



From Panama to Practice

Africa's Reflections on the
2026 International SBCC
Summit

Reflection brief from the AS-SBC learning
dialogue, 3 September 2026



Introduction

The African Society for Social and Behaviour Change (AS-SBC) convened an online learning dialogue on Thursday 3 September 2026 to reflect on the International SBCC Summit held in Panama City from 22 to 25 June 2026.

More than 90 participants joined from across Africa, and from Asia, Central Asia, Europe and North America.

Elizabeth Chiyende (Catholic Relief Services Zambia and co-chair of the RBM Partnership SBC Working Group) moderated. Babafunke Fagbemi (Executive Director, Centre for Communication and Social Impact, and Summit co-chair) gave the keynote.

The panel brought together Prof Adebayo Fayoyin (AS-SBC Board Chair), Prof Sara Jewett (University of the Witwatersrand), Massimiliano Sani (Global Lead, Social and Behaviour Change, UNICEF) and Paul Odeke (AS-SBC Board and Secretariat, speaking for emerging practitioners).

The dialogue was built around three questions: what did Panama tell us, what does it mean for Africa, and what should Africa take forward.

This brief records the answers that emerged and sets out recommendations for action through the country chapters.

Convening Entity

African Society for Social and Behaviour Change
(AS-SBC Secretariat)

Date & Attendance

3 September 2026
90+ Leaders across Africa, Asia, Europe & Americas

Leadership

Elizabeth Chiyende (CRS)
Babafunke Fagbemi (Keynote, CCSI)

Expert Panel

Prof Fayoyin • Prof Jewett
Massimiliano Sani • Paul Odeke

The 3 Guiding Questions

01

What did Panama tell us?
Unpacking signals, trends, shifting power lines, and global AI discourse.

02

What does it mean for Africa?
Translating signals to sovereignty, research ownership, and government systems.

03

What should Africa take forward?
7 executable country actions and 6 Society-wide institutional commitments.

1. What Panama told us

The keynote opened with an invitation:

“For one minute, close our eyes and imagine an SBCC summit without Africa. No African participating, no African supporting, no African planning.”

What would be missing, the keynote argued, is the ancestral history, cultural diversity and youth perspective that make Africa a source of insight into how identity, trust, relationships and local knowledge shape lasting change. Five signals followed.



Babafunke Fagbemi

Keynote Speaker
Executive Director, CCSI

01

Signal

Bridge the intergenerational gap.

Panama gave young people a seat at the planning table and treated them as partners rather than audiences. The task after Panama is to move from young people as targets of interventions to young people designing and leading programmes.

This means transferring institutional knowledge to the next generation while leaving room to experiment, make mistakes and build confidence, and doing so in ways that respect African culture and hierarchy without restricting growth.

02

Signal

AI must earn trust.

The AI conversation at the Summit shifted midway from what AI can do faster to who benefits and who is left out when it is adopted without safeguards. Faster evidence is not better evidence. There is broad appetite for guidance and standards on responsible use, but no shared view on who sets them or with what authority.

African practitioners need to be at that table from the start rather than receive frameworks built elsewhere and retrofitted. Technology does not replace human intelligence, local knowledge, trust and relationships.

03

Signal

Design with communities, not for them.

The Summit placed strong emphasis on participation, human-centred design and community ownership. The question for Africa is whether this is practised or only stated. Context supersedes templates, and existing SBCC frameworks need to be examined for how well they reflect African heritage, languages, institutions and lived realities.

04

Signal

Build institutions that outlive projects.

Africa needs SBC institutions that survive beyond individual projects and funding cycles, supported by sustainable financing, long-term planning, stronger local research capacity and investment in young professionals. Knowledge held on shelves and hard drives needs to be preserved, published and made easy to find.

05

Signal

African expertise is not the issue.

Visa denials, difficult immigration experiences, long connections and high costs made participation in Panama disproportionately hard for Africans, and in at least one case a delegate was refused entry. SBCC has a role in addressing these barriers by promoting good governance, accountability and positive narratives about Africa, and by challenging the perceptions that undermine the continent's credibility as an equal partner.

Panellists added that the Summit broadened the agenda beyond health and public health emergencies into disability inclusion, social protection, education and migration; that more young people and more country-level staff were in the room even as delegations shrank; and that a young people's network living with HIV sat on the Summit Secretariat.

2. What it means for Africa

SBC as a field and a profession.

“They are still talking about making the case for SBC, and we have been making the case for all these years.”

(Prof Adebayo Fayoyin).



SBC is still treated as a function, a strategy or a support system rather than a discipline in its own right, and the case for it is still being made.

Becoming a profession requires disciplinary content taught and accredited in tertiary institutions, a move out of the public health home into climate, environment, governance and national development, and collective agency exercised through national and continental structures such as Africa CDC and the African Development Bank.

Knowledge as an African asset.

**“Knowledge is power.
It is an asset we hold
within Africa, and too
often we give it away
for free.”**

(Prof Sara Jewett).



Knowledge is too often shared
without intention. The
shift is from extracting
knowledge to producing
it with communities,
framing it for the
people who need
it, translating it
beyond the project
that produced it,
and governing who
shares it, with whom
and on what terms,
including authorship and
acknowledgement.

Institutions and government.

“There is a role for SBC in basically all fields. We have to do this with our own government partners. That is where we are going to build more resilient institutions.”

Massimiliano Sani



SBC becomes resilient when it is embedded in government systems rather than delivered mainly through projects. Decision-makers from line ministries need to be in the room at future Summits and Society events.

Africa CDC's growing SBC function, including its coordination of the Ebola response with WHO and the SBC financing and costing package under development, shows what continental investment can look like.

Academia for SBC, a UNICEF-convened consortium of more than 26 university partners, holds its symposium in Nairobi in November 2026 and has invited AS-SBC to bring its university work.

The traditional private sector (marketing agencies, food system companies, telecoms) and local foundations are largely absent from SBC platforms and need to be brought in.

The emerging practitioner.

“As you grow older and leave space for the youth, please leave some of the power and the wealth behind for them as well.”

Paul Odeke



The typical SBC practitioner in Africa is young and holds little power or resources. Representation at Panama was good but must become authorship of the strategies that shape the field.

AI use inside organisations should be visible and credited rather than hidden, with guardrails that protect the human components of SBC as AI investment grows far beyond funding for human development.

Raw field notes, message data, rumour logs, rejected proposals and failure stories should reach the strategy table alongside polished presentations: “Bring your receipts.”

Voices & Participant Reflections

Cross-cutting themes raised across the 90+ member open dialogue session

Linguistic Parity

Inclusion requires operational multilingualism: French, Portuguese, Spanish, and indigenous African languages across all activities.

Curriculum Reform

Moving past legacy IEC/BCC coursework. Cameroon's SBC curriculum with the University of Yaoundé provides a replicable operational model.

Cross-Sector Reach

SBC must branch decisively beyond public health into agricultural systems, trade corridors, and climate adaptation.

Arts as Methodology

Storytelling, performance, and creative arts are fundamental operational pedagogies across all interventions, not isolated sub-topics.

3. What Africa takes forward

- 01 Nominate mentors and supervisors for the University Challenge and use it to give students practice labs for applying SBC knowledge.
- 02 Open a conversation with at least one university or communication department on reviewing SBC content in the curriculum, and share what already exists with Academia for SBC.
- 03 Bring decision-makers from line ministries into chapter learning sessions, with evidence on what SBC costs and what it returns.
- 04 Hold at least one learning session where members bring raw field material, rejected proposals and failure stories, and document the lessons for the second Africa SBC Summit.
- 05 Run chapter activities in the languages members use, and translate Society materials for Francophone and Lusophone members.
- 06 Map local foundations, marketing agencies, food system companies and telecoms as potential partners and present SBC to them.
- 07 Agree a chapter position on responsible AI use in SBC (visible, credited and safeguarded) and feed it into a Society-wide position.

AS-SBC commitments from the dialogue

01 University Challenge

Formally announce the University Challenge and issue the call for mentors and supervisors in participating countries.

03 Language Inclusion

Improve language inclusion in future activities and communications.

05 Academia for SBC

Collaborate with UNICEF's Academia for SBC consortium on the Nairobi symposium in November 2026 and circulate details to members.

02 2nd Africa SBC Summit

Begin preparations for the second Africa SBC Summit, tentatively July 2027, with dates and venue to be confirmed within two months.

04 Curricula Restructure

Work with chapters and academic institutions to review and restructure SBC curricula.

06 Membership Expansion

Continue the membership drive through country chapters.
Registration:

as-sbc.org/register.



The keynote closed with a question that the Society carries forward:

Are we inclusive enough in our approach to building an enduring SBCC legacy in Africa, and whose views and which institutions do we need as we move from Panama to practice?

The African Society for Social and Behaviour Change

Launched formally in 2022 out of informal regional practitioner assemblies, AS-SBC is the premier continental professional network advancing behavior change programming, community resilience, and evidence-based public health across Africa.

By counteracting short-lived project interventions, the Society secures an enduring, highly-skilled indigenous base of practice.

18

Country Chapters

Active across West, East, Central & Southern Africa

1K+

Active Members

Practitioners, academicians & researchers

08

Learning Dialogues

Deliberative peer sessions hosted

02

Published Papers

Peer-reviewed regional contributions

“

How to Join

as-sbc

African Society for
Social & Behaviour Change



Steps to register your AS-SBC membership

- 1 **Visit the Official Website:** Go to <https://as-sbc.org/>.
- 2 **Navigate to the Member Portal:** On the homepage click on the button **Join the SBC Network**.
- 3 **Complete the Registration Form:** You will be directed to our registration page (<https://members.as-sbc.org/register>). Fill in the required fields, including
 - Full Name
 - Job Title / Role
 - Email Address
 - Password
 - Country Chapter
 - Gender
 - Short Bio
- 4 **Submit:** Once you have provided your details, submit the form to complete your registration.

If you encounter any issues during the registration process, you can contact the society directly via email at info@as-sbc.org.



You can also scan
to register as
a member

Learn more



as-sbc.org