

# From Participation to Partnership

Kenyan CSOs Input in the Development of the EU-Civil Society Roadmap 2025-2027

**2025 - 2027**



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# Executive summary

From 9th to 17th March, the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), the SDGs Kenya Forum, and Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), with support from the European Union, conducted virtual civil society organization (CSO) consultations across six regional economic blocs; Lake Region Economic Bloc (LREB), North Rift Economic Bloc (NOREB), Frontier Counties Development Council (FCDC), Jumuiya ya Kaunti za Pwani (JKP), South Eastern Kenya Economic Bloc (SEKEB), and the Mount Kenya and Aberdares Region (MKA), as well as Nairobi. The consultations were undertaken to inform the development of the European Union–Kenya Civil Society Roadmap (2025–2027).

The consultative process brought together 474 participants, representing a diverse cross section of civil society actors, including grassroots and community-based organizations, youth and women-led groups, and thematic and national civil society networks. The consultations provided an inclusive platform for capturing region specific experiences, priorities, and perspectives on civic space, development challenges, and civil society engagement in Kenya.

The primary objectives of the consultations were to assess the state of civic space across regions; reflect on lessons learned from previous European Union–civil society engagement frameworks; strengthen understanding of the Global Gateway Strategy and the role of civil society in its implementation; identify capacity needs, partnership opportunities, and areas for collaboration between CSOs and development partners; and generate actionable recommendations to guide the development and effective implementation of the forthcoming Civil Society Roadmap.

Overall, the consultations demonstrated strong consensus on the central role of civil society as a driver of inclusive, accountable, and sustainable development. Participants emphasized that CSOs should be recognized not merely as beneficiaries, but as equal partners and co-creators across the full development cycle, including project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

A key cross-cutting finding was the limited awareness and accessibility of existing European Union civil society engagement frameworks, particularly the Civil Society Roadmap (2022–2025). Many stakeholders reported minimal exposure to the roadmap or engagement in related initiatives without clarity on their strategic alignment, highlighting gaps in communication, outreach, and decentralized engagement, especially among grassroots and community-based organizations.

The consultations further identified systemic barriers to effective CSO participation, including complex and restrictive funding mechanisms, limited access to timely information on EU programmes, capacity gaps in technical, digital, and policy engagement skills, and inconsistent inclusion of CSOs in early stages of project design and decision making. Participants also expressed concern about the evolving development financing landscape, particularly the shift toward loan and investment-based models under the Global Gateway Initiative which, if not complemented by flexible grant-based instruments, risk marginalizing vulnerable communities and undermining local ownership.

Despite these challenges, the consultations highlighted significant opportunities to strengthen civil society engagement, including expanding decentralized and inclusive dialogue platforms, strengthening partnerships among CSOs, government, and development partners, and leveraging civil society's comparative advantage in community mobilization, policy advocacy, and accountability. The importance of context specific approaches was underscored, with regional priorities such as agroecology, blue economy, civic education and governance, and digital inclusion emerging as key thematic areas.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for a recalibrated and forward looking EU–Kenya Civil Society Roadmap (2025–2027) that enhances awareness and accessibility of EU frameworks, strengthens enabling conditions for civic space, promotes inclusive and flexible financing mechanisms, institutionalizes structured and continuous dialogue, and positions civil society as a strategic partner in achieving sustainable development outcomes.

# Introduction

## The Regional CSOs Consultation Process

To ensure that the European Union–Kenya Civil Society Roadmap (2025–2027) reflects lived realities across the country, the consultations were designed as a phased and participatory process engaging civil society actors at both regional and national levels. This section outlines how the consultations were conducted, who participated, and how insights were generated to inform the Roadmap.

The consultations were conducted sequentially across regional blocs, beginning with the LREB on 9th March and concluding in Nairobi on 17th March. This phased approach enabled progressive reflection and deeper engagement, allowing insights from earlier consultations to inform discussions in subsequent regions and ensuring responsiveness to diverse regional contexts.

Prior to the virtual consultations, an online survey was administered and completed by 56 civil society organizations. The online survey served as a complementary consultation tool, providing an additional avenue for civil society organizations to submit detailed written inputs. This approach accommodated diverse participation preferences and ensured the use of multiple, inclusive methods to engage a wide range of CSOs across Kenya. Further analysis of the survey findings is presented in section 5 of this report.

Below is a tabulation of the virtual consultation participation in numbers

Regional Bloc	Date	Attendance Female	Attendance Male	Total Number	Counties Represented	Missing Counties
LREB	9/3/2026	80	71	151	Bungoma, Busia, Homa Bay, Kakamega, Kisii, Kisumu, Migori, Nyamira, Siaya,	Vihiga
NOREB	10/3/2026	34	23	57	Uasin Gishu, Trans Nzoia, Nandi, Elgeyo Marakwet, Baringo, Bomet, Nakuru, Narok, West Pokot, Turkana	None
FCDC	11/3/2026	12	25	37	Wajir, Mandera, Marsabit, Isiolo, Samburu	Garissa
JKP	12/3/2026	45	66	111	Kilifi, Kwale, Lamu, Mombasa, Taita Taveta, Tana River	None
SEKEB	13/3/2026	14	17	31	Machakos, Makueni, Kajiado	Kitui
MT. KENYA	16/3/2026	20	25	45	Nyeri, Nyandarua, Meru, Tharaka Nithi, Murang'a, Laikipia, Kiambu.	Embu, Kirinyaga
NAIROBI	17 /3/2026	21	21	42	Nairobi	None

Note: A total of 30 women-led organizations and 42 youth-led organizations participated. Overall, the consultations engaged 474 participants, comprising 226 women and 248 men.

The opening and introductory remarks delivered by members of the National Steering committee who were moderating the sessions, emphasized the importance of moving beyond centralized, Nairobi-based engagement toward more inclusive regional participation. The remarks underscored the need to strengthen decentralized dialogue mechanisms and to ensure that diverse civil society voices meaningfully inform European Union–civil society engagement frameworks.

To guide the discussions, participants were invited to reflect on a set of key questions including:

- How can civil society engagement be made more inclusive and accessible across regional and community levels?
- What roles should CSOs play across the Global Gateway project cycle, from design to implementation and oversight?
- How can partnerships between the EU, government institutions, private sector, and CSOs be strengthened?
- What lessons from the previous roadmap should inform the next phase?

Participants were encouraged to reflect critically on both opportunities for enhanced collaboration and structural barriers that continue to limit meaningful and sustained civil society participation.

# Grounding Learning Sessions:

## Global Gateway and the EU–CSO Roadmap

To ensure meaningful and informed participation, each regional consultation was preceded by a foundational learning and information-sharing session. These sessions were designed to provide civil society organizations with a shared understanding of the policy and strategic frameworks underpinning the consultations, thereby enabling more substantive and informed engagement during discussions.

The learning sessions focused on four core areas:

- i) An overview of the Global Gateway Strategy and its relevance to Kenya;
- ii) A brief reflection on the previous EU–Kenya Civil Society Roadmap (2022–2025);
- iii) An overview of the new EU–CSO Roadmap framework in Kenya (2025–2027); and
- iv) Key entry points through which CSOs can prioritize, engage, and influence EU supported initiatives, including across the Global Gateway project cycle.

The sessions were particularly timely, as they drew on recent and relevant expertise from civil society leaders directly engaged in EU–CSO dialogue processes.

The first presentation was delivered by David Busienei, a civil society representative engaged through the META Project. He has recently published a book examining the Global Gateway as a diplomatic and development instrument and the role of civil society within this evolving framework. Drawing on his published reflections, the presentation situated the Global Gateway within the European Union’s broader shift from traditional aid models toward partnership and investment-driven approaches. This framing provided participants with critical analytical context on how infrastructure financing, geopolitics, and civil society engagement intersect, lending depth and credibility to the discussion.

Building on this strategic overview, Sascha Gabizon, Executive Director of Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), unpacked the financial architecture of the Global Gateway, with particular attention to blended finance, guarantees, and loan-based instruments. The presentation explored both the opportunities and risks these models present for civil society, drawing on experiences from Europe to illustrate how CSOs have sought to engage meaningfully with investment-driven initiatives, including both opportunities and constraints.

A further presentation was delivered by Esther Nyawira, META Programme Coordinator at FEMNET, who reflected on lessons from the previous EU–Kenya Civil Society Roadmap (2022–2025). Drawing on direct experience engaging with the earlier roadmap, the presentation highlighted its overarching objectives, achievements, and limitations, while encouraging participants to critically assess gaps in awareness, participation, and implementation. This session helped ground the consultations in lived experience and provided practical insights to inform the next phase of the Roadmap.

Together, these presentations ensured that participants entered the consultative discussions with a shared baseline of knowledge and a clearer understanding of the policy and financing landscape. They also provided concrete reference points for articulating priorities and recommendations. This approach strengthened the quality of dialogue and supported more informed, strategic, and context-responsive civil society input into the development of the EU–Kenya Civil Society Roadmap (2025–2027).

# Strategic Framing of the Global Gateway

## i. **Global Gateway as a Development and Diplomatic Strategy by David Busienei**

This presentation provided a strategic and conceptual framing of the Global Gateway Strategy, highlighting it as a significant shift in the European Union's development cooperation approach. Drawing on reflections from the presenter's recently published book, the analysis situated the Global Gateway within a broader transition away from traditional aid models toward a partnership-based framework grounded in sustainability, transparency, and mutual accountability.

The presentation emphasised that shift reflects a broader repositioning of development cooperation within a competitive global financing and geopolitical landscape, where infrastructure investment has emerged as a central instrument of influence. Within this context, the Global Gateway was presented as a multi-sectoral initiative spanning digital transformation, climate and energy, transport infrastructure, health systems, and education, sectors that align closely with Kenya's development priorities.

At the same time, the presentation raised critical questions regarding inclusivity and accessibility, particularly given the Strategy's emphasis on large scale infrastructure and investment driven programming.

The presentation further underscored the strategic role of civil society across the policy, implementation, and oversight phases of development interventions. However, participants noted that this role remains largely aspirational unless accompanied by structured and institutionalised engagement mechanisms. Without meaningful civil society participation, there is a risk that large-scale investments may fail to reflect community needs, particularly those of marginalized populations.

## ii. **Global Gateway: Financing, Risks, and Civil Society Engagement by Sascha Gabizon**

Building on the strategic overview, this presentation provided a critical examination of the financing architecture underpinning the Global Gateway, highlighting that the widely cited €300 billion Global Gateway envelope is largely composed of guarantees, loans, and blended finance instruments rather than direct grants. This distinction was emphasized as fundamental, as it directly shapes who is able to participate in and benefit from EU-supported Global Gateway initiatives.

From an analytical perspective, the increasing reliance on investment-driven models signals a shift toward prioritizing "bankable" projects capable of generating financial returns. While this approach may attract private sector partnerships and accelerate infrastructure development, CSOs noted that it risks excluding grassroots, youth-led, and women-led organizations. These organizations often lack the financial and technical capacity required to engage with complex investment instruments.

Concerns were particularly pronounced among grassroots and community-based organizations, who warned that these financing models could deepen existing inequalities within the civil society ecosystem. Youth-led organizations highlighted barriers related to limited access to financial and technical expertise, while women-led organizations pointed to structural challenges in accessing capital and decision-making spaces. Organizations working in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) and Indigenous contexts further emphasized that investment-driven approaches often fail to account for local realities, including geographic isolation and limited market integration.

The session also raised important political and economic considerations, including the risk of reinforcing neo-colonial dynamics, privatization of essential services, and weakened local ownership. These concerns underscored the need for stronger safeguards and CSOs involvement to ensure that Global Gateway investments align with principles of equity, inclusion, human rights and sustainable development.

While emerging opportunities for civil society engagement such as advisory platforms and dialogue mechanisms were acknowledged, participants noted that these spaces remain limited in reach and accessibility, particularly for grassroots actors. A strong emphasis was placed on gender equality, with calls for flexible gender responsive financing and targeted support for women-led organizations, recognizing that inclusive outcomes require deliberate and intentional design.

#### **4.1 Reflections on the EU Civil Society Roadmap (2022–2025) and Future Directions: Lessons from Practice and Lived Experience**

This presentation reflected on the implementation of the EU Civil Society Roadmap (2022–2025), drawing on direct experience engaging with the framework. While the roadmap has contributed to strengthening policy dialogue and institutional engagement, its impact was described as uneven, particularly among grassroots, rural based, and regionally situated organizations.

A key analytical insight was that awareness of the roadmap remains low, not due to lack of activity, but due to weak communication and limited contextualization. Many organizations reported participating in EU-supported initiatives without recognizing them as part of the EU-CSOs engagement strategy. This suggests that the issue is not only about implementation but also about visibility, accessibility, and ownership.

The participants emphasized that civil society is not a homogeneous entity, and that disparities in access to information, resources, and participation must be addressed. Youth-led and rural-based organizations, in particular, face distinct barriers compared to larger, urban-based CSOs, underscoring the need for differentiated and context responsive engagement approaches.

Looking ahead to the 2025–2027 Roadmap, proposed priorities including improved mapping of the civil society landscape in Kenya, strengthened dialogue mechanisms, and enhanced enabling CSOs conditions were welcomed. However, participants emphasized that these priorities will only be effective if accompanied by concrete strategies for decentralized decision making, capacity strengthening, and sustained flexible engagement.

A key takeaway from the discussion was the need to reposition the roadmap as a “living” and adaptive strategy, grounded in continuous feedback and institutionalized mechanisms for Kenyan CSOs engagement and accountability, rather than one- off consultations.

# Breakout and Plenary Discussions Civil Society Priorities, Perspectives and Insights Across Regions in Kenya

Following the presentations, civil society organizations engaged in facilitated discussions tailored to regional participation levels. In regions with larger numbers of participants, discussions were held through thematic breakout groups, enabling more focused reflection and inclusive engagement. In regions with fewer than 50 participants, discussions were conducted in open plenary sessions, allowing for collective dialogue and shared reflection.

These discussions were complemented by responses from an online survey completed by 56 civil society organizations, providing an additional written channel for feedback and enabling broader participation beyond the live sessions. Together, the breakout discussions, plenary exchanges, and survey responses generated rich qualitative insights into civil society experiences, challenges, and priorities within the EU–Kenya partnership.

The analysis presented in this section synthesizes these inputs, capturing both cross-cutting themes and region-specific nuances. While many challenges were shared across regions, their manifestations varied by geographic context, organizational size, and thematic focus, underscoring the need for context-responsive and differentiated approaches in the implementation of the Civil Society Roadmap.

## I. Participation, Inclusion, and Civic Space

Meaningful participation of CSOs across the policy and project cycle, from priority-setting to design, implementation, and accountability is widely recognized as essential for responsive and inclusive development outcomes. However, findings across all regions indicate that CSO engagement remains largely confined to the implementation phase of projects, limiting their ability to shape priorities or influence intervention design.

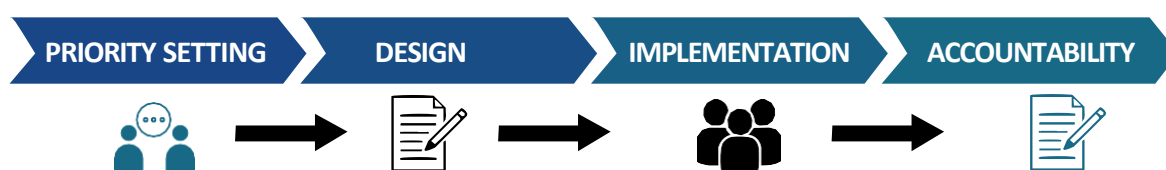
*As noted by a participant:*

“Meaningful participation is often undermined when young people and grassroots organizations are engaged too late in the process, frequently limited to the implementation stage rather than being involved from the outset.”

This pattern reflects both structural and contextual constraints. The absence or fragmentation of formal mechanisms for early-stage engagement reinforces centralized, top-down planning processes, while weak political goodwill and limited institutional frameworks further restrict inclusive participation. These challenges are not uniform: in frontier and marginalized regions, particularly within FCDC and parts of NOREB, participants reported more pronounced civic space restrictions, including higher levels of political interference and weaker enabling environments. In more urbanized regions such as NRB, participation opportunities may be more visible but are often described as symbolic rather than substantive, particularly for youth.

Socio-cultural and structural inequalities further shape participation. Across regions, marginalized groups including women, youth, and especially the girl child in northern areas face compounded barriers to engagement. Women-led and grassroots organizations also highlighted risks associated with participating in governance and accountability processes, contributing to self-censorship and reduced advocacy.

As a result, CSOs are frequently engaged only after key decisions have already been made, limiting their role to implementation rather than co-creation. This undermines the relevance and effectiveness of interventions, as local and contextual knowledge particularly from grassroots actors are insufficiently integrated into project design. While survey data suggests that civic space is moderately open, qualitative findings point to significant geographic and social disparities



## II. Access to Information and Awareness Gaps

The above-mentioned participation constraints are closely linked to persistent gaps in access to information. Timely, accessible, and contextually relevant information is a prerequisite for meaningful engagement, enabling CSOs to identify opportunities, participate in policy dialogue, and contribute to programme design and accountability. However, across all regions, participants identified significant information and awareness gaps as a foundational barrier.

Survey findings indicate that over 70% of CSOs reported limited awareness of European Union programmes, including the EU Civil Society Roadmap, despite prior participation in EU-supported initiatives. This reflects systemic issues in how information is shared. Current practices are often centralized, technical, and reliant on formal, digital, and English-dominant channels that do not align with the operational realities of many CSOs.

These barriers manifest differently across contexts. In ASAL and frontier regions, including FCDC and parts of NOREB, limited digital infrastructure constrains access to online platforms. In coastal regions such as JKP, language barriers and exclusion from formal networks are more pronounced, particularly for community-based organizations. In Nairobi, while access to information is relatively stronger, the technical complexity of content still limits meaningful engagement.

*As one participant observed:*

“Access to information on Global Gateway initiatives remains limited, with most discussions occurring at higher levels and rarely reaching grassroots actors. There is a need to deliberately cascade these engagements to ensure broader inclusion.”

Socio-economic inequalities further compound these challenges. Youth-led organizations highlighted the digital divide as a key constraint, while women-led organizations emphasized exclusion from formal information-sharing networks. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) face additional barriers related to accessibility.

As a result, many CSOs especially those outside major urban centres remain unaware of funding opportunities, policy dialogues, and programme design processes. Consequently, existing dialogue platforms are underutilized, limiting the diversity of voices shaping development priorities.

### III. Access to Funding and Structural Barriers

Limited access to information directly translates into challenges in accessing funding. Equitable and accessible financing is critical for enabling CSOs to sustain their work and engage meaningfully in development processes. However, participants consistently reported significant barriers in navigating funding mechanisms.

Nearly 60% of surveyed CSOs indicated difficulty engaging with EU funding processes due to complex application procedures, bureaucratic reporting requirements, and institutional capacity constraints. These challenges are rooted in funding models shaped by risk management and compliance frameworks that tend to favour larger, well-established organizations. Requirements such as audited financial statements, high co-financing thresholds, and prior donor experience create structural barriers for smaller and emerging CSOs.

*As one participant noted:*

“Engagement with the EU remains complex for grassroots organizations, particularly due to demanding application and reporting requirements, which often require prior experience.”

Regional dynamics further shape these constraints. In LREB and MKA, participants emphasized the long-term effects of donor dependency and called for greater support for local resource mobilization. In SEKEB, declining availability of grant-based funding was identified as a growing concern. In Nairobi, participants raised concerns about the increasing shift toward loan- and investment-driven financing, noting its incompatibility with rights-based and non-profit approaches.

As a result, many CSOs particularly grassroots, youth-led, and women-led organizations are excluded from direct access to funding and instead rely on intermediary organizations. While this can provide short-term access to resources, it often reduces agency, limits visibility, and constrains control over programme design and implementation. Complex funding processes also discourage participation and reinforce dependency, undermining long-term sustainability.

### IV. Dialogue, Engagement, and Accountability

Barriers to funding and information are further reinforced by limitations in dialogue and engagement structures. Inclusive, accessible, and continuous dialogue between civil society and development actors is essential for accountability, trust-building, and meaningful participation.

However, consultations indicate that engagement mechanisms remain largely centralized and concentrated in major urban centers.

*As noted by a participant.*

“Engagement with duty bearers remains largely distant from grassroots communities, highlighting the need to bring public participation and governance processes closer to the people to enable inclusive and locally driven development.”

This centralization reflects institutional preferences for top-down coordination, limited investment in decentralized participation structures, and insufficient emphasis on inclusive communication strategies. In regions such as FCDC, NOREB, and SEKEB, access to national-level platforms is limited, with logistical and financial barriers further restricting participation. In NRB, despite closer proximity to engagement spaces, CSOs reported limited influence over final decision-making processes.

Across all regions, grassroots organizations face the greatest barriers due to intersecting logistical, financial, and informational constraints. As a result, existing dialogue platforms are often underutilized and have limited impact on decision-making. Civil society engagement frequently occurs too late in the project cycle, reinforcing reactive rather than proactive participation.

These dynamics weaken accountability, reduce trust, and constrain the ability of CSOs to shape development priorities. The absence of continuous feedback mechanisms further limits transparency and responsiveness.

*As noted by a participant*

“Accountability frameworks should be aligned with existing devolved structures, ensuring that national-level mechanisms are effectively linked to county-level platforms where CSOs can actively engage.”

Despite these challenges, participants emphasized the importance of strengthening civil society’s watchdog role. Effective monitoring of development investments particularly under initiatives such as the Global Gateway was identified as critical for promoting transparency, accountability, and equitable outcomes.

## V. Partnerships and Coordination Challenges

Systemic constraints also affect how CSOs collaborate and coordinate. Effective partnerships are essential for maximizing collective impact, reducing duplication, and fostering inclusive development. However, consultations revealed persistent challenges in coordination within the civil society sector.

Competition for limited funding discourages collaboration and reinforces siloed approaches, while the absence of structured coordination mechanisms contributes to fragmentation. These challenges are particularly evident in regions such as SEKEB, LREB, and NOREB, where coordination platforms are weaker and opportunities for sustained engagement are limited. In NRB, partnerships are more established but tend to be concentrated among larger organizations.

Power asymmetries further shape partnership dynamics. Across all regions, smaller and grassroots organizations reported exclusion from strategic partnerships, limiting their access to resources, visibility, and capacity development opportunities. These dynamics reinforce existing inequalities and constrain the diversity of actors involved in development processes.

As a result, partnerships are often fragmented, leading to duplication of efforts and reduced collective impact. While platforms such as Global Gateway advisory mechanisms provide opportunities for engagement, decision-making spaces are often dominated by private sector actors, leaving CSOs with limited structured participation.

Nevertheless, participants identified opportunities to strengthen partnerships through more inclusive and structured dialogue platforms, multi-stakeholder engagement, and collaboration with universities and innovation hubs. These approaches can help bridge capacity gaps and support more coordinated and sustainable development outcomes.

## VI. Capacity Constraints and Institutional Strengthening

Underlying all these challenges are persistent capacity gaps that affect the ability of CSOs to engage effectively across all dimensions of development processes. Institutional and technical capacity is a critical enabler of participation, access to funding, engagement in dialogue, and effective partnerships.

However, consultations identified significant disparities in access to resources, training, and institutional support, particularly for grassroots, youth-led, PWD, and women-led organizations. These constraints are especially pronounced in underserved and frontier regions, including FCDC and parts of NOREB, where access to capacity development opportunities remains limited.

As a result, many CSOs lack the technical and institutional capacity required to engage in policy advocacy, project design, and monitoring processes. This limits their ability to access funding, participate in dialogue platforms, and contribute meaningfully to development processes. Capacity gaps are particularly evident in areas such as financial management, digital literacy, research, policy engagement, environmental monitoring, gender accountability, and social inclusion.

*A participant emphasized that,*

**“There is a need to address knowledge and capacity gaps to enable meaningful participation in key processes, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities.”**

The limited integration of community-generated data and traditional knowledge further reduces the relevance and effectiveness of development interventions, as local insights are not systematically incorporated.

Participants emphasized the need for more sustained and inclusive capacity-strengthening approaches. Mentorship models and consortium-based partnerships were identified as effective mechanisms for supporting smaller organizations in navigating complex EU and Global Gateway funding frameworks, while enhancing institutional resilience, collaboration, and long-term sustainability.

### 5.1 Emerging Sectoral and Regional Priorities

Regional consultations highlighted a set of context-specific development priorities that reflect both localized needs and broader structural trends within the EU–Kenya partnership. These sectoral priorities are shaped by a combination of ecological conditions, regional economic structures, and socio-political dynamics. Variations in climate vulnerability, natural resource endowments, livelihood systems, and levels of infrastructure development influence the areas where CSOs are most actively engaged. At the same time, national and global policy shifts particularly around climate action, green transition, and digital transformation are creating new entry points for civil society engagement.

As a result, CSOs are increasingly positioning themselves within specific thematic areas where they have contextual knowledge and community trust. These sectors are not only seen as development priorities but also as strategic opportunities for influencing programme design, implementation, and monitoring. However, the ability of CSOs to engage effectively within these sectors is often constrained by the same systemic challenges identified earlier, including limited access to funding, information, and technical capacity.

## Regional distinctions:

Consultations highlighted the following key priorities across the different regions:

- **Agroecology and climate resilience (NOREB, MKA):** Driven by climate variability, food insecurity, and reliance on agriculture-based livelihoods, CSOs in these regions emphasized sustainable farming practices, climate adaptation, and green energy solutions.
- **Blue economy and marine resources (JKP):** Coastal CSOs identified sustainable fisheries, marine conservation, and blue economy value chains as critical areas, shaped by geographic location and economic dependence on marine ecosystems.
- **Civic education and governance (NRB, MKA):** In more urbanized and politically engaged regions, CSOs prioritized governance, accountability, and civic participation, reflecting both greater exposure to policy processes and governance challenges.
- **Trade and green transition (SEKEB):** Participants highlighted opportunities in trade-oriented development and green transition initiatives, alongside concerns about declining grant-based funding.
- **Digital inclusion and infrastructure (cross-cutting):** Across all regions, digital access and infrastructure were identified as critical enablers for participation, service delivery, and economic inclusion.

These priorities underscore the need for a flexible and context-responsive Roadmap that can accommodate regional diversity while aligning with broader development objectives.

## 5.2 Alignment of Consultation Findings with CSRM Pillars

The following section provides an analysis of findings of the survey, regional consultations and how they align with the CSRM Pillars.

### 1. Enabling Environment

Consultations across all regions highlighted persistent constraints in the enabling environment for civil society engagement. These constraints are rooted in a combination of weak political goodwill at the county level, restrictive or unclear regulatory frameworks, and structural barriers embedded within funding and programme design processes. Limited decentralization of information and engagement mechanisms further reinforces exclusion, particularly for marginalized groups. Many CSOs especially grassroots and community-based organizations remain unaware of the EU Civil Society Roadmap and related funding opportunities. Complex funding procedures, reliance on loans and guarantees, and structural issues such as land tenure insecurity in some regions further limit participation. Civic space limitations also restrict the ability of CSOs to engage in advocacy and accountability processes.

### 2. Dialogue and Engagement

The consultations revealed significant gaps in how dialogue and engagement mechanisms are structured and implemented. Dialogue processes are often designed in a centralized manner, with limited investment in decentralized or community-level engagement. There is also a tendency to prioritize formal, one-off consultations over continuous and iterative engagement processes.

### 3. Partnerships

Partnerships were identified as both a critical enabler and a persistent challenge within the civil society ecosystem. Weak coordination structures, competition for limited resources, and unequal power dynamics between large and small organizations contribute to fragmented partnerships. Limited formal mechanisms for collaboration further hinder effective coordination. Despite these challenges, participants identified strong opportunities for thematic partnerships in agroecology, green trade, sustainable agriculture, digital infrastructure, and the blue economy. Strengthening collaboration between CSOs, communities, governments, and donors was seen as essential for promoting co-creation and shared ownership.

### 4. Capacity Development

Capacity development emerged as a central pillar underpinning effective civil society engagement. Capacity constraints are driven by unequal access to resources, limited investment in long-term institutional development, and the increasing complexity of funding and compliance requirements. Smaller organizations often lack the technical expertise and institutional systems needed to engage effectively. Participants emphasized the importance of mentorship, peer learning, and consortium-based models to support smaller organizations in navigating EU and Global Gateway funding mechanisms and strengthening long-term sustainability.

#### Key Takeaways for the Roadmap

1. Awareness gaps remain widespread, requiring stronger and more inclusive outreach strategies.
2. Grassroots, youth-led, PWD and women-led organizations are underrepresented across engagement platforms.
3. Capacity constraints significantly limit effective participation, particularly outside major urban cities
4. Structured partnerships and co-creation are critical for ensuring context-responsive and community-driven interventions.
5. Sectoral opportunities in agroecology, green transition, sustainable agriculture, and the blue economy provide entry points for meaningful CSO engagement.

# Recommendations

Building on the above conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to address identified gaps and strengthen the inclusivity, responsiveness, and effectiveness of the Civil Society Roadmap (2025–2027).

## 1. Reform and Diversify Funding Models:

Given that current funding structures systematically exclude smaller and grassroots organizations, there is a need to simplify application processes and reduce compliance burdens that disproportionately affect these actors. Without such reforms, participation will remain concentrated among larger, well-established CSOs, limiting diversity and local relevance in programme implementation. Expanding flexible funding mechanisms including sub-granting and consortium models will enable more equitable access to resources. This is particularly important in regions such as LREB and SEKEB, where concerns about sustainability and declining access to grant-based funding were strongly raised. At the same time, to address long-term dependency, the Roadmap should support local resource mobilization, social enterprise models, and partnerships with domestic institutions. Strengthening financial sustainability will enhance the resilience and autonomy of CSOs across regions.

## 2. Strengthen Inclusive and Early-Stage Participation:

The limited involvement of CSOs in early stages of the project cycle reduces the relevance and effectiveness of development interventions. Institutionalizing civil society engagement across all phases from agenda-setting and design to implementation and evaluation is therefore critical. Moving beyond consultative approaches toward genuine co-creation will ensure that local knowledge informs programme priorities. This is particularly important in regions such as NOREB and MKA, where context-specific expertise in agroecology and climate resilience can significantly improve outcomes. Targeted strategies are also needed to address the exclusion of marginalized groups, including youth, women, persons with disabilities, and communities in ASAL regions such as FCDC. Ensuring that participation is meaningful not symbolic will strengthen both equity and impact.

## 3. Enhance Access to Information and Communication:

Addressing information asymmetries is essential to broadening participation and improving transparency. As current communication approaches favour centralized and formal channels, they inadvertently exclude many grassroots actors. Decentralizing communication strategies through the use of local languages, community-based platforms, and simplified materials will improve accessibility. Proactive outreach is particularly important in underserved regions such as FCDC and coastal areas like JKP, where barriers related to infrastructure, language, and network access are more pronounced. Improved access to information will enable a more diverse range of CSOs to engage in funding opportunities, policy dialogue, and programme design, thereby strengthening inclusivity and ownership.

## 4. Invest in Capacity Development:

Capacity constraints continue to limit the ability of many CSOs to engage effectively in complex development processes. Without targeted investment, these gaps will continue to exclude smaller organizations from meaningful participation. Priority areas for capacity development include digital literacy, financial management, policy analysis, research, and technical expertise in emerging sectors. These needs are particularly acute in frontier regions such as FCDC and parts of NOREB, where access to training and institutional support is limited. Leveraging partnerships with universities, training institutions, and innovation hubs can support long-term skills development. Mentorship and consortium-based approaches will also enable smaller organizations to engage more effectively with EU and Global Gateway frameworks.

## **5. Strengthen Partnerships and Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue:**

Weak coordination and fragmented partnerships reduce the overall effectiveness of civil society engagement. Without structured collaboration, opportunities for shared learning, co-creation, and collective advocacy remain underutilized. The Roadmap should institutionalize inclusive and continuous multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms that bring together CSOs, government, private sector actors, and development partners. These platforms should be decentralized and accessible, ensuring representation from diverse regions and organization types. Strengthening CSO networks and alliances will be particularly important in regions such as SEKEB, LREB, and NOREB, where coordination challenges are more pronounced. More inclusive partnerships will enhance collective impact and improve alignment with local priorities.

## **6. Promote Transparency, Accountability, and Civic Space Protection:**

Limited civic space and weak accountability mechanisms undermine the effectiveness and legitimacy of development interventions. Supporting civil society's watchdog role is therefore critical to ensuring transparency and equitable outcomes. Robust monitoring frameworks should be established to track the implementation of EU-supported initiatives, particularly large-scale investments under the Global Gateway. CSOs should be meaningfully involved in these processes to strengthen accountability. At the same time, safeguarding civic space is essential particularly in regions where constraints are more pronounced, such as FCDC. Ensuring that CSOs can operate freely, engage in advocacy, and participate in governance processes without fear of restriction will be critical for sustaining inclusive development.

# Conclusion

The consultations demonstrate a strong and consistent commitment among civil society actors to engage meaningfully in shaping the EU–Kenya partnership and the forthcoming Civil Society Roadmap (2025–2027). However, this commitment is unfolding within a context where structural and systemic barriers continue to limit the extent to which diverse CSOs can participate effectively.

Across all regions, a central conclusion is that current approaches to engagement remain largely centralized and insufficiently responsive to the diversity of Kenya’s civil society landscape. While policy frameworks such as the Global Gateway Strategy and the previous Civil Society Roadmap provide important entry points, their practical effectiveness is constrained by limited accessibility, uneven awareness, and inadequate inclusion of grassroots actors. This is particularly evident in regions such as FCDC and parts of NOREB, where infrastructure limitations and geographic marginalization further restrict access to information and engagement platforms, compared to relatively better-connected contexts such as NRB.

These constraints are not merely operational they have direct implications for the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of development interventions. Grassroots and community-based organizations, despite being closest to communities and most attuned to local realities, remain underrepresented in decision-making processes. This disconnect risks producing interventions that are less responsive to local needs and less sustainable over time. For example, in agricultural regions such as MKA and NOREB, where agroecology and climate resilience are key priorities, limited early-stage engagement of local CSOs reduces the integration of context-specific knowledge into programme design.

The findings further indicate that participation remains largely confined to the implementation phase of projects. Youth-led organizations emphasized that this limits their ability to shape priorities, while women-led organizations highlighted persistent barriers in accessing funding and leadership spaces. In more marginalized regions, including FCDC, these challenges are compounded by restrictive civic environments and weaker institutional presence, further constraining meaningful participation.

The widespread lack of awareness of the EU Civil Society Road map particularly among grassroots actors reflects deeper challenges in communication, outreach, and ownership. This gap suggests that current engagement models are not sufficiently decentralized or tailored to diverse audiences. As a result, participation tends to be concentrated among larger, urban-based organizations, reinforcing existing inequalities within the civil society ecosystem.

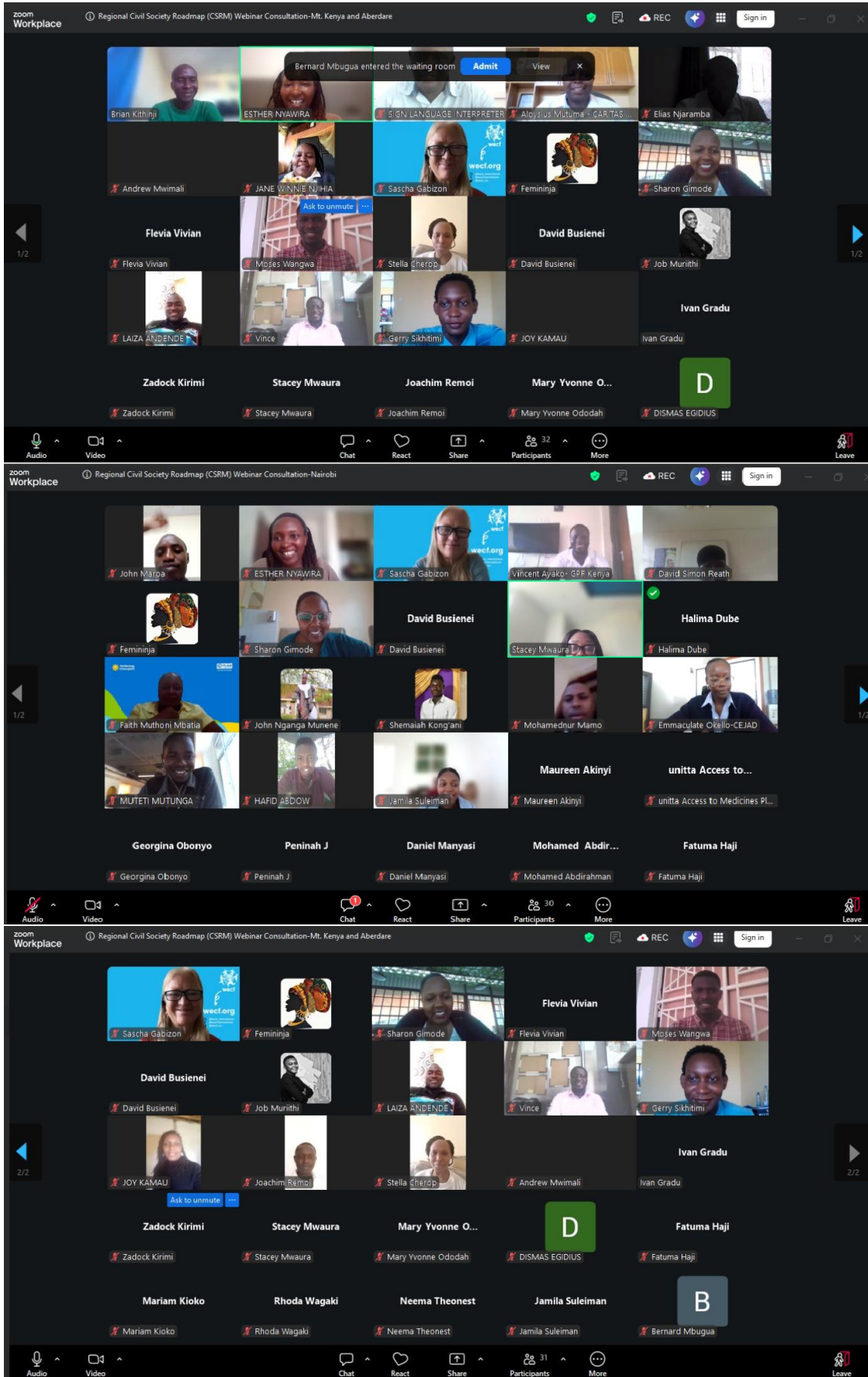
At the same time, the evolving development financing landscape presents both opportunities and risks. Investment-driven approaches, such as those under the Global Gateway, have the potential to mobilize significant resources in sectors such as infrastructure, green transition, and the blue economy. However, without deliberate inclusion measures, these models risk excluding smaller CSOs that lack the capacity to engage with complex financial instruments. This concern was particularly pronounced in NRB and SEKEB, where participants noted a growing misalignment between financing models and the operational realities of most CSOs.

The consultations also highlight persistent weaknesses in partnerships, coordination, and accountability mechanisms. Fragmentation within the civil society sector, combined with limited structured dialogue with government and development partners, continues to constrain collective action and reduce overall impact. In regions such as SEKEB and FCDC, where coordination mechanisms are less developed, this fragmentation further limits opportunities for collaboration and shared learning.

Ultimately, the findings underscore that sustainable and equitable development cannot be achieved through centralized, top-down approaches. Instead, it requires a deliberate shift toward participatory, inclusive, and locally grounded models of engagement. Positioning civil society as strategic partners and co-creators rather than implementers will be critical not only for improving the relevance and effectiveness of EU-supported interventions, but also for ensuring that development outcomes are equitable and responsive to Kenya's diverse regional realities.

<b>Name of Rapporteur</b>	<b>Georgina Obonyo and Sharon Gimode</b>
<b>Workshop/Meeting Title</b>	<b>Virtual CSOs Consultations on the New EU- Civil Society Roadmap in Kenya (4th Generation, 2025-2027)</b>
<b>Moderators</b>	<p> <b>Roy Douglas:</b> LREB Region  <b>Gladys Kiplagat, June Bartuin:</b> NOREB Region  <b>Sharon Gimode:</b> FCDC Region  <b>Mumina Mohamed:</b> JKP Region  <b>Eunice Ngina:</b> SEKEB Region  <b>Brian Githinji:</b> MKA Region  <b>Vincent Ochieng:</b> NRB Region  <b>Hellen Apila:</b> SDG Kenya Forum  <b>Stacy Mwaura:</b> SDG Kenya Forum </p>
<b>Workshop speakers:</b>	<p> <b>Esther Nyawira:</b> <i>META Programme Coordinator, African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)</i>  <b>Sascha Gabizon:</b> <i>Executive Director, Women Engage for Common Future</i>  <b>David Busienei:</b> <i>Chair, National Steering Committee for the META Action CSOs Structured inclusive Dialogue Mechanism in Kenya</i> </p>

# Photos from the consultation







# From Participation to Partnership

Reclaiming Inclusive Civil Society Engagement in Kenya's  
EU Development Framework

**2025 - 2027**