

THE ABUJA FORUM

Report

**AFRICAN CIVIL
SOCIETY & DIASPORA**



GRFDT
Global Research Forum on Diaspora
and Transnationalism



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We extend sincere gratitude to all panellists and moderators for delivering such insightful sessions that steered a lot of inputs from the participants. We are grateful for the very rich engagement of all participants from diaspora, civil society and trade unions. This report outlines some key highlights of the sessions and the diverse insights around the GFMD process, continental agenda and regional implications in relation to AfCFTA and other RECs protocols and instruments.

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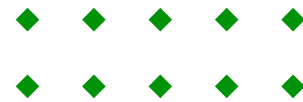
Background

The Abuja Civil Society Forum, a three day event, focusing on capacity building and launch of the GFMD civil society process, was organised by [Pan African Network in Defense of Migrants' Rights \(PANiDMR\)](#), [Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism \(GRFDT\)](#), [African Foundation for Development \(AFFORD\)](#), [African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation \(ITUC-Africa\)](#). This forum of African civil society, diaspora organisations and key leaders from the GFMD Civil Society Mechanism's [International Steering Committee \(ISC\)](#) took place in Abuja between 30 January and 1 February 2023. The Forum was focussed on African priorities in migration in relation to the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration \(GCM\)](#) and the [Global Forum on Migration and Development \(GFMD\)](#) processes as well as civil society concerns on the implementation of the African continental agenda and regional Implications of protocols of free movement. The launch of the civil society 2023 GFMD process was an opportunity to bring together all actors including African stakeholders and kick off the process towards the GFMD Summit in early 2024 and to collectivise civil society thinking around the topic of climate change, labour migration and diaspora engagement.

The Abuja Forum involved participation from African non-state actors, with representatives from the government of Nigeria, France- as the current chair of the GFMD, and Senegal- Chair of the African Union. The ECOWAS Commission was equally represented at the Forum together with development partners working in the field of migration.

The **main aim of the event** was to **highlight the importance of African voices** - reflecting migration trends/ themes of importance to African countries (such as labour migration, climate induced migration and displacement as well as the role of the diaspora) in the GFMD discussions - opening up the GFMD civil society process commonly referred to as the [Road from Abuja to Paris](#). A key result of these discussions materialised in the **publication of the [Abuja Statement](#) jointly drafted by African civil society actors and diaspora.**

The Forum served as an avenue to continue ongoing migration advocacy with African migration authorities and development actors, to discuss relevant issues around the African migration dynamics and governance, as well as the forthcoming GFMD and to ensure that migration actions in Africa (and their impacts) are people-centered.



Opening Session

The organisers welcomed and shared their expected outcomes. They were represented by **PAMiDMR** and **AFFORD** who emphasised on engaging actors in African centred ways in the participation in discourse around migration frameworks, the importance of strong support from the GFMD Civil Society Mechanism as well as centering the conversations around African migrants as assets equipped with diverse skills. Further, it was pointed out that African diaspora enjoy hospitality in host countries but also experience hardship including exploitation, which called for the civil society actors to pursue the hard work for government accountability on migration to be safe, orderly, and regular. They called for African global unity joint efforts, between civil society, diaspora and trade unions, in strengthening the engagement in the GFMD process and encouraging interaction. The organisers were proud that this event was recognised as the formal launch of the 2023 GFMD civil society process.

As a financial and technical contributor to the event, **FES** shared its remarks and pointed out its extensive work in Africa for over 40 years and its focus on migration and gender, climate change and other issues. **Mr Bruck Negash Teame** pointed out that managing and supporting migration actors in addressing complex challenges required understanding the local context.

The **IOM** (Chief of Mission) pointed to the GCM, which calls for governments and civil society to help reach its objectives. **Mr Laurent de Broek** raised critical points on the human and material capital in Africa's diaspora. He also shared on IOM Nigeria's efforts connecting diaspora for development. He emphasised the role of non-state actors in migration and development agendas through networking, partnering with institutions at the local, national, and international levels. He also pointed out the joint efforts required for the reduced costs of sending remittances.

On behalf of the **ECOWAS** Director Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs, **Dr Sintiki Tarfa Ugbe and Mr Osondu Ekeh** raised the role of mobility in ECOWAS as a vital component of regional integration, ECOWAS was keen on a common regional approach to migration with six principles and making the free movement of people the main principle. They emphasised the work of ECOWAS to explore all avenues for working with civil society on migration challenges, such as human rights violations, climate change, and lack of identity documents making it difficult for people to migrate .

The **Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)**, represented by **Mr Eustace James**, called for solidarity with the Abuja CSO Forum and pledged its support to the outcomes. He emphasised that NLC is a strong ally to migrant workers.

Ms Grace Ikhuoya, Chief of Staff to the commissioner, represented the **National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and IDPs**. She gave the official opening remarks, pointing out that civil society in Nigeria has been involved in policy formulation, migrant assistance, research and awareness raising. She noted the flagship awareness raising event co-hosted by civil society in 2021 demonstrating the Nigerian government's readiness to work with civil society for migration governance. She reiterated the commitment to ensure that civil society's contributions in the migration ecosystem continue to thrive and positively impact migrants themselves.

Invited by the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and IDPs to join in the official remarks, the **Nigerians in the Diaspora Commission** represented by **Engr. Dr. Sule Yakubu Bassi**, Secretary of Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), supported the spirit of the Abuja Forum. He called for migration to be managed in a humane and orderly manner with CSOs playing a vital linking role.

Capacity Building Sessions



Mamadou Goïta began by stressing the value of information exchange regarding the status and participation of African CSOs global migration governance processes, such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). He highlighted the importance of the African diaspora, civil society, and labour unions in self-mobilizing and continuing the global discussions from the perspective of African actors at the African level. Noting the importance of Africa's six regions (including diaspora), forums such as the Abuja Forum provide an opportunity to clarify the contradictory practices in migration and development and ensure a focus, not only on migrant contributions, but specifically on migrant rights. He pointed to the need to create more awareness for the African public on regional protocols and frameworks, as well as the human rights agenda in African regional integration processes and what the AfCFTA means for African migrants.

PANiDMR has hosted yearly capacity building meetings for its members in Togo, Senegal, South Africa and Kenya. This year, it is joining efforts with diaspora leaders (**GRFDT and AFFORD**) and trade unions (**ITUC-AFRICA**) working with global mechanisms (**GFMD Civil Society Mechanism**) to bring together key actors from the continent in Abuja.

Session 1. Global Frameworks: Focus on GCM

Moderator: Paddy Siyanga Knudsen (GRFDT)

Panel: Colin Rajah (Action Committee); Mamadou Goïta (PANiDMR); Stella Opoku-Owusu (AFFORD).

Key Points

- **GCM adoption by UN Member States demonstrates an important point in history and its current structures and mechanisms** (e.g. UN Network for Migration). It brings all UN agencies that work on migration together around the GCM.



- **The COVID-19 pandemic tested the effectiveness of the GCM:** the primary purpose of the GCM is to provide safe and orderly migration regardless of the context. Unsafe migration pathways were more prominent during the pandemic and exposed more migrants to abuse and human rights violations. The GCM has been a first step in the right direction, however, its limitations and lack of effective implementation represent significant setbacks.
- **GCM Objectives 19 and 20 encompassing diaspora engagement require establishing partnerships for implementation:** While objective 19 focuses on creating an enabling environment for ‘migrants and diaspora to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries’, objective 20 highlights the need to ‘promote faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances. Both objectives present two propositions that have been widely addressed and advocated by diaspora-led organisations in the past decade. When it comes to implementation, there is the need to leverage resources and establish partnerships as well as digital means for skills transfer.
- **The Multipartner Trust Fund** was created for migration programs, meant for UN agencies and member states, and so far shows **limited access for civil society**.

Open discussion highlights:

- In the African context, **regional/sub-regional negotiated frameworks are the fundamental instruments for local civil society working on migration processes** and guiding their plan of action. This means that international agreements such as the GCM and GCR might have less relevance and importance for grassroots organisations. Emphasis was placed upon the reflection that it is through African migration instruments that African countries can address the root causes of migration on the continent.
- Many highlighted the need to have a clear line of **coherence between the GCM and GCR**. There are cross-cutting issues and there is a need to strive for alignment.

Session 2. Continental Agenda, Regional Implications: Focus on protocol of free movement, AfCFTA and ECOWAS' instruments

Moderator: Amanda Bisong

Panel: Gibril Faal (GK Partners); Fambaye N'doye (ITUC-Africa); Philippe Nanga (PANiDMR); ECOWAS



Key Points

- **African countries should be encouraged to sign agreements/frameworks and treaties that promote regional and continental integration.** The focus should not only be on signing these agreements, but on increasing the advocacy towards implementing these agreements.

Several agreements exist that have not been implemented in the context of regional and continental integration

- **Targeted advocacy measures should take into consideration the contextual realities of mobility on the continent.** First noting that African countries have mixed policies relating to mobility and movement of people. Second, advocacy measures should focus on activating a 'coalition of the willing' - aimed at working with countries who are interested in moving the agenda forward. Lastly, for some countries, bilateral relations are still crucial to promoting mobility and free movement of persons.
- **Improved communication on the impact and benefits of migration to the societies** (host and origin), and the migrants and their families can help reduce political tensions around migration in some countries that lead to xenophobia. How to maximise development impacts of migration in the policy discussions remains the key question.
- It is important to work on protecting the rights of migrants (workers) and their families. Advocacy in this regard can be done in cooperation between trade unions and civil society organisations.

Open Discussion highlights:

- We need to do more on advocacy and sensitization and providing required data and research to help policy makers navigate political tensions around migration discussions.
- While CSOs and Unions can advocate for policy implementation, the onus is on the governments to implement the policies and these are guided by the local contexts (discussions, politics and realities).
- It is important to build useful partnerships that leverage the expertise, resources and knowledge to steer advocacy on migrants rights and development concerns.
- In order to address the current lack of political will in promoting free movement of persons on the continent, CSOs and other non-state actors need to be innovative in addition to their classic advocacy measures. Policy makers need to realise that the realities around migration and practice are ahead of policy. People are moving, the question remains when the policy will catch up with existing practices.

Session 3. Global Processes: Focus on GFMD

Moderator: Stella Opoku-Owusu

Panel: Mamadou Goïta (PANiDMR); Otila Maunganidze (ISS); Gibril Faal (GK Partners); Colin Rajah (GFMD Civil Society Mechanism); Linda Oucho (PANiDMR/AMADPOC)

The GFMD Civil Society Mechanism was instrumental in providing all relevant information on the 2022-2023 GFMD process (including details on all the thematic roundtables), contextualising the process and channels for civil society engagement in the GFMD, identifying and coordinating the active participation or support of GFMD Civil Society ISC leaders from other regions, and any technical and administrative support.



The background to the GFMD process and the role of the GFMD Civil society mechanism was an essential setting for the launch and discussions on Africa's engagement. The GFMD is a forum for dialogue among member states, civil society, private sector, local authorities and others.

Key Points

- African CSO have been actively participating in the GFMD process since its inception in 2007. The participation has largely been isolated with limited participation from the continent and its diaspora. In recent years, the participation emphasis has shifted from select and individual support to collective support leveraging on the benefits of joint efforts. As such, **the Abuja Forum presents an opportunity for the much needed proactive engagement and collaboration among African civil society, trade unions and diaspora.** Africa's limited participation has shown some results, showcased in diaspora and regularisation being included in the GFMD and GCM.
- The **policy approach in the migration governance between EU and Africa has largely been Eurocentric**, with the EU setting the agenda on irregular migration focus when this accounts only for a small percentage of irregular Africans moving into Europe, less compared to other parts of the world. This has consequences on policy measures that lean more to visa restrictions and development aid packages matched to returns agendas.
- On the continent, there are contentions on African free trade vs free movement with some states less keen on free movement linked to fears of irregularity. **While the Europe-bound movements are often in focus, African leaders need to look internally to see how we can respond to these challenges.** For example, there are non-tariff barriers that still remain heightened in supporting trade between countries. West and East Africa link 70% of their income from informal cross border trade and the full potential remains untapped.
- There was a clear emphasis on the importance of knowledge and how African non-state actors can shape narratives/stories about migration and can build our own narratives. The role of civil society is to balance these narratives by including people who are directly impacted by migration issues to inform and shape policy and practical measures. Key issues for civil society include:
 - **Shift towards inclusive development:** which can be achieved with enhanced approach on use of remittances for development, which have overtaken FDI and ODA in several African countries including Ghana, Egypt, Kenya. This shows the African agency in contributing to the development of Africa.

-- **Legal pathways:** recognising that migration is inevitable and that the policy support should ensure people move safely, orderly and regularly as well as ensuring the effective tracking and tracing of those migrants that go missing or die at sea (participants noted it was still astonishing that we still don't know how many migrants die during their migration journey);

-- **Refocus on education for Africa's young population** ensuring that there various options and pathways for its broader population.

-- Stress the importance of **diaspora engagement**.

-- **Centre the migration discourse on what Africa needs** in terms of addressing trafficking of human beings to the Middle East and heavy concerns of those living in Gulf.

- **The importance of acknowledging the role of the African states in the GFMD process, which remained limited.** However, together with the African non-state actors in the GFMD, these voices are largely accountable for the introduction of diaspora and regularisation agenda in the GFMD. Further, GFMD discourse in the African context facilitated the leap to the GCM, where African states negotiated as one group, commonly referred to as “the Africa Group” during the GCM negotiations. The GFMD avenue provided the informal channel, networks and means for engagement pushing civil society (e.g ADEPT, AFFORD, PANiDMR) to support CSOs to attend GFMD events. From working on diaspora and migration policies, reporting on GCM and local actions (e.g. Senegal engagement of its diaspora at regional and district level), states have a critical role in engaging its civil society and diaspora on migration and development.



- The GFMD allowed states to build trust with each other in an informal space, to talk comfortably about migration, and there is notable progress on the issue of deliberations on human rights, which is now one of the six GFMD themes. The link between GCM and GFMD is fundamental - the GFMD led the way for the GCM going back 10 years before the GCM was signed. The road from Abuja to Paris/Geneva, for the current 2023-2024 GFMD process is beyond a summit in Paris/Geneva. It is a process with a lot of preparation for participants that go into it including preparatory meetings, consultations, workshops and events (e.g. the June GFMD workshops on culture and narratives in the Paris museum of immigration) that need civil society delegations to join. The Road from Abuja to Paris/Geneva needs to be created by civil society, we must create our own events/linkages to the GFMD.
- There was also a renewed focus on gender and skills recognition linked to labour migration. Everyone has a skill and civil society has a role in pushing for the view that labour migrants are never unskilled. Further, with regard to labour migration governance, civil society should advocate for sub-regional frameworks across the continent to work together resolving the limitations that exist related to infrastructure capacity gaps. Another key priority is social protection for labour migrants that are in the Middle East. This can be enhanced by research on how actors across the continent, including civil society and diaspora, envision labour migration, how partnerships can have an impact and the importance of including the voices of migrants themselves.
- **The Key Cs: Communication** both internally and externally is critical for African actors, **Consultation** with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and African leadership in GFMD (e.g. Senegal and RT co-chairs); **Coordination**; **Collaboration** and **Consensus** among civil society. All this in a Context where we understand where we work, methods we need to use, and people we engage with.
- The importance of enhancing the use of mechanisms that ensure effective monitoring of regional and global migration governance commitments at the local level. Civil society working with diaspora and trade unions plays a critical role in evidence based research and dissemination with a broad range of actors on the continent.
- The GFMD process presents an opportunity for African non-state actors to build up engagement and their position of the GFMD priorities. Building from the local reality to the global discourse, African non-state actors play a critical role in contributing to a meaningful GFMD process before and beyond the Summit. A GFMD process that brings critical issues that migrants face at borders and during their migration journey.

Open Discussion highlights:

- The discussion echoed the **need for collaboration amongst non-state actors across the continent and the importance of including the Lusophone community**, as the Franco-phone and Anglo-phone were covered in this Forum. This was equally critical in building bridges with civil society and the African diaspora.
- There was a **call for an Afrocentric approach in relation to migration governance for the issues**, policies and practices to be relevant for migrants on the continent and off the continent.
- There was a **need to assess the African participation in the GFMD more closely** and keep it relevant for the African priorities using the GFMD. Africans have to set our own agenda before preparatory meetings and summits and keep development partners accountable in their support of national agenda.
- **African non-state actors can also open the space for those that are left behind in this Forum** (e.g. deportees, returnees, irregular migrants) who do not have access to the global governance infrastructure to share their perspectives.
- There was a clear **call for assessing African countries' implementation of regional and continental agreements on labour migration as well as migration governance** in general. This is also linked to keeping countries accountable to GCM objectives and actions through African participation in the GCM's regional review forums and the IMRF. Here, African actors raised their voice on the importance of common agenda setting as well as measuring and assessing outcomes that are accountable to migrants and their families.
- The discussion highlighted a **disconnect between the protocols, national legislation and reality on the ground** (e.g. increased loss of lives of migrants taking dangerous journeys, limited action on addressing root causes to irregular migration, limited social protection measures for vulnerable migrants ..). The importance of bringing back issues from GFMD to national and regional settings and always bridging the gaps of collaboration between civil society and diaspora in its diversity.
- Civil Society, through its deep engagement at the community level, **can support refocusing efforts** on safe migration information, advocating for regular pathways, supporting measures on alternative thinking on supporting livelihoods, among others.
- Civil society can also **work with governments in establishing stronger networks at national and regional levels** to enhance policy and practice that ensures migrants rights are at the centre of migration governance.

Session 4. Focus on GFMD: 2023 GFMD Themes and Regional Civil Society Processes

Moderator: Philippe Nanga

Panel: Lukmon Akintola (Migration Youth and Children Platform), Eustace James (Nigerian Labour Congress); Yara Hassan (CCRM); Paddy Siyanga Knudsen (GRFDT).



Key Points

On Climate Change and Human Displacement

- Migration induced by climate change is increasing. In fact, figures show that 1.3 million people have been already displaced, 600 people died

because of flooding in Nigeria alone, and droughts are causing issues in the East and the Horn of Africa. Despite these severe and concerning figures, policymakers are still failing to implement impactful policies and programs addressing such issues.

- Young people are disproportionately impacted. Prompt action is needed in the areas of research and data, integration and implementation, finance and resilience.

On Labour Migration

Migrants around the world are facing rights violations due to:

- Criminalization and securitization approach to migration.
- Unethical recruitment practices and the disproportionate power held by recruitment agencies. Trade unions have been systematically advocating for monitoring systems to prevent such practices.
- Lack of access to social protection



On the Diaspora

Moving beyond the concept of African diasporas that has been widely discussed, it is important to make space to learn more about concrete initiatives led by the diaspora and bring to light the agency of African diasporas.

Diaspora agency is intergenerational and multifaceted, there is no one model or handbook followed by diaspora actors but rather they are responsive to the contexts in which they live.

- Active networks of the African diaspora have been proactive in supporting third-country nationals. For example, some of these networks were created with the aim of helping African students stuck in Ukraine.
- Common areas in which the diaspora actively engage include issues of integration, reintegration, homeland development, diaspora investment and remittances.

Highlights from Group Work Sessions:

The work sessions were conducted in 4 groups which focussed on Diaspora, Climate change, Labour Migration as well as “our own agenda”.

The crucial elements that emerged from the in-depth sessions are a strong recognition of civil society’s agency, as well as the protracted lack of human rights protection for migrants and their families. In fact, already in the opening of the Statement, there was an emphasis on the importance of recognising the agency of African civil society in leading and contributing to global and continental migration processes: GCM, GFMD and other frameworks.’ A few highlights of the outputs of the work sessions are shared with the analysis of the feedback making the bulk of the Abuja Statement (next setion).



Highlights from Group Work Sessions:

*Cross-cutting
- Tech
- Access to
- Gender equality

Labour Migration

① Policies: Recognition of need for harmonisation to regulate liberalisation
- Visa schemes incl. protection & other Int'l & regional instruments
- Free movement Protocol & other Int'l & regional instruments
- ILO conventions & other Int'l & regional instruments

② Skills: Connecting workers with work
- Skills transfers & recognition & harmonisation of qualifications/skillsets
- Labour market mapping & matching

③ Information, data & research
- Proper information to inform policies & practices
- Research the "How" - practical action

④ Practices: Promoting economic inclusion of labour migrants
- Fair labour practices
- Wage protection
- Social protection
- Changing of narratives

Diaspora financing for development ①

DIASPORA = sustainable dev't

① Diaspora Direct Investment
② Diaspora networks for investment & development
③ Philanthropy - hometown associations
④ Brain gain/circulation
⑤ Intellectual/skills/competences

⑥ Technology → plays a role in education. Support for more technology to channel information
What can Trust building - what does the diaspora get back - eg political/civic participation (eg voting, standing for positions)

⑦ Productive investment - strengthen support of diaspora from micro to macro

OUR OWN OUR OWN

- Financing of diaspora civil society (MPTF not suitable; alternative needed; GFM) can lead discussion on this.

- Adequate ANRR for deportees to manage their re-integration into Nigerien.

- Awareness in the Nigerian society to reduce stigmatisation of deportees.

- Financement des projets de migrants

Solutions

① Expanding & definition of Refugee to capture climate migrants

② Legal support for climate migrants

③ Climate-Mobility finance → Safe relocation, Great Green Wall, Innovation, Education, Policy engagement. (Stakeholders)

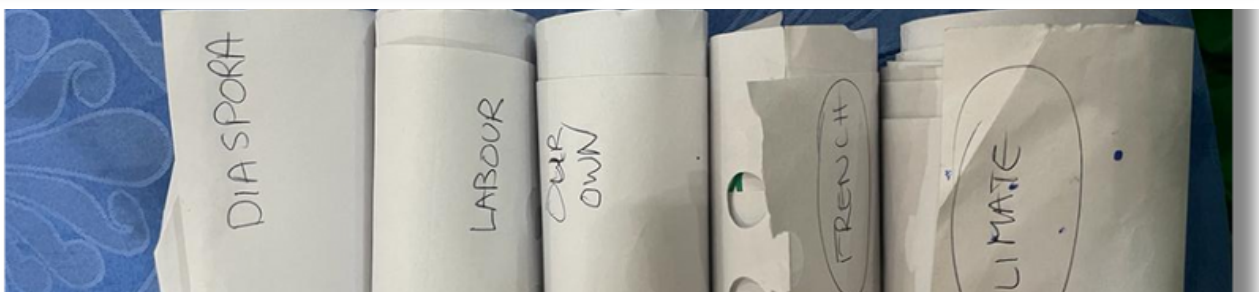
④ Reviewing existing migration Policies

⑤ Compensating victims of Climate-induced migration

⑥ Early Warning System + Data

⑦ Accountability of funding

⑧ Monitoring & Evaluation of Climate Mobility Initiatives



Engagement session with Senegal



The participants got an opportunity to share questions and reflections with the representative from Senegal. The **key points** from this session include:

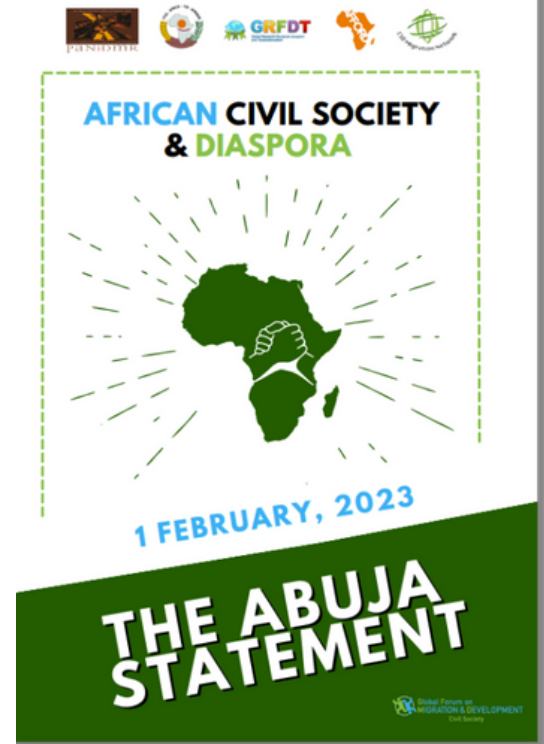
- Recognition of the importance of migration and development in the African agenda for sustainable development, its strategy on improved trade and free movement. Senegal highlighted the importance of this agenda in line with its role of AU Chair and its engagement with global processes.
- Recognition that Senegal, similar to other African countries, continues to implement programmes and projects at the national level in a bid to contribute towards national, continental and global migration governance frameworks.
- Recognition that the role of civil society and diaspora was central in the undertaking of programmes and initiatives related to migration and development, on and off the continent. Senegal highlighted the need for effective partnerships between various actors on the government side and non-state actors.
- Recognition of the importance of African participation in global migration governance where the agenda on migration and development requires African agency.



Adoption of the Abuja Statement

The participants were presented with a draft statement, in both English and French, of the forum coined the “Abuja Statement”. It provided an opportunity for participants to reinforce the messages, provide emphasis where needed and support the declaration format and overall context. The idea was to immediately communicate key messages to the wider migration and development ecosystem of partner states, international organisations and donors that African civil society has clarity on what is desirable and key to move a number of challenges using the GFMD process. The Statement was later shared for more detailed comments for finalisation. The Abuja Statement is a joint advocacy statement, a result of collaborative efforts between all African civil

society and diaspora participants of the Abuja Forum which identifies the current challenges Africa and its diaspora are facing and calls for prompt action from governments. Read the full statement to discover the priorities of African civil society and diaspora.



[Read the Statement: EN FR](#)

Overarching reflections

The capacity building session commenced with a moment of remembrance for migrants and activists who have lost their lives in the past year; acknowledging the hundreds of thousands of Africans who have lost their lives while crossing seas and deserts. Participants called out the names of migrants and activities who were honoured by a moment of silence. On behalf of the organising committee, Fr Emeka Obiezu and Stella Opoku-Owusu gave the opening remarks. They acknowledge the importance of African civil society organisations and diaspora organisations to speak with unity on the issues of migration globally. Noting that the event is symbolic of the African global diaspora unity. The urged participants to take advantage of the capacity building session which was aimed at getting participants up to speed on global and regional migration processes.

The next steps were to finalise to move to the engagement strategy cognisant of the GFMD official calendar as well as ensuring a wider circulation of the Abuja statement and delimitations of its outcomes.



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