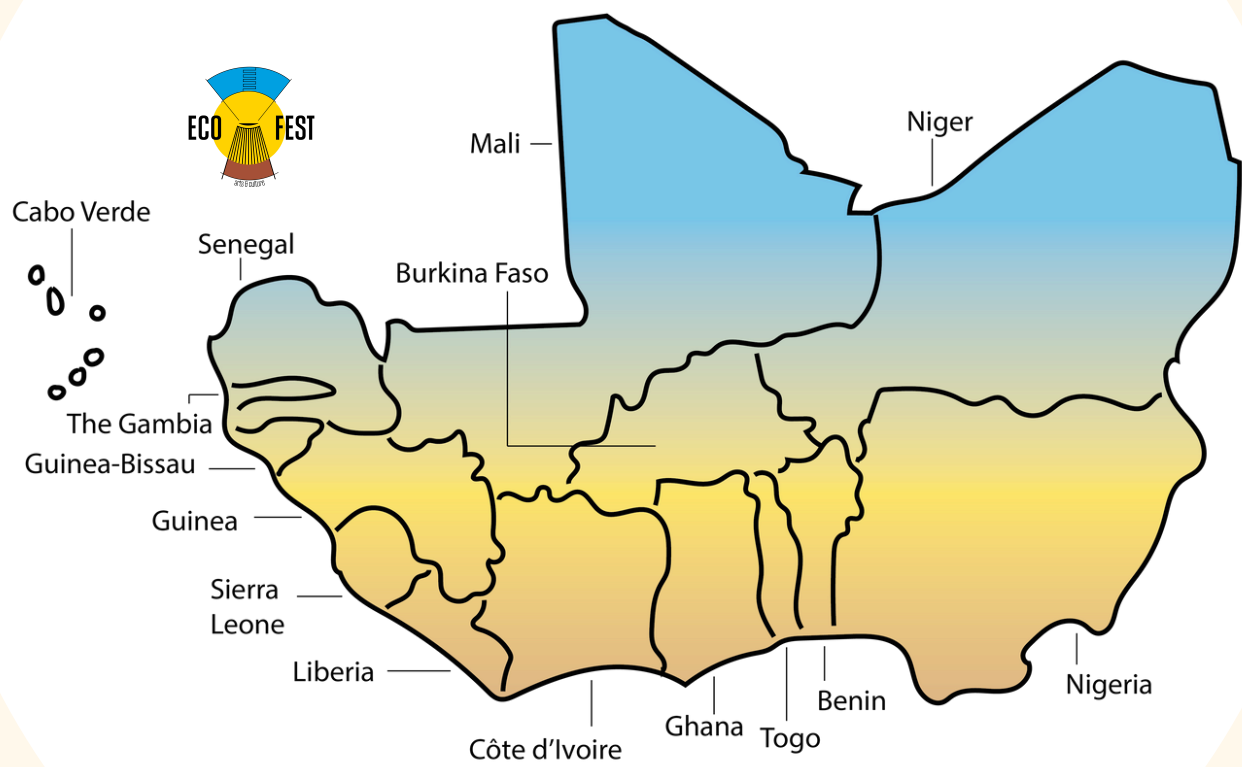


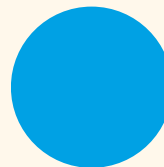


PRESS
RELEASE



DAKAR, SENEGAL
NOVEMBER 30 - DECEMBER 7, 2025





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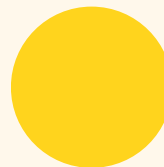
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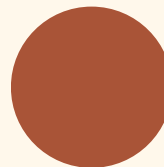
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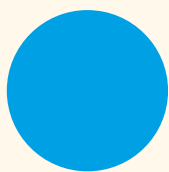
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PRESS RELEASE



Dakar - May 29, 2025

Launch of the 1st Edition of the West African Festival of Arts and Culture (ECOFEST)

The West African artistic community is preparing to vibrate to the rhythm of creativity and cultural diversity with the official launch of the first edition of the West African Festival of Arts and Culture (ECOFEST).

This major cultural event is being organised jointly by the Commissions of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), in partnership with the Republic of Senegal. ECOFEST is scheduled for November 2025, under the thematic: ***“Socio-political changes and crises in West Africa: what role for culture?”***.

This first edition of the festival, a must-attend event for artists, emerging talents and cultural institutions in the region, has been launched at a press conference on Friday 30 May 2025 at AZALAÏ Hotel in Dakar.

This press conference has jointly been hosted by the Senegalese Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, Ms Khady Diène Gaye; the WAEMU Commissioner in charge of the Human Development Department, Mr. Mamadu Serifo Jaquité; and the ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Social Affairs, Ms Fatou Sow Sarr.

The main objective of ECOFEST is to ***“promote integration, social cohesion, peace and socio-economic and cultural development in the West African region”***.

ECOFEST will serve as a space for meetings, exchanges, sharing and the promotion of West Africa’s rich cultural heritage. The festival will showcase various artistic expressions such as music, dance, theatre, visual arts, literature and many other disciplines. It aims to strengthen regional cohesion by celebrating diversity and creativity.

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MS KHADY DIÈNE GAYE

MINISTER OF YOUTH, SPORTS AND CULTURE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SENEGAL

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear partners from the ECOWAS and UEMOA Member States,
Dear artists and cultural actors,

On the behalf of the Senegalese people and in my capacity as Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, I address you on this solemn occasion that is the West African Festival of Arts and Culture, to be held in Dakar in November 2025, bringing together the Member States of our Economic Community of West African States and those of our West African Economic and Monetary Union.

This festival comes at the right time, in a context where our sub-region is going through a period marked by instability. Faced with contemporary challenges and the profound changes that West Africa is experiencing, we must more than ever mobilize our cultural resources to strengthen regional resilience and cohesion. Art and culture constitute our most precious assets, our most universal languages for fostering dialogue, transcending divisions and consolidating bonds between our peoples.

The theme chosen for this first edition in Dakar, “**Socio-political changes and crises in West Africa: what role for culture?**” fits perfectly within the political vision of His Excellency Mr. Bassirou Diomaye Faye, President of the Republic of Senegal, and of his Prime Minister and Head of Government, Mr. Ousmane Sonko. This approach reflects our shared conviction that culture must play a central role in the positive transformation of our societies and in addressing our common challenges.

This festival will be a privileged vehicle for consolidating the achievements of our cultural policies built thus far with determination and vision. It follows on from the remarkable efforts of ECOWAS and UEMOA to promote harmonious regional integration, underlining the fundamental role of culture in building a united, stable and prosperous West Africa.

This festival is ours. It must become a powerful instrument to promote our authentic cultural values; that millennia-old heritage which constitutes our wealth and uniqueness. Through its diverse forms of artistic expression – traditional and contemporary music, dance, theatre, visual arts, literature, artisanal crafts, cinema – we should identify and celebrate the common values that strengthen our West African identity, all while nurturing the pan-African pride that drives us.



This festival in Dakar in 2025 will confirm that culture can be a powerful lever to positively accompany the transformations of our society, strengthen our resilience during crises, and consolidate our fraternal bonds.

Senegal, land of Teranga (hospitality), welcomes you with open arms. Our entire nation is already abuzz with colours, music and cultural expressions as we prepare for this exceptional event. From historic Saint-Louis to lush Ziguinchor, from Tambacounda with the rhythms of Fouta, from Thiès to Kaolack – every region of Senegal is unveiling its artistic and heritage treasures to make this Dakar edition a dazzling showcase of our traditions and contemporary creativity.

Together, let us make this festival a major cultural crossroads – a platform for intercultural dialogue and multifaceted exchanges that will offer an international showcase for West African artistic talent, while also stimulating the development of our cultural enterprises and our cultural and creative industries.

Long live West African cultural cooperation! Long live ECOWAS! Long live UEMOA! Long live Senegal!

**WELCOME
TO
THE LAND
OF
TERANGA!**



1. THE WEST AFRICAN FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND CULTURE: ECOFEST

ECOFEST : A major cultural crossroads of West Africa

ECOFEST (West African Festival of Arts and Culture) aims to become the cultural reference point that brings together the richness and diversity of West Africa's artistic expressions. Born from the common will of the ECOWAS and UEMOA Member States, this biennial eight-day festival is conceived as a unifying, multidisciplinary framework for cultural exchange, as well as a regional market for cultural goods and services.

It is distinguished by a programme supported by all 15 Member States, providing an international showcase for West African artistic talent.

The organisations behind ECOFEST: ECOWAS and UEMOA

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) created on 28 May 1975 by the Treaty of Lagos currently brings together 12 Member States: Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo. Its main objective is to promote regional economic integration in order to strengthen cooperation between states and improve the living conditions of West African populations.

Since its founding, the organisation has undergone several notable developments, including the accession of Cabo Verde in 1977, as well as withdrawals such as that of Mauritania in 2000 (although Mauritania signed a new cooperation agreement in 2017), and more recently the withdrawals of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in January 2025. ECOWAS relies on a commission established in 2007 and funded notably by a community levy on imports.

ECOWAS works towards the creation of a common market, free movement of goods, services and people, harmonisation of sectoral policies (agriculture, energy, trade, etc.), support for SMEs, and monetary integration. It is committed to a more inclusive and united region. By 2050, it aspires to become an "ECOWAS of the Peoples", founded on peace, development and shared prosperity.

- Its 1987 Cultural Framework Agreement guides actions for the protection of cultural heritage, the promotion of intellectual property and a culture of peace, as well as the development of cultural industries.

The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), founded on 10 January 1994 in Dakar, brings together eight coastal and Sahelian countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. These states share a common currency, the CFA franc (African Financial Community franc), issued by the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO).

UEMOA pursues an ambitious goal: to build an integrated and harmonised economic area in West Africa, based on the free movement of people, goods, services, capital and production factors. It also guarantees citizens the right of residence, establishment and the practice of liberal professions across all member countries. Its Common Cultural Development Policy, adopted in 2013, aims to energise the market for cultural goods and services, professionalise sector stakeholders, facilitate access to financing, and promote regional cultural expressions.

With its Vision 2040, UEMOA aims to be *“a sustainably integrated, peaceful and prosperous economic and monetary area, open to Africa, with a consolidated strategic position in the world.”*

By 2030, the implementation of its 2025–2030 Strategic Plan IMPACT 2030 will enable the UEMOA Commission to become *“an agile institution, the driving force for deepening integration and the structural transformation of UEMOA economies”*.

- Its Common Cultural Development Policy, adopted in 2013, aims to boost the market for cultural goods and services, professionalise shareholders in the sector, facilitate access to funding and promote regional cultural expressions.

A shared vision for regional cultural dynamism

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) share the same ambition: to make culture a true lever of development in West Africa. Together, they work to protect, enhance and transform the region's rich cultural heritage into goods, services and economic activities that benefit the greatest number.

This momentum builds on tangible progress achieved in several Member States, where public policies, private initiatives and civil society engagement have stimulated artistic creation and strengthened cultural industries.

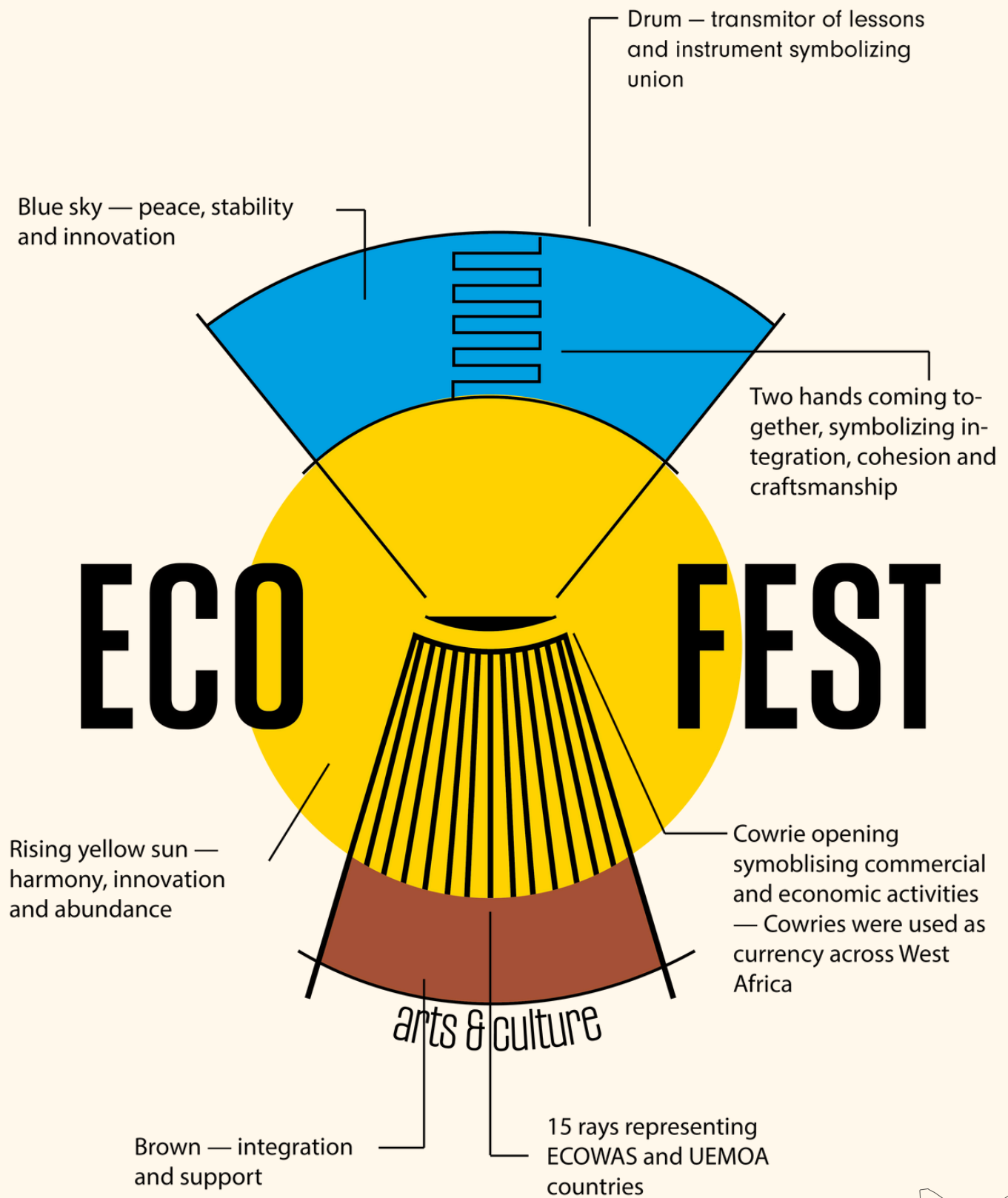
Today, the region is experiencing a remarkable cultural effervescence, embodied by major events such as the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO) in Burkina Faso; the Market for African Performing Arts (MASA) and the Anoumabo Festival of Urban Music (FEMUA) in Côte d'Ivoire; the Dakar Biennale of Contemporary African Art (Dak'Art) in Senegal; the International Festival of African Fashion (FIMA) in Niger; as well as the Carnivals of Lagos, Bissau and Mindelo, and the Atlantic Music Expo in Cabo Verde. These festivals are not only showcases of creativity: they are genuine cultural marketplaces, spaces for exchange and regional outreach that foster integration.

EECOFEST enriches this cultural landscape by offering a unique, federating multidisciplinary platform. By bringing together all cultural and artistic expressions of the West African region, ECOFEST positions itself as an essential pillar of cultural integration. It offers a space for dialogue, creation and exchange for artists and the public, thus strengthening synergies among the different art forms on a regional scale.

From vision to reality: key milestones

- 1987: Decision to create ECOFEST via ECOWAS Protocol A/P.1/87
- 2009 and 2015: Renewed commitment during the ECOWAS Ministers of Culture Conferences in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) and Lomé (Togo)
- 2013: Adoption of Supplementary Act No. 06/2013 of 24 October 2013 by UEMOA
- 2014: Project development at a technical workshop in Cotonou, Benin
- 2024: Official launch ceremony of ECOFEST in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
- 2025: Organisation of ECOFEST in Dakar, Senegal

The ECOFEST Logo



2. A UNIFYING EVENT TO CELEBRATE WEST AFRICAN CULTURAL WEALTH

ECOFEST is intended as a true catalyst of unity, driven by a vision deeply rooted in cooperation, valorisation and development. Its strategic objectives aim to:

- Highlight West Africa's cultural heritage, through a showcase of traditional and contemporary artistic expressions from across the community;
- Strengthen cohesion among peoples through intercultural dialogue that fosters tolerance and mutual respect;
- Stimulate the creative economy by developing the regional market for cultural goods and services;
- Leverage culture as a tool for peace, using cultural resources to ease tensions and promote peaceful coexistence.

Through these ambitions, culture becomes a powerful instrument for unifying identities and building a shared regional community.



ECOFEST: heading to Senegal in 2025!

Established by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government through Protocol A/P.1/87, ECOFEST brings together live performances, craft exhibitions, professional encounters, artistic competitions and fashion shows, highlighting the creative richness of West Africa.

A first milestone was laid in October 2018 during a technical workshop bringing together African experts from major cultural events, which helped finalise the festival concept. However, challenges were not lacking: the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by socio-political tensions in West Africa, led to several successive postponements, despite an attempted launch in Abidjan in May 2024.

In 2025, under the joint impetus of the ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions, Senegal – a land of culture, hospitality and creativity – will finally host this great pan-African celebration. It is a much-anticipated event, a symbol of regional resilience and fraternity.

Senegal, host country: a new vision for culture

The Constitution of Senegal proclaims in its preamble, “the necessity of political, cultural, economic and social unity, indispensable to the affirmation of the African personality”. Aware of the role of culture in this struggle for emancipation, the reclaiming of national sovereignty, and the consolidation of national and pan-African unity, Senegal has, since independence, affirmed this dimension of the functions and powers of culture in the fundamental text of the Constitution.

Mindful of this dimension of culture, the public authorities arising from the most recent elections of March 2024 have expressed – through the voice of His Excellency Mr. Bassirou Diomaye Faye, President of the Republic – the desire to meet the legitimate aspirations of the people, with youth at the forefront of the civic movement ushering in the change of political regime.

Thus, the public authorities have asserted in the government policy framework a new vision, expressed in the orientations of a National Development Strategy (2025–2029), in which “significantly improving the living conditions of the population requires a systemic transformation of the Senegalese economy, through the authorities’ new 25-year vision (Vision 2050)”.

To achieve this vision of a “Sovereign, Just and Prosperous Senegal,” the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture is striving to put in place governance capable of meeting the challenges of revitalising the sector, based on the principles of “JUB JUBBAL JUBANTI.” These principles of governance emphasise transparency, equity and social justice.

On the international stage, Senegal has made a number of commitments, such as recognising the need to defend and promote cultural diversity – including its economic and commercial aspects – with:

- adoption, in 2005 at UNESCO, of the International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions;
- promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as set out by the United Nations in its 2030 Agenda;
- promotion of the objectives of the African Union’s Agenda 2063, which advocates, *“An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics.”*

Anchored to these commitments and to the new political vision, culture is positioned as a lever of development, a factor of social cohesion and of building sustainable peace for the benefit of the people, particularly the youth. In this spirit, Senegal intends to continue and deepen – in the context of bilateral cooperation – the cultural conventions and cooperation agreements concluded with friendly countries and partners.

The Ministry’s Development Policy Letter, prepared this year, has notably taken these commitments into account, as well as the social and economic challenges of the culture sector – including the structuring and promotion of Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI), a sector with high potential for growth and job creation and a factor of attractiveness for territories.

The dynamism of the culture sector is an opportunity linked to the emergence of communities of artists, artisans and creators, and cultural, digital and film industry entrepreneurs, whose potential is reconfiguring the cultural economy. In line with its mission, the Ministry will endeavour to improve the environment for these CCIs, the infrastructure of cultural territories, and the capacity of communities of creators and cultural, artistic, digital and film industry entrepreneurs and workers.

Senegal intends to carry out the structural transformation of the cultural economy in order to enhance the wealth of the historical heritage of its regions, as well as the resources and opportunities constituted by CCIs, the protection and promotion of sector stakeholders, and the valorisation of artistic, artisanal and heritage resources.

3. THEMATIC FOR THE 2025 EDITION

POLITICAL CHANGES AND CRISES IN WEST AFRICA: WHAT ROLE FOR CULTURE?

Under the chosen theme “*Socio-political changes and crises in West Africa: what can culture do?*”, the event will take place from 30 November to 7 December 2025 in Senegal, the host country of this unprecedented cultural gathering.

This theme offers an essential reflection on the role of culture in the face of the social and political transformations the West African region is experiencing. In the face of challenges marked by risks of disintegration, loss of unity and social cohesion, culture appears as a lever of unity and a catalyst for peace and regional integration, enabling the people of West Africa to come together in line with the age-old and very close bonds that have always existed among them.

More than a simple cultural and artistic event, culture is a space for exchange, for showcasing the cultural expressions of the countries of the community, for invigorating the integration of peoples, for developing the culture and creativity economy, and for expanding the regional market for cultural goods and services built around those cultural expressions.

Culture allows people to express their aspirations, to promote their identities even as they display their diversity, and to participate actively in national and regional cohesion.

Through this theme, ECOFEST 2025 seeks to stimulate an open dialogue among artists, cultural actors, institutions and citizens, in order to explore the answers that culture can provide to current changes. The event also aims to strengthen cultural policies and to promote innovative approaches for a more peaceful, united and forward-looking West Africa.



4. ORGANISATION ET PROGRAMME

Organising Committees

The ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions have set up a Regional Organising Committee (ROC) composed of regional experts in the cultural and artistic sector. This committee works in synergy with a National Organising Committee (NOC) formed by the host country. Together, they have developed an innovative and relevant programme, addressing the current challenges of the region.

Artist Selection

The process of selecting artists is carried out via a call for applications across all UEMOA and ECOWAS Member States, in line with the recommendations of the ROC and NOC. ECOFEST is committed to hosting the selected artists in Dakar, ensuring full support for them, including financial and technical assistance during their stay.



5. A CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC PROGRAMME SUPPORTED BY THE MEMBER STATES

Senegal, the host country of the 2025 edition, will host a rich artistic programme in Dakar, with activities potentially extended to other cities.

Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony of ECOFEST, presided over by the Head of State of Senegal, marks the launch of the festival. This spectacular event includes a parade of artistic groups from the Member States, followed by official addresses. The highlight will be a choreographic fresco orchestrated by a Senegalese choreographer in collaboration with a regional counterpart. The ECOFEST ambassadors – three renowned artists from the region – will honour the event with their presence, while two artists acclaimed at the regional level will offer exclusive performances.

Live Performances

West Africa's cultural richness will be showcased through performances by four artistic groups from each Member State. These groups will represent the diversity of the region's artistic expressions, covering traditional dance, traditional music and contemporary music, highlighting young talent.

Popular Entertainment

The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture of the Republic of Senegal will orchestrate a series of popular festivities in Dakar and surrounding municipalities. This programme will feature local artists as well as talent from the Member States participating in the event, offering the public an immersive cultural experience.

Artistic Competitions

An artistic competition will cover the disciplines of painting, photography and sculpture, with criteria defined by internal regulations. Each Member State is invited to present one work in each category. The top three works in each discipline will be recognised at the closing ceremony. The winners will receive support for the production and dissemination of their works.

Closing Ceremony - Awards Night

The festival will culminate in an official evening closing ceremony, featuring speeches, artistic performances, and awards for the winning artists as well as technical and financial partners. This event will bring together eminent personalities from the cultural sector to celebrate West African talent.



6. A PLATFORM FOR CRAFTS AND CULTURAL & CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Hosting ECOFEST 2025, Senegal aims to position culture as a lever for economic and social development. Beyond artistic celebration, the festival is intended as an accelerator for the region's cultural and creative industries (CCI).

Creativity Fair

The Creativity Fair is conceived as an exceptional showcase of West African innovation and know-how. It is divided into two distinct areas: the Heritage and Arts Pavilion, which highlights traditional techniques and their contemporary evolution, and the Digital Creation Pavilion, offering a platform to young digital talents. This fair aims to showcase the region's creative wealth while encouraging exchanges among artisans, artists and innovators.

A guide lays out the participation criteria for artists and creators from the Member States.

Film Screenings and Masterclasses

The film component of ECOFEST will feature a selection of 12 films of community interest, with two screenings per day. In parallel, masterclasses led by renowned filmmakers will provide participants a unique opportunity to learn and interact with film industry professionals.

Professional Meetings

The professional meetings at ECOFEST 2025 will begin with an inaugural conference setting the tone for all subsequent discussions and exchanges.

A prominent West African figure will lead this conference on the 2025 edition's central theme: "Socio-political changes and crises in West Africa: what can culture do?". This introduction will lay the groundwork for reflection and guide the debates of the professional meetings.

The discussions will then continue around three major focus areas, organised as panels or roundtables at a pace of one theme per day:

1. **Cultural and creative industries and the regional market:** artist mobility, digital creation, business models, training, social protection;
2. **Regional citizenship and culture of peace:** free movement of people in the ECOWAS area, reducing border fragilities, managing intercommunity conflicts, improving living environments;
3. **Regional cultural diversity and heritage:** know-how, fashion, and the restitution of cultural property.

These meetings will bring together artists, entrepreneurs, investors and institutional representatives to encourage collaboration and stimulate the development of West Africa's cultural sector.

Ministerial Seminar

Under the theme "*Building Regional Sovereignty through Culture*", this seminar offers the region's ministers a platform for exchange on crucial issues. The discussions will notably address cultural cooperation, the movement of cultural goods and actors within West Africa, as well as the preparation of a joint advocacy for integrating culture into international development objectives.

7. MEETINGS/DIALOGUE WITH THE YOUTH

West Africa is characterised by its young population, with around 60% of inhabitants under the age of 25. This unique demographic presents both significant challenges and opportunities for regional development. In this context, ECOFEST is enabling a dialogue with youth titled *“Pathways to the Future with Youth for Development, Peace and Integration.”* This encounter will begin with an introductory conference dedicated to youth, in the form of an opening message to kick-start the dialogue. It offers young people an unprecedented opportunity to engage directly with the presidents of the ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions. This open dialogue will address the concerns of young people and jointly explore paths towards a promising future for the region.

Complementing these exchanges, project leaders from both institutions will present several flagship regional programmes specifically aimed at youth. These presentations are intended to inform and further involve young people in regional development and integration initiatives.



8. ENHANCED VISIBILITY AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR WEST AFRICAN CULTURAL SHAREHOLDERS

ECOFEST positions itself as a springboard for the region's artists, artisans and other cultural actors. The festival offers them a unique platform to:

1. **Showcase their creations to a broad audience**, thereby increasing their visibility on the international scene. This exposure will allow artists to make themselves known beyond their national borders and to reach new audiences.
2. **Meet cultural industry professionals and forge strategic partnerships**. These encounters may lead to new collaborations, contracts or distribution opportunities, which are essential for the development of their projects and careers.
3. **Benefit from training and workshops to strengthen their skills**. These capacity-building sessions enable participants to acquire new techniques, improve their practices and better market their know-how in a professional context.

Offering these opportunities, ECOFEST actively contributes to the development and professionalisation of the West African cultural sector, while encouraging exchange and collaboration on a regional scale.

The festival village: showcasing expertise and trade fair

This space at ECOFEST unfolds in several parts, offering a showcase for the richness and diversity of West African cultural products:

Arts and Crafts Exhibition:

A dedicated area for exhibiting and selling West African art and artisanal craft products. This exhibition plays a crucial role in strengthening the regional art market, providing artisans with a prime platform to present and commercialise their creations.

Promotional Exhibition for Institutions and Businesses:

This area allows cultural institutions and creative sector companies to showcase their activities, products and services. It serves as a platform to facilitate professional exchanges and business opportunities within the West African cultural industry.

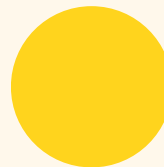
Tourist Circuits

To round out the cultural experience, the National Organising Committee, in partnership with local agencies, is offering a series of tours and sightseeing visits. These excursions give visitors the opportunity to explore the cultural and natural heritage of Senegal, the host country of this edition of ECOFEST.



9. *SITES*

- Diamniadio Sports Palace (Dakar Arena)
- Grand Théâtre National Doudou Ndiaye Coumba Rose
- Esplanade of the Grand Théâtre National Doudou Ndiaye Coumba Rose
- Place du Souvenir Africain (African Remembrance Square)
- Museum of Black Civilisations
- Gallery of the Museum of Black Civilisations
- African Renaissance Monument
- Douda Seck Cultural Centre



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Date: November 30 to December 7, 2025

Location: Dakar, Senegal

Website: www.ecofest-arts-culture.com

Social media: [@ecofest.arts.culture](https://www.instagram.com/ecofest.arts.culture)

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VISUAL CREDITS

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***United by culture, art and
crafts for a prosperous and
harmonious future.***

ECOFEST 2025
West African Festival Arts & Culture