

A REPORT ON THE
CIVIL SOCIETY 2025
Conference
Theme Humanitarian and Development Work
as Catalysts for Peace and Development



Buea, November 8th 2025



NGANG GOD'SWILL N.
Convener

A WORD FROM THE CONVENER

I want to start off by thanking Dr. Jeffrey Chenyi for sponsoring this conference through Royalty World. His commitment and belief in the power of civil society to transform communities made this gathering possible, and we are truly grateful.

On behalf of the organizing team, I also extend profound appreciation to every individual and institution that contributed to the success of the Civil Society Conference 2025. What began as a vision for reflection, renewal, and rediscovery has become a moment of shared learning, strengthened collaboration, and a deeper commitment to service.

Your presence—whether as speakers, facilitators, partners, or participants—demonstrated that civil society remains a movement of conscience and compassion. You brought not just expertise, but values, purpose, and the conviction that development work is first and foremost an act of humanity.

To our thought leaders and contributors, thank you for the insight, energy, and perspective you shared. Your reflections helped us examine who we are, why we serve, and how we can anchor our work more strongly in dignity, integrity, and community ownership. To our partners and supporters, thank you for walking with us and ensuring that this convening was meaningful, grounded, and impactful.

And to every participant—whether here in Buea or connected online—thank you for choosing to be part of this journey of rediscovery. It is my hope that the networks built, the conversations held, and the convictions renewed here will continue far beyond this event.

May the spirit of collaboration, humanity, and shared responsibility we experienced continue to guide how we work, lead, and serve. Civil society is not merely an institution—it is the living expression of the people's will to build a better society. And together, we have shown that this spirit is very much alive.

Thank you for making CS-Con 2025 a moment of renewal and purpose.

ABOUT CS-CON

The **Civil Society Conference (CS-Con)** was conceived as a response to a growing erosion of civic participation and rising dependency culture in community engagement. Across Cameroon and Africa, civil society has increasingly been misunderstood - reduced in public perception to “project implementers” instead of strategic actors for peace, justice, accountability, and human development. CS-Con seeks to restore dignity, purpose, legitimacy, and indigenous leadership within the civil society space. It is meant to be a perpetual question to civil society actors and stakeholders - *are we doing the right thing, the right way, and for the right reasons? Are we true, are we authentic?*

CS-CON 2025



The Civil Society Conference 2025 (CS-Con 2025) Cameroon, marked a pivotal turning point in the national discourse on civil society's role in peacebuilding, humanitarian response, and localized development. Hosted at the Royalty World Compound in Buea, this first-ever edition assembled a dynamic and diverse community of actors who share a collective responsibility: *to restore the moral, human and transformative essence of civil society action in Cameroon.*

With over 40 organizations applying nationally and internationally, and more than 20 participating onsite and online, the event emerged as a dynamic crossroads for development thinkers, humanitarian actors, private sector champions, youth leaders, and grassroots influencers.

Participants included, Local and national CSOs, CBOs, Youth and women-led groups, Humanitarian and development professionals, Private sector CSR representatives, Local government stakeholders, Academics and researchers, Media practitioners, Graduate students specializing in development studies

Attendance included representation from Southwest & Northwest Regions, Littoral and Centre Region. International virtual participants were also present from South Africa and Zambia, along with national development networks and practitioners.



Networking sessions facilitated vibrant exchanges, formation of collaborative interest groups, an strengthening of existing alliances.

CS-CON 2025

Speakers



Ngang God'swill N

Engagement and Partnerships Officer @ Royalty World
CS-Con Conveyor

*CSOs and the Peace/Development Journey in Cameroon's
Anglophone Crisis - Has It Really Brought Peace and Development?*



**SE Aura
MC**



Doris Ngum

Executive Director
Royalty World

*Impact Beyond
Projects: Redefining
Success in Humanitarian
and Development
Practice*



Barr. Jaque Jonathan

Executive Director
The Okwelians

*Reimagining CSOs
for Impact and
Sustainability*



Dr. Akum Hedwig Kien

Executive Director
Nimo Care Association

*Ordinary People,
Extraordinary Impact:
Why Humanitarianism
and Development Belong
to All?*



Manzo Nzumafo (M.Sc., MPH)

Impact Bridges CSR

*Cooperate Social
Responsibility*

KEYNOTE SESSIONS

The conference featured a powerful and carefully curated line-up of speakers whose collective experience cut across humanitarian action, development leadership, governance, and grassroots mobilization. Their contributions did not merely transfer knowledge - they provoked reflection, reshaped perspectives, and reignited a sense of purpose among participants.

Each session deepened understanding of the civil society ecosystem in Cameroon, the cultural and operational challenges affecting humanitarian practice, and emerging opportunities for CSOs to catalyse change in fragile contexts.

Session 1: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Impact – Why Humanitarianism and Development Belong to All

Speaker: Dr. Akum Hedwig Kien — Founder, Nimo Care Foundation

Dr. Akum opened the day's learning sessions with a deeply human-centred keynote that instantly captivated the room. Speaking from a decade of frontline humanitarian experience in child protection, Education, WASH, Livelihood health, and women's empowerment, she reminded participants that the *heart of civil society work is not found in complex frameworks or donor log frames - but in the capacity of ordinary people to show extraordinary kindness.*

Key Highlights

- She explored the philosophy behind humanitarianism, arguing that compassion precedes capacity, and empathy precedes expertise.
- Dr. Akum unpacked the misconception that humanitarian work must be driven by large institutions. Instead, she emphasized that communities themselves hold the greatest power to support, protect, and rebuild each other.
- She illustrated how local health workers, community mothers, and volunteers often provide more consistent care than institutional actors—yet receive the least recognition.
- Using real-life stories from Nimo Care's mental health work, she demonstrated how a simple act of listening can restore dignity and hope.



Her session served as a deeply grounding experience—an invitation for practitioners to reflect on why they serve, who they serve, and what it means to elevate community agency above organizational visibility.

Transit Session: Corporate Social Responsibility Talk **Speaker:** Chechua Manzo Kwankam-Nzumafor (M.Sc., MPH)

Manzo introduced development actors to the modern face of CSR - moving it beyond the traditional “charity lens” toward evidence-based, inclusive, and innovation-driven investments. He stressed that the private sector is an essential partner in driving sustainable development, particularly in crisis-affected regions where corporate actors can fuel youth employment, social entrepreneurship, and local infrastructure development.



Session 2: CSOs and the Peace/Development Journey in Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis – Has It Really Brought Peace and Development?

Speaker: Ngang God’swill N. — **CS-Con 2025 Conveyor | Development Practitioner**



This session delivered one of the most engaging, emotionally charged, and intellectually stimulating reflections of the conference. Using real data (from the uploaded PowerPoint) and years of direct field experience, Ngang Godswill explored the uncomfortable truth behind civil society efforts in the Anglophone Regions.

He traced the crisis from its eruption in 2016, highlighting the humanitarian and developmental consequences - loss of life, mass displacement, broken families, collapsed livelihoods, and structural violence.

He then shifted attention to the dual reality of the crisis, *on one hand, millions of dollars have been mobilized, thousands of projects launched, and countless lives supported. But on the other hand, humanitarian needs remain consistently high. In some years, they have even increased, raising unsettling questions about sustainability and long-term strategy.*

Participants reflected on whether CSOs have inadvertently become trapped in a project delivery cycle that addresses symptoms rather than root causes. Godswill underscored one of the most critical issues: *the superimposition of foreign frameworks and external logic on local crises, resulting in interventions that may be technically sound but socially disconnected.* He challenged CSOs to interrogate their own practices, particularly around data sharing, repeated beneficiaries, and the politics of access. and structural violence.

Participants were highly engaged, asking numerous questions, sharing personal field stories, and engaging in heartfelt debate. The session felt like a collective reality-check, a moment where civil society paused, looked at itself in the mirror, and resolved to pursue more authentic, locally led, and dignified approaches to peacebuilding.

The session was described repeatedly as “liberating,” “bold,” and “painfully honest.” Many participants admitted that it forced them to rethink their assumptions about humanitarian success and the utility of donor-driven interventions.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Breakout sessions provided an opportunity for participants to unpack complex issues in smaller, interactive groups. These sessions were some of the most vibrant and transformative moments of CS-Con 2025, with participants openly sharing experiences, challenging long-held assumptions, and co-creating solutions rooted in context and realism.

The energy in each room was unmistakably intense - reflecting a deep hunger for honest dialogue, peer learning, and practical tools for improving civil society practice.

Breakout Session 1

CSOs & Community-Driven Development: Agency, Equity & Inclusion

Facilitator: Ngang God'swill N.

Rapporteur: Minette Ebue

Team Members: Kome Blaise, Otta Margaret, Napoleon Nkenfor, Nganji Jefta, Tiku Felix, Steve Abangma

This session was exceptionally rich, grounded in real field dynamics and lived experiences from participants who work daily with conflict-affected communities. It began with a powerful statement:

"Without the community, we as CSOs are just wasting time and resources." Ngang God'swill N.

Participants explored how genuine community-driven development requires more than consultation - it requires humility, cultural intelligence, and a willingness to allow communities to set the agenda.

Discussion Points

Dependency and Sustainability Challenges

- Many interventions unintentionally reinforce dependency because they are not designed with community ownership in mind.
- Participants discussed examples like food distributions that undermine local markets, demonstrating the need for localization at every level - from procurement to execution.

Equity and Dignity in CSO -Community Interactions

- Dressing, body language, and behavior of CSO staff can create unintended hierarchies.
- Stories were shared about chiefs offering food, communities giving gifts, and the cultural implications of accepting or refusing these gestures.
- Participants examined how Western humanitarian principles - though important - sometimes clash with African social expectations, creating confusion and tension.

Meaningful Inclusion

- Inclusion was reframed beyond disability to encompass youth, women, and marginalized voices.
- Participants emphasized that listening must be genuine, not performative.

Key Recommendations

- Develop interventions from inside the community, not from donor templates.
- Advocate honestly during policy engagements - not out of defiance, but out of responsibility to reality.
- Invest in long-term relationship-building with communities.
- Document and communicate cultural complexities to donors for better programming.

This breakout session was emotionally resonant, grounded in truth-telling, and sparked a strong call for operational humility.

Breakout Session 2

Reimagining CSOs for Impact and Sustainability

Facilitator: Barrister Jaques Jonathan

Rapporteur: Manzo Nzumafor

Team Members: Elisabeth Lysinge,
Fon Honoraë, Kindzeka Ethel Abo,
Tabot Miriam

This session offered a strategic and forward-looking exploration of CSO evolution and sustainability. The facilitator outlined the journey of civil society from its early forms to its modern manifestations, setting a foundation for participants to question outdated models and embrace new paradigms.

Exploration

- Participants discussed how CSOs can maintain relevance in an environment where funding is unpredictable and donor priorities are constantly shifting.
- Innovative financing models - including social enterprise, service contracting, and local fundraising - were examined as pathways to independence.
- Collaboration with the private sector through CSR initiatives was presented as an untapped opportunity for local impact.
- Environmental and social compliance was highlighted as crucial for CSOs aspiring to global competitiveness.

Key Takeaways

- CSOs need to build strong identities rooted in values, not just projects.
- Digitalization is no longer optional - automation of administrative and reporting processes can significantly increase efficiency.
- CSOs must reposition themselves as thought leaders, not just project implementers.
- International standards should be adapted, not adopted wholesale, to reflect Cameroon's diverse realities.

This session ended with optimism and a renewed sense of strategic direction for CSO leaders.

Barrister Jaques Jonathan

CSOs must evolve from outdated models to agile, intentional, purpose-led institutions capable of driving peace, development, and systemic change.

Key Action Points

- Engage the private sector through CSR.
- Become globally competitive through environmental and social compliance.
- Conduct thorough needs assessments and work in coalitions.
- Adopt social enterprise models for income diversification.
- Embrace digitalization and automation of operations.
- Contextualize international standards to local realities.
- Align interventions with development banks' strategies.
- Carry out research to ground interventions in evidence.

Breakout Session 3

Reimagining CSOs for Impact and Sustainability

Facilitator: Ngum Doris

Rapporteur: Ngwepekem Eunice Foloh

Team Members: Ngum Dorothy, Abigel

Doris Ngum

CSOs must reclaim the soul of civil society through dignity-centered, human-first approaches.

Responses to Guiding Questions

What is “Impact Beyond Projects”?

- Transformation that continues without funding
- Personal impact through self-driven service
- Long-term empowerment of beneficiaries
- Evidence of change after project closure

How can CSOs prioritize dignity and resilience?

- Understand and internalize humanitarian principles
- Build community financial independence
- Improve collaboration for better data and access
- Use peer-to-peer and ToT models for sustainability

Role of Ethical Transformational Leadership

- Be intentional in selecting beneficiaries
- Uphold impartiality, respect, and compassion
- Place humanity at the center of design and implementation

This group wrestled with one of the most important questions of development practice: How do we know if we are truly making a difference?

Insights

- Participants explored the gap between project outputs (activities) and true impact (transformation).

- A strong case was made for emphasizing dignity, resilience, and ethical leadership - values that often get overshadowed by donor-driven indicators.

- The discussion highlighted the importance of reaching the right beneficiaries, building financial independence in communities, empowering local leaders, and embedding humanity into every phase of the project cycle.

Key Takeaways

- True impact is measured in lives changed, not numbers reported.

- Community members must be co-creators of change - starting from project design.

- Ethical leadership is a form of service, not authority.

- Sustainability begins with local capacity and ends with local ownership.

This session ended with a renewed conviction that civil society must reclaim its soul—a powerful theme echoed throughout the conference.



Conclusion: A New Dawn for Civil Society

CS-Con 2025 was more than an event - it was a rebirth of purpose, a reawakening of conscience, and a rallying call to rebuild the moral foundation of civil society.

It united thinkers, dreamers, and doers around a single truth: Civil society is not a project machine, it is people, conscience, and community in motion.

CS-Con 2025 succeeded in its core mission to reawaken the conscience of civil society, redefine impact as a moral responsibility, and reconnect practitioners to the humanity at the center of development. It marks the beginning of a continuous movement toward, community-centered humanitarianism, contextualized development approaches, ethical leadership, as well as stronger, smarter, and more accountable civil society practice.

The first edition has officially set the stage for a larger, more robust, and more internationally recognized movement.

Looking Forward: CS-Con 2026

With excitement, anticipation, and renewed conviction, preparations will soon begin for CS-Con 2026. It will not only continue the conversation, it will contribute towards institutionalizing a new civil society culture in Cameroon.

CS-Con 2026 promises to be bigger, deeper, more interactive, and even more transformative. With an expanded participation, regional and international speakers, practical workshops and stronger partnerships across sectors.

See you in 2026. The movement has begun.