



**CONSOLIDATED REPORT FOR ACTIVITY 4 OF THE YOUNG WOMEN IN
POLITICS PROJECT**

ROUND ONE DIALOGUE SESSIONS

PREPARED BY THE SOCIAL JUSTICE LEAGUE

MAY TO SEPTEMBER 2024



“I can lead anywhere; counties are one of the places I can start with”

Fostering Women’s Leadership through County Engagement

The Young Women in Politics: 50/50 Campaign

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FOREWORD

The Social Justice League is honoured to present this report on the Round 1 Dialogue Sessions conducted across Homabay, Kiambu, Bomet, and Samburu counties. These sessions brought together stakeholders, including political aspirants, community leaders, and civil society representatives, to explore and address barriers to young women's political participation. This initiative is part of our broader commitment to promoting gender equality in leadership and fostering inclusive governance through the Young Women in Politics Project.

We are inspired by the resilience and ambition of the young women who participated. They shared their challenges and aspirations with courage and conviction. Their voices affirm the importance of engaging county-level stakeholders to create supportive environments for women's leadership.

This report encapsulates the insights, challenges, and recommendations from these sessions. It serves as a guiding document for future interventions as we strive to break down barriers and empower young women to claim their rightful place in Kenya's political landscape.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all participants, facilitators, session mobilizers and partners whose contributions have enriched this dialogue and moved us closer to achieving our vision of a 50/50 representation in politics.

Together, we reaffirm the belief that leadership knows no boundaries as one of the female aspirants stated:

“I can lead anywhere and counties are one of the places I can start with.”

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Odondi

Chairperson, SJL

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to all the participants and stakeholders who contributed to the success of the Round 1 Dialogue Session. Your invaluable input, engagement, and passion for fostering positive change in young women's political participation have paved the way for a meaningful conversation about the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

We appreciate the diverse perspectives shared, the candid discussions, and the commitment demonstrated by everyone involved. Your active involvement has not only enriched the dialogue but also strengthened our collective resolve to address the barriers to young women's participation in politics. The insights gathered from this session will serve as a crucial foundation for the next steps in this transformative journey.

We also extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (IFA) through its Zivik Funding Program, supported by the Auswärtiges Amt (Federal Foreign Office) of Germany under the Zivik Democracy Building Aid Program. Your invaluable support has enabled us to take significant steps in organizing programs and activities under the Young Women in Politics: 50/50 Campaign (Kenya), aimed at achieving equal gender representation in Kenya's elective positions.

Additionally, we would like to acknowledge the dedicated support and collaboration of the Gender Departments in the counties of Homabay, Kiambu, Samburu, and Bomet, who worked closely with the Social Justice League (SJL) Mobilizers to identify and profile key stakeholders for the dialogue sessions. Your commitment to this cause has been integral in bringing together diverse voices and perspectives essential for the success of this initiative.

We look forward to continuing our collaboration and working together to ensure that the voices of young women in politics are amplified and heard at all levels.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to this important cause.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
INTRODUCTION	7
HOMABAY COUNTY	10
BOMET COUNTY	12
SAMBURU COUNTY	14
KIAMBU COUNTY	17
RECOMMENDATIONS	19
CONCLUSIONS & WAY FORWARD.....	21

INTRODUCTION


The Round 1 Dialogue Session provided a critical platform for discussing the challenges and opportunities surrounding women's participation in politics, particularly at the county level. A dialogue session is a structured conversation that brings together stakeholders from different backgrounds to engage in open and meaningful discussions on key issues. The purpose of this session was to create a space where female political aspirants, key county stakeholders, and community members could share their fears, challenges, and recommendations regarding women's involvement in politics. This dialogue allowed participants to voice their concerns and ideas, enabling them to actively contribute to shaping the future of women's political participation at the grassroots level.

It is of utmost importance to discuss the challenges women face in participating in politics at the county level, as these barriers are often magnified in rural and marginalized areas. Women in such regions face cultural, economic, and social obstacles that prevent them from fully engaging in the political process. Addressing these challenges at the county level is critical because it ensures that the solutions are tailored to the unique needs of local communities, creating more inclusive and effective political systems.

Counties must take proactive steps to put in place structures that promote women's participation in both elective and appointive political posts. Without these structures, women will continue to face barriers that prevent them from ascending to positions of power. Gender-sensitive policies, quotas, mentorship programs, and initiatives that encourage women to participate in politics are crucial to creating an environment where women can thrive politically. By establishing such structures, counties contribute to an enabling environment that supports the political aspirations of women, creating more equitable and balanced leadership at all levels.

Counties are uniquely positioned to support women at the grassroots level. They are closest to the communities and have a deeper understanding of the local dynamics, making them well-placed to advocate for and implement measures that foster women's political participation. Moreover, counties are crucial in ensuring that women's voices are heard in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives and livelihoods.

At the national level, achieving the two-thirds gender rule is an important milestone toward gender equality in political representation. However, counties play an even more significant role in advancing this cause by ensuring that women have the support and opportunities to run for office and be appointed to leadership positions. By creating a supportive environment for women, counties can help catapult the achievement of the two-thirds gender rule, moving beyond it to a true 50/50 representation in both elective and appointive posts.



The Beijing Platform for Action, which advocates for equal representation of men and women beyond the 30% target, serves as a critical framework in the fight for gender equality. This platform urges the global community to work toward gender parity in all spheres of life, including politics. The dialogue session emphasized the importance of aligning county-level actions with this international vision, encouraging progress that goes beyond the minimum threshold to achieve true gender equality.

In Kenya, the G7 strategy of the seven women governors provides an excellent model for identifying gender mainstreaming programs at the county level. These women governors are leading the charge in creating policies and programs that support women in leadership and political roles. By following their example, counties can adopt best practices that will advance the participation of women in both elective and appointive positions.

Throughout the dialogue, it was crucial to allow female aspirants and those new to politics to openly discuss their fears, challenges, and recommendations. This approach was essential for fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among the participants. The Social Justice League (S JL) was keen to allow solutions to emerge from the stakeholders themselves, rather than imposing solutions from the S JL team. By involving the community and female aspirants in the solution-building process, the dialogue session created a platform for genuine, locally-driven change that will have a lasting impact on women's political participation.

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LAUNCH

WOMEN GOVERNORS CAUCUS G7 STRATEGY





Homabay Dialogue Session brought to the fore discussions that identified five (5) main challenges women faced in politics, among them;

- **Lack of Mentorship**

Women often lack established networks of political mentors who can provide guidance, advice, and sponsorship crucial for advancement. Men traditionally dominate political spaces, forming informal mentorship circles that exclude women. This lack of access to experienced role models and advocates severely hampers women's ability to navigate the complexities of the political system, learn effective strategies, and gain access to key opportunities. This results in a smaller pool of women with the experience and confidence to run for office.

- **Limited Awareness of leadership opportunities other than elective posts:**

Many women, particularly those from marginalized communities, lack awareness of the electoral process. This includes knowing the number of polling stations, understanding voter registration deadlines and procedures, and comprehending the complexities of campaign strategies and election laws. This lack of information prevents them from fully engaging in the democratic process and hinders their ability to participate effectively. It's often exacerbated by low literacy rates and unequal access to information.

- **Coalition Building**

Building strong grassroots coalitions and partnerships is essential for political success. Women need to form alliances with other women and with diverse groups to mobilize support, raise awareness, and garner resources. This requires significant effort in organizing, networking, and community outreach. However, existing power structures often make it difficult for women to access these networks and build the necessary alliances. They may face resistance or exclusion from established political groups.

- **Gender-Based Violence in various forms**

Violence and harassment are significant obstacles to women's political participation. This can range from subtle forms of intimidation and online abuse to physical threats and assault. Harassment from family members can prevent women from even considering a political career. Technology-facilitated abuse, such as online trolling and doxing, can be particularly damaging, silencing women and discouraging their participation. This violence creates a hostile environment that discourages women from entering or remaining in politics.

- **Financial Challenges**

It was agreed that Campaign financing is expensive. Women often face greater difficulty in securing funding compared to men. This is due to a variety of factors, including existing biases in fundraising networks, unequal access to capital, and a lack of recognition for women's leadership. The disparity in funding creates an uneven playing field, limiting women's ability to compete effectively with better-resourced male candidates. This financial barrier can be particularly difficult for women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.



BOMET COUNTY

In Bomet County, key stakeholders provided examples of women who have historically had success in politics including the late Dr. Joyce Laboso, former first female Governor of Bomet County and Honourable Linet Toto Chepkorir who became the first youngest female woman representative of Bomet at just 24 years' old. A stark comparison was made of how Linet Toto leveraged campaign support through boda boda riders' association using their motorcycles for campaigns while Joyce Laboso continued with resilience despite several financial challenges when she first tried her hand in politics.

In addition, the following challenges were discussed at length:

- **Cultural Norms**

Patriarchy and Practices like FGM demoralize women's self-esteem and confidence. Cultural norms significantly shape societal roles and expectations for both men and women. In Bomet County, patriarchal structures dominate, leading to the marginalization of women in political and social arenas. Practices such as FGM exemplify how deeply ingrained cultural beliefs can restrict women's autonomy and participation. FGM often results in health complications and

psychological trauma, which can deter women from engaging in public life or pursuing leadership roles. Furthermore, these cultural practices perpetuate a cycle of oppression where women's rights are undermined, limiting their voices in decision-making processes and reinforcing gender inequality.

- **Gaps in Political Mentorship**

The absence of female role models in leadership positions contributes to a significant mentorship gap for aspiring women leaders. Women in Bomet County indicated that majority of them have no access to the few women whose stories they hear about in the news. It becomes harder for them to envision themselves in leadership roles. Mentorship is crucial, as it provides guidance, support, and encouragement. Furthermore, male-dominated environments can often overlook the importance of fostering female talent, leading to a lack of initiatives aimed at empowering women.

- **Campaign Financing:**

Whilst learning the strategy used by female politicians like Honourable Linet Toto to lobby for resources and in-kind support for campaigns, limited financial resources was identified as a factor that restricts women in politics. Financial resources play a pivotal role in political engagement and campaigning. Women often face significant challenges when it comes to fundraising and accessing financial support for their political aspirations. This limitation can be attributed to various factors, including a lack of networks that facilitate financial backing for women candidates. Without adequate funding, women struggle to mount competitive campaigns, ultimately leading to underrepresentation in political offices. The disparity in campaign financing not only hinders individual women's political ambitions but also perpetuates the broader trend of male dominance in politics, which further marginalizes women's issues in policy discussions.



SAMBURU COUNTY

The discussions in Samburu County were quite illuminating. In a county where no single woman is elected at the grassroots ward level for the position of Member of County Assembly, it was interesting to see the diversity of voices and suggestions for increasing women’s participation in politics, while at the same time, hearing of the worry expressed over how long this may take. In particular, the following were identified as challenging factors:

- **Patriarchal Structures**

In Samburu County, patriarchal structures deeply engrained in cultural norms position women (identified as the “neck”) are considered as subordinate to men (identified as the “head”) in all aspects of leadership. This hierarchy often results in men being regarded as the primary custodians of culture, knowledge, and power. These structures have historically diminished women’s agency and limit their roles in decision-making processes, reinforcing stereotypes that prioritize male voices over female contributions. Consequently, women may find their capabilities and aspirations undervalued, perpetuating cycles of inequality and disenfranchisement.

- **Cultural Practices**

Cultural practices such as early and forced marriages, along with Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), significantly undermine women's status in Samburu County. Early marriages rob girls of their childhood, education, and opportunities for personal development, while FGM leads to severe health complications and trauma. These practices are often justified through cultural or religious beliefs, yet they disregard women's autonomy and well-being, further entrenching gender inequalities and restricting women's roles within their communities.

- **Insecurity due to increased banditry and inter-clan conflicts**

Persistent security challenges—such as conflicts, violence, and instability—hinder political engagement and participation for women in Samburu County. In environments plagued by insecurity, women may prioritize safety over civic involvement, leading to their exclusion from political spheres. In particular, Samburu is quite a vast county geographically and thus, it is equally challenging for security personnel to cover the entire county within a given time if not properly resourced. Moreover, these adverse conditions cultivate a prevailing atmosphere of fear and distrust, discouraging women from voicing their opinions or running for office, ultimately affecting the representation of Samburu women in politics.

- **Campaign Financing**

One significant barrier to women's political participation in Samburu is the lack of resources for campaign financing. Young and experienced women candidates indicated their struggle to secure funding for their campaigns due to limited access to financial networks.

- **Electoral Violence**

Samburu women reported that 2022 polls in the county included instances of harassment, intimidation, and cyberbullying. This hostile environment not only undermined women's confidence but also reinforced the notion that political spaces are unsafe for them, further limiting their participation.

- **Illiteracy Levels**

High levels of illiteracy among women in Samburu County present a significant barrier to active political engagement. Literacy is essential for understanding political processes, policies, and electoral systems. A majority of women in Samburu lack access to education and this diminishes

their ability to engage in informed discussions, make educated choices, or advocate for their rights. This gap in education translates into reduced representation in decision-making bodies, perpetuating gender inequalities in governance.

- **Policy Gaps**

Stakeholders from Samburu's Gender Department indicated the absence of a finalized gender policy which has hampered efforts to promote women's rights and participation in governance. The County's gender policy remains in draft form, indicating challenges to addressing the systemic barriers at the county level through policy and gender mainstreaming programs. The delay in implementing comprehensive policies has hindered initiatives aimed at promoting equality, protecting women's rights, and ensuring their meaningful participation in political processes, thereby perpetuating existing inequalities.



Kiambu County, located in the central region of Kenya, is emblematic of the broader challenges women face in political participation across many regions. Despite significant progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women in various sectors, barriers remain deeply entrenched in the political landscape of Kiambu. Women in this county encounter a complex interplay of cultural, economic, social, and institutional hurdles that hinder their full participation in political processes. The challenges discussed during the dialogue session included:

- **Cultural Norms and Gender Stereotypes**

Traditional beliefs and societal expectations often dictate gender roles within Kiambu. Many communities in Kenya (in the four project regions and beyond) hold the perception that politics is a male-dominated arena, leading to the marginalization of women's voices. These cultural norms discourage women from vying for political positions or participating in decision-making processes, as they are often viewed as inappropriate or unfit for leadership roles.

- **Limited Access to Education**

Education plays a pivotal role in empowering individuals to engage in politics. In Kiambu, while educational attainment among women has improved over the years, disparities still exist. Many women lack the necessary education or training to compete effectively in political environments, restricting their capabilities to understand political processes and advocate for their rights.

- **Violence and Intimidation**

The political landscape in Kiambu, like much of other parts in Kenya, can be characterized by threats of violence and intimidation, which disproportionately affect female politicians. Harassment not only dissuade women from entering politics but also create an environment where those who do choose to participate must navigate significant personal risks.

- **Insufficient Support Networks**

Women often lack robust networks that can facilitate their political ambitions. Male-dominated political structures may overlook or undervalue women's contributions, leading to insufficient mentorship and support. The absence of strong alliances or organizations that champion women's political rights further deepens this challenge.

- **Institutional Barriers**

Although there are legal frameworks aimed at promoting gender equity in politics, such as the Constitution of Kenya, enforcement remains weak. Women in the Kiambu dialogue session indicated that institutional practices and biases within political parties often favor male candidates, limiting the opportunities for women to secure nominations or meaningful representation in political offices.



Women in politics must conduct a SWOT analysis of themselves before, during and after an electioneering period



-Participant during Homabay County Dialogue Session

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of the dialogue sessions, the counties presented specific recommendations aimed at overcoming obstacles and enhancing women's leadership. These recommendations focus on strategic initiatives, community engagement, and capacity building to empower female aspirants. The responsibility for these actions is shared among various stakeholders, including local governments, electoral bodies, political parties, civil society organizations, and community leaders. Each recommendation is aimed at addressing the unique challenges faced by women in different regions, fostering a collaborative approach to promote gender equality in political spaces.

They include:

A. To Women in Politics

- Conduct SWOT analyses to help women strategize for leadership.
- Build women’s self-esteem and resilience against gender-based violence
- Leverage social media for community mobilization
- Women should unite and support each other in leadership ambitions through coalition building

B. To Kenya’s National Government

- Enact legislation to address political interference and electoral violence against women
- The importance of passing and implementing gender-inclusive policies to promote women’s participation in politics was emphasized

C. To County Governments

- Promote partnerships with community stakeholders like the boda boda sector
- Engage cultural leaders and male champions at the grassroots level.
- Strengthen male engagement to advocate for women’s leadership

D. To Political Parties

- Allow Youths and women to participate in party decision-making processes to ensure inclusive policies at the political party level

E. To Civil Society Organizations

- Introduce mentorship programs and public speaking skills workshops.
- Expand dialogue sessions to the electoral wards in the counties
- Strengthen male engagement to advocate for women’s leadership
- Provide training on political campaign, media engagement and leadership strategies

Conclusions and way forward

Having completed the first round of dialogue sessions in the four project counties, SJL prioritized plans to share policy actions with County governments at the end of the Project that focus on fostering women's leadership through targeted support and legislative measures within the counties' legislative powers as outlined in Kenya's Constitution.

In addition, SJL saw the need for organizing a second dialogue session at the sub-county level to engage grassroots communities. Moving forward, the YWIP will emphasize collaboration with community stakeholders, cultural leaders, and male advocates to create a supportive environment for women in politics.

During in-person interviews with female aspirants, key questions to explore include: What strategies have female aspirants employed to build their self-esteem and resilience in the face of political challenges? How do female aspirants envision leveraging social media for mobilization? In what ways have they received support from other women in their political journey? What specific legislative changes would they advocate for to address political interference? How can men and cultural leaders better support women's leadership ambitions?

The insights gathered from these dialogue session would will serve as a cornerstone for designing impactful, context-specific interventions aimed at achieving equitable representation and advancing the democratic ideals of inclusion and diversity in Kenya's political landscape.

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22

