



CONCEPT NOTE AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

FIRST AFRICA CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S SHELTERS



*Building Stronger Shelter Systems Across Africa:
Partnerships, Policy and Sustainable Investment*

16
DAYS OF ACTIVISM
AGAINST GBV



Dates –
26-27 November 2026



Venue –
Iconic Plaza Hotel
Nairobi, Kenya



Participation –
Approximately
250 delegates



Strategic window –
16 Days of Activism
against GBV

Convened by the Centre for Domestic Training and Development (CDTD), through the National Shelters Network (NSN), in partnership with the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW), and in collaboration with the State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action.

August 2026

Executive Summary

The First Africa Conference on Women's Shelters (ACWS) is a proposed continental convening to be held in Nairobi on 26-27 November 2026. It responds to a call made by African delegates at the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters in Sydney for a dedicated African platform that can strengthen shelter systems, amplify African leadership, advance enabling policy and mobilize sustainable investment. The conference is planned for approximately 250 participants and will coincide with the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

Kenya is well positioned to host this inaugural conference because it combines an active National Shelters Network, established civil-society experience, ongoing government investment in GBV Protection Centers, and a policy window for strengthening the legal, regulatory and financing framework for shelter services. The initiative therefore offers both a continental leadership opportunity and a

Purpose of this brief: To provide a consolidated understanding of the conference rationale, design, governance, roadmap, workplan, budget position, risks and the specific high-level support required from Government.

practical platform for advancing Kenya's domestic agenda on protection, standards, coordination and survivor support.

Conference at a Glance

Item	Current planning position
Conference	First Africa Conference on Women's Shelters (1ACWS)
Theme	Building Stronger Shelter Systems Across Africa: Partnerships, Policy and Sustainable Investment
Dates and venue	26-27 November 2026; Iconic Plaza Hotel, Nairobi. Venue secured and deposit paid; final package verification remains part of the logistics workplan.
Convening model	CDTD through NSN, in partnership with CREAM, and in collaboration with the State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action.
Scale	Approximately 250 participants from African governments, shelter networks, survivor-led organizations, civil society, development partners, academia, philanthropy and the private sector.
Format	Two-day, action-oriented conference with high-level dialogues, technical sessions, country showcases, practitioner exchanges, survivor-informed sessions and partnership roundtables. Hybrid/livestream elements are subject to technical and budget confirmation.
Primary legacy	An Africa Shelter Declaration, policy recommendations, knowledge products, a sustainable investment framework and a roadmap for continuing continental coordination.

1. Background and Strategic Rationale

Women's shelters and GBV Protection Centers are essential components of a survivor-centered response system. They provide immediate safety while linking survivors to psychosocial care, health services, legal assistance, child protection, education, livelihoods, reintegration and longer-term recovery. Their effectiveness depends not only on physical infrastructure, but also on clear policy recognition, minimum service standards, trained personnel, sustainable financing, effective referral pathways, data protection and multi-agency coordination.

The need remains substantial. The World Health Organization's 2025 estimates indicate that 17 per cent of ever-married or partnered women aged 15 years and above in sub-Saharan Africa, and 16 per cent in Northern Africa, experienced physical or sexual intimate-partner violence in the previous 12 months.[1] Yet reliable, comparable data on shelter availability, capacity and geographical coverage across Africa remain limited. This weakens planning, public financing, accountability and the ability to identify underserved areas.

Kenya's National Shelters Network administrative mapping identifies 96 operational shelters across 20 of the country's 47 counties, with only two reported as government-managed; these figures remain subject to continuous validation.[2] The distribution illustrates both the depth of civil-society leadership and the significant gaps in national coverage, public investment and standardization.

1.1 Genesis of the Africa Conference

The 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters was held in Sydney, Australia, from 15 to 18 September 2025 as a global platform for learning, networking and collective action. During an African caucus at the conference, delegates discussed barriers that limited African participation, including visa challenges and the cost of long-distance travel. The caucus called for a continental conference hosted in Africa, and Kenya was nominated to lead the inaugural convening. The nomination was accepted with Government support represented at the Sydney conference, creating a clear mandate for a Kenya-led process.

The proposed conference, however, builds on a much longer history of African shelter organising. The African Network of Women's Shelters (ANWS) was established in February 2012 following a resolution of the African Caucus at the World Conference of Women's Shelters in Washington, DC. Over the years, African shelter movements have maintained relationships and shared learning despite periods of limited continental coordination. The National Shelter Movement of South Africa (NSMSA) has played a sustained role in advancing this agenda, including through national and regional shelter exchanges and renewed efforts to strengthen the ANWS. The recent revitalization of continental collaboration, together with the Sydney 2025 call, provides a strong foundation for the First Africa Conference on Women's Shelters (1ACWS).

The 1ACWS is therefore not conceived as a one-off event, but as a catalyst for a durable African platform for peer learning, policy advocacy, technical cooperation, partnership building and collective engagement with the global shelter movement, including preparations for the 6th World Conference of Women's Shelters.

1.2 Why Kenya and Why Now

Continental leadership opportunity. Hosting the first Africa conference positions Kenya as a convening hub for shelter policy, practice and investment and raises the visibility of African-led solutions.

Domestic policy relevance. The inaugural planning meeting highlighted the absence of a comprehensive national legal framework for shelters and the need to define and standardize terminology for shelters, safe houses, safe spaces and GBV Protection Centres.

Government investment window. The State Department reported ongoing work on GBV Protection Centers, proposed GBV legislation, amendments to the domestic-violence framework and exploration of a survivor-support financing mechanism. The conference can provide comparative evidence and partnership support for these reforms.

Existing institutional base. CDTD serves as Secretariat of the National Shelters Network, while CREAM and other women's rights organizations bring policy, legal and survivor-support expertise. The State Department provides Government leadership and links to national and county structures.

Strategic advocacy moment. The conference will be held during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, creating a timely platform for political commitment, public awareness and resource mobilization.

2. Strategic and Policy Alignment

The conference directly supports national, continental and international commitments requiring States to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, provide accessible protection and support services, strengthen legal and institutional systems, and ensure adequate resources for implementation.

Framework or policy agenda	Relevance to the conference
Kenya's emerging GBV Protection Centre framework	Offers a platform to benchmark terminology, standards, governance, referral pathways, financing and accountability with other African countries.
Proposed domestic-violence and GBV legal reforms	Conference evidence and recommendations can inform provisions on establishment, management, oversight and sustainable financing of protection centers.
African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls	Adopted by the AU Assembly in February 2025, the Convention strengthens the continental legal and policy framework for prevention, protection, survivor-centered services, access to justice and coordinated responses.[4]
Maputo Protocol and CEDAW	Reinforce State obligations to prevent violence, protect women's rights and ensure accessible, adequately resourced support services, including shelters and referral systems.
Sustainable Development Goal 5.2	Commits States to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual exploitation.[5]
16 Days of Activism against GBV	Provides a global advocacy window to elevate the role of shelters and secure public, political and partner commitments.

3. Conference Goal, Objectives and Design

3.1 Overall Goal

Goal: To strengthen shelter systems across Africa through regional collaboration, enabling policy frameworks, shared learning and sustainable investment, while laying the foundation for an enduring continental platform that advances survivor-centered protection and support.

3.2 Specific Objectives

1. Strengthen collaboration among shelter providers, governments, civil society, survivor-led organizations, development partners, academia, the private sector and regional networks.
2. Facilitate peer learning on survivor-centered, trauma-informed and context-responsive shelter models, standards, innovations and practices.
3. Advance shared priorities on policy, legal and institutional frameworks that recognize, regulate, coordinate and sustainably support shelter services.
4. Promote sustainable financing and mobilize public, philanthropic, technical and private-sector investment in shelter systems.
5. Amplify survivor voices and African perspectives in shelter policy, service design and regional and global advocacy.
6. Build consensus on a roadmap and coordination mechanism for continued Africa-wide collaboration and engagement with the global shelter movement.

3.3 Program Architecture

Programme track	Indicative content
1. Policy, Standards and Public Systems	Legal recognition; standardization of terminology; minimum standards; public financing; survivor funds; referral pathways; coordination; national and county government roles; accountability.
2. Quality, Safety and Survivor-Centered Practice	Trauma-informed care; safeguarding; ethical participation; accessibility; child protection; case management; data protection; workforce wellbeing; economic recovery and pathways beyond shelter.
3. Sustainability, Evidence and African Solidarity	Financing models; public-private partnerships; data and research; locally led innovation; shelter networks; cross-country technical exchange; Africa Shelter Declaration and continental coordination.

3.4 Conference Approach

The conference will use participatory, practical and action-oriented methods. Session design will prioritize clear outcomes rather than a congested agenda. Proposed formats include:

1. High-level opening and policy dialogue involving Government, African institutions and senior partners.
2. Keynote addresses and evidence-based framing of the African shelter landscape.
3. Country showcases and practitioner panels presenting tested models and lessons.
4. Technical clinics and thematic working groups focused on standards, financing, safeguarding, data and referral systems.
5. Survivor-informed sessions designed under strict do-no-harm, consent, privacy and psychosocial-support protocols.
6. Partnership and investment roundtables linking needs to Government, donor, philanthropic and private-sector support.
7. Structured drafting sessions for the Africa Shelter Declaration and post-conference roadmap.
8. Optional learning visit to selected local shelters, subject to safeguarding, confidentiality and logistics approval.

4. Participants, Representation and Inclusion

The conference will target approximately 250 participants and seek balanced representation by geography, role, lived experience, disability inclusion, language and decision-making authority. Participation will be curated to connect practice expertise with policy influence and investment capacity.

4.1 Participant Groups and Contributions

Participant group	Expected contribution
Survivor leaders and survivor-led organizations	Shape priorities, test proposed solutions and ensure lived experience informs policy and practice without requiring unsafe disclosure.
Shelter operators and practitioners	Share operational models, service standards, workforce realities, referral challenges and innovations.
National and county governments	Advance policy, legislation, public financing, regulation, coordination and institutional commitments.
Women's rights and civil-society organizations	Contribute advocacy, legal, safeguarding, community and movement-building expertise.
African shelter networks and regional bodies	Strengthen continental coordination, peer learning and common advocacy positions.
Development partners, UN agencies and philanthropy	Provide technical support, investment and links to regional and global commitments.
Academia and research institutions	Strengthen evidence, data methods, evaluation and knowledge products.
Private sector and media	Support innovation, in-kind resources, ethical visibility and public engagement.

4.2 Safeguarding and Ethical Participation

Safeguarding is a cross-cutting responsibility and will be integrated into program design, communications, delegate management, data handling and on-site operations. Minimum requirements will include informed and specific consent; options for anonymity and withdrawal; no pressure to disclose lived experience; secure handling of images and personal information; accessible participation; psychosocial support and referral arrangements; media and photography protocols; and a clear incident-reporting and response mechanism.

5. Expected Outputs, Outcomes and Legacy

5.1 Immediate Conference Outputs

1. An Africa Shelter Declaration.
2. Actionable policy and advocacy recommendations on shelter recognition, terminology, standards, coordination, financing and accountability.
3. A compendium of promising African shelter models, innovations, practices and lessons.
4. A partnership and sustainable-investment framework identifying opportunities for Government, donor, philanthropic and private-sector support.
5. A roadmap for continued Africa-wide coordination, including proposed governance, membership, priority actions and links to the global shelter movement.
6. A conference report and action matrix recording commitments, responsible actors and follow-up milestones.
7. An initial framework for a professional Africa Shelter Landscape Report covering all African countries, subject to resources and a validated research methodology.

5.2 Anticipated Medium- and Long-Term Outcomes

1. Stronger regional coordination and country-to-country technical cooperation.
2. Greater policy recognition, clearer standards and increased public investment in shelter systems.
3. Improved quality, safety, accessibility and consistency of survivor-centered services.
4. Increased technical and financial partnerships for shelter infrastructure, staffing, systems and survivor recovery.
5. More meaningful survivor leadership in policy, practice and accountability processes.
6. A more united, visible and influential African shelter movement with a sustained coordination mechanism.

6. Governance and Committee Structure

The inaugural multi-stakeholder planning meeting held on 30 July 2026 endorsed an inclusive governance structure intended to combine Government leadership, continental representation, technical ownership, efficient coordination and transparent decision-making. The African Network of Women's Shelters (ANWS) will serve as a key continental partner, supporting regional outreach, technical exchange and engagement with shelter networks and practitioners across Africa.

Level	Composition	Core responsibility
Convening Leadership / Steering Group	State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action; CDTD; CREAW; and the African Network of Women's Shelters (ANWS)	Provide strategic direction, Government and continental leadership, high-level approvals, institutional engagement and accountability. ANWS will strengthen regional representation, continental outreach and linkages with shelter movements and networks across Africa.
Multi-Stakeholder Planning Committee	Government, county representatives, shelter networks, civil society, development partners, academia and invited partners	Main collective decision-making forum; reviews progress, resolves escalated issues and validates program, budget and delivery decisions.
Conference Secretariat	CDTD through the National Shelters Network, working in coordination with CREAW, ANWS and the State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action	Day-to-day coordination; meetings and records; master workplan; follow-up; stakeholder communication; partner engagement; consolidated reporting; budget oversight in collaboration with Finance.
Technical Subcommittees	Four workstreams led by nominated partner organizations	Develop and deliver technical workplans; report progress and recommendations to the Secretariat and Planning Committee.

6.1 Confirmed Technical Subcommittees

Subcommittee	Chair / Co-chair	Mandate highlights
Scientific Programme and Knowledge	CREAW / Gender Violence Recovery Centre (GVRC)	Theme and sub-themes; program; abstracts; speakers and moderators; safeguarding within program design; rapporteurs; declaration, position paper, report and implementation roadmap.
Logistics, Protocol and Delegate Services	Office of the Woman Representative - Nairobi / CFK Africa	Venue and breakaway rooms; travel; accommodation; airport transfers; visas; registration support; accessibility; interpretation; security; ICT; protocol; hospitality and on-site operations.
Finance, Resource Mobilisation and Partnerships	CDTD / Aga Khan Foundation	Detailed budget; sponsorship packages; donor and corporate mapping; proposals; contribution framework; procurement oversight; financial and in-kind contribution tracking.
Communications, Media and Documentation	SHOFCO / CCGD	Brand and web presence; invitations; registration communications; media; social campaign; photography and videography; livestream; IEC materials and conference documentation.

6.2 Working and Reporting Rhythm

1. Subcommittees hold regular technical meetings and maintain action trackers for their workstreams.
2. The Secretariat consolidates a single master workplan, decision log, risk register, budget tracker and partner/contact matrix.
3. The Planning Committee meets bi-weekly during the initial planning period and shifts to weekly review meetings as the conference approaches.
4. Routine operational issues are resolved by the relevant subcommittee and Secretariat; matters affecting scope, budget, Government commitments, safeguarding or public positioning are escalated for approval.
5. The State Department serves as the overall Government lead and supports all workstreams, including engagement of county governments and other ministries.
6. The Steering group named the “1ACWS Executive Committee” that includes members of the ANWS to meet bi-weekly to review the progress of the planning process.

7. Implementation Roadmap and Key Milestones

The implementation roadmap is organized into seven phases covering governance, technical planning, resource mobilization, delegate and speaker engagement, operational readiness, conference delivery and post-conference follow-up. The schedule below consolidates the roadmap, detailed workplan and decisions of the inaugural planning meeting.

Phase	Period	Priority activity	Primary output
1. Foundation	8-30 July	Scope, concept note, initial roadmap, partner mapping, venue direction, invitations and inaugural planning meeting.	Governance established; four subcommittees formed.
2. Design and mobilization	August	Subcommittee workplans; program workshop; final budget; sponsorship package; donor mapping; brand, website/registration design; initial speaker and country outreach.	Technical framework, costed budget and resource mobilization active.
3. Regional and operational planning	September	Confirm speakers and delegates; submit funding proposals; secure partner commitments; travel, accommodation, visa and interpretation planning; intensified media outreach.	Participation and logistics plans substantially confirmed.
4. Program lock	October	Finalize program, speakers, moderators and rapporteurs; confirm travel and accommodation; contract key suppliers; produce conference materials.	Program and operational plan locked by 30 October.
5. Final readiness	1-25 November	Delegate confirmations; printing; protocol and volunteer briefing; safeguarding readiness; speaker briefings; technical rehearsal and dry run.	Go/no-go readiness review completed by 20 November.
6. Conference delivery	26-27 November	Registration, opening, high-level dialogue, technical sessions, partnership roundtables, declaration drafting and closing commitments.	Conference delivered and shared commitments adopted.
7. Legacy and accountability	December 2026 onward	Conference report, Africa Shelter Declaration, financial accountability, evaluation, partner appreciation and commitment tracking.	Follow-up mechanism activated from January 2027.

7.1 Decision Milestones

Deadline	Milestone
30 July 2026	Planning Committee launched; governance and four technical subcommittees agreed.
7 August 2026	Initial subcommittee meetings held and workstream recommendations submitted.
13 August 2026	Next full Planning Committee review - proposed virtual meeting.
31 August 2026	Detailed budget finalized; sponsorship package approved; fundraising and program development actively underway.
30 September 2026	Venue package, regional delegate mobilization, speaker confirmation and logistics planning substantially advanced.
30 October 2026	Program locked; speakers, moderators and rapporteurs confirmed; travel and production plans finalized.
20 November 2026	Final readiness review and full technical dry run.
26-27 November 2026	Conference delivery.
By 18 December 2026	Conference report, declaration, financial report, evaluation and follow-up action matrix completed or in final approval.

7.2 Immediate Post-Inaugural Workplan

Action	Responsible	Timing / status
Circulate meeting minutes, decisions, committee contacts and action tracker.	State Department / CDTD Secretariat	By 3 August 2026
Create the full committee communication platform and subcommittee groups.	Secretariat / Subcommittee Chairs	Immediate
Convene first subcommittee meetings and refine terms of reference, outputs and dependencies.	Subcommittee Chairs	By 7 August 2026
Submit workstream reports, recommendations, risks and decisions required.	Subcommittee Chairs	By 7 August 2026
Hold next full Planning Committee review.	Secretariat	Proposed: 13 August 2026
Finalize and circulate the fully costed budget and sponsorship prospectus.	Finance, Resource Mobilization and Partnerships Subcommittee	By 31 August 2026
Expand Government, county, African network, diplomatic and funding-partner engagement.	All members; coordinated by Secretariat	Ongoing

8. Conclusion

The First Africa Conference on Women's Shelters (1ACWS) offers Kenya and the African Network of Women's Shelters (ANWS) an important opportunity to advance a practical continental conversation on how safe shelter systems can be recognised, financed, coordinated and held accountable. It connects an urgent survivor-protection need with Kenya's domestic reform agenda and Africa's emerging legal and policy framework on ending violence against women and girls. With clear Government leadership, effective multi-stakeholder coordination, a realistic budget, strong safeguarding measures and a sustained post-conference mechanism, the November convening can move beyond visibility to deliver concrete policy, practice and investment outcomes. Early high-level endorsement will strengthen official outreach, partner confidence and timely implementation during the remaining planning period.

The 1ACWS builds on the African Network of Women's Shelters (ANWS), established in 2012, and the important foundation created by African shelter actors who have worked to foster continental connections and engagement over the years. While continental coordination has experienced periods of limited activity, the current momentum led by National Shelter Movement of South Africa (NSMSA) provides an opportunity to reconnect shelter actors across the continent, strengthen the ANWS and build a more coordinated and sustainable continental movement.

The 1ACWS therefore represents a platform not only to convene stakeholders, but to renew and strengthen Africa's shelter movement through peer learning, policy advocacy, technical cooperation, partnership and sustainable investment. It can provide a practical platform for African shelter actors to develop shared priorities, strengthen the ANWS and deepen Africa's contribution to the global shelter movement. The 1ACWS is therefore both a milestone and an opportunity to renew the foundations of a stronger, more connected and more influential African shelter movement.

Selected Sources

- [1] World Health Organization (2025), "Lifetime toll: 840 million women faced partner or sexual violence." Regional past-12-month intimate-partner violence estimates. <https://www.who.int/news/item/19-11-2025-lifetime-toll--840-million-women-faced-partner-or-sexual-violence>
- [2] National Shelters Network administrative mapping, July 2026. Internal planning data; figures remain subject to validation.
- [3] Global Network of Women's Shelters / 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters, Sydney, 15-18 September 2025. <https://www.worldshelterconference.org/> and <https://gnws.org/our-work/world-conferences/>
- [4] African Union, African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, adopted February 2025. <https://au.int/en/aucevawg>
- [5] United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal 5, Target 5.2. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>
- [6] CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating General Recommendation No. 19 (2017). <https://www.ohchr.org/>