



Africa Centre for Open Governance

# AfriCOG Strategic Plan 2024-2028

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Professionalism Independence Integrity People-centeredness Courage Proactiveness

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**AfriCOG's 2024-28 Strategic Plan** frames the design and implementation of its programmes within the operating context for civil society created by the big issues of our time. We take a particular perspective: that the changes taking place in the world are epochal, and have challenged our understanding and expectations about how democracy and economic systems work. The struggle to come to grips with the shifts that have occurred has left progressive forces in Kenya fragmented and exhausted as they seek to diagnose and respond to the crises we now experience in the state, in our economies, and in our societies.

The changes sweeping the world present multiple threats as well as opportunities for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), as laid out in AfriCOG's pioneering paper by Wachira Maina '[Civil Society: Epochal change and the Way Forward](#)' (hyperlink). The regression of democracy and the associated rise of populism has undermined the traditional toolkit of advocacy. Political parties are now routinely mobilising identity over ideology; digital platforms have sharpened social and political polarities; and the voice of moderate allies in advanced democracies have been choked by the spike in racism and religious bigotry across the globe. At the forefront of the failings of western liberal democracy are the consequences of neglected socio-economic rights and structural inequalities which have eroded social cohesion and provoked popular protests over deepening economic misery.

During the span of this Strategic Plan, civil society will be working in a radically different global and national space. In response, AfriCOG has developed a new Theory of Change. Innovative programmes and training will be implemented, with a focus on socio-economic rights, launching a new line in governance: fiscal constitutionalism – taking care of the people's purse. We will continue to provide a hub for thought leadership, feeding critical knowledge products into political spaces, and convening dynamic discussions to re-energise and inform civil society.

## Who we are, what we're about

Africa Centre for Open Governance, AfriCOG, is a not-for-profit Kenyan organisation, registered in January 2007. It has grown into a respected voice on issues of accountability and transparency, and established a

unique record on investigative research, public interest litigation and thought leadership.

AfriCOG envisions a country and continent in which citizens and civic institutions are vigilant over public life and actively watch the politics and economy of Kenya and the region.

AfriCOG's mission is to build and entrench a culture of integrity and transparency through informed and determined action in the public and private sector. We do this by providing cutting-edge research on governance: strengthening the implementation of the constitution through advocacy and strategic litigation; focusing on neglected socio-economic rights; monitoring performance on political and economic governance in the public and private sectors; building a constituency of anti-corruption champions; and being an authoritative resource centre on governance and socio-economic issues by working with progressive forces in Kenya, in the counties, and in the region.

### Core Values At The Centre Of Our Work Are:

- **Professionalism**
- **Independence**
- **Integrity**
- **People-Centredness**
- **Courage**
- **And A Proactive Approach**

AfriCOG's secretariat is organised around two main functions:

- 1) Programmes – this includes research, training, advocacy and partnerships, and dissemination and linkages.
- 2) Institutional strengthening – this is built around governance, administration, finance, training and information and communication technology.

AfriCOG's approach is to use research and knowledge products to inform and strengthen policy partnerships and a good governance coalition, while mobilizing civic forces to be a countervailing power on the state. AfriCOG policy statements and events are frequently covered by national media, and over a hundred reports in its own name and for its civil society partners have been produced and well received. These are available to

all – citizens and government - on [africog.org](http://africog.org) AfriCOG has also conducted over thirty public interest cases, and led impactful advocacy missions to the African Union, the United Nations Security Council and the International Criminal Court, among many others. It is seen as a valuable partner by such organisations as the Open Government Partnership, the Global Initiative against Transnational Crime, and the Coalition for the United Nations Convening Against Corruption, and works in conjunction with the Africa Leadership Centre, Kings College, London.

### What matters to us:

AfriCOG’s strategic priorities are to:

1) conduct action and policy-relevant research, highlighting the structural causes of bad governance and its effect on the welfare of Kenyan and African peoples: helping to sustainably address structural realities and inequalities.

- 2) use evidence-based advocacy to influence legislation, regulation, public policy and practice through strategic, pre-emptive and governance interventions and activities, including dissemination of information.
- 3) reach out to like-minded groups to mobilise, energise and provide skills for new constituencies for reform to counter and reject bad governance in Kenya at all levels.

### The environment we work in

Kenya is in the process of implementing one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, at a time when there is a global retreat from democracy and progressive forces have become fragmented and exhausted. Epochal changes sweeping the world challenge many of our conventional claims and expectations about how democracy and economic systems work, and has created a radically different global and national space for civil society to work in. These changes present threats as well as opportunities for CSOs working in governance:

The nature of Advocacy Space		
	What this means for democracy	Implications for CSOs and Advocacy
<b>Shrinking of progressive constituencies in the West</b>	Kenya’s pro-democracy forces, including CSOs, have fewer and weaker allies in the West.	The old transnational pro-democracy alliance does not exist anymore; but new ad hoc alliances are forming in digital spaces.
<b>Politics of insecurity</b>	The politics of insecurity has rekindled hyper-nationalist rhetoric, with a ‘my-country-first’ politics, giving a boost to the politics of resentment.	Open society values are everywhere under attack, making CSO advocacy work harder, and dangerous; demands new skills and more debate.
<b>The return of enlightened dictatorship</b>	The moral rehabilitation of the autocratic developmentalist state is forcing those who support democracy to justify it.	Autocrats are no longer geopolitically isolated and are given policy space. This makes it harder for CSOs to push for accountability and transparency; inviting innovative approaches.
<b>Western retreat from democracy promotion</b>	The West’s retreat from democracy has meant ceding moral ground to autocrats, abandoning its former allies in the developing world and embracing autocrats.	Autocrats have become more difficult to confront, adept at supporting each other in transnational alliances; requiring progressive forces to expand the search for new allies.
<b>The vulnerability of borrower nations</b>	The new debt crisis in Africa arises from private sovereign borrowing, which cannot be bilaterally bargained away in the same way state/multilateral lending could.	Borrowing from private lenders has undone CSOs ability to form common cause with citizens of lender nations to push for better debt terms; but has focused the need on socio-economic rights.

## AfriCOG's New Theory of Change

AfriCOG has updated its Theory of Change, ToC, to meet the political and economic exigencies of the times. The problematic remains the same: mobilizing civic forces to be a countervailing power on the state and the hub for ideas to drive policy change in governance. The overarching challenge is how to re-energise and reconnect the now fragmented progressive forces in Kenya back to advocacy and, at the same time, to identify, mobilize and enthuse a new constituency for change in an environment of radical uncertainty, low-trust politics and growing popular distrust in both democracy and democratic institutions.

AfriCOG believes that policy change in this environment requires a shift in both the process and content of advocacy. In terms of process, AfriCOG believes that advocacy strategies based on the linear progression of action (by CSOs), reaction (by government) followed by negotiated reforms (that is agreed to by both government and CSOs) have run their course.

In the coming years, the biggest policy changes are likely to come contingently, from foreseeable but not precisely predictable events and opportunities. That means that openings for positive change can come from either transitions or crises; that single issue groups – like the Me-Too Movement, MTM, or Black Lives Matter, BLM, - can, positively, coalesce quickly and force rapid change and, negatively, be one's allies on one issue today but could morph into opponents on another issue tomorrow. Because this new terrain requires imagination, canniness and fleet-footedness, we believe that CSOs must become even more entrepreneurial and brave in their approaches. AfriCOG will adopt a 'Brain-Trust' model built on scenario-building and periodic blue-sky thinking sessions that receive and test new ideas and regularly track shifts in the environment.

In terms of content, AfriCOG's founding diagnosis that the crisis in Kenya is structural remains valid but two decades of working on reforms to curb corruption and improve governance have shown that only disruptive shifts -defined as shifts that rapidly undermine the conventional wisdom that props up the status quo and force a radical re-think of the basis of

policy- can loosen the political elites' grasp on the state and are likely to generate enduring change. But that will require that would-be advocates for change understand the nature of the current global crisis; that they identify allies and the levers of action and familiarize themselves with disruptive change techniques.

## AfriCOG's Programmes for 2024-2028

AfriCOG will work to influence reforms in economic and political governance, and on implementing and strengthening the constitution, particularly for marginalised economic groups, and in the counties.

### Training and Research

Our programme in this strategy period is heavy on training. That is to build the capacity of CSOs in scenario-style planning; implementing policy change in difficult environments; and re-energising Kenya's thought leaders and advocates for change to re-establish a leadership role.

Training programmes are designed to upskill CSOs on re-framing traditional governance issues in terms of socio-economic rights, while research remains the backbone of our organisation and comprises a significant part of AfriCOG's work.

### Programme strategies

- Strengthen strategic change, research and public interest litigation by delivering training programmes on **socio-economic rights**. Target traditional rule of law CSOs as well as development NGOs doing service delivery; train young researchers in the counties to radically use publicly available government information relating to socio-economic rights.
- Launch a new line of governance on **fiscal constitutionalism**, spotlighting the use and abuse of Kenya's public finance system – the role of power in taxation, economic policies and administration; train journalists to place accessible and engaging information to amplify socio-economic rights in mainstream and social media.
- Enable CSOs to tap into the economic and **democratic potential of socio-economic groups** such as informal traders, including leveraging policy at county level; build policy change capacity of advocacy NGOs to take up youth economic inclusion issues.

- Address **rural political and economic exclusion** – the ‘misery economy’ created by decades of ineffectual reforms – which violates the constitution and socio-economic rights.
- Bring a **new perspective to climate change** and environmental management by piloting programmes in environmental policy and litigating environmental crimes. The current legal and policy framework is weak, and conflict and contestation between roles for national and county government have serious consequences. Build a coalition of governance NGOs and agencies working on environmental issues by conducting a high-level audit of environmental and climate change governance in Kenya.
- Use the new socio-economic focus as **an opportunity to work with judiciaries**, and take advantage of the resilient role of the courts. Strengthen AfriCOG’s and CSOs ability to do socio-economic analysis of decisions of the courts through training programmes on socio-economic rights. Produce a periodic ‘Spotlight on the Courts’ highlighting specific court decisions and their effects on broad governance and socio-economic rights, especially those arising from strategic litigation and public interest cases.
- **Leverage positive change opportunities** offered by independent state institutions and other islands of integrity, which can be important in arresting democratic recession - like the resilience of the Auditor General and Controller of Budget. Use the information in these reports – public spending on education, health, potable water and sanitation – for work in strategic litigation on socio-economic rights and fiscal constitutionalism.
- **Provide thought leadership** for progressive and strategic change, primarily by reframing governance issues in the language of economic inclusion. Expand the search for allies, particularly at county level.
- **Build a Brain-Trust** for governance thought leadership. Establish a strategic and representative go-team composed of committed and imaginative thought-leaders to assist AfriCOG and CSO partners to review the operating environment, identify emerging opportunities, and anticipate risk and threats.

## Key programmes

Programme	Rationale	Actions
<b>Developing socio-economic rights analysis</b>	Strengthen skills for political economy analysis and strategies, and tap into the democratic potential of excluded socio-economic groups like youth, women, and the informal sector.	Train CSOs on implementing policy change in a fluid and uncertain environment; and re-frame traditional governance issues in terms of socio-economic inclusion. Identify target counties to leverage the leadership to implement policies responsive to social democratic issues.
<b>Looking after the people’s purse: fiscal constitutionalism</b>	Economic policies can be as violent as political ones. Fiscal constitutionalism (makes sure the people’s purse is being properly taken care of) by scrutinizing the entire public finance system.	Train CSOs on the importance of fiscal constitutionalism, tying budgets back to democratic theory and practice. This includes the design, function and failure of the budget system; taxation; and oversight on borrowing.
<b>Using the changing role of the courts to litigate socio-economic rights</b>	Courts in Kenya and the region have become key actors in the policy field, and are frequently the last bastion against official denial or excess.	Leverage opportunities for strategic litigation of socio-economic rights. Upskill lawyers for socio-economic public interest cases; train journalists to report on them effectively; and provide socio-economic analysis of decisions of the courts. Produce ‘Spotlight on the Courts’ for media, policy makers and the public.

Programme	Rationale	Actions
<b>Piloting a new approach to climate governance and policy</b>	Kenya's Population depends primarily on natural resource extraction which makes climate change an existential issue and yet the current legal and policy framework is weak, without specific departmental mandates for climate outcomes and shot through with conflict and role conflicts between institutions as well as between national government and county governments.	Pilot the new environmental governance programme by: a) Conducting a rapid high-level audit of climate change governance to identify gaps. This includes looking at a) the fragmentation of environmental responsibilities across agencies; b) the conflicts between county level and national level oversight and c) the proliferation of regulators and its impact on accountability for climate change outcomes. Building a coalition of governance NGOs that can use the findings of the audit to develop a training programme for NGOs and government agencies.
<b>Addressing rural political and economic exclusion</b>	Economic immiseration of rural areas and decline of incomes in rural Kenya could destabilize the country more acutely than urban political protests. This calls for CSOs to build issue coalition that can be platforms for identifying the issues; diagnosing the problems and crafting alternative reform pathways that can be used for policy dialogue with both national and county governments.	AfriCOG will develop a framework within which to seed a comprehensive and long-term programme on political and economic Inclusion of Kenya's rural areas. The preliminary steps to this end will entail two things. a) Forming a Standing CSO Coalition of like-minded partners on Rural Exclusion and Decay. b) Undertaking a comprehensive scoping study of the potentially transformative issues in a programme on rural economic and political inclusion.

## Challenges, lessons and achievements

### Cross-cutting challenges

Three central cross-cutting challenges emerge for the strategic plan period:

- 1) Consolidating democracy, the constitution and restoring trustworthiness in public institutions
- 2) Fostering sustained attention and political will to fight bad governance and secure growth of an open, rule-based economy
- 3) Strengthening, re-skilling and re-energising CSOs in order to effectively mobilise progressive forces and provide thought leadership in a challenging environment.

### Dissemination and Linkages

The impact of AfriCOG's research work, advocacy and policy partnerships depends on getting information to stakeholders for follow-up action.

AfriCOG will provide relevant, objective, accessible and professionally-packaged information to a variety of stakeholders and audiences to suit different information and activity needs. This may include confidential in-house briefings, policy briefings, media kits, advocacy kits and intelligence briefs and a diversity of audio-visual and multi-media products.

To foster permanent civic vigilance, AfriCOG continues to invest in expanding its institutional capacity for knowledge-generation, information-brokerage and advocacy over the long term, positioning itself as a leading regional resource centre for information on governance and reform.

## Communication

AfriCOG seeks to better leverage new communication technologies, identifying how AfriCOG products can be disseminated through different influencers and digital platforms, including podcasts. It also needs to identify and build the internal skills needed to effectively use such platforms.

While dissemination has achieved remarkable success and grown organically in response to external demand, this function needs to be strengthened and streamlined.

## Institutional Strengthening

AfriCOG is committed to maintaining a lean, efficient and effective Secretariat. This requires rationalising resources available to the institution and aligning them with AfriCOG's vision, mission and the requirements of the Strategic Plan. Activities identified for institutional strengthening include institutionalising policies and procedures, strengthening the management of AfriCOG's research function and resource mobilisation, and developing staff capacities.

## Risks and Assumptions

In preparing this Strategic Plan, AfriCOG has identified the following risks and made several assumptions.

### Risks

1. The global democratic recession is reducing support for civil society organisations.
2. Scarcity of donor funding increases inflexibility, focusing on reporting, efficiency and caution rather than effective use of resources.
3. Governance and socio-economic public interest cases are sensitive and could lead AfriCOG into litigation areas.
4. AfriCOG is among leading organisations that have borne the brunt of
5. The terrain for socio-economic rights and governance work is vast, as well as the scope for training and research, and may tempt AfriCOG to spread itself too thin.

## Assumptions

1. National and global unpredictability and uncertainty have become a feature of life.
2. Discontent will continue with the present government, which expects to remain in place until elections are held in 2027.
3. Kenyans pay increasing attention to political and economic developments in the counties.
4. There will be opportunities to leverage advocacy and reform offered by independent offices and institutions in islands of integrity and accountability at national and county level
5. Media houses and journalists will show willingness to take on the socio-economic rights and litigation agenda.
6. The effectiveness and impact of AfriCOG training and programmes can be assessed against the changing and unpredictable environment through periodic evaluative events.
7. Risk management will need to be built around strategic vigilance and surveillance, drawing on CSO networks of trust, cooperation and coordination.

## Planning, Implementation and Evaluation Framework

This Strategic Plan outlines the broad beacons for our work.

AfriCOG will work through a programme cycle built around the 2024-28 Strategic Plan, broken down into annual operational plans. Annual operational plans will present specific activities around the thematic concerns with clear outputs, time frames and responsibility allocation. Each year will begin with an annual operational planning session and conclude with a review for reflection on objectives, activities carried out, achievements registered, challenges faced and lessons learnt.

Given the unpredictable and changing global and national environment, strategic reviews will be periodically convened to align the Strategic Plan to prevailing realities in the political and economic environment.

An annual report will highlight the year's activities and results. Results will be tracked continuously by the staff responsible for each function and collectively through various monitoring tools.



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