

EMPowerHer

Quarterly KEWOPA e-newsletter



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Chairperson's Spot



Hon. Leah Sankaire
MP. Chairperson - KEWOPA

As this quarter concludes, we present KEWOPA's second newsletter edition, highlighting our ongoing commitment to empowering women in politics and driving legislative change. This quarter has seen significant strides in policy advocacy, community engagement, and strategic partnerships. A key achievement was the release of policy briefs developed with the Institute of Public Finance (IPF), offering critical insights into gender-responsive budgeting. These briefs have sparked discussions and will be featured in upcoming forums, strengthening advocacy for women's rights.

Our Gender Responsive Budgeting training to budget champions- with Institute of Public Finance capacity-building efforts in Kwale, Machakos, and Kisumu have empowered women leaders to influence budgetary decisions through training and workshops.

The Uraia program's executive communications meetings in Mombasa and Tharaka Nithi also enhanced coordination among women's organizations, paving the way for future collaborations.

This quarter also marked the start of our partnership with IDInsight, we look forward to the research initiatives to boost KEWOPA's advocacy. Our ongoing collaboration with UN Women continues to advance legislative efforts for gender equality, already yielding legislative successes.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the upcoming 16 Days of Activism campaign, focusing on ending gender-based violence. We extend our heartfelt thanks to our members, partners, and supporters. Together, we are making meaningful progress toward a more inclusive Kenya. Stay connected with KEWOPA as we continue this important work.

Building Momentum for Gender-Responsive Leadership: KEWOPA's Strategic Actions and Community Impact.

As we conclude this third quarter, KEWOPA reflects on a season of both challenges and transformative progress. This year has seen major national changes, including a significant cabinet reshuffling without the anticipated appointment of a Cabinet Secretary for Gender. In response, we took the opportunity to refine and enhance our strategies, strengthening our commitment to a gender-responsive agenda and amplifying the voices of women across Kenya's political landscape. One core achievement this quarter has been our gender-responsive budget training in five counties. Following the President's decision not to ascend the Finance Bill, we identified a crucial opportunity to deepen budget literacy and advocacy skills among women. Partnering with the Institute of Public Finance, we launched training sessions for local budget champions, equipping them to engage more effectively in fiscal discussions and promote gender-responsive budgeting in their communities. The success of this initiative underscores the power of grassroots advocacy and the positive impact we're already seeing from these local leaders.

Our Strategic Plan continues to drive KEWOPA's work, focusing on three main pillars: strengthening women's political participation, advocating for gender-responsive policies, and fostering economic empowerment. This quarter, we advanced these objectives by supporting women legislators in championing critical reforms and fostering a more inclusive political environment. Our work this year remains not only relevant but also firmly rooted in these long-term priorities, building a solid foundation for sustainable impact.

With growing discourse around affirmative action and recent calls from Gen Z to reconsider the Women Representative position, KEWOPA has planned an upcoming civic education initiative to address these concerns. We believe in encouraging open dialogue on these important matters and highlighting the value of affirmative action in advancing women's representation. To further this conversation, we will also host two X-space discussions, bringing together youth and thought leaders to exchange views on creating a more equitable society.

Reflecting on this quarter's progress, we are deeply grateful for the unwavering support of our partners. Their collaboration—through funding, mentorship, and strategic guidance—has been invaluable in driving gender equality and advancing women's political participation. We invite even more allies to join us in this mission, amplifying the voices of women in leadership and providing essential resources and platforms for meaningful change.

Together, we can turn the vision of gender equality in leadership into a reality. Thank you for your partnership and support.

Budget Champions Trainings

The Strengthening Parliamentary Leadership for Transformative Action (SPALTA) program, spearheaded by the Institute of Public Finance (IPF), is dedicated to enhancing the leadership capacities of Kenyan parliamentarians and their teams. This initiative equips lawmakers with the tools to improve public finance management, gender-responsive budgeting, and social accountability. By doing so, SPALTA ensures that governance reforms and legislative actions are more responsive to the needs of citizens, especially those from underserved communities, ultimately fostering transformative and inclusive governance across Kenya.

In line with these goals, KEWOPA recently conducted county-level forums in Kwale, Machakos, and Kisumu, fostering public participation and providing critical governance education to local communities. These engagements, held in partnership with IPF, came at a time when civic activism was on the rise, particularly among young people. By creating spaces for constructive dialogue, KEWOPA's activities enabled citizens, especially youth, to engage in public discourse and understand their roles in governance and budgetary processes.

In Kwale County, a budget literacy and gender-responsive budgeting training brought together young community members, local leaders, and stakeholders. The Kwale Women Representative, Hon. Fatuma Masito, emphasized the importance of youth engagement in advocating for budgetary equity. Participants left empowered, with a stronger understanding of public resource management and how to ensure fair allocations within their communities.

Similarly, in Machakos County, KEWOPA and IPF focused on educating budget champions on fiscal processes. Machakos Women Representative, Hon. Joyce Kamaene, highlighted the need for financial literacy among youth, encouraging them to take an active role in discussions about public debt, revenue, and resource allocations. This training aimed to create a ripple effect, empowering attendees to further educate their communities on these critical issues.

In Kisumu County, the gender-responsive budgeting session underscored the importance of inclusive financial planning at the county level. With a strong turnout from youth leaders and community members, the training addressed key issues in resource distribution and accountability, equipping participants to hold their leaders responsible for transparent, equitable budgetary practices.

Through these county-level engagements, KEWOPA, in collaboration with IPF under the SPALTA initiative, has not only bolstered public finance knowledge but also strengthened the voice of young people in governance. These efforts are building a more informed and proactive citizenry, ensuring that governance decisions across Kenya truly reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of its people.



Community engagement forum in Kwale County



Budget champions pose for a photo with Machakos County Women Representative, Hon. Betty Kamene

KEWOPA Mashinani

In Tharaka Nithi County, KEWOPA facilitated a public forum to underscore the importance of citizen involvement in governance. The event centered on the idea that sovereign power lies with the people, aiming to empower residents with knowledge on how to actively participate in the decision-making process.

During the forum, KEWOPA representatives encouraged community members to voice their concerns and contribute to policy-making. Discussions revolved around citizens' rights and responsibilities, fostering a deeper understanding of democratic engagement and the impact of their involvement on local and national governance.

This forum served as an open platform where Tharaka Nithi residents could directly interact with their leaders, express their priorities, and understand how to hold their representatives accountable. KEWOPA's efforts here reinforce its commitment to ensuring governance that is reflective of citizens' needs and aspirations, promoting transparency and inclusivity at every level.



A participant speaks during the training in Tharaka Nithi



Senator Susan Nduyo shares insights with participants

Mswada wangu

KEWOPA held the 'Mswada Wangu' forum in Mombasa, led by Senator Crystal Asige, to raise awareness about key legislative efforts aimed at supporting the rights and addressing challenges faced by persons with disabilities (PWDs). This event highlighted barriers PWDs face in areas like accessibility and social inclusion, with a strong call for supportive, inclusive policies.

The forum was lively, with active youth involvement. Young attendees contributed ideas and showcased talents in music, art, and spoken word, underscoring the importance of youth voices in shaping an inclusive society. Through engaging the community and rallying support for PWD rights, the 'Mswada Wangu' forum demonstrated KEWOPA's dedication to fostering a Kenya where all citizens are valued and supported.



Senator Crystal Asige shares insights with participants



Participants pose for a photo with Senator Hon. Crystal Asige

A Reflective Journey: Celebrating KEWOPA's Progress and the On-going Partnership with UN Women.

It has been over 25 years since KEWOPA partnered with UN Women, and this enduring relationship has played a vital role in championing the shared vision of empowering women leaders across Kenya. UN Women's continued belief in women's potential in leadership has strengthened our collective commitment to gender equality and expanded women's political influence.

Since the introduction of our theme in 2021, "Propelling Women's Political Leadership Through Sustainable Mentorship and Capacity Strengthening," KEWOPA has achieved notable milestones, thanks to this support. This year, our partnership with UN Women has empowered us to grow our mentorship and capacity-building programs for women MPs, women aspirants, and upcoming leaders. These programs have not only advanced skills and confidence but also supported crucial gender-responsive policies and laws.

To highlight our shared achievements, we're excited to include an infographic showcasing recent progress. Since 2017, the number of women elected in single constituencies rose from 23 to 29, and many former Women Representatives transitioned into other influential roles, such as Hon. Gladys Wanga, Hon. Kawira Mwangaza, and Hon. Ruweida Obbo. These leaders, beneficiaries of the UN Women-sponsored mentorship programs, have successfully broken new ground, from Hon. Rehema Masito's journey from nominated MCA to elected leader in a single constituency to Hon. Rosa Buyu's election in a single constituency.

This partnership has been pivotal in helping women overcome structural barriers, inspiring many to pursue and secure leadership roles. KEWOPA deeply values the resources, mentorship, and strategic guidance provided by UN Women, knowing that these elements have fueled transformative change for women leaders in Kenya.

As we reflect on our shared journey, KEWOPA looks forward to reinforcing this impactful partnership with UN Women, working together toward a future where women's voices shape a more inclusive and equitable political landscape in Kenya. Together, we remain committed to fostering lasting, sustainable change for women in leadership.

Partnerships and Collaborations

KEWOPA and IDinsight: A New Partnership for Data-Driven Policy

KEWOPA and IDinsight forged an exciting new partnership aimed at enhancing the role of data in legislative and policy-making processes. This collaboration marks a significant step towards leveraging evidence to drive positive change and improve the lives of vulnerable communities across Kenya.

Empowering Leaders with Evidence-Based Insights

IDinsight's support will play a crucial role in helping KEWOPA members use data effectively. With the right tools and guidance, KEWOPA's leaders will be able to integrate evidence into their legislative work, driving improvements in policy-making processes. This evidence-driven approach is expected to lead to more effective and targeted interventions, particularly benefiting vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Strengthening Evidence-Generation in Policy Development

The partnership will focus on enhancing the evidence-generation process during policy development. KEWOPA and IDinsight aim to create a robust framework for using data to address key issues facing vulnerable populations. This effort aligns with KEWOPA's mission to promote gender-responsive policies and improve the quality of life for women and girls in Kenya.



KEWOPA and IDinsight team at the inception meeting

A Vision for the Future

As we embark on this journey together, the vision is clear: to increase the demand for data in legislation and policy-making and to strengthen the role of evidence in creating impactful policies. The collaboration promises to drive positive change by ensuring that decisions are informed by accurate, actionable data.

Partner interventions include promoting the participation of Special Interest Groups in political participation, strengthening participation of youth in leadership, promoting human rights approach in media and in news reporting among others. KEWOPA continues to be a key partner in making sure the program is a success in line with their 2024-2027 setting the priorities in advancing women's parliamentarian's work in legislation, oversight and representation.

As a result of multifarious interventions targeting elected, nominated, appointed and aspiring women leaders, KEWOPA has contributed to increasing avenues, through which gender equality can be achieved by encouraging more women to come out and vie for leadership positions, strengthening the capacity of women to actively participate in the governance and decision making processes and to amplify voices of grassroots women, by creating forums for engagement with stakeholders at various levels, including media and community decision making structures.

Support through various program interventions has also increased women leaders capacity to organize and galvanize voices around advocating for improved democracy by developing advocacy plans to accelerate the realization of the not more than 2/3rds gender rule among other legislations that can bolster gender equality.



Participants unite during a collaborative training session focused on empowering women leaders and fostering community

Member Spotlight

Hon. Millie Odhiambo: The Tenacious 'Bad Girl'



Hon. Millie Odhiambo
MP. Suba North

Known for her bold and unapologetic stance on matters of governance and leadership, Hon. Millie Odhiambo—often referring to herself as the "bad girl" of Parliament—continues to defy the odds. Her resilience, dedication, and tenacity have not only earned her a prominent place in Kenya's political landscape but have also made her a role model for countless women aspiring to lead with conviction and integrity.

In October 2024, Hon. Odhiambo launched her much-anticipated book, *Rig or Be Rigged*, a title that speaks to the harsh realities of electoral processes in Kenya and beyond. The book provides an eye-opening account of her personal experiences in politics, focusing on her journey navigating Kenya's complex and often challenging electoral environment. Hon. Odhiambo delves deep into the tactics, obstacles, and resilience needed not only to survive but to thrive in the political arena. Candid and insightful, her narrative critiques systemic flaws and serves as a call for comprehensive electoral reform, promoting transparency and fairness.

The book launch was a testament to Hon. Odhiambo's enduring commitment to transparency in Kenya's democracy. The event brought together legislators, activists, and advocates, all of whom commended her courage in openly sharing her story and advocating for necessary changes in electoral processes. Her willingness to confront challenges head-on and address difficult truths continues to inspire her peers and the public.

Beyond her literary contributions, Hon. Millie Odhiambo remains a legislative powerhouse. Her role in Parliament is marked by a dedication to championing progressive laws that prioritize the rights of women, children, and marginalized communities. Some of her most impactful legislative contributions include:

The Sexual Offences Act – Hon. Odhiambo has played a crucial role in advocating for amendments to strengthen this Act, which aims to provide justice for survivors of sexual violence. Her efforts have focused on addressing gaps in prosecution, ensuring stricter penalties, and providing survivors with greater legal support.

The Marriage Act – As an advocate for gender equality, Hon. Odhiambo supported the Marriage Act to promote equitable rights within marriages. This legislation is pivotal in recognizing and safeguarding the rights of both spouses, creating a framework that ensures fairness and respect.

The Protection Against Domestic Violence Act – Driven by a passion for protecting vulnerable individuals, Hon. Odhiambo has been instrumental in pushing for legislation that protects individuals from domestic abuse. This Act serves as a vital tool in addressing and preventing domestic violence, providing legal recourse and protection to those affected.



MILLIE ODHIAMBO MABONA

FOREWORD BY THE RT HONORABLE RAILA AMOLLO ODINGA

STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Dorothy Muriu

What's one moment in your career where you thought, "Wow, this is really making an impact for gender equality?"

When I was 11, Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001, and that moment shaped my understanding of the power of women in leadership. In my career, a similar defining moment was when Martha Karua was chosen as Raila Odinga's running mate during the 2022 election. Seeing a woman stand in such a significant political position felt like real progress towards gender equality in Kenya.

What's one creative campaign, project or message you worked on that you're super proud of for promoting gender equality?

I'm particularly proud of the campaign we ran called "Why Affirmative Action is Crucial." This campaign highlighted the importance of gender-responsive policies and the need for representation at all levels of governance. It allowed us to explain, in a simple but powerful way, how these measures can transform the lives of women and girls.

How do you balance tackling serious issues like gender inequality, gender based violence and harmful gender norms with keeping the messaging relatable and fun?

Balancing serious issues with relatable and engaging messaging comes down to understanding your audience. It's about breaking down complex topics into digestible, everyday language, while using humor, storytelling, and creative visuals. When we use real-life stories and humor carefully, it makes the message stick without dilute

What's a surprising thing about working in communications for gender equality that most people don't realize?

Working at KEWOPA offers the unique opportunity to witness history unfold, whether good or bad. It's empowering to know that the work I do in communications plays a part in shaping that history. Even the smallest contributions can have a big impact, and over time, these collective efforts drive real change. What many don't realize is that being involved in gender equality communications places you right at the center of transformative moments, where every step forward, no matter how small, adds up to something truly significant.

What's the most inspiring story or feedback you've received from someone who was touched by your gender equality work?

I love how the preamble of the Constitution of Kenya begins with "We the people," as it speaks to the collective power and responsibility we all share in shaping our nation. KEWOPA exists solely for the empowerment of women in politics and those aspiring to leadership, embodying this spirit of inclusivity and progress. This mission was brought to life when I received feedback from a young woman who attended one of our workshops. She shared how the event not only inspired her to pursue community leadership but also equipped her with the tools to advocate for girls in her area. Her story reminded me that our work has a powerful ripple effect—empowering others to take action and make meaningful changes in their communities.

If you could describe your workday with a playlist, what would be the top two songs?

"Worth It All" by Meredith Andrews – This song inspires me to keep pushing forward and reminds me that every effort I put in is meaningful.
"Zaidi na Zaidi" by Eunice Njeri – It motivates me to continue giving my all, even when the work gets tough, knowing there's always more to give and achieve.

What's your favorite way to unwind after a day of tackling gender issues—Netflix, a good book, or something else entirely?

A coffee date with family and friends is my go-to. Catching up with them keeps me grounded. Relationships are at the core of who I am, and spending quality time with the people I love is something I do effortlessly and with joy

If you could host a dinner party with three women (past or present) who are passionate about gender equality, who would be at your table?

I'd invite Wangari Maathai, for her unwavering dedication to environmental and gender equality, Priscillah Nyokabi, for her work on women's rights in legislation, and Millie Mabona, for her passion and boldness in advocating for women's leadership.

If your career in promoting gender equality were made into a movie, what would be the title?

"Next Week, A Day Like Today, We'll Be There!" It speaks to the persistence and optimism required in the journey toward gender equality—always moving forward, knowing that progress is within reach







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