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| OPEN Southern Africa |

Concept Note:   
5th Annual Africa PEMO Conference 2025:

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| THEME: | BACK ON TRACK: RENEWING THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE LEGISLATURES AND CIVIL SOCIETY |
| WHAT: | APMON will hold the 5th Annual Africa PEMO Conference in 2025. It will be hosted in Southern Africa for the first time and will be an opportunity for Parliamentary Engagement and Monitoring Organisations (PEMOs) from the sub-region to participate, share their experiences and learn from each other and other sub-regions. PMG & SAf-CNGO will be co-hosts of the Southern Africa component of the Conference.  As a regional conference, it will focus on lessons and experiences from across sub-Saharan Africa and will comprise delegates from West Africa, East Africa, and of course, Southern Africa.  The host organization for West Africa is PN Africa; the host organization for East Africa is Mzalendo Trust. |
| WHERE: | Pan-African Parliament Campus, Gallagher Estate, Midrand |
| WHEN: | Last week in September 2025.  This is to coincide with the sitting of the PAP committees. October will see the plenary sitting of the PAP. It will be easier to secure some members from select committees to engage with our delegates during the committee session than the Plenary session where all delegates must be present. |
| WHO: | * The conference will target **20** participants, comprised of PEMO representatives from across the Southern Africa region.   The following countries will be invited: *Angola, Botswana, DRC, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rep of South Africa, Seychelles, Zambia and Zimbabwe*.   * The Conference will target **12** participants from East Africa from the following countries:   *Burundi****,*** *Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania.*   * The Conference will target **12** participants from West Africa from the following countries:   *Benín, Cabo Verde, Cote d’Ivoire, The Gambia****,*** *Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.*  We will also invite select parliamentarian delegates to the Pan-African Parliament from the PAP committees ensuring a spread from all three sub-regions. We will utilize the opportunity to foster dialogue between CSO delegates and their country representatives on the PAP.  Other invitees will include: SADC Parliament/EAC/ECOWAS, SAf-CNGO Secretariat, PAP CSO Forum Secretariat.  Continental media representatives play a key role in publicizing and monitoring parliaments and should have some space at the conference. |
| WHY: | Parliaments play a crucial role in defining and shaping good governance in countries across the world, making them fundamental components of democratic architecture. Parliaments serve as a reflection of the quality of a nation's democracy as a body that represents its population, oversees the Executive branch, and carries out legislative duties. Parliaments must be open, transparent, responsive to the public, and regarded as motivating citizen participation in their work to carry out these duties in a way that would yield benefits for citizens' development.  The relationship between the Parliament and the Executive has come in for much criticism over the past decade across the region; 2024 has seen several countries in the region go to the polls to elect new Executive and Legislative branches of government. Often with surprising results. Elections in Burkina Faso, Mali, South Sudan, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau were postponed, underscoring the persistent challenges in these regions. However, countries including Senegal, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Mauritius, Ghana, and the self-declared Republic of Somaliland managed to conduct elections, that were broadly seen as credible, competitive, free, and fair – though not without issues.  After a decade of democracy, South Africa is governed by a coalition of parties who have spent the better part of 30 years opposing each other; in Botswana, the party of the *Ntate ya Sechaba*, Sir Seretse Khama, managed to only return 4 MPs in a parliament of 65 members; in Mozambique, a low-level civil war erupted after the elections. In the Comoros, only 16,3% of the eligible voters turned up to vote – hardly an endorsement of the incoming political leadership.  This context presents Sub-Saharan Africa with an opportunity to reframe anew the relationship between Parliament and civil society to address the criticisms of the past, and to help Parliament fulfil its democratic mandate fully. Or to start the conversation.  With the accession to the White House for a second term by Donald Trump, America’s foreign policy stance has shifted dramatically – with dire consequences for previously considered stable relationships. African countries have felt the consequences especially sharply. Trade relations through instruments like AGOA were upset; development aid from the US has been curtailed or even ended with very little warning; even military cooperation and infrastructure projects have been shuttered; the US withdrew from Climate and Energy compacts and commitments.  All these geopolitical moves have impacted wananchi, ordinary people on the ground on the continent. From job losses in the health and allied sector, to exacerbated food insecurity, to the closing down of manufacturing production for the American market. The response from various governments has been individual and localized and failed to discern the opportunity and need for regional and continental cooperation of the kind that we have seen in Europe or the Americas. So how do citizens of Africa engage their lawmakers and representatives about dealing with these challenges in a more coordinated way that leverages the wisdom of the local in the face of also a technological onslaught. This is a critical juncture in Africa’s evolution – and our elected leaders and lawmakers will need all the support they can get to work in the collective interests. |
| Parliaments & Engagement | Parliaments play a crucial role in the governance and democratic processes of any nation. Parliaments across the continent grapple with similar challenges in delivering fully on their mandate to represent the aspirations and interests of the citizenry. Nevertheless, how those challenges present themselves differ regionally and even at a national level.  In many ways the colonial legacy still impacts political governance today; the systems and shape of government derived from those colonial systems also show up in the present day. This also shows up in the variable levels of access and engagement with civil society across the continent.  Learning and sharing experiences might offer perspectives, solutions and workarounds that address similar challenges in other contexts. |
| East Africa: | In East Africa, parliaments face unique challenges that impact their effectiveness and the overall political stability of the region. Below are some of the key challenges facing parliaments across East Africa and the implications for governance and development.  **1. Political Instability and Conflict**  One of the most significant challenges facing East African parliaments is political instability and conflict. Countries like Somalia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have experienced prolonged periods of conflict, which disrupt parliamentary functions and hinder legislative processes [1](https://www.csis.org/analysis/state-eight-challenges-facing-east-africa-community). These conflicts often lead to a lack of continuity in governance and make it difficult for parliaments to enact and enforce laws effectively.  **2. Corruption and Lack of Transparency**  Corruption remains a pervasive issue in many East African countries. Parliamentary members and officials are often implicated in corruption scandals, which erode public trust and undermine the legitimacy of legislative bodies [2](https://www.africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk/evolution-of-african-parliaments-adapting-to-21st-century-challenges/). The lack of transparency in parliamentary proceedings further exacerbates this issue, making it challenging to hold officials accountable and ensure that laws are enacted in the public's best interest.  **3. Limited Technological Infrastructure**  While some East African countries have made strides in adopting digital tools for governance, many parliaments still struggle with limited technological infrastructure [2](https://www.africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk/evolution-of-african-parliaments-adapting-to-21st-century-challenges/). This gap hinders the ability to conduct virtual sessions, engage in e-legislation, and facilitate real-time public participation. The digital divide also affects the efficiency and accessibility of parliamentary processes, making it difficult to keep up with global legislative trends.  **4. Inadequate Legal and Institutional Frameworks**  The legal and institutional frameworks within which East African parliaments operate are often inadequate. Many countries lack comprehensive laws and regulations that support effective parliamentary functions [3](https://thesis.extension.harvard.edu/files/thesis/files/effects_of_political_legal_and_governance_challenges_case_study_of_the_east_african_community.pdf). Additionally, the independence of parliaments is frequently compromised by executive interference, which undermines their ability to function as autonomous legislative bodies.  **5. Socio-Economic Challenges**  East African countries face numerous socio-economic challenges, including high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. These issues place additional pressure on parliaments to develop and implement policies that address the needs of their populations [2](https://www.africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk/evolution-of-african-parliaments-adapting-to-21st-century-challenges/). However, limited resources and competing priorities often make it difficult for parliaments to effectively tackle these socio-economic challenges.  **6. Regional Integration and Cooperation**  The East African Community (EAC) aims to promote economic, political, and social integration among its member states. However, regional integration efforts are often hampered by political tensions and disagreements between member countries [1](https://www.csis.org/analysis/state-eight-challenges-facing-east-africa-community). These tensions can spill over into parliamentary relations, making it difficult to achieve cohesive and coordinated legislative efforts across the region.  **Conclusion**  The challenges facing parliaments across East Africa are multifaceted and deeply intertwined with the region's broader political, economic, and social issues. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to enhance political stability, combat corruption, improve technological infrastructure, strengthen legal frameworks, and promote regional cooperation. By tackling these issues, East African parliaments can better fulfill their roles as pillars of democracy and drivers of development. |
| Southern Africa: | In Southern Africa, parliaments play a critical role in shaping the region's socio-political landscape, but they face a series of challenges that undermine their efficacy. These hurdles are rooted in historical, economic, and institutional complexities, and they demand careful attention if the region is to achieve its developmental and democratic goals. Persistent Political Influence / EXECUTIVE OVERREACH One of the most striking challenges confronting Southern African parliaments is the persistent influence of political parties on parliamentary proceedings. In many countries across the region, parliaments are dominated by ruling parties that prioritize party loyalty over national interests. This often leads to a lack of genuine debate and a rubber-stamping of executive decisions rather than rigorous legislative scrutiny. For example, in nations such as Zimbabwe and Angola, strong party control has been known to stifle dissenting voices within parliaments, eroding the ideals of representative democracy. Limited Fiscal Autonomy Financial independence is crucial for any parliament to function effectively, yet many Southern African parliaments struggle with limited fiscal autonomy. In countries where funds allocated to parliamentary activities are controlled by the executive branch, operational independence is compromised. This financial dependency hampers legislative oversight and reduces the ability of parliaments to hold the executive accountable. Without adequate resources, parliaments also face challenges in hiring skilled staff, conducting research, and reaching out to constituencies. Corruption and Mismanagement Corruption remains a pervasive problem in Southern African governance, and parliaments are not immune to its effects. Instances of mismanagement of public funds and unethical behavior among elected members tarnish the credibility of parliamentary institutions. This not only diminishes public trust but also hinders the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight. Parliaments must adopt stricter ethical codes and strengthen anti-corruption mechanisms to restore confidence and legitimacy. Weak Institutional Capacity The effectiveness of parliaments is often tied to their institutional capacity. Across Southern Africa, many parliaments face challenges associated with inadequate infrastructure, outdated technology, and insufficient training for members and staff. These limitations make it difficult for parliaments to leverage modern tools for legislative research, constituency outreach, and data analysis. Building institutional capacity requires investments in technology, skills development, and facilities that enable parliaments to better serve their citizens. Lack of Gender and Minority Representation Although there have been strides toward inclusive representation in Southern African parliaments, gender and minority representation remains a significant challenge. Women, youth, and marginalized groups are often underrepresented, limiting the diversity of perspectives in policymaking. Some countries, such as South Africa and Namibia, have implemented quotas to boost female representation, yet cultural and societal barriers persist. Greater efforts are needed to ensure that parliaments reflect the diversity of their populations. Threats to Parliamentary Independence In certain Southern African nations, the independence of parliamentary institutions is threatened by interference from the executive branch or other powerful entities. When parliaments are unable to act autonomously, their ability to provide checks and balances is severely compromised. Instances of intimidation, suppression of opposition voices, and manipulation of parliamentary processes have been reported across the region, undermining democratic principles. Public Apathy and Engagement Another challenge facing parliaments in Southern Africa is a growing sense of public apathy toward political processes. Many citizens feel disconnected from their representatives and perceive parliaments as inefficient or inaccessible. This lack of engagement not only affects voter turnout but also diminishes public advocacy for stronger parliamentary accountability. Parliaments must prioritize outreach programs to bridge the gap between elected officials and the public, fostering trust and participation. Regional Cooperation and Integration While parliaments have the potential to play a role in fostering regional integration, such efforts often face various obstacles. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has made strides in promoting cooperation, but the role of parliaments in these efforts remains limited. Challenges such as differing political systems, resource disparities, and national interests hamper cohesive regional approaches to legislation and governance. The Path Forward Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that combines structural reforms, capacity building, and public engagement. Parliaments must strive for greater financial independence to enhance their operational autonomy. Institutional capacity should be strengthened through investments in training, technology, and infrastructure. Equally important is the need for inclusive representation that reflects the diverse populations of Southern Africa.  Public trust in parliamentary institutions can be bolstered through transparency and accountability measures. Anti-corruption initiatives, ethical codes, and oversight mechanisms must be rigorously implemented to eliminate mismanagement and build credibility. Furthermore, regional cooperation among parliaments should be encouraged to align legislative processes and promote collective development goals.  In conclusion, parliaments in Southern Africa stand at a crossroads. While they face numerous challenges, they also hold the potential to drive democratic progress and sustainable development. By addressing these hurdles with resolve and innovation, the region's parliaments can emerge as stronger, more effective institutions that truly serve the interests of their people. The journey toward this transformation requires the commitment of all stakeholders—from government leaders to civil society and the citizens they represent. |
| West Africa: | West Africa, a region rich in history, culture, and diversity, stands at a critical juncture in its democratic evolution. Parliaments across the region serve as the cornerstone of representative democracy, tasked with enacting legislation, holding governments accountable, and ensuring that the voices of their citizens are heard. However, despite their profound importance, these institutions face numerous challenges that undermine their effectiveness, transparency, and accessibility. Below are some of the key hurdles confronting West African parliaments, highlighting the complexities of governance in this vibrant yet politically volatile region. 1. Political Instability and Fragile Democracies One of the most significant challenges for parliaments in West Africa is the prevalence of political instability. Coups d'état, contested elections, and authoritarian tendencies have disrupted the functioning of democratic institutions across the region. Countries like Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso have experienced military coups in recent years, leaving their parliaments in a state of dormancy or under the control of unelected regimes. Such instability erodes public trust in democratic processes and sidelines the legislative body from its intended role.  Furthermore, even in nations where democratic processes have been sustained, fragile institutions often struggle to assert their independence from the executive branch. Parliaments frequently become rubber-stamp bodies, approving decisions made by presidents without sufficient debate or scrutiny. 2. Limited Resources and Capacity Parliaments across West Africa often operate under severe financial and human resource constraints. Budgetary limitations hamper their ability to conduct research, draft legislation, and oversee government actions effectively. Many legislative bodies lack adequately trained staff or access to modern technology, which further diminishes their capacity to perform their duties.  In addition to financial challenges, the lack of technical expertise among some parliamentarians poses another roadblock. Representatives may face difficulties understanding complex policy issues or crafting laws that align with international standards. These shortcomings can lead to poorly designed legislation that fails to address the region’s pressing economic, social, and environmental concerns. 3. Corruption and Lack of Transparency Corruption remains a pervasive issue within West African parliaments. Reports of bribery, nepotism, and embezzlement tarnish the credibility of these institutions, making it hard for citizens to trust their representatives. The misuse of public funds, coupled with opaque legislative procedures, often leads to the prioritization of personal or political interests over the needs of the populace.  The lack of transparency in parliamentary proceedings further exacerbates the problem. Limited access to information about debates, votes, and decision-making processes prevents citizens and civil society organizations from holding their representatives accountable. This disconnect undermines the principle of participatory governance and alienates the electorate. 4. Gender Inequality and Underrepresentation Despite progress in some areas, gender inequality continues to plague West African parliaments. Women remain significantly underrepresented in legislative bodies, with cultural norms, political structures, and economic barriers hindering their participation in politics. For example, countries like Nigeria and Sierra Leone have among the lowest rates of female representation in parliament compared to global averages.  The absence of gender balance not only limits the diversity of perspectives in policymaking but also perpetuates systemic inequalities. Efforts to promote inclusivity, such as gender quotas, have seen mixed results, often facing resistance from entrenched political elites. 5. Security Challenges The persistent threat of terrorism, insurgency, and organized crime poses significant challenges to parliamentary operations in West Africa. In conflict-affected regions such as northern Nigeria and the Sahel, insecurity has disrupted legislative activities, making it difficult for representatives to convene, deliberate, or engage with constituents. Parliamentarians themselves have become targets of violence, further deterring active participation in governance.  Additionally, security concerns often divert governmental focus and resources away from parliamentary strengthening, leaving legislative bodies ill-equipped to address the root causes of instability. 6. Weak Political Party Systems The role of political parties in shaping parliamentary dynamics cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, many West African nations struggle with weak and fragmented party systems, characterized by a lack of ideological coherence and internal democracy. Political parties often revolve around individual personalities rather than structured platforms, leading to inconsistencies in policy formation and implementation.  This weakness translates into volatile parliamentary environments where shifting alliances and defections disrupt legislative continuity. It also undermines the development of long-term strategies to address national challenges, leaving parliaments reactive rather than proactive. 7. Limited Citizen Engagement A crucial function of any parliament is to serve as a bridge between the government and the people. However, in West Africa, limited citizen engagement and awareness about parliamentary roles and processes hinder the effectiveness of these institutions. Many citizens remain unaware of their rights to petition or interact with their representatives, resulting in a lack of grassroots input into national policymaking.  Civil society organizations, while active in some areas, often struggle to create sustained pressure on parliaments due to an absence of legal frameworks that support participatory governance. This disconnect between parliamentarians and the electorate perpetuates a cycle of disengagement and mistrust. 8. Regional Disparities West Africa’s diversity is both a strength and a challenge for its parliaments. Regional disparities in wealth, development, and access to education create uneven representation within legislative bodies. Representatives from more affluent urban areas often overshadow those from rural or marginalized communities, leading to policies that fail to address the needs of all citizens equitably.  The lack of inclusivity in representation can exacerbate social divides and deepen tensions in nations already grappling with ethnic and regional fragmentation. Conclusion Parliaments across West Africa are navigating a complex landscape of historical legacies, institutional weaknesses, and contemporary challenges. While strides have been made toward strengthening democratic governance, significant hurdles remain on the path to effective and accountable representation. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts from governments, civil society, and international partners to build resilient institutions that truly reflect the aspirations of the people they serve.  From promoting transparency and gender equality to ensuring security and regional inclusivity, there is much work to be done to empower parliaments as instruments of change. As West Africa continues its journey toward stable and robust democracies, the role of its legislative bodies will remain central to shaping the region’s future. |
| HOW: | The (hybrid) Conference will consist of plenary sessions, discussion groups and a site visit to the Pan African Parliament.  Innovations, good practices and lessons learned will also be generated through a series of consultations between participants with conclusions presented in a comparative brief back.  If we manage to secure the PAP campus as the venue for the Conference, part of the time will be spent visiting the PAP and meeting officials and delegates there.  The programme will be held in English, French and Portuguese under a strict policy of non-attribution (Chatham House Rules) |
| WHERE: | Midrand South Africa. / Pretoria  The conference venue would be either Midrand Conference Centre (<https://www.sa-venues.com/visit/midrandconference/> ) or the Gallagher Hotel & Conference Centre (<https://www.sa-venues.com/visit/thegallagherhotel/> )  Irene Country Lodge  Univ of PTA’s FutureAfrica Centre  Accommodation options include:   * Midrand Conference Centre * Gallagher Hotel and Conference Centre * Premier Hotel Midrand   The meeting with the PAP delegation will happen on the PAP campus at the Gallagher Estate. |
| Proceedings: | Hybrid: in-person + virtual login / streaming on FB(?).  Panelists could join remotely for their inputs |
| Preparation: | Each sub-region produces 3 case studies of parliamentary engagement or monitoring for publication and sharing.  2 pre-conference webinars on Open Parliament/Open Government and Engagement hosted by Southern Africa and open to other regions. |
| Possible Themes | Positive Engagement: Case studies of positive engagement between legislature and civil society  Channels for engagement: Principles of engaging national (and regional institutions)  Responding to global geopolitical storms – Tariff wars, AGOA, Infrastructure and Development Aid  Civil Society role in supporting regional initiatives – security, extreme weather, energy crisis etc  Impact of AI and technology – also in strengthening parliament’s mandate. |
| Harvest / Outcomes | * Hybrid Recording of proceedings * **9x Case Studies** of constructive engagement between Legislatures and CSOs. 3 case studies per region * Input on proposed SADC Parliament NSA Engagement Mechanism * Write-up on EAC & ECOWAS engagement mechanisms * Write up on relationship between PAP and PAP CSO Forum * Conference Report & Recommendations |

# PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES:

 Among other things, the two-day session, targeting PMOs from across sub-Saharan Africa, will provide a platform for peer learning, collaboration and exchange as well as creation of awareness of the Africa Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations Network (APMON) constitutive framework.

# DRAFT PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK

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| **Time** | **Day Zero** | **Day One**  ***Engaging Parliament*** | **Day Two**  ***Monitoring Parliament*** | **Day Three** |
|  |  | Conference Hall | Pan-African Parliament Campus | Conference Hall |
| **08h00 – 12h30** | Travel & Arrival | **Welcome, Purpose**  The Important Place of Parliament  **Keynote Address**: ZA DIRCO Minister/DG – ***Our respective responsibilities in times of unparalleled crisis***  **Panel:** EA | WA | SA | OGP – *The importance of the partnership between Civil Society & Government*  **World Café**: ***Mashauriano*** – talking to each other in Africa | Welcome: Secretary/President of PAP  **African Union & Agenda 2063**  ***An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, representing a dynamic force in the international arena –*** *What is the role of civil society in responding to regional and continental challenges – extreme weather, insecurity & conflict, changing world of work*  **APMON Institutional Arrangements:**  Break out into 3 regional groups to discuss networking and actions | **Theme**: *Monitoring Parliaments*  ***Efficiencies of Parliaments: What #OPI2024 tells us.***  Resolutions  Conference Wrap Up |
| **12h30 – 13h30** |  | LUNCH | LUNCH (with the PAP) | LUNCH |
|  |  | **Theme**: *Engaging Our National Parliaments* | **Theme**: *Engaging the Region* | Departure |
| **14h00 – 16H30** | Arrival & Registration | **Panel**: ***The Challenge of Open Parliaments | 3 Case studies***  **OP | EA | SA | WA**  **Thematic Parallel Sessions:**  AI & Governance | Mobilising & Responding in the Age of Trump | Elections & Change | Recap from Previous Day  Keynote Address: **PAP CSO Forum – Engaging the AU**  **Panel**: 3 Regional CSO forums speak  Commissions: *Challenges & Successes (regional dynamics / media freedom / leveraging expertise)* |  |
| **18H00 -** | Conference Welcome Dinner  (Meet n Greet) |  | Conference Dinner (invite PAP Chairpersons of Committees) | Departure |