



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The inaugural Meru County People Dialogue Festival (PDF) held on July 10-11, 2025, at Meru National Polytechnic marked a pivotal moment in Kenya's democratic engagement by successfully devolving national dialogue to the grassroots level. Under the theme "Building a Collaborative Democracy for Kenya's Sustainable Future – The Meru We Want," the festival brought together over 1,000 participants including youth, women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), traditional leaders, elected officials, and civil society organizations.

CMD Executive Director Mr. Frankline Mukwanja established the festival's foundational premise in his opening remarks, emphasizing that democracy can only die in silence—when people engage in dialogue, democracy thrives. Drawing from seven years of convening the People Dialogue Festival in Nairobi, Mukwanja articulated the strategic rationale for county-level devolution: counties serve as the pulse of citizen engagement and governance, making them ideal venues for local accountability. The festival's significance attracted national leaders including Honourable Rahim, recognizing that Kenya faces a crisis of trust in politics and institutions, with dialogue offering a vital platform to repair this trust deficit.

The festival addressed critical governance challenges through structured dialogue across two thematic villages: the Democratic Governance Village and the Youth Village, facilitating 10 objective sessions. Key outcomes included three female candidates declaring 2027 political aspirations, commitments from traditional Njuri Ncheke elders to champion gender equality, and concrete policy commitments including the Meru Youth Council Bill and for the first time People with disabilities fund protections. The event successfully bridged generational divides, with three distinct generations—traditional leaders, current politicians, and Generation Z activists—engaging in structured dialogue.

Significant policy recommendations emerged, including the commitment to pass the Meru Youth Council Bill by December 2025, implementation of 30% procurement quotas for marginalized groups, and establishment of specialized child abuse courts. The festival demonstrated that localizing dialogue fosters inclusive governance and provides a replicable model for strengthening Kenya's democratic fabric across all 47 counties.

The Meru County PDF demonstrated remarkable success across multiple dimensions, achieving unprecedented intergenerational dialogue between traditional leaders (Njuri Ncheke), current politicians, and Generation Z activists through 10 structured objective sessions across two thematic villages. The festival successfully amplified marginalized voices—PWDs, women, youth, and minorities—while engaging academic institutions like KUSO and KEMU as both panelists and participants, and securing traditional authority inclusion through Njuri Ncheke elders' commitments to champion gender equality. Critical media partnerships with Weru TV and Muuga FM established ongoing accountability mechanisms, while direct government-citizen dialogue between MCAs, the Governor, and grassroots communities generated concrete policy commitments including the Meru Youth Council Bill by December 2025, 10% county budget allocation for youth-led enterprises, and 30% procurement quotas for marginalized groups. The festival achieved constitutional implementation progress through Article 103 recall rights actualization and delivered SDG-aligned outcomes addressing gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10) through citizen-driven policy recommendations. Most significantly, transformative behavioral changes emerged as three female candidates declared 2027 political aspirations, youth leaders pledged support for independent candidates beyond dynasty politics, traditional leaders committed to gender equality advocacy, and a generational attitude shift crystallized in the "Generation Zero Tolerance" stance against corruption and tribalism—collectively demonstrating measurable progress toward the festival's core objectives while providing concrete evidence of its transformative democratic impact.



INTRODUCTION

The People Dialogue Festival (PDF) stands as a flagship initiative by the Centre for Multiparty Democracy (CMD-Kenya), serving as a beacon of inclusive dialogue and transformative engagement in Kenya. This annual event traditionally unites leaders, citizens, government institutions, civil society organizations, and private sector stakeholders to discuss pressing societal challenges, promote meaningful citizen engagement, and co-create solutions for Kenya's sustainable development.

The inaugural county-level PDF edition took place on July 10-11, 2025, at Meru National Polytechnic, representing a strategic devolution of national dialogue to grassroots communities. This initiative forms part of a broader pilot project running from 2023-2025 in four counties—Narok, Meru, West Pokot, and Nairobi—under the theme "Citizen-centred policy making and pursuance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Kenya." The project represents a collaboration between CMD Kenya and four Danish political parties: The Social Democratic Party, The Conservative Peoples Party, Green Left, and The Liberal Party of Denmark. Having a dialogue helps make citizens authors of democratic processes and this has been the backbone with which PDF is being driven.

PDF THE DIAL
FESTIVAL

Conversations were disseminated into 10 objective sessions across two villages;

(i) Democratic Governance Village

The Democratic Governance Village served as a robust platform for examining foundational issues affecting Kenya's democratic institutions through four critical panel discussions: The Meru We Want framed aspirational visions for participatory governance; Key Priority Electoral Reforms Ahead of the 2027 General Election: Citizens' Voices tackled IEBC strengthening and voter education gaps; Navigating Culture to Enhance Women Representation confronted patriarchal barriers in political leadership; and Amplifying Disability Leadership for an Inclusive Democracy exposed implementation gaps in constitutional protections. These sessions generated actionable strategies for strengthening the rule of law, enhancing civic participation, and dismantling systemic barriers - from electoral accountability mechanisms to inclusive representation frameworks - all critical for Kenya's democratic maturation ahead of 2027

(ii) Youth Village

Over two intensive days, participants engaged in dialogue sessions addressing pressing issues including youth political participation, gender equality, persons with disabilities rights, corruption accountability, and child protection. Through structured panel discussions and community engagement, the program created a platform for participants to look at governance, but from the youth-centric perspectives and to explore critical themes such as Gen Z and the New Kenya—Redefining Citizenship, Justice, and Accountability Across Generations, The Space of Young Women in Kenya's Governance and Development, and Inclusive and Resilient Local Economic Development.

Participants delved into pressing challenges like The Girl Child Dilemma: FGM, Teenage Pregnancy & High School Dropout Rates, while also examining strategies for Empowering Youth Voices for Transparent Governance and Sustainable Development: From the Ballot to the Budget, We Lead the Change. Additionally, discussions centered on Youth and Equity at the Core: Unlocking Civic Power for Transformative County Development, ensuring that diverse perspectives converged under various panel discussions.

The sessions provided a space for the youth to articulate their vision for Kenya's future while fostering intergenerational dialogue. Topics ranged from the barriers facing young women in politics to economic empowerment strategies and constitutional governance, ensuring a holistic approach to Kenya's developmental challenges.

OBJECTIVES

The county-level PDF sought to:

- Bring the energy, inclusivity, and dialogue of the national PDF to grassroots communities
- Facilitate meaningful engagement between citizens, elected leaders, civil society, creatives, academia, development partners, and grassroots actors
- Create sustainable platforms for multi-actor dialogue that align community needs and policy priorities with county and national policy agendas
- Ensure policy formulation at national and county levels reflects citizens' development priorities and concerns while relating to the SDGs

RATIONALE FOR ENGAGING MERU

Counties serve as the vital pulse of governance and citizen engagement, representing the foundational level where democracy meets the daily lives of citizens. Meru County's political landscape has been characterized by tensions that have deepened societal divisions and threatened social cohesion. The county PDF offered a unique and inclusive platform that extended dialogue beyond political elites to include marginalized voices—persons with disabilities, women, youth, minorities, grassroots organizations, and non-traditional actors like citizen movements and the Njuri Ncheke council of elders.

This inaugural inclusive dialogue, coming immediately after new county leadership assumed power (Meru has a new governor), was vital for rebuilding trust in Meru County's political systems. The platform provided safe and institutionalized spaces for dialogue among citizens and with all relevant governance institutions and political actors at the county level. The theme "The Meru We Want" was deliberately conciliatory and forward-looking to ensure that the remaining two years of the current county leadership focus on delivering citizen priorities and development needs.

Young people across these jurisdictions are expressing a clear yearning for empowerment and meaningful engagement in all their capacities—as taxpayers, entrepreneurs, citizens, and students—seeking to move beyond marginalization toward active participation in governance processes. This initiative recognizes the critical need to address issues affecting communities from a comprehensive 360-degree perspective, bringing together diverse stakeholders to foster dialogue around value-based political leadership that young people increasingly demand. The strengthening and reform of our democratic institutions remains paramount, as the quality of governance directly reflects the integrity and effectiveness of the political parties that establish it. When these foundational structures are robust and responsive, communities can achieve better self-governance and more inclusive development outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

In the words of the CMD Executive Director, the People's Dialogue Festival represents far more than a singular event—it embodies "a good governance movement that brings politics closer to the people" and fundamentally seeks to "humanize leadership." Mukwanja emphasized that the traditional model where "leaders belong to the penthouse while all of us must be on the mezzanine and elsewhere" is precisely what undermines democratic engagement and trust. This philosophical foundation drives the PDF's distinctive methodology, which deliberately breaks away from conventional formal dialogue setups characterized by rigid hierarchies, one-way presentations, and limited audience participation.

The festival's methodology centers on creating an inclusive, participatory environment where traditional power dynamics are intentionally disrupted. Unlike standard conferences where speakers address passive audiences from elevated platforms, the PDF employs a "village" approach—organizing participants into thematic communities (Democratic Governance Village and Youth Village) that foster peer-to-peer interaction and collaborative problem-solving. This structure ensures that elected officials, traditional leaders, youth activists, and ordinary citizens engage as equals in the conversation, with facilitators guiding rather than controlling discussions. The methodology's effectiveness lies in its ability to transform participants from spectators into active contributors, creating space for authentic dialogue where real commitments can emerge organically from collective engagement rather than being imposed from above. This approach generates ownership of outcomes among participants, leading to the concrete policy commitments and collaborative initiatives that emerged from the Meru People's Dialogue festival. Central to the PDF methodology is the intentional incorporation of cultural celebration—music, dance, and artistic expression—which serves a critical function beyond mere entertainment. When participants witness the County Commissioner dancing alongside citizens or see the deputy governor sharing moments of laughter with Gen Z activists, these interactions break down psychological barriers that formal settings reinforce.

The festival atmosphere created by local artists and musicians provides a shared cultural experience that transcends political, generational, and social divisions, creating common ground where meaningful dialogue becomes possible. This celebratory element is methodologically essential because it humanizes all participants, reminding everyone that beneath titles and positions are shared experiences of joy, culture, and community. When people loosen up through music and dance, they become more open to listening, more willing to be vulnerable in their contributions, and more likely to see former adversaries as fellow human beings with legitimate concerns. The festival format thus serves as both a disarming mechanism and a trust-building tool, creating the emotional safety necessary for honest political discourse and collaborative problem-solving.



PDF THE PEOPLE
DIALOGUE



Participant Engagement Strategy:

The PDF Meru employed a deliberate multi-tiered engagement strategy designed to maximize authentic participation while ensuring inclusive representation across Meru's diverse demographic landscape. Pre-festival mobilization utilized existing networks through strategic partnerships with academic institutions (Meru National Polytechnic Student leadership body, KUSO, KEMU), civil society organizations, traditional governance structures (Njuri Ncheke), Media (Weru Tv) and grassroots movements to identify and recruit participants beyond conventional political circles.

The engagement methodology deliberately disrupted traditional power hierarchies through the "village" approach, where county commissioners, MCAs, traditional elders, and Gen Z activists participated as equals rather than in hierarchical speaker-audience formats. Cultural integration served as a critical engagement catalyst—incorporating local music, dance, and artistic expression to create psychological safety and break down formal barriers that typically inhibit honest political discourse.

Active facilitation techniques ensured balanced participation, with specific interventions to amplify marginalized voices including women, persons with disabilities, and youth. Real-time adaptation allowed facilitators to redirect conversations when domination patterns emerged, while structured small-group rotations guaranteed every participant contributed meaningfully to policy dialogue and commitment-making processes.

Logistical Innovation:

Flexible Space Design: The venue arrangement allowed for rapid reconfiguration between plenary sessions, village discussions, and cultural activities. Participants could get spaces where they would have one on one engagements with the panelists and MCAs present.

Cultural Sensitivity Protocols: Coordination with Njuri Ncheke leaders ensured traditional protocols were respected while maintaining inclusive participation. This required careful navigation of cultural expectations regarding elder recognition and youth participation.

Accessibility Coordination: Comprehensive support for PWD participants included not only physical accessibility but also communication support with sign language interpreters present in every session.

PDF AT A GLANCE

Picture this, the County Commissioner stepping out of protocol to dance alongside citizens, the County Commander joining in—even if just with a dignified salute—breaking down the invisible walls that typically separate authority from the people. This was the extraordinary atmosphere that defined the Meru County People Dialogue Festival, where formality gave way to authentic human connection and rigid hierarchies dissolved into shared purpose. Against the backdrop of Kenya's Gen Z revolution sweeping across the nation, the festival became a living testament to democracy in motion—a space where traditional leaders sat shoulder-to-shoulder with young activists, where political discourse transformed from adversarial debate to collaborative dialogue, and where the very essence of "the people" was not just spoken about but actively embodied. The energy was palpable, infectious, and transformative—creating moments that camera lenses could capture but only hearts could fully comprehend, as over 1,000 voices united under the Meru sun to reimagine what Kenyan democracy could look like when everyone truly has a seat at the table.

The two-day festival at Meru National Polytechnic transformed the educational institution into Kenya's most inclusive political arena, with over 1,000 participants representing the county's rich demographic tapestry. The deliberate participant composition reflected CMD-Kenya's commitment to authentic representation: 35% youth aged 18-35 (including vibrant Generation Z activists and university students from KUSO and KEMU), 28% women leaders and political aspirants, 15% traditional leaders anchored by the respected Njuri Ncheke council of elders, 12% elected officials including MCAs and county leadership, and 10% persons with disabilities whose voices historically remain marginalized in political discourse. This demographic intentionality created unprecedented cross-sectoral dialogue opportunities. The presence of 30+ civil society organizations, development partners from Danish political parties, media partners Weru TV and Muuga FM, and grassroots community-based organizations ensured that conversations transcended typical political elite circles. The festival's logistical coordination required managing complex stakeholder expectations while maintaining the informal, celebratory atmosphere that encouraged authentic engagement across traditional power divides.

Day One: Democratic Governance Village - Foundation Setting

Morning Session (9:00 AM - 12:30 PM): "The Meru We Want" The opening session established the festival's aspirational framework, with the County Commissioner setting an unprecedented tone by participating in traditional Meru welcome ceremonies alongside citizens rather than delivering formal speeches from elevated platforms. This symbolic gesture immediately communicated the festival's commitment to dismantling hierarchical barriers.

Real-time adaptation occurred when early conversations revealed tension between traditional governance expectations and youth demands for transparency. Facilitators introduced "perspective bridging" exercises where participants shared personal stories before engaging in policy discussions.

Key Outcomes: Emergence of shared governance priorities including transparent budget processes, inclusive development planning, and youth-elder collaboration mechanisms. The session generated the foundational commitment from Njuri Ncheke elders to champion gender equality—a breakthrough moment that required sensitive cultural navigation.

Afternoon Session (2:00 PM - 5:30 PM): "Key Priority Electoral Reforms Ahead of 2027" This technically intensive session addressed IEBC reconstitution and voter education gaps, with participants organized around thematic tables focusing on electoral integrity, voter registration, and civic education. The session's success hinged on translating complex constitutional provisions into accessible language while maintaining technical accuracy.

Logistical coordination proved critical when passionate debates about electoral integrity threatened to become adversarial.

Key Outcomes: Concrete commitments from Hon. Kiogora for Youth Service Bill development and from NCIC for facilitated dialogue between youth and government leadership. The session produced detailed electoral reform recommendations with specific implementation timelines.

Day One: Youth Village

"Gen Z and the New Kenya" (9:00 AM - 11:00 AM): Featured Meshack Kiprotich's defining declaration: "We are Generation Zero Tolerance. No more corruption, no more tribalism." This session generated the youth manifesto for political transformation and established youth leader networks for 2027 election engagement.

"The Space of Young Women in Governance" (11:30 AM - 1:00 PM): Addressed intersectional challenges facing young women in politics, with participants developing mentorship programs and support networks for female political aspirants.

Day Two: Parallel Village Sessions - Deepening Commitments

Democratic Governance Village Morning (9:00 AM - 12:30 PM): "Navigating Culture to Enhance Women Representation" This session confronted Meru County's stark reality of having only one elected female MCA among all elected positions.

The session's real-time adaptation occurred when traditional leaders initially resisted discussions about cultural barriers to women's leadership. Facilitators introduced "elder wisdom" framing, asking traditional leaders to share examples of powerful women in Meru history, which shifted the conversation from defensive to collaborative.

Key Outcomes: Three women publicly declared 2027 political aspirations, while traditional leaders committed to actively supporting women candidates. The session generated specific strategies for addressing cultural resistance to women's political participation.

Youth Village Parallel Sessions (9:00 AM - 5:30 PM) The Youth Village operated as a dynamic, high-energy space with six rotating sessions designed to maintain engagement while addressing complex governance issues from youth-centric perspectives. Sessions employed technology integration, allowing real-time polling and social media engagement while maintaining face-to-face dialogue intensity.

"The Girl Child Dilemma" (2:00 PM - 3:30 PM): Tackled FGM, teenage pregnancy, and school dropout rates through community-based solution design, generating commitments for parent-child communication programs and specialized court establishments.

"Empowering Youth Voices" (4:00 PM - 5:30 PM): Connected civic participation to budget oversight, with participants committing to train 500 youth budget monitors ahead of 2027 elections.

The festival's commitment to inclusion was demonstrated in two powerful sessions where PWD participants led discussions on constitutional implementation gaps. The logistical coordination ensured full accessibility, with sign language interpreters, accessible seating arrangements, and assistive technology support. These sessions were the session on **"Inclusive and Resilient Local Economic Development "** (3:00 PM - 4:00PM) that took place on Day one at the youth village and the session on **"Amplifying Disability Leadership for an Inclusive Democracy"** that took place at the democratic Village on Day 2.

Real-time adaptation occurred when non-PWD participants initially dominated discussions.

Key Outcomes: Hon. Morogocho's commitment to align Meru County PWD Act with national 2025 legislation by Q3 2025, and Assembly commitment to ring-fence PWD allocations to prevent misappropriation.

GOVERNANCE TRENDS IN MERU

Inclusive Governance Challenges and Opportunities

The festival exposed profound systemic barriers to women's political participation, starkly illustrated by Meru County's solitary elected female MCA among all elected positions. Conversations extensively examined the challenges faced by Governor Kawira Mwangaza, using her experience as a lens to understand broader patterns of resistance to women's leadership. Panelist Casty Micheni's account of being branded 'Kamwali' (outsider) during her 2022 campaign underscored persistent cultural resistance, while Patricia Gakii's 2027 candidacy pledge signaled emerging generational shifts in political participation.

Critical debates emerged around affirmative action mechanisms, with participants questioning whether reserved seats perpetuate dependency rather than fostering competitive leadership—a tension mirroring national-level critiques of such provisions. These discussions generated important conversations about reforming political structures to ensure genuine inclusion rather than tokenism, highlighting the need for systemic changes that address root causes of exclusion rather than merely creating alternative pathways to power.

Accountability and Transparency Mechanisms

Significant tensions emerged around transparency and accessibility of government information. A heated exchange occurred when youth criticized the Meru County website's poor accessibility for bills and documents, with local representatives defending that information is available through Kenya Library reports. This highlighted the gap between government claims of transparency and citizens' actual access to information.

The festival addressed broader accountability mechanisms, including discussions on budget transparency, procurement processes, and the need for enhanced citizen oversight of government operations.

Generational and Cultural Transformation

A defining moment came from youth leader Meshack Kiprotich's declaration: "We are Generation Zero Tolerance. No more corruption, no more tribalism. We'll be remembered as the generation that demanded better—and won." This statement encapsulated a generational commitment to transcending divisive practices that have historically fragmented Kenya's national cohesion.

The festival successfully bridged generational divides, facilitating structured dialogue between traditional leaders, current politicians, and Generation Z activists. This intergenerational engagement proved crucial in addressing both contemporary challenges and traditional governance structures.

Constitutional Governance and Rule of Law

Participants raised serious concerns about the use of extrajudicial force, highlighting it as unconstitutional and potential grounds for impeachment if sanctioned by the highest office. These discussions underscored the importance of constitutional governance and the rule of law in democratic societies.

The NADCO report generated extensive debate, with controversies about whether it should be viewed from a citizen's perspective or as another political elite negotiation. This reflected broader tensions about citizen participation in national dialogue processes.



KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMITMENTS BY STAKEHOLDERS.

Key Policy Recommendations:

Electoral Reforms:

- Fast-track IEBC reconstitution with adequate funding for 2027 election management

For government and Policymakers:

- Pass the Meru Youth Council Bill by December 2025.
- Actualize constitutional recall rights (Article 103) through parliamentary legislation
- Strengthen NCIC enforcement powers for hate speech regulation and social media monitoring
- Have a Multi-stakeholder approach to addressing FGM and teenage pregnancy in Meru.
- Implement zero-interest loan programs for PWDs through county SACCO models.
- Review family planning age regulations through legislative consultations
- Consolidate development funds to reduce fragmentation and improve transparency
- Regulate pornography access through enhanced child protection legislation
- Criminalize PWD fund diversion (amend PFM Act).

Reforming Political parties:

- Strengthen youth leagues and student congresses within parties.
- Shift from personality-based to ideology-based parties.
- Enforce policies ensuring youth, women, and PWDs get nominated.

Budget Reforms

- Criminalize PWD fund reallocation (amend PFM Act).
- Allocate 10% of county budgets to youth-led enterprises.
- Enforce 30% procurement quotas with monthly public audits.

Justice System

- Establish child abuse specialized courts with trauma-trained staff.
- Fast-track prosecution of gender-based political violence (<90 days).

For Civil Society:

- Support PWD scorecards for all 47 counties
- Train 500 youth budget monitors ahead of the 2027 elections.
- Sponsor parent-child communication labs in 200 schools.

For Communities

- Male Ally Networks: Engage 1,000 men as gender equality champions.
- Develop child protection community networks with mandatory reporting systems.

Cultural Change

- Conduct weekly radio dialogues through local stations like Muuga FM on FGM/teen pregnancy.
- Peer Education: Teen mothers lead school prevention programs.

For CMD

- Fund replication of PDF in Nakuru/Kisumu .
- #MeruWeWant Accountability Forums: Quarterly town halls tracking commitments
- Scale PDF model to all 47 counties before 2027 elections
- Create digital platform for ongoing citizen engagement between festivals
- Push for regulation of Political parties and faster disbursement of the political parties' fund.

Commitments by Stakeholders

Hon. Morogochi committed to ensuring the Meru County PWD Act alignment with national 2025 legislation by Q3 2025.

Ring-fencing of PWD allocations by Meru County Assembly to prevent misappropriation by the County Government.

NCIC committed to facilitate dialogue between youth and government leadership

Academic Institutions: Youth leaders from KUSO and KEMU pledged to increase support for independent candidates beyond "dynasty" politicians.

Hon. Kiogora committed to pushing for the development and passing of the Meru Youth Service Bill

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Key Challenges Identified

Political party participation:

Lack of Youth Representation in Leadership:

Political parties claim to support youth but often nominate older candidates, leaving young people underrepresented.

Tokenism in Politics: Leaders buy votes with money instead of engaging in meaningful dialogue or policy-driven campaigns.

Weak Political Party Structures: Parties are dominated by individuals rather than ideologies, leading to instability (e.g., Jubilee's decline post-Uhuru).

Youth Engagement Barriers:

Complaints about youth exclusion from budget processes and public participation

Implementation gaps in policies for PWDs and youth in addressing both contemporary challenges and traditional governance structures.

Democratic Governance Issues:

Use of extrajudicial force highlighted as unconstitutional

Disconnect between current leadership and younger generation needs

Limited access to government information and documents

Systemic barriers to women's political participation

Voter bribery undermines issue-based politics.

Systemic Challenges:

Fragmentation of development funds affecting transparency and enabling corruption.

Weak enforcement mechanisms for existing policies

Limited institutional capacity for inclusive governance

Cultural barriers to gender equality and inclusion

Policies (e.g., affirmative action) exist on paper but fail in practice.

Lessons Learnt

Inclusive Dialogue Works: The festival demonstrated that bringing together diverse stakeholders, including marginalized groups, traditional leaders, and youth, creates more comprehensive and sustainable solutions. This was witnessed at the youth Village where youth, seasoned politicians and traditional leaders dialogued on the state of the nation.

Generational Bridge-Building: Structured intergenerational dialogue proved effective in addressing both contemporary challenges and traditional governance structures.

Local Context Matters: County-level dialogue allows for more targeted discussions of local challenges while connecting them to national policy frameworks.

Stakeholder Ownership: When participants are involved in solution design, they are more likely to commit to implementation and accountability. Institutions like KeMU and NCIC had numerous representatives in the two villages both as panelists and participants which enabled them to get different perspectives and make commitments.

Media Partnership Essential: Local media partnership proved crucial for ongoing accountability and community engagement beyond the festival. Weru Tv's presence helped to share the information with the locals but also birthed commitments that would strengthen the recommendations post the festival.

The festival's strategic success manifested in concrete commitments that transcended typical conference rhetoric. The achievement of traditional-political-Gen Z intergenerational dialogue represented a breakthrough in Kenya's often-polarized political discourse. When sitting MCAs made specific legislative commitments in the presence of traditional leaders and youth activists, the accountability pressure created genuine transformation potential.

The festival's logistical triumph lay in creating conditions where such commitments emerged organically from dialogue rather than being imposed through external pressure. This approach generated authentic ownership among participants, increasing the likelihood of sustained implementation beyond the festival's conclusion.

WAY FORWARD

The Meru County PDF has established a transformative model that demands immediate scaling and institutionalization across Kenya's 47 counties before the 2027 elections. Building on concrete commitments from Hon. Morogochi for PWD Act alignment by Q3 2025, Hon. Kiogora's pledge for the Youth Service Bill, and NCIC's facilitation role, the next phase requires sustained accountability through regular #MeruWeWant town halls and digital engagement platforms. CMD-Kenya must prioritize replication in the other counties while training youth budget monitors and judiciary who will be establishing specialized child abuse courts with trauma-trained staff. The festival's success in bridging generational divides—from Njuri Ncheke elders to Generation Z activists—demonstrates that inclusive dialogue creates ownership and sustainable change. Critical to this momentum is leveraging media partnerships like Weru TV for monthly procurement audits and vernacular radio dialogues on social issues. With three women declaring 2027 political aspirations and youth leaders from KUSO and KEMU pledging support for independent candidates, the PDF model has proven its capacity to transform Kenya's democratic landscape by ensuring marginalized voices shape policy while dismantling systemic barriers to inclusive governance. The conversation must be sustained.

More specifically, participants made a request to CMD to:

Organize Youth Leadership Workshops: Train young aspirants on political engagement.

Monitor Party Nominations: Advocate for fair representation in 2027 elections.

National Dialogue on Reforms: Engage NCIC, IEBC, and political parties in policy reviews.

Grassroots Mobilization: Encourage voter registration and civic education.

CALL TO ACTION

The Meru County People Dialogue Festival represents a transformative investment opportunity with demonstrated returns that extend far beyond traditional development metrics. With concrete policy commitments worth millions in potential social impact—including the Meru Youth Council Bill, PWD fund protections, and specialized child abuse courts—the festival model delivers exceptional value for money while addressing Kenya's most pressing democratic challenges. The success in bridging generational divides, securing legislative commitments from sitting MCAs, and generating three new female political candidacies demonstrates scalable impact potential across all 47 counties before the critical 2027 elections. Continued investment enables replication of this proven model nationwide, potentially reaching 47,000 direct participants and millions of indirect beneficiaries through media coverage and policy implementation. The festival's unique ability to transform adversarial political discourse into collaborative problem-solving addresses root causes of Kenya's governance challenges rather than merely treating symptoms. With the Gen Z revolution reshaping Kenya's political landscape and traditional institutions seeking renewal pathways, sustained support for the PDF model positions donors at the forefront of Kenya's democratic transformation, offering measurable returns through enhanced governance, reduced political tensions, and strengthened social cohesion that benefits regional stability and economic development prospects.

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