



African Regional Convening Towards **Women Deliver 2026** Conference Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The African Regional Convening towards Women Deliver 2026, held from November 24-26, 2025 in Nairobi Kenya, convened together over 200 participants from across the continent, including civil society organizations, feminist movements, youth advocates, government representatives and multilateral partners. The conference focused on confronting Africa's escalating Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) crisis amidst a narrowing five-year window until the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) deadline, shrinking civic spaces and devastating foreign aid cuts. The urgent message of the three-day gathering was that African solutions must rise from African soil, demanding a shift from aid dependency to domestic accountability and authentic power-sharing. Key discussions focused on confronting the funding crisis, critically analysing the new AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls and demanding the explicit inclusion of marginalized communities, par-

ticularly Persons with Disabilities (PWD) and diverse youth groups. The significance of the convening was underscored by the context of how geopolitical tensions and restructuring of UN agencies risk the de-prioritization of SRHR, while global funding withdrawals threaten to reverse decades of progress. For instance, aid cuts are projected to deny 7.7 million people access to contraceptive services and result in an estimated 2,740 maternal deaths globally. Key discussions and outcomes of the convening centred on: Diagnosing the funding crisis as a structural problem of global aid architecture and pivoting to Feminist Economic Justice; Advancing the *Pause for Purpose* campaign to strengthen the critically flawed *AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls*; and Demanding genuine, unrestricted funding and decision-making power for youth-led and feminist organizations, especially those led by LGBTQIA+ youth and young women with disabilities.

“*The urgent message of the three-day gathering was that African solutions must rise from African soil.*”



DAY 1: CONFRONTING THE CRISIS OF FUNDING CUTS, SHRINKING SPACE AND DEMANDING AFRICAN LEADERSHIP

Day One set the stage by exposing the devastating impact of the current crisis and showcasing innovative, community-driven strategies. Welcoming all stakeholders to the convening and communicating a clear call to action, Namuma Mulindi Maria from Sonke Gender Justice reminded partners that solutions to African challenges must come from African soil, directing accountability over performative solidarity as a call to action, to all partners present at the conference. Jude Thaddues Njikem gave a conference overview that painted the SRHR reality in Africa, highlighting that recent aid cuts will cause nearly 3,000 maternal deaths, with marginalized communities bearing the burden due to their exclusion from decision-making. Dr. Maliha Khan, president and CEO of Women Deliver, announced the launch of the *Global Feminists Table*, a means to prevent millions from being deprived of services by decisions made outside their control. UNFPA Representative Anders Thomsen, reframed the moment not as a financial crisis but “a crisis of rights, equality and accountability”. He called for youth to be trusted, funded and given space as today’s leaders, moving beyond tokenism, to sit at decision-making tables with necessary tools. Abishiag Wabwire from FIDA Uganda, traced progress from 1994 SRHR recognition through the Maputo Protocol, yet countries ratify conventions while doing little on the ground. Over 300 women die daily from preventable pregnancy complications, with unsafe abortion persist-

ing despite obligations and adolescent birth rates remaining 66.9-85.9 per 1,000 girls aged 15-19.

The first panel session of the day, *Unpacking the Funding Crisis: Feminist Perspectives on Global Aid Cuts and Domestic Alternatives*, revealed the depth of the structural problems posed by the funding cuts which translate into girls being pulled from school and women losing maternal healthcare access. The crisis, which affects 7.9 million contraceptive users, exposed which communities are abandoned first, with LGBTQI communities and rural adolescent girls suffering disproportionately.

Lucy Minayo from Amplify Girls explained that cuts are not just numbers but a representation of girls pulled from school, women losing maternal healthcare access, and grassroots organizations struggling to survive. The panel reinforced that domestic financing has shifted from an option to a necessity. Tendai Kunyelesa from DAWA, Zimbabwe, highlighted disproportionate impacts in rural areas through reduced services, HIV program closures and education disruption. The conversation highlighted that global commitments are failing to translate into direct, quality funding for local women’s rights organizations (WROs) and marginalised communities with evidence showing that only about 0.3% of bilateral official development assistance (ODA) to conflict-affected contexts reached WROs directly.



The pivot was strongly directed toward Feminist Economic Justice.

Solutions included:

- ✓ NGOs diversifying funding sources and building social enterprises.
- ✓ Implementing gender-responsive budgeting and strategic shifts toward collaboration over competition.
- ✓ Advocacy for progressive taxation and care-centred budgeting as reliable, domestic alternatives.
- ✓ Using sports platforms and normalizing rights-based language.
- ✓ Examining how debt creates household GBV vulnerabilities.

Omale Ojochide Joy, representing youth and children, in her keynote address reminded us that Africa holds the world's youngest population, over 40% under 15 years. Yet deeply unequal gender systems restrict choices from childhood, with girls taught obedience while boys are let to explore. She reminded all present that “when systems fail and societies judge rather than protect young people, we face disproportionate SGBV, STIs and unsafe abortions. Youth therefore need to be actively included in decision-making, have access to comprehensive sexuality education and safe non-judgmental healthcare.”

Lived Realities in a Shrinking Civic Space

The *Feminist Fireside Chat* offered a safe space for activists to share lived experiences of navigating and resisting hostile environments. The session, hosted by the ATHENA Network, focused specifically on the gendered impacts of civic space restrictions manifesting as surveillance, criminalization, defunding, online harassment and physical violence that disproportionately target young women and LGBTQI+ leaders. Additionally, digital repression and legal intimidation through NGO regulations and anti-terrorism policies also emerged. Partners shared strategies for survival emphasizing healing as resistance, building Pan-African alliances and recognizing that “hope has always been our resistance”.



“hope has always been our resistance”



Community-Led Solutions and Innovation

Breakout sessions moved beyond just conversations, showcasing practical and ground-up interventions:

- **VSO's Intersectional Community Scorecard:** This six-step tool was highlighted as a powerful mechanism that has enhanced grassroots accountability in Kenya. It uses community-generated evidence to drive policy change by assessing the accessibility, availability, affordability and quality of SRHR services. Notable successes included increased community-county collaboration in Emali, Homa Bay partners being invited to policy processes and Kilifi county's RMNCAH bill adoption after scorecard data presentation. VSO maintains advocacy data platforms aggregating results for national-level presentation, with tools adopted by partners across Kisumu, Kilifi, and Makeni. Key recommendations included using community-generated evidence to compel governments to adopt essential legislation and maintaining consistent follow-up and documentation to drive policy wins in-country.
- **Mental Health in Relation to SRHR for Adolescent Girls and Young Women (LVCT Health):** Innovative programs were shared in this session, including the Mind Shields program, a sports-based mental health intervention to enhance resilience and coping skills among adolescents in institutions, young mothers and refugees. The co-created Okie Kenya app offers a digital platform for menstrual health and mental wellness with period tracking and call-in support, specifically co-designed with persons with disabilities in mind. Key lessons: Barriers including depression, stigma and limited youth-friendly services must be addressed; social media and AI offer both opportunities (anonymity, information access) and risks (cyberbullying, misinformation) that require careful navigation.
- **Sustainable Financing for Youth Led Orgs/Movements (Terres de Hommes Schiewz and Yield Hub):** The session highlighted how tokenism, limited visibility, capacity gaps and short-term project cycles constrain youth-led organizations. Tayson Mudariki from Terres de Homme explained that shifting power needs simplifying funding processes and establishing youth advisory structures. Capacity barriers including limited documentation, financial literacy and organizational systems emerged as key obstacles. Key recommendations put forward included co-designing programs with youth and communities; establishing rapid response funds; providing unrestricted long-term financing; investing in documentation and capacity-building systems and supporting community-driven research.

- **SRHR in Conflict-Affected Settings (Sonke Gender Justice):** This session addressed the impact of the 35 non-international armed conflicts in Africa, which displace nearly 46 million people. It revealed that conflict severely disrupts SRHR as health facilities are targeted and sexual violence is used as a weapon of war. In eastern DRC, over 30 years of conflict and 100+ armed groups have caused systemic sexual violence affecting Pygmy communities, producing long-term trauma. Yet post-conflict recovery still faces weak infrastructure, staff shortages and stigma. Key strategies shared included enhancing evidence-based advocacy; training healthcare workers for quality care; conducting culturally sensitive education campaigns; mainstreaming integrated approaches that combine infrastructure rebuilding, health worker training, traditional leader engagement and phased humanitarian transitions. Although it was noted that humanitarian aid withdrawal often disrupts services.

The crisis we are currently facing in the feminist and civic spaces requires diversified African-led solutions backed by accountable action. Cross-cutting recommendations from Day 1 included co-designing programs with youth, persons with disabilities, gender diverse groups and communities, providing unrestricted long-term financing with rapid response capacity, strengthening intersectional inclusion especially for persons with disabilities and marginalized groups, and building cross-movement Pan-African alliances.

DAY 1



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ **“The solution to African challenges needs to come from African soil”** - Namuma Mulindi Maria’s opening call set the tone for the entire convening, demanding that partners move from performative solidarity to genuine accountability and funding of African-led solutions.
- ✓ **Funding cuts are not just numbers, they represent real lives:** 7.9 million contraceptive users affected, 3,000 maternal deaths projected, girls pulled from school and grassroots organizations closing their doors. The crisis has exposed that LGBTQI communities and rural adolescent girls are abandoned first when systems fail.
- ✓ **African solutions are already working:** Community scorecards in Kenya are compelling county governments to adopt legislation; social enterprises like bakeries are sustaining organizations; sports-based mental health interventions and digital platforms co-designed with PWD are filling gaps; and emergency funds are keeping organizations alive during the crisis.
- ✓ **Youth are today’s leaders, not tomorrow’s:** The day reinforced that tokenism must end. Young people demanded unrestricted long-term financing, co-designing of programs from inception and recognition that “hope has always been our resistance” in shrinking civic spaces.



DAY 2: STRATEGIC TOOLS, POLICY GAPS AND COLLECTIVE POWER

The second day of the convening focused on a critical political analysis of regional commitments, confronting anti-rights movements and developing strategic tools for advocacy. The morning plenary, led by Sarah Stallon from Fos Feminista, featured a deep examination of the *AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls*, adopted in February 2025. Nancy Baraza, from Zamara Foundation, traced the convention's origins from South Africa's 2020-2021 positive masculinity initiative to limited 2024 virtual civil society consultations, revealing a drafting process that lacked transparency, excluded feminist voices and diluted progressive proposals.

Presenting findings from AMwA's feminist analysis with Fos Feminista, Winfred Apiyo outlined the Convention's strengths; its recognition of gender beyond biology, explicit naming of femicide, protection of women human rights defenders and its status as the first African treaty addressing cyber violence. However, significant gaps still remain:

- **Critical omissions:** The Convention fails to explicitly name FGM, child marriage and marital rape as forms of violence against women and girls.
- **Vulnerable Language:** The Convention's reliance on "African family values" was deemed vulnerable and susceptible to anti-rights misuse; use of "violence against women and girls" instead of "gender-based violence."

- **Flawed Process:** Webinars involving CSOs across Africa and MENA revealed that 93% of participants were not consulted during the Convention's drafting process.
- **Insufficient Standards:** An article-by-article review showed two-thirds of the Convention's provisions fail to meet basic standards in prevention, response mechanisms, survivor agency and grounding in human rights-based approaches.

With only Djibouti having ratified the convention at the time of the conference, the overall consensus was an urgent call for partners to advance the *Pause for Purpose* campaign to strengthen the convention before its entry into force. The campaign calls for pausing ratification until key weaknesses are addressed, including: transparent, inclusive consultations centered on feminist and community voices; explicit naming of FGM, child marriage, and marital rape; removing "African family values" language; grounding obligations in clear, enforceable state responsibilities; integrating evidence-based prevention and comprehensive survivor care; addressing technology-facilitated GBV; and shifting terminology from "victims" to "survivors." This pause is essential to prevent regression from established human rights norms.



Strategic Advocacy and Movement Building

Five concurrent breakout sessions equipped participants with strategic tools for policy advocacy, anti-rights resistance, ethical storytelling, community-centred leadership and sustainable youth engagement:

- 1. Policy Advocacy with Parliamentarians (Sonke Gender Justice):** The session guided participants in co-creating frameworks for effective parliamentary advocacy, emphasizing the need for structured engagement between CSOs and parliamentarians. Strategies shared included building trust through diplomacy and evidence-based advocacy, embedding CSO voices by understanding parliamentary processes and cycles, and formalizing relationships through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). Lived realities were deemed essential for advocacy, helping “put a face to issues.” Key recommendations included building coalitions and strengthening CSO-parliament engagement through structured frameworks; using community evidence to humanize issues and formalizing collaborations through MOUs and targeted engagements aligned with parliamentary processes and budget cycles.
- 2. Confronting Anti-Rights Movements (ATHENA Network):** The session unpacked the organized nature of anti-rights movements, which use tactics like disinformation campaigns, criminalization of identities, coordinated attacks and online attacks to undermine feminist leaders. The conversation revealed massive external funding targeting feminist movements, with case studies from Kenya and Malawi on backlash and resistance. Identified weaknesses in the SRHR movement included fragmentation, tokenism and ageism, with “the enemy within” described as established organizations in the feminist spaces that gatekeep resources. Key strategies shared by partners included viewing rest as resistance; building Pan-African alliances beyond national boundaries; investing in young feminist leadership; strengthening regional alliances; monitoring opposition trends; addressing internal movement fragmentation and resource gatekeeping; and safeguarding the civic space.
- 3. Ethical Storytelling for Advocacy (FEMNET):** The session reinforced that narratives must humanize data and elevate underrepresented voices, but with strong emphasis on ethical, community-centred storytelling. Critical principles included safeguarding, consent and dignity, particularly for survivors and human rights defenders, and the power of narrative to influence policy. There were recommendations for partners to prioritize ethical practices in all storytelling; build multimedia capacity; ensure accessibility; and center lived experiences to influence policy while maintaining consent and dignity protocols.
- 4. Reclaiming Women’s and Youth Leadership in SRHR (Pathfinder International)** session explored redesigning leadership models grounded in accessibility, dignity and meaningful participation. It spotlighted the exclusion of young people with disabilities, the transformative power of lived experiences and the need to move beyond tokenism. Key recommendations included dismantling tokenism in leadership spaces; embedding accessibility in all programming; investing in youth and women-led innovations; expanding mentorship and community-rooted leadership models; and ensuring meaningful participation from program design through monitoring and evaluation.

“*Lived realities were deemed essential for advocacy*”



5. **Sustainable Youth Engagement and Leadership (Women Deliver):** The session showcased emerging leaders' work on harmful practices, intersex rights, climate-SRHR linkages and food security, while highlighting barriers such as threats, underfunding and ineffective interventions. Young leaders articulated clear demands for decision-making power and recognition of diverse youth leadership. Session recommendations were for partners and donors to provide long-term financing with reduced bureaucracy; support cross-country collaboration; leverage digital platforms to counter anti-rights narratives; and recognize diverse youth leadership including rural adolescent girls, persons with disabilities and LGBTQI youth.

A key message and call to action of the day was the need for urgent action to pause the ratification of the flawed AU Convention. The afternoon collective action planning session synthesized shared challenges across Africa including shrinking civic and funding spaces, persistent harmful practices, maternal mortality, limited access for persons with disabilities and weak implementation of existing policies. Participants developed cross-movement priorities emphasizing building strong, structured coalitions for advocacy, ethical storytelling centered on lived experiences, investing in young feminist leadership to counter coordinated opposition, and advancing accountability and solidarity toward Women Deliver 2026.



DAY 2



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ **The AU Convention requires a pause, not celebration:** While historic as the first African treaty on violence against women and girls, the convention's failure to explicitly name FGM, child marriage and marital rape, combined with vulnerable "African family values" language and a flawed consultative process where 93% of CSOs were excluded, demands the Pause for Purpose campaign to strengthen it before ratification.
- ✓ **Anti-rights movements are organized, funded and strategic:** Feminist movements face coordinated attacks, disinformation campaigns, and massive external funding targeting their work. The "enemy within" - established organizations that gatekeep resources - emerged as a critical internal challenge requiring movement accountability alongside external resistance.
- ✓ **Evidence and lived experiences are the most powerful advocacy tools:** Community evidence humanizes policy debates and "puts a face to issues." Structured CSO-parliament engagement through MOUs, alignment with parliamentary processes, and ethical storytelling that centers consent and dignity can drive policy wins when combined with coalition-building and sustained follow-ups.
- ✓ **Youth and women's leadership must be reimaged:** Dismantling tokenism requires embedding accessibility, investing in innovations led by young people with disabilities and LGBTQI youth, expanding mentorship, and ensuring meaningful participation from program design through monitoring and evaluation. Long-term financing with reduced bureaucracy is non-negotiable.

DAY 3: ACCOUNTABILITY, AUTHENTIC CO-CREATION AND THE ROADMAP TO WOMEN DELIVER 2026



The final day synthesized and translated demands for sustainable funding, inclusion and accountability into actionable commitments for the road to Women Deliver 2026.

A filmed series of dialogues highlighted the devastating, concrete impacts of funding withdrawal, such as community outreach vehicles halting and nurses leaving their stations. Communities across the continent are being forced to revert to traditional medicine and harmful practices, eroding years of SRHR gains. Organizations are demonstrating resilience by supporting social enterprises (like bakeries) and creating emergency funds. However, the crisis has exposed how marginalized groups are being deprioritized and continue to threaten long-term public health outcomes.

Two powerful dialogues drove the convening's imperative for authentic co-creation:

- **PWD and SRHR Access:** Advocates for persons of short stature, including Catarina Nyambura from Kenya, described being infantilized in healthcare settings and assumed to have been assaulted rather than having consensu-

al relationships, when presenting at healthcare facilities for services. The collective of persons with disabilities demanded that inclusion should move from an abstract concept to an explicit practice, highlighting systemic barriers including outdated data, absent budgets for disability programming, inaccessible facilities that are not accommodative of the needs of PWD, and policy implementation failures despite progressive legislation like Kenya's new Disability Act of 2025. **Key recommendations** put forth emphasised for PWDs to be explicitly named and centered across all sections of programming and policy documents, not treated as an afterthought; budgets must be allocated specifically for disability-inclusive programming; facilities must be redesigned for accessibility; the principle of "No sentence should be considered complete without PWD in it" must be adopted; PWD representation must be ensured in all decision-making spaces including government Cabinets; and Women Deliver 2026 must explicitly mention and fully factor in PWD when drafting any resolutions.



- **The Youth Town Hall** plenary and interactive sessions demanded authentic co-creation, not tokenism. Panellists called for SRHR programming rooted in feminist principles, intersectionality and lived realities, rejecting one-size-fits-all approaches. HER Voice Fund’s Cindy Amaiza presented current statistics showing that 4,000 AGYW contract HIV weekly, with 3,100 in sub-Saharan Africa, yet structural and systemic barriers persist with governments slow to act. Young people in the audience articulated clear demands for decision-making power from program design through monitoring and evaluation, reinforcing the urgent need for stigma-free health spaces, real choices in HIV prevention, integrated services and economic opportunities with contextual implementation reflecting their lives. They insisted on

flexible, long-term funding and the recognition of diverse youth leadership, including rural adolescent girls, PWD and LGBTQI youth. **Their key demands** were for 35% of donor funds to be set aside specifically for youth-led organizations in all their diversities (including feminist, LGBTQI, PWD); 5% of funding to be dedicated to capacity building; participation in decision-making spaces to shift from “privilege” to right; and for Women Deliver 2026 to provide dedicated platforms for adolescent girls from rural areas, supporting and facilitating their participation in the conference.

The overarching demand was for a fundamental shift to power-sharing, summarised by the phrase: “No sentence should be considered complete without PWD in it”.

DAY 3



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ **PEPFAR cuts have real faces and names:** Community outreach vehicles halted, nurses leaving stations, established community cadres stopping operations, young people in hard-to-reach areas losing access to PrEP, condoms, HIV testing and STI screening. Communities are reverting to traditional medicine and harmful practices, eroding years of SRHR gains while marginalized groups - LGBTQI persons, teen mothers, sex workers, transgender persons are consistently being deprioritized.
- ✓ **“No sentence should be considered complete without PWD in it”:** This powerful principle emerged as the non-negotiable standard for authentic inclusion. PWD demanded to move from abstract concepts to explicit practice, with representation in all decision-making spaces, dedicated budgets, accessible facilities, and visibility across all programming and policy documents.
- ✓ **The crisis is an opportunity to refocus civil society’s role:** From subsidizing government services to holding governments accountable. Organizations are demonstrating resilience through social enterprises, emergency funds (disbursing up to USD 2,500 to organizations facing crises), and strategic coalitions. However, domestic resource mobilization and government accountability can no longer be optional, they are existential necessities.
- ✓ **4,000 AGYW contract HIV weekly in Africa, yet their voices remain marginalized:** Young people rejected one-size-fits-all approaches and performative inclusion, demanding SRHR programming rooted in feminist principles, intersectionality and lived realities. They want real choices, stigma-free health spaces, integrated services, economic opportunities and contextual implementation, not just policies but meaningful participation in design, implementation and monitoring.

THE FINAL ROADMAP AND KEY ASKS

The convening concluded with a clear roadmap of non-negotiable asks to drive the agenda towards Women Deliver 2026, reflecting a decisive pivot from petitioning for aid to demanding accountability and power.

STAKEHOLDER	KEY ASKS/COMMITMENTS
AU Member States	<p>Increase SRHR budget allocations toward the 15% health spending commitment.</p> <p>Implement transparent tax justice and hold governments accountable for policy implementation.</p> <p>Integrate Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) into school curricula as a national policy priority.</p>
Donors/ Multilaterals	<p>35% of donor funds must be set aside specifically for youth-led organizations in all their diversities (including feminist, LGBTQI, PWD).</p> <p>Provide unrestricted, flexible, and long-term funding.</p> <p>Dedicate 5% of funding to capacity building.</p>
CSOs/ Movements	<p>Co-create harmonized training manuals across the region and build coalitions beyond the SRHR movement to strengthen advocacy for tax justice.</p> <p>Mobilize and protect women in conflict regions.</p>
Women Deliver 2026	<p>Integrate economic empowerment into all programming.</p> <p>Ensure explicit platforms and visibility for transwomen and LBQ women.</p> <p>Adopt the principle of “No sentence should be considered complete without PWD in it.”</p>

“*Adopt the principle of “No sentence should be considered complete without PWD in it.”*”

