

Strengthening Civil Society in Kenya



Youth leaders received training in how to lead community discussions on the new Constitution and other civic education. USAID partners with leaders from all levels of government and civil society to build strong systems, processes, and institutions that support the devolution process.

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Civil Society FY 2015 Budget: \$2.25 million

Activities:

- Yetu (Kiswahili for “our”) Initiative
- Strengthening Community Resilience Against Violent Extremism
- Shiriki (Kiswahili for “participate”)
- URAIA Trust Civic Education Program

Key Partners:

- Aga Khan Foundation
- Act Change Transform
- Keeping Alive Societies Hope (KASH)
- URAIA Trust

OVERVIEW

An active, thriving civil society is essential to democracy. The thousands of civil society organizations in Kenya keep the public informed, mobilize communities to take action, and provide services in many sectors. Civil society organizations (CSOs) also play a critical role in government oversight, by promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen voice in government.

PROGRAM AREAS

At present, USAID is helping key organizations build their capacity to effectively advocate for local priorities in areas such as health, education, women’s rights, land, justice and security, as well as supporting civic education and active participation in local government.

USAID also partners closely with civil society, the US State Department, and other diplomatic missions in Kenya to urge the Kenyan government to maintain an open and free space for civic engagement.

Civil Society Strengthening

USAID is supporting several innovative, targeted initiatives to enhance the capacity of Kenyan civil society where it is most needed.

In FY2015, the Yetu initiative (“Our Initiative” in Kiswahili) launched its e-philanthropy platform and started its first communication campaign with a local organization. The e-philanthropy platform is the first of its kind in Africa, allowing Kenyans to donate online or through mobile money to a number of philanthropic causes. Yetu’s first strategic communication campaign was to encourage Kenyans to support a local organization that provides story books for children in schools around the country. The campaign uses social media and partnerships with traditional media to amplify the message nationwide.

CSOs are a powerful avenue for constructive citizen engagement, especially in marginalized regions, such as Kenya’s six coastal counties. USAID’s Strengthening Community Resilience against Extremism (SCORE) is working in these counties to build the capacity of local organizations to undertake activities to address the drivers of violent extremism and conflict in their local areas. Another USAID activity, *Shiriki*, works through local CSOs in four coastal counties to increase citizen participation in local government. *Shiriki*, which means “participate” in Kiswahili, will provide training to selected civil society organizations in each county working in a range of sectors, such as health, education, and human rights, to improve their ability to lead public participation and advocacy initiatives.

Civic Education

Kenyan civil society has long been involved in civic and voter education. The Uraia Trust Civic Education Program brings together 57 local CSOs to train and deploy civic educators and disseminate a national civic education curriculum in all 47 counties of Kenya. Before the 2013

election, the program used a national civic education curriculum called “The Citizen Handbook,” developed in collaboration with the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), to disseminate accurate and timely information on electoral process and system.

In support of the successful implementation of devolution, Uraia Trust continues to deliver civic education, with a focus on citizens’ participation in the implementation of devolution and other Constitutional reforms as well as promoting social accountability at the county level. Uraia focuses on enhancing the participation of previously excluded groups, such as women, people with disabilities, and minorities. Topics include an overview of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 and what it seeks to achieve, understanding devolution and the units of devolved government, and citizen participation.

USAID’S CIVIL SOCIETY IMPACT

In response to proposed restrictive amendments to Kenya’s Public Benefits Organizations (PBO) Act that were proposed in October 2013, civil society groups launched an advocacy effort to engage with government and the public. Development partners, including USAID and the US Ambassador, supported this effort through private meetings with Government of Kenya interlocutors, and in public comments. Sustained advocacy led to a dialogue meeting called by the National Assembly’s Justice and Legal Affairs Committee in collaboration with the Development Partners Group. USAID led these efforts. This dialogue meeting led to changes in the draft amendments which significantly reduced their potential negative impact, including dropping a cap on foreign funding. USAID continues to support civil society networks and the Government of Kenya with the goal of ensuring a free and open space for civic dialogue and civil society action in Kenya.

The original target number of CSO’s receiving USG assistance in advocacy interventions in 2015 was 7024, in fact during 2015 12,315 organizations were engaged. The target was exceeded for two key reasons: 1) a December 2014 DQA activity helped to streamline and improve data collection tools and frequency, allowing for a more accurate account of participants and; 2) the USAID YYC activity was extended for six months, providing more implementation time and greater results than anticipated. In addition, high performing bungenes (local youth parliaments) motivated other networks and an additional four thousand bungenes engaged in advocacy interventions. Bungenes also received tremendous support from the Government of Kenya, along with other partners, related to advocacy interventions.