noting both the promise and risks of such measures. They observed that MPs often remain suspicious of civil society's motives, while inadequate campaign financing laws distort political accountability. A "wish list" emerged: parliaments that prioritised service delivery, standing orders that mandate regular consultation, and representatives who consistently fulfil their responsibilities.
- Participants also stressed that parliamentarians should be closely attuned to citizens' everyday struggles, creative in engaging youth, and proactive in removing restrictive laws that hinder participation. Calls were made for stronger civic education, parliaments that reclaim independence from the executive, and more evidence-based engagement with citizens.

Interactive Session: *Pause Café* Exercise

Chairperson: Mr Richard Bloggers (Zambia)

Cafe Exercise modelled after the **Mashauriano:** Council of Elders (Kenya)

Round 1 – Reflections on Engagement with Parliament

- **South Africa (Green Connection organisation):** Engaged with the new **Minerals and Petroleum Committee** (2024), securing a weekly dialogue channel with the chairperson's advisors and researchers. This opened up a direct channel between citizens and parliament engagement.

- **Malawi:** Introduced an annual **Parliamentary Open Week** to bring citizens closer to legislative processes, despite budget constraints.

- **Zimbabwe:** The cabinet of Zimbabwe decided that their decision would remain confidential. Munyaradzi Dodo with his organisation Magamba Network based in Harare advocated for **public access to cabinet decisions**, challenging government opacity.

Common Thread: Direct and respectful engagement with parliamentarians is key to unlocking influence.

Session 2 – Looking to the Future (5–10 years ahead)

- **Uganda:**

    o   Strengthen civic–parliamentary relationships.

    o   Improve feedback loops.

    o   Address oversight gaps.

    o   Expand civic education for both MPs and citizens.

Session 3 – Inclusion of Marginalised Voices

- **Botswana:** Called for engaging marginalised groups through an **inquisitive rather than prescriptive approach**, ensuring context-driven understanding.

Common Concerns and Themes of the Breakaway sessions:

- **Trust Deficit:** Evidenced by continent-wide protests and citizen disengagement.

- **Corruption:** Infrastructure projected as a central avenue for looting.

- **Youth Apathy:** A generation disillusioned with parliaments.

- **Military Interference:** Ongoing coups undermined democratic institutions.

- **Civil Society's Role:** Acting as an "informal parliament" to fill representation gaps.

- **Ethical Leadership:** Rooted in Africa's history, culture, and collective consciousness.

0. **Audience Engagement**

Highlights from the Question and Answer session with PAP President
- Corruption, good governance and Africa: what was PAP doing in holding leaders accountable who had served for three or even four Terms
- Parliaments being disrupted in the continent, with no intervention
- Corruption being a cancer. Advisory Board on corruption which assessed the issues of corruption; however the issue of sovereignty continuously impeded this. PAP had a mandate to escalate the resolutions to the African Union (AU) for further action.

- PAP and African Parliamentarians Network Against Corruption (APNAC) collaborating. PAP worked in all five regions to promote awareness. MPs were impeding the work of PAP.
- PAP relied on civil societies to escalate the various issues, to conduct their work. Operating in five languages (French, Portuguese, English, Kiswahili and Arabic)
- PAP working in various media platforms; invite to attend PAP events. He (Mr Charumbira) encouraged people to boldly and publicly voice their concerns and suggestions.
- Giving praises loudly but criticisms in a softer volume.
- A funding issue in the continent
- Condemn, debate, resolve- stressing the role of PAP
- Civil societies forming part of military government and becoming the Transitional Parliament
- Reiterating the importance of personally engaging with the 29 delegates, to understand their work
- PAP had various committees tackling various issues affecting society (climate change, GBV, poverty to name a few)
- PAP investigated on issue of female genital mutilation in an African country, and a call was subsequently made to end this

0. Closing Summary

The lessons distilled from these discussions were clear: tracking parliamentary resolutions was vital for accountability; partnerships must be fostered on trust and openness; legal reforms were needed to guarantee inclusive participation; and digitalisation, supported by policies that reduced costs and improved literacy; this was essential to bridging the urban-rural divide.

Collectively, these insights underscored that the legitimacy of African parliaments rests not only on their formal mandates but also on their capacity to institutionalise continuous, inclusive, and citizen-centred engagement.

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. Said sessions explored how regional parliaments could 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.

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2. Key Discussion Points

Reflections

- A participant from Uganda stressed that civil society must approach parliament in a cooperative and non-hostile manner to build trust and ensure meaningful dialogue.

- A participant from Somalia questioned how the Pan-African Parliament could create a standardised continental strategy to strengthen civil society and parliament engagement.

Panel Discussion 1: Engaging Regional Parliaments
 Moderator: Lebogang Kenneth Mabotho (Southern African Council of Non-Governmental Organisations, or NGOs)

- Mr Mabotho opened the discussion by noting the absence of certain Parliamentary Forum representatives, stressing the urgent need for stronger commitments to inclusive dialogue.

Panellists:

- **Kgothatso Semela (from Open Government Partnership, South Africa):** Emphasised structured mechanisms such as thematic working groups, digital dashboards, and multi-stakeholder forums. Highlighted the importance of political champions within both parliament and civil society to sustain reform agendas.

- **Gitungo Wamere (from Mzalendo Trust, Kenya):** Called for transparency in terms of public debt, stronger monitoring of the East African Assembly, and future-proof partnerships between civil society and parliaments.

- **Benjamin Aryeh (Parliamentary Network Africa, Ghana):** Shared experiences of deploying open parliament teams, but warned that internal bottlenecks within legislatures slow progress.

- **Jacob Makambwe (Zambia):** Highlighted Zambia's *Beyond the Numbers* project as a model for embedding citizen participation in governance, bridging the gap between national-level dialogue and grassroots realities.

Panel Discussion 2: The Challenge of Open Parliament
Moderator: Caroline Gaita, regional manager of the Mzalendo Trust

- Framed the discussion around barriers to open parliament, including access, limitations, poor communication, and weak civic infrastructure.

Panellists:

- **Osman Moalin (Somalia):** Reflected on the difficulty of rebuilding parliamentary openness in a post-conflict context and ensuring citizens have meaningful access.

- **Mulenga Hlezipi Mapalo (Chapter One Foundation, Zambia):** Noted weak civic participation in legislative processes and reiterated the importance of mechanisms like petitions for advocacy.

- **Adjib Epsi (Benin):** Pointed to communication failures as a central obstacle to parliamentary openness.

- **Maria Baron (Director, Directorio Legislativo, Argentina):** Provided comparative lessons from Latin America, where her organisation worked with over 20 parliaments despite shrinking funding streams. She highlighted the importance of regional advocacy networks for sustaining reform momentum.

The Cafe Breakaway Sessions of Day 2

- **Group 1: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Open Parliament**

  - Explored AI opportunities in bill tracking, information sharing, and citizen access.

  - **Timothy Chemonges (Uganda, Centre for Policy Analysis or CEPA):** Presented tools such as finance trackers, debt monitors, and MP performance assessments, stressing AI as complementary to and not a replacement for human engagement.

  - **Mohlatse Komote (Campaign on Digital Ethics, South Africa):** Warned about risks including misinformation, biased systems, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Called for ethical frameworks and regulation.

- **Group 2: Political Party Dynamics and Representation**

  - Discussed party dominance, coalition instability, monetisation of politics, and weak representation.

  - Emphasised CSOs' role in awareness campaigns, coalition-building, donor lobbying, and citizen sensitisation.

<u>Breakaway Session: African Elections and Change</u>

This session examined elections as a cornerstone of representation. The chairperson raised concerns about the monetisation of politics and the dominance of single parties in some jurisdictions, while others struggle with fragmented coalitions.

Delegates shared experiences:

- Mozambique: Dominated by a single party, with limited initial consultation on budgets, later improved after CSO pressure and donor influence.

- Lesotho: Chronic political volatility and costly repeat elections undermine stability. Coalition governments are frequent, with service delivery tied to pre-election spending.

- Benin: Electoral reforms, including thresholds for party representation and closed-list systems, have shaped representation. CSOs are building platforms to educate voters.

- Niger: MPs are imposed by parties, undermining accountability. Allowances provided to MPs are often unused for constituency work. CSOs are stepping in to raise awareness of parliament's role.

- Somalia: Called for debate on direct versus indirect elections to ensure legitimacy.

- South Africa: Coalition politics has reshaped governance. Opposition chairs 25% of committees, strengthening oversight, but budget adoption has been contentious. Judicial appointments now require extensive negotiation.

- Tanzania, Kenya, Madagascar, Uganda, South Sudan, Nigeria, Zambia, Sierra Leone, and Ghana: Each highlighted specific barriers, including repressive laws, corruption, party dominance, voter apathy, and weak citizen-parliament linkages.

CAFÉ DAY 2: AFRICAN ELECTIONS AND CHANGE
- In advocacy; use of data was encouraged. Finding: a strong trust deficit in many African countries, and a correlation with trust deficit and corruption among MPs, in part because of how elections were done.
- Campaign for advocacy work to address said matter, and initiatives to strengthen Parliament and restore public's trust in government.
- Asymmetry between Parliament and the CSO.
- Some initiatives included: inviting MPs to public events and introducing them to the public. Partnering with media which allows the MPs debates to be monitored. Some Parliaments believed they could trust the CSOs because of how stable they were. Inflation of MPs' salaries. CSOs could affect change from within. Bridging the gaps with Politically Exposed People (PEP).
- How to balance power with the government and considering CSO as a third sector.
- Public perception of Parliament was so crucial; the public did not understand the role of MPs and rather exploited them for personal favours. MPs should know their own roles too
- CSO intervenes by tracking the campaign promises and being realistic about what could be provided.
- CSO raising awareness for the public and interpreting the policies in place for the public.
- A call to train public servants for their roles and positions to better serve the public.

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3. Insights & Takeaways

- Cooperation, not confrontation, was key for civil society–parliament engagement.

- A Pan-African framework could strengthen engagement but must remain adaptable to local contexts.

- Regional parliaments faced systemic challenges that reflect national-level dynamics.

- Open parliament efforts were constrained by poor communication, weak infrastructure, and lack of resources.

- AI offered powerful governance tools but must remain ethical, localised, and citizen-centred.

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4. Recommendations / Action Points

- Promote collaborative, solutions-driven engagement strategies between parliaments and CSOs.

- Develop a Pan-African framework for structured civil society–parliament cooperation.

- Institutionalise peer learning and political champion networks to overcome high turnover.

- Invest in ethical AI solutions with safeguards against bias and misuse.

- Strengthen CSO capacity to counter political dominance and monetisation of politics.

- Rebuild citizen trust through anti-corruption strategies and stronger accountability mechanisms.

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5. Audience Engagement

- Reflections triggered debates on balancing national realities with continental strategies.

- AI discussions drew concerns about replacing human oversight with automated systems.

- Electoral system debates highlighted the role of CSOs in addressing instability and weak representation.

- Trust deficits and corruption resonated strongly with participants from multiple regions.

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6. Closing Summary

The day concluded with four overarching lessons:

1. Elections had consequences.

2. Modalities of representation mattered.

3. South Africa's political shift demonstrated democratic resilience.

4. The rising monetisation of politics requires joint CSO–parliament strategies to safeguard accountability and citizen trust.

1. Session Overview

The third day of the conference focused on the role of technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and civil society in strengthening parliamentary openness, citizen engagement, and accountability. Reflections highlighted the value of structured dialogue, global collaboration, and digital tools to overcome barriers in parliamentary culture. Formal sessions examined tools for monitoring parliament, the launch of the Open Parliament Index (OPI) 2nd edition, and governance frameworks for the Africa Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations Network (APMON).

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2. Key Discussion Points

Reflections on Previous Day

- **Participant from Uganda:** Highlighted the importance of technology and AI for enhancing citizen engagement, oversight, and monitoring.

- **Participant from Argentina:** Stressed global collaboration as a way to co-create innovative ideas from diverse perspectives.

- **Participant on PAP:** Questioned how PAP could move beyond non-binding outcomes to achieve its founding vision and strengthen its authority.

- **Group reflections:**

    o MPs were described as sometimes creating access barriers, e.g., demanding favours to grant entry.

    o Structured dialogue (annual thematic engagements, budget sessions) was seen as key to institutionalising CSO–parliament relations.

    o Digital dashboards could provide practical access points for civil society.

    o Somalia's delegation expressed hope that PAP's openness to civil society could be replicated in their own parliament.

Thematic Discussions

- Legislatures varied (elected, nominated, appointed) and required tailored strategies for CSO/Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations (PMO) engagement.

- Electoral changes (e.g., coalition governments in South Africa) reshaped legislatures, increased accountability, but also caused legislative delays.

- CSOs needed to engage not only with legislative outcomes but also in electoral processes to foster diversity and representation.

- Zimbabwean colleagues showcased surveys on corruption and governance to bridge information gaps between citizens and parliament.

- **AI & Governance Session:**

  o Opportunities: AI chatbots, data-driven applications, improved monitoring and access.

  o Risks: misinformation, deepfakes, embedded bias.

  o Consensus: AI was an assistant to human effort, not a replacement.

Panel Discussion 1: Tools for Monitoring Parliament
 Moderator: Mr Ghalib Galant

Panellists:

- **Rashaad Ali (PMG, South Africa):**

  o Showcased PMG's repository of parliamentary information used by CSOs, academia, MPs, and law firms.

  o Emphasised the centrality of committees ("engine room of parliament").

  o Highlighted opportunities for young monitors, some of whom have transitioned to parliamentary roles and even become MPs.

- **Naahila Parbhoo (OUTA, South Africa):**

  o Introduced *Parlimeter*, a tool launched in 2024 to improve active citizenry.

  o Monitored parliamentary activity but was currently desktop-only.

- **Gitungo Wamere (Mzalendo Trust, Kenya):**

o Demonstrated civic tech tools including:

- *Dokeza* (bill annotation platform).

- Promise tracker (tracks implementation of party manifesto commitments).

- SMS services allowing citizens without the internet to contact parliament.

● **Munyaradzi Dodo (Magamba Network, Zimbabwe):**

o Shared creative engagement methods: satire, hip hop festivals, WhatsApp chatbots, rural kiosks, and free open-source civic tech tools.

o Highlighted youth involvement in co-designing tools and strategies to make parliament "accessible and exciting."

o Reiterated the importance of planning for restrictions (e.g., Open Party Playbook as an exit strategy if CSOs were shut down).

Session 2: Open Parliament Index (OPI) 2nd Edition

● Pre-release of OPI 2025 (to be formally launched on 29 September).

● Expanded from West Africa to include East and Southern Africa.

● Measures:

o **Transparency** (disclosure, decision-making processes).

o **Civic Participation** (mechanisms for citizen input, inclusivity).

o **Public Accountability** (MP performance and institutional reporting).

● Objectives:

o Strengthen parliaments through openness.

- o   Track and compare progress over time.

- o   Provide evidence for collaboration between CSOs and parliaments.

- Methodology drew on: Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) indicators, and OGP standards.

Session 3: Governance & Structure (APMON)

- Reviewed draft regulatory framework of the Africa Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations Network.

- Key structures:

  - o   General Assembly (highest body, must meet annually).

  - o   Continental Executive Committee (CEC).

  - o   Secretariat.

  - o   Regional and country networks.

- Framework adopted as a working document, to be finalised at the next AGM.

- Potential hosts for next year's conference: Benin, Senegal, Zambia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Seychelles.

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3. Insights & Takeaways

- Technology, particularly AI, was reshaping citizen and parliament engagement but requires safeguards.

- Tailored strategies were needed to engage different types of legislatures.

- Electoral outcomes reshaped parliamentary culture and could increase accountability but also create instability.

- Innovative monitoring tools (from repositories to satire and kiosks) expanded citizen access and participation.

- Data-driven instruments such as OPI could strengthen parliamentary accountability and transparency across regions.

- APMON was maturing into a structured continental network with formal governance.

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4. Recommendations / Action Points

- Promote structured dialogue (annual thematic sessions, dashboards) to formalise CSO–parliament engagement.

- Ensure CSOs engage in electoral processes, not only legislative outcomes, to influence representation.

- Invest in civic tech innovations that lower access barriers, especially for youth and rural citizens.

- Strengthen safeguards for AI adoption to mitigate risks of misinformation and bias.

- Roll out and institutionalise OPI as a continental benchmark for parliamentary openness.

- Finalise and operationalise the APMON framework at the next AGM.

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5. Audience Engagement

- Participants praised monitoring tools for taking engagement "to another scale" and for generating gender-informed data.

- Reflections raised debates on how PAP can move beyond symbolic outcomes.

- Zimbabwe's experience sparked discussions on using citizen surveys to fight corruption and bridge trust gaps.

- AI discussions generated debate on balancing opportunities with risks like deepfakes and disinformation.

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6. Closing Summary

The day concluded by reaffirming that:

1. Technology and AI provided unprecedented opportunities for openness but must remain human-centred.

2. Electoral change continued to reshape legislatures, requiring CSOs to adapt strategies.

3. Parliamentary monitoring was evolving through innovative, accessible tools that engage citizens at scale.

4. OPI 2025 provided a crucial evidence base for accountability across regions.

5. APMON's adoption of a regulatory framework marks a milestone in strengthening continental collaboration and sustainability.