# FROM MARGINS TO MANDATE

## A Framework for Civil Society Engagement in Mission 300

May 2025

## Introduction

Mission 300, a collaboration between the World Bank Group (WBG), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and others, seeks to connect 300 million people in sub-Saharan Africa to electricity by 2030. While this ambition represents a historic opportunity to accelerate Africa's energy access goals, especially for the roughly 630 million[1] In a region without electricity, its current architecture lacks an explicit, institutionalised role for Civil Society Organisations (CSOS). This absence could fundamentally undermine the initiative's legitimacy, sustainability, and alignment with people-centred development goals.

This document, developed as part of the Six30 Campaign,[2] a civil-society-led push to ramp up investments in energy access across sub-Saharan Africa, outlines the rationale for robust CSO participation, identifies the risks of exclusion, demonstrates the potential of inclusive engagement, and proposes a structured framework to embed civil society into Mission 300's governance and delivery mechanisms.

## The current gap: missing civic engagement in Mission 300

A review of official documents from the WBG and AfDB reveals no formal mechanisms for CSO participation in the governance, design, or monitoring of Mission 300. While the language of inclusion appears—references to local communities, consultations, and partnerships—these remain superficial and fail to reflect structured civil society involvement.

In contrast, African civil society actors, through the Six30 Campaign, have underscored the necessity of placing communities and grassroots organisations at the core of energy access strategies. The lack of CSO integration in Mission 300 ignores this consensus. It replicates a familiar top-down, technocratic model where African agency, especially through organised civic movements, is marginalised in favour of donor-government-private sector alliances. This undermines democratic ownership of the energy transition, the potential for grassroots innovation, especially around decentralized renewables, and long-term sustainability grounded in social legitimacy and accountability.

## Why CSO participation matters

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| **Enhancing Accountability and Transparency** | CSOs act as watchdogs, advocating transparent procurement, preventing corruption, and tracking the effectiveness of delivery. Their involvement bolsters trust and ensures funds reach their intended targets. |
| **Rooting Interventions in Local Realities** | CSOs possess contextual knowledge and trusted relationships with communities, especially marginalised groups. This ensures that interventions are socially inclusive and better tailored to lived realities. |
| **Amplifying Equity and Rights** | Civil society provides critical perspectives on gender, disability, and environmental justice. Without CSO input, Mission 300 risks reinforcing structural exclusions rather than remedying them. |
| **Unlocking Innovation** | Many CSOs operate innovative, community-based energy models—solar cooperatives, clean cooking social enterprises, youth-led energy start-ups. Institutionalizing their roles brings creativity, cost-effectiveness, and scalability. |

[1] Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 80% of global population lacking electricity

[2] Launched in April 2024 in Addis Ababa by the former president of Uganda, Dr Joyce Banda, the Six30 Campaign in a pan-African, multi-stakeholder push for increased investments in energy access in Africa. The Campaign calls on governments, donors and investors in and out of Africa to priorities energy access for 630 million people in the region without electricity by investing no less than $630 billion or $1000 for everyone without electricity by 2030. It is spearheaded by the African Coalition for Sustainable Energy and Access and the pan-African Climate Justice Alliance, which have a collective membership of more than 1000 community organizations, women's groups, farmers' organizations, youth movements and NGOs in more than 51 African countries. For more information about the Six30 Campaign and join the movement, visit www.six30.acsea54.org

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| **Strengthening Policy and Institutional Reform** | CSOs engage in national policy processes, advocating for energy pricing, subsidies, and governance reforms. Their presence enriches Mission 300's broader ecosystem of reform. |

## RISKS OF EXCLUSION

The absence of CSO involvement threatens to strip Mission 300 of its transformative potential. Rather than empowering communities and strengthening Africa's energy security and sovereignty, it risks becoming another technocratic exercise that deepens dependency, marginalises local voices, and misses the opportunity to build a truly just, inclusive, and sustainable energy future.

| Risk Category | Risk | Implication |
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| **Legitimacy Deficit** | *Projects may be seen as externally imposed, weakening community buy-in and ownership.* Without structured CSO involvement, Mission 300 risks being seen as donor-driven and externally imposed, with limited direct engagement of local communities and grassroots actors. This mirrors past energy access programs that failed to build local buy-in, resulting in community resistance, stalled implementation, or lack of maintenance. CSOs, by virtue of their embeddedness in local realities, are essential brokers of social legitimacy. Without their buy-in, Mission 300 risks replicating the mistrust that has historically plagued externally financed energy projects across Africa. | Weak social legitimacy can erode public trust, especially in rural or marginalized communities where energy poverty is most severe. |
| **Exclusion of Local Knowledge and Context** | *Technocratic, top-down solutions that miss real needs.* CSOs often bring intimate knowledge of community needs, social dynamics, and governance challenges. Their exclusion limits the initiative's ability to design inclusive, context-specific solutions, especially for hard-to-reach, underserved populations. It also dangerously entrenches a "development without agency" model: solutions for Africa rather than with Africa. Without CSO participation to challenge these inequities and ensure solutions are contextually appropriate, Mission 300 risks reinforcing rather than dismantling the structures perpetuating Africa's energy poverty. | Solutions may appear technically sound but fail socially, politically, or culturally, particularly among women, youth, indigenous, and pastoralist groups. |
| **Weak Accountability Mechanisms** | *Lack of independent oversight could lead to mismanagement and elite capture*. Without independent CSO monitoring, Mission 300 could replicate a pattern of opaque procurement, inflated costs, elite capture, and unaccountable financing—especially if private investors and governments dominate decision-making. | This undermines debt sustainability and risks turning energy access into another site of corruption and inequality, not transformation. |
| **Commodification of Energy Access** | *Market-driven approaches without safeguards may deepen inequalities in energy access and make alignment with people-centred development goals questionable.* African civil society has long emphasized that energy access | Poor households may remain locked out due to high tariffs, connection fees, or lack of voice in pricing structures—entrenching rather than reducing energy poverty. |

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| | is not simply a technical challenge, but a profound issue of justice, governance, and rights. Mission 300's heavy focus on scaling grid and off-grid technologies and mobilising private capital is essential but insufficient if divorced from broader societal needs such as affordability, equitable access for marginalised groups, gender equality, and local economic empowerment. It carries a significant risk of framing electricity as a commodity and not a right. CSOs have the experience and proximity to advocate for tariff protections, community-centred business models, and gender-sensitive energy planning—elements that otherwise risk being sidelined in favour of private sector profitability and infrastructure expansion imperatives. | |
| **Gender and Social Inequities** | *Interventions risk missing the needs of women, youth, and other marginalized groups.* Without strong CSO advocacy and gender mainstreaming expertise, Mission 300 could perpetuate existing gender and social exclusions in energy planning and access. | Women and girls, who bear the brunt of energy poverty, may not benefit equally from energy interventions, reinforcing cycles of disempowerment and unpaid labour. |
| **Reduced Innovation, Scalability & Sustainability** | *Missed opportunity to leverage grassroots innovations.* Excluding CSOs sidelines grassroots innovations, particularly in decentralised renewable energy, social enterprise, and cooperative ownership models. Second, sustainability could be severely compromised. CSOs are not just watchdogs but also critical enablers of project sustainability. By excluding CSOs, Mission 300 may fail to cultivate the local champions necessary for ongoing maintenance, adaptation, and scaling | Mission 300 may default to large-scale, centralised systems that are slower to deploy, less resilient, and more prone to political disruption, especially in fragile states. |
| **Fragile Social Contracts** | *Without local ownership and civic watchdogs, long-term impact and maintenance are jeopardized.* Mission 300, without CSO engagement, risks reinforcing a state-donor-private sector triad that displaces communities from the centre of Africa's energy transition. Their absence deprives Mission 300 of key knowledge about local governance systems, social dynamics, and capacity-building needs that are vital for maintaining energy infrastructure over the long term. Past experiences—from "white elephant" grid projects to abandoned off-grid solar schemes—have shown that infrastructure without community ownership and stewardship often collapses once donor funding dries up or political priorities shift. | This undermines Africa's policy sovereignty, and may breed long-term resentment and disillusionment—especially if the initiative is later perceived as extractive or neocolonial in character. |

## A FRAMEWORK FOR CSO ENGAGEMENT IN MISSION 300

To ensure Mission 300 truly delivers for the people, we propose a four-pillar framework for CSO participation:

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| **Pillar 1**<br>Governance and Representation | • Establish a Mission 300 Civil Society Advisory Council (M3-CSAC) at the regional and national levels.<br>• Ensure CSO representation in the Mission's governing bodies, including steering committees and technical working groups.<br>• Institutionalise periodic high-level dialogue between CSOs and the WBG/AfDB leadership. |
| **Pillar 2**<br>Programmatic Co-Implementation | • Create dedicated funding windows for CSO-led and community-driven energy initiatives under Mission 300.<br>• Partner with CSOs in implementing social and environmental safeguards, especially regarding land rights, resettlement, and gender impacts.<br>• Leverage CSO networks to expand last-mile delivery through public-private-community models. |
| **Pillar 3**<br>Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) | • Mandate independent, CSO-led citizen audits of Mission 300 projects.<br>• Develop a public-facing monitoring dashboard, co-managed with CSOs, for real-time progress tracking and bottlenecks.<br>• Support participatory MEL frameworks that include community-defined success indicators. |
| **Pillar 4:**<br>Advocacy, Capacity Building, and Policy Influence | • Fund and institutionalize CSO capacity building for energy policy engagement, project implementation, and technical literacy.<br>• Integrate CSOs into National Energy Compact development and review processes.<br>• Create CSO-led research platforms to inform policy innovation and evidence-based advocacy. |

## SUPPORT AND ENDORSEMENT

This framework is the result of multistakeholder consultations in Tanzania.[3] and Côte d'Ivoire. It has been reviewed and endorsed by the Bank-Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change and Energy, the African Coalition for Sustainable Energy and Access (ACSEA) and the Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), which collectively represent more than 1000 civil society organisations across more than 51 African countries.

## CONTACT

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[3] See African civil society statement on making Mission 300 deliver a just and inclusive energy transition issued in Tanzania on the sidelines of the African Heads of State Summit on Energy on 28 April 2025. https://pacja.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Making-Mission-300.pdf