

## KUMI's Remarks

Hello to all.

It is an honour to stand before you today and discuss the journey of African civil society organisations and their pivotal role in shaping our continent's future. To gain a deeper understanding, I would like to talk a bit about where we've come from in civil society in Africa, the present challenges, and the path forward for these organisations.

When we examine the historical emergence of African civil society organisations, we witness a rich tapestry of resilience and activism. Throughout the 20th century, civil society organisations played a crucial role in the fight against colonialism and apartheid, advocating for independence, freedom, and self-determination. From coalitions of CS organisations like the United Democratic Front (UDF) in South Africa to the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS), **OTHERS?** these groups were instrumental in bringing about political transformation and social justice. **More about this**

As we transition to the present, we must acknowledge the challenges that African civil society organisations face today. Despite their notable achievements, they operate within an evolving landscape of complexities. One such challenge is climate change, which disproportionately affects the African continent. Civil society organisations are at the forefront of raising awareness, mobilising communities, and advocating for sustainable practices to mitigate the impact of climate change and protect our environment.

Additionally, Africa's youth bulge presents both opportunities and challenges. With a rapidly growing young population, civil society organisations must address the aspirations, needs, and concerns of this demographic. **(TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?)** They play a crucial role in empowering and engaging young people in decision-making processes, providing education and employment opportunities, and nurturing their leadership potential.

Rising inequalities pose another significant challenge. While Africa has made progress in reducing poverty and improving livelihoods, disparities persist within and between countries. Civil society organisations play a vital role in advocating for equitable distribution of resources, addressing systemic injustices, and promoting inclusive economic growth.

Moreover, the rise of authoritarianism poses a threat to the gains made in democratic governance. African civil society organisations, through their advocacy, monitoring, and watchdog roles, act as a counterbalance to authoritarian tendencies, defending human rights, promoting good governance, and ensuring accountability.

In the face of these challenges, civil society organisations are called upon to play a transformative role in Africa's future. To be "fit for purpose," they must leverage the power of the people they seek to represent. By working with people and not losing sight of this, these organisations can be better equipped to identify the root causes of social issues, design evidence-based interventions. One of the biggest oversights that many CSO's end up making is the error of not documenting their work well enough. Not only does this

demonstrate their value but it helps to foster continuous learning and inform future strategies.

Technology and platforms such as the African civil society organisations Platform hold immense potential in facilitating collaboration, knowledge sharing, and networking. By harnessing digital tools, civil society organisations can transcend geographical barriers, amplify their voices, and mobilise resources more efficiently. These platforms provide spaces for dialogue, coordination, and collective action, creating synergies and strengthening the collective impact of civil society organisations.

However, we must remember that it is the dedicated individuals within these organisations and in the communities they seek to serve who truly drive change. Equipping civil society organisations to be fit for purpose requires investment in capacity-building, professional development, and leadership training. By fostering a culture of innovation, inclusivity, and collaboration, organisations can nurture the talent and expertise needed to address the multifaceted challenges we face.

Furthermore, strategic partnerships between civil society organisations, governments, private sector entities, and international organisations are vital. Collaboration and cooperation are essential in leveraging resources, expertise, and networks to tackle complex issues collectively. By joining forces, we can create lasting systemic change and ensure that the aspirations of all Africans for justice, peace and dignity are realised.

We find that one of the critical issues that civil society must address right now is how to create multiple pathways where people can participate in activism based on the interest skills, inclination, and things that give them joy and meaning. Because that is the most sustainable form of participation. This participation is critically needed for two reasons: One, it is to maximise and aggregate power to push political and business leaders to change much faster than they're willing to. But it's also critically important to actually provide a sense of community, community resilience, enhance mental wellbeing, and so on in a context where climate anxiety is on the rise.

Just as I would say to anybody else in the world, if you're an artist, then use your arts as part of your contribution rather than sitting in board meetings and taking minutes. Use those unique and distinct skills that you have to support the different efforts that are ongoing to improve things. Based on these ideas of focusing on the power that people do have rather than the power that they lack, I have come up with this diagram that illustrates the multiple pathways for people to participate in changemaking. I will go through the four quadrants now, and you will see that almost all of them require the capacities that are found in this audience today.

\*KUMI GOES THROUGH THE QUADRANTS - 3mins\*

The journey of African civil society organisations has been marked by resilience, activism, and important achievements. As we navigate the challenges of the present and strive for a better future, these organisations must be equipped to be fit for purpose. By including those we seek to serve, documentation, and knowledge, embracing technology and platforms, and

fostering collaboration and partnerships, African civil society organisations can continue to drive transformative change and shape a future where every African can thrive.

Thank you.