



THE PEOPLE DIALOGUE FESTIVAL COUNTY EDITION

 **TRANS NZOIA COUNTY**

REPORT

2–3 July 2026 · Kitale National Polytechnic

Theme: “Building a Collaborative Democracy for Kenya’s Sustainable Future”



Background

The Centre for Multiparty Democracy (CMD-Kenya) established the People Dialogue Festival (PDF) as its flagship, citizen-centered platform for structured dialogue on governance, accountability and inclusive development, convened annually in Nairobi since 2018 and extended to the county level through community-based, digital and school-based dialogue formats. It was on this foundation that CMD-Kenya convened the 2026 County PDF in Trans Nzoia County, held on 2–3 July 2026 at Kitale National Polytechnic. Trans Nzoia was selected for its demographic diversity, active civic landscape, and the need to strengthen citizen engagement on electoral and governance issues ahead of the 2027 General Election, with particular emphasis on youth voter registration and civic participation.

Objectives

- Provide a structured, citizen-led platform for dialogue on democratic governance, electoral accountability and inclusive development in Trans Nzoia County.
- Localise national democratic conversations to county-level realities, ahead of Kenya's 2027 General Election.
- Strengthen citizen engagement on electoral and governance issues, with particular emphasis on youth voter registration and civic participation.
- Create space for women, persons with disabilities and marginalised communities to articulate concerns and reform priorities.

Participation and Reach

The Festival drew 714 participants registered via USSD at the point of entry, 58% male and 42% female, 78% aged between 18 and 35 years and 25% identifying as persons with disabilities; 86% were already registered voters. Trans Nzoia residents made up the majority of attendees (59%), alongside participants from over 30 counties and a wide range of institutions, including research institutions and universities, civil society organisations, government agencies, political parties and the private sector.

Voice from the Festival

“I WALKED IN UNREGISTERED. I WALKED OUT A VOTER.”

The process of registering as a voter was surprisingly quick and efficient. The attendants simply asked for some basic details — my name, ID number, and geographic details like my ward, constituency and polling station.

The geographic details were tricky for me. As a first-time voter, I simply didn't know my ward, constituency or polling station off the top of my head and had no way to fill those sections in on my own. But the attendants were gracious enough to list out the wards, constituencies and polling stations, which helped me pick the ones that sounded most familiar to me. I was only able to confidently choose my polling station because the location was one I recognised immediately — somewhere close to home.

Overall, it was very easy to register as a voter, and it was great to have a voter registration tent at an event like the PDF — it's a place where young people can ask for clarification about their ward and constituency and learn how to cast their vote properly on the day.

I'm glad I did it. Now it's your turn.

— Matthew Ngungu, first-time voter from Nairobi. Registered on-site at the PDF's IEBC voter registration tent.

Key Highlights

- Polling station simulation exercise facilitated by IEBC in collaboration with Bunge Mashinani to help first-time voters understand the voting process before election day.
- Representation by citizens drawn from about 32 counties of Kenya
- Consolidation of outcomes from the Democracy Beyond the Ballot session into a policy brief for submission to the TransNzoia County Government contributing to a more inclusive, responsive and accountable county governance while advancing the aspirations of the county's youth and citizens.

Opening Remarks

Opening remarks were delivered by Frankline Mukwanja, Executive Director of CMD-Kenya, who began by welcoming all present to the Festival. He framed the PDF as a space for participants to be heard rather than a search for firm conclusions, and challenged attendees to reflect honestly on a political culture in which citizens too often engage leaders only in search of handouts, and accept violence as part of choosing them — arguing this must give way to issue-based engagement. He spoke directly to the youth in the audience being misused by political leaders in exchange for small sums of money. He urged young people to engage seriously with the political parties present rather than voting along clan lines.

Hussein Ali, Kitale County Commissioner, Trans Nzoia County, described democracy not as a contest to be fought over but as a process of presenting policy for voters to judge. He committed to following up directly with the County Police Commander on student security concerns raised at the meeting. He cautioned young people against being misused by politicians to incite conflict, and urged them to have confidence in institutions such as IEBC and the National Police Service.

Gloria Wawera, Chief Executive Officer of the National Youth Council (NYC) — herself a young person — urged fellow youth to turn out and vote peacefully on 10 August 2027, cautioned against being misused by politicians as “goons” to cause disorder, and stressed that Kenya's economic prosperity depends on its young people, who hold the highest stake in it. She highlighted NYC's Youth Passport to Opportunity, connecting young people to training, financing and employment programmes including the Youth Fund, the National Employment Authority and the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA).

Victor Ijaka Kablani, Regional Coordinator of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), outlined the Commission's mandate across the upper Rift Valley to combat discrimination and hate speech and support peaceful cohesion, flagged a concerning rise in hate speech and incitement on social media, and urged young people to report ethnic or religious hate speech directly to the Commission (SMS 1547 or complaints@cohesion.go.ke).

Eliud Turmoi, CEC for Youth, Sports, Culture and Tourism, County Government of Trans Nzoia, expressed concern that Kenyan elections cannot be discussed without reference to violence, citing recent school unrest as an example of destructive youth behaviour. He challenged young people to choose leaders on competence and consistent engagement rather than wealth or campaign spending, and called for an end to Kenya's culture of near-permanent campaigning overshadowing the work of governance.

Keynote Address

The Festival's Chief Guest, Dr Moses Alutalala Mukhwana, Commissioner, IEBC (Voter Education, Partnership Engagement and Communication), delivered the keynote address. He challenged what he termed the “trap of apathy” among young voters, arguing that abstaining from voting does not punish politicians but instead hands them unchecked power and forfeits citizens' right to hold leaders accountable. He urged young people to refuse being paid to incite political violence, challenging any politician who asked this of them to involve their own children instead, and affirmed that Kenya belongs to its young people now — citing IEBC's employment of 12,450 young people as clerks and voter mobilisers, use of national polytechnics and universities as voter registration centres, and establishment of a dedicated youth communication hub. He closed by calling on youth to hold politicians accountable on concrete policy — youth enterprise, healthcare access, agricultural support — rather than rhetoric, and to vote according to conscience, free from inducement.





Session Summaries

Session 1: Democracy Beyond the Ballot: Strengthening Citizen Participation, Electoral Accountability and Issue-Based Politics

Hosted by CMD-Kenya and the National Youth Council. Framed around the declaration that “our turn is now” rather than youth being merely “leaders of tomorrow,” this interactive Gumzo town-hall session challenged participants to move beyond critiquing leadership towards actively shaping the governance agenda, identifying structural barriers to youth inclusion in county governance and proposing concrete solutions. Outcomes are being distilled into a policy brief for submission to the Trans Nzoia County Government.

- Barriers identified: limited finance to sustain campaigns; low confidence linked to lack of experience; patronage (“godfather”) politics; very few county leadership dockets available to youth relative to their 60%+ population share; absence of a Trans Nzoia County Youth Policy; tokenistic county support (e.g. footballs and tents); and limited awareness of opportunities such as the Nawiri Programme, county youth funds, and the PDF itself.
- Key outcomes / recommendations: adopt a dedicated County Youth Policy backed by mentorship financing; create a fair, resourced environment for youth to contest leadership; establish an accessible information platform (app or dedicated page) for opportunities; use technology and social media to connect youth to opportunities in real time; support structured grassroots youth leadership pipelines (citing Nairobi’s “Green Army”); encourage uptake of existing funding programmes; and use innovation/technology plus active citizen participation to strengthen accountability beyond the ballot.
- Key takeaway: democracy requires continuous citizen participation beyond elections — youth must be treated as stakeholders today, and empowered through policy, civic education and information access, while also taking personal responsibility to prepare for and pursue leadership.



Session 2: From Microcredit to Market Power: Aligning Public Finance, Market Policy and Climate Resilience for Trans Nzoia's Livelihoods

Hosted by the Africa Innovation and Research Centre (AIRCE). A facilitated, testimony-based dialogue across two sittings, examining why citizens and farmers remain reliant on small, short-term credit rather than durable, market-driven wealth, moving across four discussion threads: access to finance and credit; public procurement and tendering; market access, value addition and fair pricing; and the link between governance, elections and economic inclusion.

- Barriers identified: lack of collateral and reliance on short-term “token” loans; unclear tender requirements and lack of documentation/technical portfolios among youth; tenders described as pre-determined in favour of politically connected individuals despite being advertised as “open”; weak market access and value addition despite high production volumes; unequal access to training resulting in farmers being taxed before receiving support; and transactional voting (handouts over competence) entrenching leaders who do not deliver fair tenders, credit or taxation.
- Key outcomes / recommendations: promote group-based lending (registered groups of 20–25 members) as collective collateral, drawing on models from Kitui, Taita Taveta and West Pokot; establish a transparent, structured tendering framework and build youth capacity to prepare tender documentation; invest in value addition and cooperative marketing; extend training and support before, not instead of, taxation; strengthen civic education linking voting to economic outcomes; and encourage youth to verify their voter registration ahead of 2027.
- Key takeaway: economic inclusion and democratic governance are inseparable in Trans Nzoia — who is elected directly shapes who accesses tenders, credit and fair taxation, with opacity in procurement (not lack of youth ambition) identified as the central barrier to youth economic opportunity.

Session 3: Transforming Democracy Through Inclusive Governance

Hosted by CMD-Kenya, KANU, UDPK, FIDA-Kenya and the Kenya and Trans Nzoia Women Leaders Organization, with IEBC and ORPP present throughout. Moderated as a Gumzo/town-hall dialogue, the session moved from the meaning of inclusive governance through FIDA's work, constitutional grounding and accountability, pathways for youth and persons with disabilities into elective and appointive office, women's leadership, and disability employment barriers, closing with institutional responses from IEBC and ORPP.

- Hon. Dr Chris Wamalwa (the Festival's sole politician present) grounded discussion constitutionally: Article 1 vests sovereign power in the people and requires inclusion of all genders, Persons with disabilities and marginalised groups; Article 10 sets out national values of governance including rule of law, integrity, inclusivity and transparency. He cited the County Assembly's current lack of a Persons with Disabilities (PWD) representative as a specific failure, and outlined remedies under Article 118 (petitioning) and MCAs' duty to vet and reject non-inclusive CEC appointment lists; cited Articles 86 and 88 on citizens' duty to hold leaders accountable through the 2027 vote; described championing the Political Parties Bill establishing the Political Parties Fund and minimum-membership/marginalised-representation requirements; explained Trans Nzoia's estimated KES 13 billion annual revenue and challenged residents to demand spending accountability; confirmed sign language interpretation at county assemblies is a mandatory legal requirement; and, when directly challenged on his own campaign team's composition, pointed to his record as MP for Kiminini.
- Other findings: political party structures, more than legal frameworks, were identified as the primary barrier to Persons with Disabilities and women's representation, with a specific recommendation that parties be required to admit independently nominated members to safeguard Persons with Disabilities representation; a youth participant called for peers to move beyond attendance into active civic education, mentorship and knowledge of constitutional rights; Persons with Disabilities participants raised employment-specific barriers (perception, financial constraints, rejection despite qualifications); and IEBC/ORPP confirmed active list-review and funding-incentive mechanisms that depend on citizens invoking them.
- Key takeaway: constitutional frameworks for inclusion are clearly articulated, but implementation — particularly party-list manipulation — remains the central obstacle.



Session 4: Strengthening Partnerships Between Community Organizations, Government and the Private Sector

Hosted by the Emerging Leaders Foundation (ELF). A moderated panel of four community organisation leaders — including youth-led organisations such as Youth Pillars Trans Nzoia — followed by open-floor testimony, exploring how stronger partnerships, shared resources and collective action can strengthen locally led development in Trans Nzoia County.

- Speakers running children's homes and schools: two panellists spoke from direct experience running children's homes and schools, surfacing serious government-related challenges not captured elsewhere in the session. One, who runs orphan homes, described funding earmarked for orphan homes not reliably reaching them; a government office ordering one of her orphan homes to close (on grounds that the children should return home, despite government itself being unable to care for them), an order reversed only later; restrictive laws requiring donor funds to pass through government first, causing delays of two to three years and prompting donors to withdraw; schools serving the poorest communities but structured as “private” institutions being excluded from CDF-type public support; and the legal process for adopting vulnerable children being exceptionally strict. The other described running two schools serving a Kitale slum community since 2010, sustained almost entirely by a small number of external partners rather than government support, with dropout risk turning on children's inability to afford small sums such as exam registration fees.
- Barriers identified: donor dependency exposed as a structural vulnerability by recent funding cuts; government partnership undermined elsewhere by slow bureaucracy and exclusion of non-profit service providers from public support; CBOs working on similar issues struggling to collaborate due to unhealthy competition and informal legal status; and a stricter Public Benefit Organisations (PBO) Act raising the barrier to entry for informal or nascent groups.

- Key outcomes / recommendations: prioritise local resource mobilisation over donor dependency; pursue inter-organisational collaboration — pooling complementary capabilities rather than competing for the same opportunities, as shown in current joint-tender examples; ground new organisations' priorities in genuine community consultation; and seek mentorship from established organisations in the same sector.
- Key takeaway: collaboration, rather than competition, is already working in practice as the path to sustainability for community organisations, though trust and informal legal status remain limiting factors.



Cross-Cutting Themes

Several themes recurred across the Festival:

- Youth belong “now,” not just “tomorrow”: youth are stakeholders today, not merely “leaders of tomorrow.”
- Political violence and incitement: a recurring concern, with repeated calls for youth to refuse being used to incite unrest or disorder.
- Confidence in institutions: trust in bodies such as IEBC, the National Police Service and cohesion mechanisms was repeatedly framed as foundational to participation.
- Closing the information and awareness gap: on opportunities, rights and processes available to youth.
- Economic inclusion and democratic governance are inseparable: who is elected directly shapes who accesses tenders, credit and fair taxation.
- Constitutional frameworks are articulated, but implementation is the gap: inclusion frameworks are clearly set out in law, but party-list manipulation remains the central obstacle in practice.
- Collaboration over competition: already working in practice as the path to sustainability for community organisations.

Priority Recommendations

Below is the list of recommendations (grouped by stakeholders) that arose from the PDF County Edition:

YOUTH	• Verify voter registration ahead of 2027 and vote according to conscience, free from inducement. • Refuse incitement to political violence, and challenge any politician who asks this of them. • Proactively pursue leadership opportunities and civic/public participation forums, competing on merit and persistence rather than waiting to be invited. • Hold politicians accountable on concrete policy commitments — youth enterprise, healthcare, agricultural support — rather than rhetoric. • Take up existing funding programmes (e.g. the Nawiri Programme and county youth funds) to convert business ideas into funded ventures. • Track and monitor development projects and contractors in their communities to help curb corruption. • Pursue civic education, mentorship and knowledge of their constitutional rights, and engage seriously with the political parties present rather than voting along clan lines.
COUNTY GOVERNMENT	• Adopt a dedicated Trans Nzoia County Youth Policy backed by financing for leadership mentorship. • Create a fair, competitive and adequately resourced environment for youth to contest leadership positions. • Establish an accessible information platform to consolidate and communicate available leadership, funding and employment opportunities to youth. • Support structured, grassroots youth leadership pipelines, citing models such as Nairobi's "Green Army" as a possible template.
COUNTY ASSEMBLY / MCAs	• Exercise the duty to vet, and where necessary reject, CEC appointment lists that lack gender and disability inclusion (per Hon. Dr Wamalwa, Session 3).
POLITICAL PARTIES	• Require governing councils to admit independently nominated members specifically to safeguard persons-with-disability representation, rather than leaving this to internal party discretion
CIVIL SOCIETY / CBOs	• Prioritise local resource mobilisation over donor dependency, following examples such as diversifying into income-generating activities. • Pursue inter-organisational collaboration — pooling complementary capabilities — rather than competing for the same donor and tender opportunities. • Ground new organisations' priority issues in genuine community consultation, and seek mentorship from established organisations in the same sector.
ALL STAKEHOLDERS	• Sustain grassroots dialogue platforms between election cycles as long-term democratic infrastructure, not merely pre-election interventions.

Institutional Mechanisms Confirmed (IEBC & ORPP)

The items below were not recommendations put to IEBC or ORPP by participants or facilitators. They are mechanisms and commitments that IEBC and ORPP representatives themselves confirmed already exist or are already under way, offered as institutional context in Session 3 rather than as asks arising from the dialogue.

IEBC	• Party lists are reviewed against set criteria; non-compliant lists can be declined. • IEBC will carry out mapping of persons with disability ahead of the election to improve polling station accessibility. • Persons with Disabilities nominees whose promised list position is altered have the right to challenge this through the courts. • Citizens are encouraged to raise Persons with Disabilities specific electoral concerns through memoranda submitted for parliamentary consideration. • Youth-focused measures are already under way: employment of young people as clerks and voter mobilisers, use of polytechnics and universities as registration centres, and a dedicated youth communication hub.
ORPP	• Party membership can be verified or corrected via the *509# USSD service, safeguarded by the Data Protection Act. • Governing councils are required to apply the two-thirds gender rule and include Persons with Disabilities representation at all levels, from national to county. • 15% of Political Parties Fund allocation is tied to a party's representation of Special Interest Groups. • ORPP's role in the list process is limited to confirming genuine party membership; responsibility for vetting a list's inclusiveness rests with IEBC and the County Assembly.

Exhibitors and Elections Village

At the entrance to the main meeting hall, the Festival hosted a vibrant array of exhibitors, including the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), URAIA Trust, Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) and the National Youth Council of Kenya, alongside political party tents for WIPER, KANU, ODM and UDA, who used the opportunity to register new members. IEBC in collaboration with Bunge Mashinani set up a mock voting station complete with ballot boxes replicating the actual voting process expected on election day, while also registering new voters on-site.

Feedback collected from Elections Village visitors reflects a strongly positive experience: 94% found the information provided clear and helpful, 88% left with a better understanding of electoral processes and greater trust in electoral institutions, and 94% felt more confident engaging with these institutions. Notably, all visitors surveyed (100%) indicated they are more likely to participate in the 2027 General Election as a result of their visit, with half (50%) registering as voters on-site.



