FORUMCIV.

Power to change









FORUMCIV REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA 2026- 2030

Theme: Empowering communities, advancing justice, and driving innovation for a democratic and sustainable future

THERE IS NO DEMOCRACY WITHOUT CIVIL SOCIETY.



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Introduction

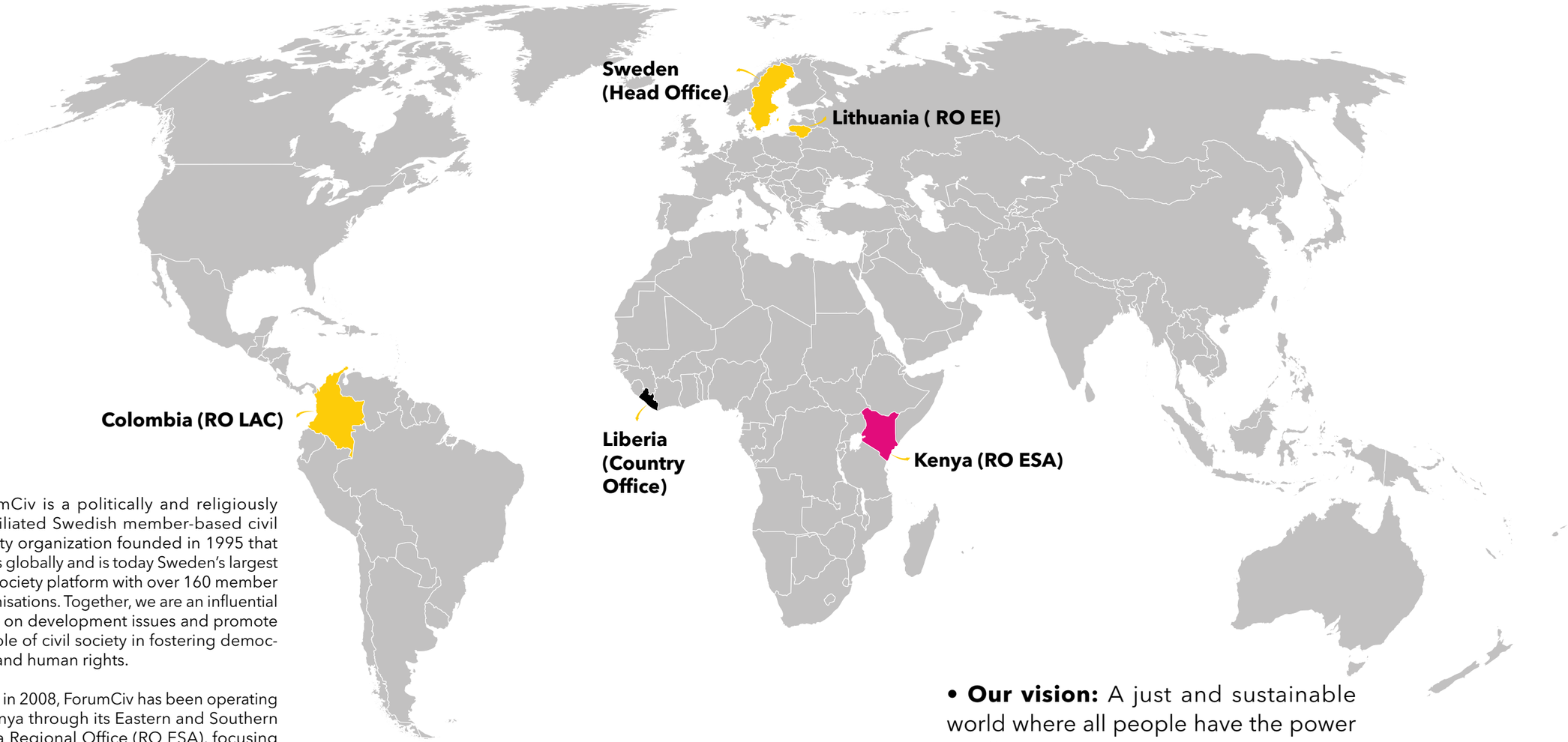


The ForumCiv Regional Strategy for Eastern and Southern Africa 2026–2030 sets out the organization's vision for advancing democracy, gender equality, climate justice, and civil society resilience across Eastern and Southern Africa.

Grounded in extensive consultations and survey feedback, the strategy identifies three external strategic pillars and one internal excellence pillar.

Cross-cutting drivers – youth leadership, artivism, technology & Artificial Intelligence (AI), and partnerships – are embedded across all priorities to ensure ForumCiv remains innovative, inclusive, and impactful.

About ForumCiv



ForumCiv is a politically and religiously unaffiliated Swedish member-based civil society organization founded in 1995 that works globally and is today Sweden's largest civil society platform with over 160 member organisations. Together, we are an influential voice on development issues and promote the role of civil society in fostering democracy and human rights.

Since in 2008, ForumCiv has been operating in Kenya through its Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (RO ESA), focusing on strengthening civil society, deepening democracy, advancing human rights, and promoting gender equality. The office works with various partners and stakeholders at the grassroots, national, regional, and global levels. Besides Sweden and Kenya, ForumCiv also has offices in Colombia, Liberia, and Lithuania.

- **Our vision:** A just and sustainable world where all people have the power to effect change.
- **Our purpose:** To empower people living in marginalization, who organize to claim their rights and advocate for change that contributes to a just and sustainable world.

Our theory of change



Our vision is a just and sustainable world where all people have the power to effect change, and we achieve this by strengthening marginalised people around the world who organise to claim their rights and by advocating for change.

We believe that sustainable development is only possible with a rights-based approach. This approach recognises marginalised people as right-holders whose rights are being denied, and thus are the appropriated agents to design the solutions that impact their lives.

We believe that a diverse and independent civil society allows a wide range of groups to have a voice, to be represented and heard. Together, we challenge unjust power structures and discriminatory norms caused by a multitude of civil, political, social, cultural, and economic injustices and we address the barriers and root causes that prevent people from participating in democratic processes and from realising their rights.

How we do this

ForumCiv increases the capabilities of civil society actors by providing capacity development and a platform for experience and knowledge exchange, by channeling resources to civil society organizations via grants and by joining efforts in advocacy.



Our work in Eastern and Southern Africa: Context and rationale

The Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) region is at a critical crossroads. While democratic values and civic action have made important gains, the space for civil society is under increasing threat from restrictive laws, shrinking freedoms, and digital repression. Youth, women, and marginalized groups remain underrepresented in governance, despite being most of the population.

At the same time, gender inequality, exclusion, and persistent gender-based violence undermine progress toward justice and equity. New challenges – such as online harassment, cyber exploitation, and the digital gender divide – demand integrated responses that combine rights- based advocacy with technology and innovation.

The climate crisis is disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities in the region. Droughts, floods, resource conflicts, and food insecurity are exacerbating poverty and inequality. Communities often lack the power, resources, or technical capacity to access climate finance, engage in carbon markets, or influence national climate policies. Yet, there is enormous potential in community-driven adaptation, renewable energy, and green livelihoods.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are ForumCiv's closest partners who are facing mounting challenges: short-term funding cycles, capacity gaps, burnout among activists, and limited access to digital tools. At the same time, new opportunities are emerging AI, and digital technologies can amplify advocacy, Public-Private Development Partnerships (PPDPs) can unlock resources, and artivism can mobilize mass support for democracy, rights, and climate justice.

ForumCiv is uniquely positioned to respond. With a strong presence in ESA and a track record of empowering grassroots movements, ForumCiv can bridge civil society, government, and private sector actors. The 2026–2030 strategy builds on these strengths while embracing innovation, technology, and youth leadership as core drivers of change.



Our strategic pillars

The purpose of the strategy is to empower communities and civil society in Eastern and Southern Africa to defend democracy, achieve gender justice, and lead climate action, while positioning ForumCiv ROESA as a credible and innovative regional hub.

It is guided by four imperatives:

1. **Protect democracy and civic space as the foundation for all rights and freedoms**
2. **Advance gender equality and social inclusion as a non-negotiable principle of justice.**
3. **Foster climate justice and sustainable livelihoods as a response to the dual crises of inequality and climate change.**
4. **Ensure regional office excellence so that ForumCiv ROESA is credible, accountable, and effective in driving impact.**

Pillar 1: Protecting and expanding democratic and civic space

Strategic objective:

Safeguard civic freedoms and enable citizens, especially youth and marginalized groups, to shape governance and hold power accountable.

Strategic focus:

Safeguard civic and digital rights: Advocate for protection of freedoms (expression, association, assembly), strengthen digital security, and counter AI-driven disinformation and online repression.

Youth leadership in democracy: Develop youth civic academies, fellowships, and mentorship pipelines for leadership in governance and accountability.

Artivism and innovative civic engagement: Embed artivism, digital advocacy, and CSO capacity strengthening as signature methods for civic mobilization and citizen oversight.

2030 outcome:
By 2030, civic space will be more open, digital rights protected, and empowered youth and citizens will drive accountability through innovative, creative, and resilient civil society movements.



Pillar 2: Advancing gender equality and social inclusion

Strategic objective:

Break systemic barriers to ensure women, youth, PWDs, LGBTQ+ communities, and Indigenous peoples achieve equity in leadership, livelihoods, and rights.

Strategic focus:

1. Women's empowerment and digital leadership: Advance women's political and economic participation, including access to digital and green economy opportunities.
2. Combat GBV (online and offline) and advance SRHR: Tackle gender-based violence in all its forms (including online harassment) and scale access to SRHR services for marginalized groups.
3. Inclusive and intersectional innovation: Use assistive technologies, AI tools, and accessible programming to amplify marginalized voices while building CSO resilience in promoting gender justice.

2030 outcome:

By 2030, gender-based violence will be significantly reduced, women and marginalized groups will hold leadership positions, and CSOs will use technology and innovation to ensure equality and inclusion in all spheres of life.





Pillar 3: Fostering climate justice, sustainable livelihoods and innovations

Strategic objective:

Champion community-led climate justice linking rights, resilience, and sustainable livelihoods.

Strategic focus:

1. Community-led climate action and rights: Support grassroots adaptation and mitigation strategies while strengthening CSOs to advocate for equitable climate policies.
2. Climate finance, carbon markets and just transition: Build capacity of communities and CSOs to access and monitor climate finance and carbon markets, ensuring fair benefit-sharing.
3. Market systems development, green livelihoods and innovations: Promote private sector engagement, inclusive green jobs, circular economy models, and youth-led innovations (including AI and digital solutions) to strengthen community resilience.

2030 outcome:

By 2030, grassroots communities and CSOs will lead climate action, equitably benefit from carbon finance, and pioneer sustainable livelihoods, with youth driving digital and creative climate innovations.

Pillar 4:
Regional office excellence

Strategic objective:

Position ForumCiv ROESA as a high-performing, accountable, and learning-driven regional hub.

Strategic focus:

1. Operational excellence and accountability: Strengthen governance, finance, compliance, and M&E systems to ensure integrity and donor confidence.
2. People and culture: Invest in staff capacity, diversity, equity, and wellbeing to sustain a motivated and value-driven workforce.
3. Thought leadership and partnerships: Position ForumCiv as a regional convenor and knowledge leader on democracy, human rights, gender justice, climate justice, and innovative civic engagement.

2030 outcome:

By 2030, ForumCiv ROESA will be a center of excellence, trusted for operational integrity, staff wellbeing, and thought leadership – the partner of choice for civil society, donors, and governments in Eastern & Southern Africa.



Cross-cutting drivers across all pillars



- Civil society resilience ➢ grassroots CSOs empowered with governance, funding, and advocacy capacities.
- Youth inclusion ➢ central to democracy, gender justice, and climate action.
- Technology and AI ➢ embedded as tools for transparency, inclusion, and innovation.
- Mental wellness for the development actors.
- Public Private Development Partnerships (PPDPs) and market systems ➢ leveraged to connect civil society, government, and business for systemic change.

Implementation and partnerships

The implementation of the ForumCiv ROESA 2026–2030 strategy will follow a phased approach, strengthened by partnerships at local, regional, and global levels. Implementation will ensure alignment with ForumCiv's global strategy and leverage cross-cutting drivers.

Phased implementation (2026–2030)

- 2026–2027: Foundational work including capacity strengthening, piloting innovations, and MEL systems strengthening.
- 2028–2029: Scaling of interventions, strengthening networks, leveraging PPDPs, and deepening donor engagement.
- 2030: Consolidation and sustainability including handover to CSOs, embedding knowledge products, and regional positioning.

Key partnerships

- Civil society networks: amplify grassroots voices. • Governments and regional blocs (EAC, IGAD, AU, COMESA): policy influence and alignment.
- Private sector and PPDPs: resource mobilization, green jobs, digital tools.
- Academia and think tanks: evidence generation and knowledge exchange.
- Donors and philanthropy: long-term, flexible funding for resilience.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

A robust MEL system will ensure accountability, adaptive learning, and impact measurement across all pillars. MEL will be results-based, participatory, and technology-enabled.

Approach

- Mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative).
- Participatory MEL with CSO partners and communities.
- AI-driven dashboards for real-time data visualization.

Learning loops

Annual reflection workshops, mid-term review (2028), and final evaluation (2030) will guide strategic adjustments.



Budget framework (2026–2030)

Currency	Annual estimates					Total
	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	
KES	380,000,000	418,000,000	459,800,000	505,780,000	556,358,000	**2,319,938,000**
USD	3,015,873	3,317,460	3,649,206	4,014,127	4,415,540	**18,412,206**
EUR	2,620,690	2,882,759	3,171,034	3,488,138	3,836,952	**15,999,572**
SEK	29,230,769	32,153,846	35,369,231	38,906,154	42,796,769	**178,456,769**

Assumptions on the budget

1. Continued nurturing of the current funders. In 2025, the development partners include Sida, Hewlett Foundation, Ford Foundation, Norec, the European Union, and International Labor Organization. The assumption is that the Regional Office will either maintain or grow the level of funding from these funders throughout the strategy period.
2. Cultivation of new partnerships such as governments, additional Foundations, private sector and other high net worth individuals.



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