



**2026 GLOBAL FORUM  
ON MODERN  
DIRECT DEMOCRACY**  
7-10 October - Gaborone, Botswana

## **Thematic Focus of the 2026 Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy - Where the Kgotla meets the African Union - Indigenous, Resilient & Empowering**

The 2026 Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy will offer a rare opportunity to explore democratic innovation in (Southern) Africa through the lens of Botswana's both traditional and innovative political landscape. The Forum will take place in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana. As Africa's oldest uninterrupted democracy and a hub of regional integration, the Forum will engage with key themes that blend traditional governance structures, contemporary democratic practices, and global challenges.

### **1. Enhancing democracy through local institutions**

#### **The kgotla system: Tradition meets democratic innovation**

Botswana's *Kgotla* system, an indigenous, participatory village assembly model, stands as one of the world's most enduring forms of deliberative democracy. These assemblies, led by local chiefs, ensure that every citizen has the right to speak and be heard before decisions are made. The Forum will spotlight how traditional institutions like these not only underpin bottom-up processes of governance in the region but can also enrich democracies around the world. Thus, at this Forum, we're especially interested in hearing from experiences with blending indigenous institutions and modern democratic participation from around the world.

### **2. Building strong institutions and making democracy more democratic**

#### **Constitutional reform and grassroots policy-making**

The ongoing consultation of citizens by the government through the kgotla on the proposed establishment of the Constitutional Court offers a timely opportunity to examine on how foundational legal frameworks can be shaped through inclusive and participatory processes. The Global Forum will use this moment to explore the democratic value of citizen involvement in constitution-making by reviewing experiences from across the globe. Alongside this, recent reforms in labour law, where trade unions and workers now have formalised input, highlight how institutional channels for participation are embedded across institutional domains into socio-economic governance. The 2026 Forum will examine how such approaches strengthen institutional resilience, deepen democratic legitimacy, and offer practical pathways for addressing democratic erosion and revitalising public trust.



### **Youth and intergenerational democracy**

With 60% of the population under 25, Africa is the world's youngest continent: the democratic future of the region hinges on how young people are integrated into civic life and political decision-making. The Forum will host sessions focused on building youth leadership, fostering inter-generational dialogue, and identifying democratic innovations that speak to younger constituencies, from youth-driven reform initiatives to digital civic tools.

### **People power for the planet**

Climate change is not only an environmental crisis it is also a democratic challenge. A just transition toward climate neutrality can only be assured through inclusive democratic approaches that strengthen adaptation, enable shared decision-making, and build long-term resilience. The Forum will explore how participatory and direct democratic tools can help citizens and civil society alike to work towards achieving climate justice. We will focus on citizens' assemblies and local consultation processes by drawing from experiences in Botswana and around the world.

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## **3. Democracy's never-ending challenges: Resources and regional cooperation**

### **Natural resources, diamonds, and democratic governance**

Natural resources play a central role in the economic and political life of many countries, shaping the relationship between governments, society and the environment. The Forum will explore how democratic principles, such as transparency, public oversight, and participatory decision-making can be embedded in natural resource governance to ensure that the benefits of extraction are shared equitably and sustainably. Drawing on experiences from Botswana and other resource-rich countries around the world, sessions will invite dialogue on how direct democracy and participatory mechanisms can support responsible stewardship, prevent elite capture, and strengthen community participation in decisions that affect land, livelihoods, and long-term futures.

### **Regional integration and democratic cooperation**

As host to the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Botswana plays an important role in shaping regional political norms and cooperation frameworks. At a time when the world is more interconnected than ever, regional integration and democratic



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solidarity carry renewed importance and a shared responsibility to defend democratic values. The Forum will bring together election authorities, civic leaders, academics and policymakers from across Southern Africa to share what works, learn from each other and strengthen democracy where it matters most. The focus will be on development and democracy, democratic transitions and how regional networks can help democracies hold the line.