



IZATION TOWARDS ...UL ELE



# Youth Inclusion in Political Processes in Kenya

White Paper

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## ***Introduction***

Political representation is a fundamental democratic principle. It ensures the voices and needs of citizens in policy development and decision-making processes. Inclusion of all groups is fundamental for every healthy and strong democracy, but youth continue to experience exclusion from the political arena, despite representing a vital demographic group in society. They are an important source for innovation and growth, and essential for addressing emerging challenges and change. Their exclusion does not only impact social development but also affects youths' lives, opportunities and future. In addition to lower quality of life, it can also lead to erosion of trust, disaffection, violence, radicalization, and strained democratic practices.

In Kenya, youth represent an important group and are vital for the country's democratic development. With the new constitutional dispensation, political participation has increasingly become a critical challenge in political processes, whereas youth faces exclusion from entering the political room which consequently hinders political engagement among the group. It has therefore become critical to strengthen the capacity of youth in Kenya to meaningfully influence and inform policy dialogue and policy development toward sustainable policy outcomes that capture the aspirations of youth.

## ***Youth underrepresentation in Kenya***

The youth population (18 – 35 years) makes up a large proportion, 75 percent, of the 47.6 million Kenyans. Despite constituting for the majority of the population, youth have struggled to find entry points to participate actively and effectively in civic life. Currently, the representation of youth in elective positions is at an average of 8% of parliamentarians. This creates a misrepresentation where youth continue to be marginalized and excluded from key policy and decision-making processes. This may in some cases lead to aggression, disenfranchisement, and lack of motivation in public policy.

Underrepresentation of youth in parliament restrict the representation of their needs and priorities from potential laws, policies, and interventions. In many countries in the world, as well as Kenya, there is a general apathy and lack of interest among youth to participate in electoral processes and political engagement after repeated political disappointment. In the recent Kenyan Election in 2022, mass voter registration among youth were record low despite their significant presence in society. Only 39.84 percent of youth registered as voters for the 2022 general elections compared to 51.7 percent in 2017. According to the report by the Kenyan Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) 2022 data, youth members make up 35 percent of the political parties.





## ***The Oslo Center's approach***

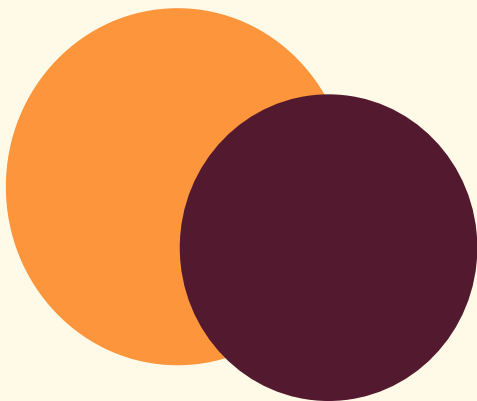
The Oslo Center's strategic goal has been to support strong democratic frameworks that respect equal representation of all citizens and support an empowered and knowledgeable citizenry. Through our projects, The Oslo Center strongly acknowledges the importance of enhancing youth's voices in society and is committed to creating avenues for increased political inclusion and engagement among youth.

One of The Oslo Center's projects *Strengthening of Youth Participation in the Political Process* in Kenya focuses on youths' policy influence in elective offices. By building synergies between party officials and youth leagues, the project assisted political parties to become more inclusive, responsive, transparent, and accountable. In the project, the main areas of engagement were: youth inclusion in party processes, youth candidates' participation in party nomination processes, youth candidate's contribution to policy development and campaign messages, and youth candidate preparation for governing responsibility.

The project engaged the youth leagues from seven major political parties in Kenya. The youth leagues identified a selected number of youths who would be trained as experts to identify the needs and gaps in political processes to develop training manuals for youth aspirant training. The youth leagues established a total of 59 youth technical experts, resulting in 153 Training of Trainers (ToTs). The knowledge gained by ToTs cascaded to youth aspirants in the various political parties and 198 youth aspirants ultimately participated in party primaries processes and the general election.

Recognising the need for meaningful participation and youth's potential peacebuilding role, TOC projects go beyond participation quotas to process engagement. In this project, youth from the seven major political parties, and other key stakeholders in the selected counties, were brought together to engage in bridgebuilding, dialogues and forums to promote peace during the electioneering period. During these activities youth developed a rallying call; "Rada Ni Peace" meaning "peace is key" in all undertaken political activities.

Digitalization and technology is an important trend where digital tools such as social media platforms are key to civic engagement and a broader democratic discourse. The Oslo Center's project and the digital peace campaign were crucial initiatives for youth from various political parties to engage in political discussions and share experiences. As an important tool to champion the initiative, social media was a key element and functioned as a medium to reach youth across the country. The digital peace campaign reached a viewership of 75,373 individuals in the span of 5 months across the various political party's Facebook pages. During these initiatives, particular focus was given to the impediments of women's political participation and electoral violence, which continues to strongly affect the political space in Kenya. From the online interaction, the digital campaign became a platform where young women could confidently present policy options, opinions and discourses. Additionally, the platform highlighted the significance the project made in creating safe space for young women to identify solutions to strengthen their active political involvement.



## Outcomes

One of the main outcomes of the TOC engagement was the strengthening of youth leagues' roles as key organs in enhancing the representation and participation of youth within political parties. This was achieved through the institutionalization of youth leagues by assisting the youth leadership in developing policy documents, such as youth charters and training manuals, and by enhancing their capacity in the political and electoral processes. Through this intervention, the youth leagues cascaded the knowledge to youth aspirants to participate effectively in the electoral processes. This increased the number of youth candidates participating in the electoral process, strengthening their representation and presence in elected positions.

*“Overcoming negative influence on oneself- self-doubt, self-pity, and self-sabotage are critical in the achievement of change and progress. The Oslo Center, through the youth program, assisted me and other youths overcome these obstacles and begin to have a positive mindset that enabled me to pursue my political ambitions.”*

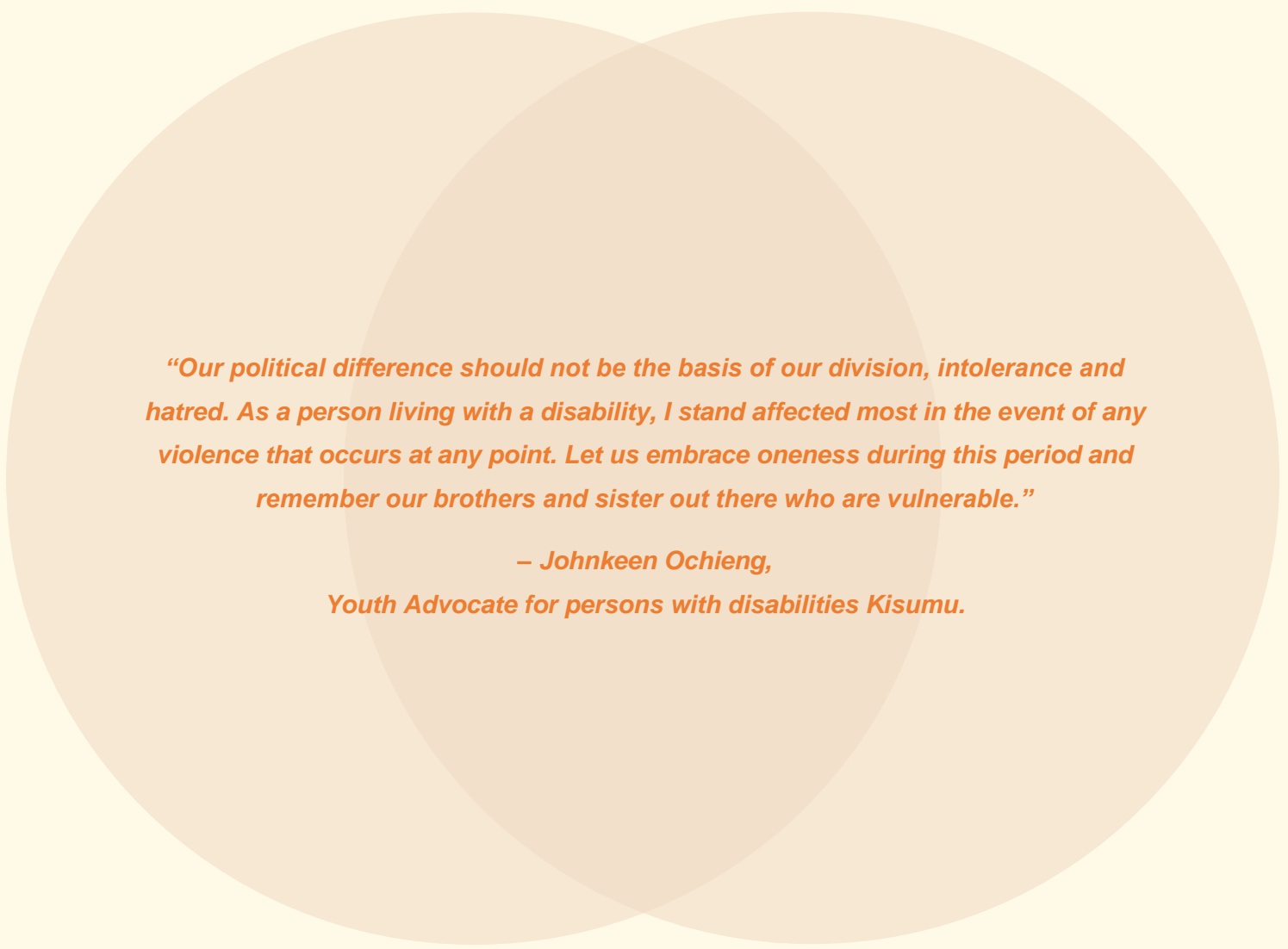
*– Caroline Cherono, Youth Aspirant Uasin Gishu County.*

Among TOCs beneficiaries was Linet Cepkorir alias “Toto”. As a young woman in Kenya, Linet has faced several challenges in her political journey. Today, Linet is the youngest female member of parliament to be elected in the 2022 General Elections after garnering 242,775 votes. Linet was trained on electoral processes, including on the legal framework around elections, campaign messaging and voter mobilization. Through this engagement, Linet's political skills were sharpened, improving her electability, which resulted in her winning the party primaries and the 2022 general elections, and become the first-ever elected female member of parliament at age 24. Being part of The Oslo Center's engagement has been a vital opportunity for Linet to rise in the political environment. Linet highlights especially the technical support as instrumental for her to navigate the political terrain. The project has also motivated her to encourage other young women to effectively participate in elective positions. Looking at where she is now, she highlights that during her time as the youngest parliamentarian she will prioritize and continue to fight for the issues of women, youth, and people with disabilities.

*“For a long time, women and youth have been undermined when seeking elective positions across the country. This is a narrative we are seeking to turn around and enable all of us to compete on an even playground based on ideas, and ideologies.”*

*- Linet Chepkorir*

A momentous event that reflects the importance of working with youth inclusion in political is the recent Presidential Election in Kenya. The Kenyan Presidential Election 2022 has been regarded as largely peaceful and transparent. This can be seen as a result of youth taking the center stage in advocating for peaceful campaigns and elections. In the various counties where TOC works, youth from across the political spectre took an oath of promoting peace and shunning away from any form of violence. In most of the sessions, the zeal and yearning from the youth to have peaceful campaigns and election was explicit to the degree that the majority of participants contributed immensely to the messaging for peace. The creativity that was depicted in these campaigns was tremendous. An initiative for the peace messaging included two key hashtags on social media to rally fellow young people to keep and maintain peace; “#RadaNiPeace” and “#SiasaSiUhasama.”



*“Our political difference should not be the basis of our division, intolerance and hatred. As a person living with a disability, I stand affected most in the event of any violence that occurs at any point. Let us embrace oneness during this period and remember our brothers and sister out there who are vulnerable.”*

*– Johnkeen Ochieng,  
Youth Advocate for persons with disabilities Kisumu.*







## ***Recommendations***

1. For political parties to establish mechanisms and structures of continuous engagement that involve the youth constructively and enhance their capacities to meaningfully engage in political processes, policy development, and governance.
2. For donors to support youth's use of technology and particularly social media to promote peace and policy based political debate.
3. Young people in political parties must ensure that youth projects involve youths at the grassroots level. They must be sensitive to local stakeholders and ensure that the policies and issues are discussed locally.
4. Political parties need to become more responsive in creating an enabling environment for youth to influence decision-making from the sub-national and national levels.

