



**world
social
forum**
Cotonou 2026

**forum
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Cotonou 2026

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Cotonou 2026

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social
mundial**
Cotonou 2026

Another world is possible!

August
4-8, 2026

CONCEPT NOTE

Natural resource governance and popular struggles in the face of global crises: what alternatives for peace, social cohesion, and sustainable development ?

Let's get going together for the WSF Cotonou - Benin 2026!

August 2025

Africa welcomes the whole world to Benin, let's get moving!

I. General Context

The World Social Forum (WSF) is one of the largest international gatherings, bringing together citizens, social movements, non-governmental organizations, and governments from around the world. It is an ongoing process that operates according to a set of objectives and values outlined in the “Charter of Principles of the WSF.” As a political innovation, it is part of the struggle and construction of popular alternatives for another possible world, in opposition to the imperialist injunctions of economic and political actors who meet annually at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, to shape a world to their advantage.

Born out of a movement of resistance to neoliberal principles, the WSF is an “open space for encounters” between civil society movements and organizations and embodies the conviction that a more humane globalization is not only possible but essential for building a more just and egalitarian society centered on human rights and the preservation of the planet. It is a process aimed at promoting encounters and collaboration between organizations and individuals in order to better combat all forms of inequality.

Since 2001, sixteen (16) WSF events have been organized successively in various parts of the world, mainly in the Global South, mobilizing tens of thousands of people through hundreds of self-organized activities and meetings.

Today, the World Social Forum has established itself as an essential space in a global context marked by persistent social, economic, and environmental imbalances. The WSF positions itself as a space for dialogue and collective reflection, responding to dynamics that, in certain regions of the world, continue to raise issues of social and climate justice, natural resource governance, respect for human rights, and more. This space highlights the challenges posed by development models that often undermine the sovereignty of states and the rights of communities. These issues include the equitable management of natural resources, the fight against economic and social inequalities, and respect for fundamental principles. By creating a space where civil society and committed actors can come together, the WSF helps to foster local, inclusive, and sustainable approaches, promoting innovative solutions for an equitable and harmonious future centered on women and young people. The WSF aims to build bridges between actors from diverse backgrounds, encouraging respectful and constructive collaboration to address global challenges and promote social cohesion and lasting peace.

In many international contexts, freedom of expression and action are limited for those who defend causes such as Palestine, the Uyghurs, the Kurds, and other marginalized communities. At the same time, certain economic practices, such as speculation on supposedly ecological mechanisms such as greenwashing and carbon credits, continue to promote the appropriation of natural resources (land, forests, water, etc.) with profound consequences: the loss of cultural identities, the destabilization of local communities, the permanent degradation of agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries ecosystems, and the weakening of regional economies. These dynamics continue to exacerbate existing crises, whether climatic, energy-related, migratory, economic,

and/or security-related, while accentuating inequalities between countries in the South and those in the North.

The 2026 World Social Forum, to be held in Cotonou, is a unique opportunity for Benin to establish itself as a strategic hub for global discussions on economic, social, and cultural dynamics. This gathering will explore current shifts in the global balance of power, particularly the growing role of the BRICS countries, and their implications for global policies and local initiatives.

It will serve as a platform for developments and the promotion of synergies between institutional actors, CSOs, and social movements. It will also provide an inclusive and constructive space to discuss innovative strategies that promote social justice, solidarity, equity, and sustainable development, while highlighting the specific strengths and initiatives of Benin and other African countries. The fact that this event is being held in Benin illustrates not only the country's growing importance on the regional and international stage, but also its commitment to collaborative and sustainable solutions to global and local challenges. The Beninese government's support for this event will help to strengthen its cultural and tourist appeal.

It is unacceptable that the richest 1% own 48% of the world's financial assets, that the rich countries of the North hold 69% of the world's wealth and are home to 74% of billionaires, even though they represent only 21% of the world's population. They emit as much carbon pollution as the poorest two-thirds of humanity. They buy and concentrate all political, economic, environmental, and media power: seven of the ten largest companies in the world have a billionaire CEO or a billionaire as their main shareholder.

A fundamental element in today's world is that the economic and cultural hegemony of Western elites is increasingly being challenged by other elites, such as the BRICS. Even if these elites may or may not be described as favorable to neoliberalism or imperialism on a case-by-case basis, and may or may not have a fundamentalist or repressive agenda towards their civil societies.

Thus, the WSF is a necessity, and participating in it is an opportunity for all actors, whether from civil society, the state, or politics, to develop and consolidate a diversity of sustainable joint actions and to disseminate sources of inspiration for struggle and action. Furthermore, it is also a process of supporting the world's governments in defining and implementing public policies for the well-being of communities at all levels.

WSF 2026 in Africa, in Cotonou, Benin

This will be the sixth time that the WSF has been held in Africa, at a time when the continent, marked by colonialism, is asserting the sovereignty of states, challenging free trade agreements, addressing security crises, particularly in the Sahel, the Great Lakes region, and the Horn of Africa, and developing innovative strategies to combat climate change, the migration crisis, women's autonomy, ...

The first World Social Forum in Africa took place in Bamako in 2006, then in Nairobi in 2007, Dakar in 2011, and Tunis in 2013 and 2015. Each edition brought something

new with specific themes: land and water grabbing, food sovereignty, the Migrants' Charter, the role of women in society, debt cancellation for countries in the Global South, etc.

Cotonou 2026 will be the WSF for social movements around the world. Participants will have the opportunity to present and connect alternatives in various self-organized meetings. They place a strong emphasis on social and environmental justice in peace, by relocalizing the governance of natural resources, food systems, peasant agroecology, the economy, public policies, socio-cultural issues, education, and security based on well-being and living together, human rights, respect, and the dignity of peoples.

The challenge of facilitating such an “event organized by Africa and hosted by Benin” illustrates not only the country's growing importance on the regional and international stage, but also its commitment to collaborative and sustainable solutions that address global and local challenges. The Beninese government's support for this event will also strengthen its cultural and tourist appeal, given its location between sea and land, the cradle of the voodoo religion and the territory of the former Kingdom of Dahomey with its Amazons, marked by the history of slavery, offering powerful symbols to shed light on the hidden face of imperialism. It will also be an opportunity for the Alliance of Customary and Traditional Chiefs of West and Central Africa to proudly proclaim our socio-cultural values.

Beninese civil society is active within the Global Convergence of Struggles for Land, Water, and Peasant Seeds in West Africa (CGLTE-OA), a member of the International Council of the WSF, which put forward Africa's candidacy and chose Benin to host it. Similarly, it will contribute to facilitating the organizational process of the WSF Cotonou 2026 with Beninese, African, and international organizations that will be key players, whether in Benin, in other countries, or online.

A key element in the success of preparing and holding the event will be, on the one hand, government support and, on the other, the involvement of a large, informed, and committed African youth, as well as African women, the pillars of our societies, the baobabs of Africa. The celebration of African and other cultures will also be a driving force for mobilization, resistance, and social, economic, agroecological, and political alternatives.

These dialogues would contribute to deepening mutual understanding and fostering active relationships of international solidarity, respectful of cultures and sovereignties, with the aim of achieving genuine social, environmental, energy, food, and economic transformation in Africa and around the world.

II. Objectives for participation in the 2026 WSF

The overall objective is to strengthen and consolidate the struggles against neoliberal, imperialist, and patriarchal capitalism by reclaiming equitable and supportive local governance in the interests of social cohesion and peace.

The specific objectives can be grouped into five main themes:

1. Understanding the current crises and their origins:

- Analyzing the various multifaceted and interconnected crises, including the governance of natural resources that have dominated the planet for centuries, but also assessing their impacts from the perspective of our sociocultural values;
- Decipher political changes in countries that have experienced revolutions and democratic movements, examining the strategies of the actors involved and the innovative solutions implemented by the populations.
- Understand the geopolitical issues, roles, and strategies of regional and international actors in order to better understand the new global balances and the evolution of conflicts in order to establish social cohesion and lasting peace.

2. Highlight and support the struggles of crisis victims:

- Highlight the struggles of those most affected (women, young people, migrants, farmers, workers, the unemployed, the landless, indigenous peoples, and other vulnerable groups) by the consequences of current conflicts and various multifaceted and interconnected crises.
- Provide a space for dialogue and solidarity between traditional social movements and new social movements emerging in response to austerity policies.

3. Promote social and environmental justice, solidarity, and cooperation:

- Reconcile relations between human beings and nature on the basis of justice, solidarity, and diversity in peace and social cohesion;
- Revisit our food systems to achieve sovereignty based on the development of local areas through small-scale agroecology;
- Enable the expression and promotion of alternatives proposed by those fighting for their economic and socio-cultural rights and gender equality;
- Strengthen relations with governments and institutions in defining public policies for good living together and the stability of nations.

4. Resist increasing digitization and its implications:

- Examine the consequences and resistance to an increasingly technological and digitized society, which leads to mass surveillance, restrictions on freedoms, the patenting of life forms, and a fascist, police-state world order.

- Analyze the positive/negative impact and power of the media and social networks, which influence our daily lives, our struggles, and our socio-cultural values.

5. Strengthen collective action and intelligence, including the future of the WSF

- Facilitate exchanges between organizations and social movements to share experiences, improve organizational methods, and support collective action;
- Harmonize decision-making and joint actions between participating organizations;
- Reflect on the future of the WSF as a global democratic space that integrates the struggles of social movements and identify new convergences and forms of mobilization.

III. Methodology

More than **fifty thousand (50,000) participants** from five (5) continents are expected to attend the 2026 WSF in Cotonou.

The event will draw inspiration from previous editions, while adding its own unique touch.

- In terms of content, it will highlight the struggles and alternatives of communities, indigenous peoples, women and young people, traditional leaders, academics, the diaspora, proposals from government authorities, etc.
- In terms of form, it will feature caravans of social movements and thematic spaces on sociocultural values and natural resources, our common goods, and the causes of multiple crises.

The activities during the WSF Cotonou 2026 will take different forms:

- **Convergence caravans** by land and sea, mainly from West and Central Africa and the regions of Benin, will join the Forum and participate in:
- **Opening ceremony:** which will be marked by a march followed by various speeches.
- **Villages:** these are specific locations that can be used for multiple activities and dedicated exhibitions, campaign presentations, etc.

In addition to **the Cultural Villages**, which are not only a source of entertainment but also a means of promoting and expressing human diversity through cultural performances and exchanges.

Also planned are:

- Youth Camp Village;
- Climate Village;
- Social and Solidarity Economy Village;
- Women's Village;
- Pride Village;

- Free Media Village;
- Migration Village;
- Village of Peoples in Struggle (Palestinians, Uyghurs, Kurds, and other threatened communities, etc.);
- Civil Society Platforms Village;
- Natural Resources, Food Sovereignty and Peasant Agroecology Village;
- Trade Union Village;
- Socio-Cultural Values of Indigenous Peoples and Communities Village.

In addition, with a view to:

- Honoring iconic figures from Africa and the Diaspora, a Testimonial Village will be set up.
 - Enabling actors to interact virtually, before and during the Forum in Cotonou or elsewhere, an extended Cotonou Space will be set up.
- **Conferences/Workshops/Seminars:** these promote debates on specific themes, exchanges of experiences, articulation, planning, and definition of strategies for groups, coalitions, and networks.
 - **Assemblies:** these are activities that bring together interested participants around topics submitted for general discussion, with the possible prospect of formulating a result that is accepted by some of the participants.
 - **Convergence Assemblies:** self-organized, they enable groups to come together and facilitate the pooling of plans and future actions.

After the Forum, a narrative report covering all activities will be prepared, as well as a financial report for accountability purposes. In addition, a capitalization document and a documentary film will be produced.

IV. Date and location:


The Forum will take place from August 4 to 8, 2026, in Cotonou, Benin.


V. Contacts:


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