



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
EAST & HORN OF AFRICA

Gender Forum

Perspectives on Gender Equality

The Green Political Foundation

Gender Forum held in Isiolo on 2nd February 2014

Isiolo women call for inclusion in County Budgeting

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While the Constitution of Kenya 2010 has very progressive benchmarks for ensuring participation in decision making, especially for women, who for a long time have been excluded from these processes, the Isiolo County woman remains largely invisible. Over 100 participants at the Gender Forum held in Isiolo on Sunday 2nd February 2014 urged the leadership to involve women in county budgeting process in line with Article 21 (3) of the Constitution which provides that “all State organs and ... public officers have the duty to address the needs of vulnerable groups within society, including women...” Isiolo residents are disappointed that concerns of women were not taken into account in the 2013/14 budgeting process, prompting the convening of the forum. As one participant stated “We expect that issues of women will be factored in the 2014/15 budget,” confirming that women will organise to position themselves in the current budget process.

The Heinrich Boell Stiftung partnered with Baliti FM, a local community radio station and the Foundation for Pastoralist Women (FOPAWO), a local NGO to convene the Forum which drew the interest and participation of local leaders, development agencies, advocacy organisations including the League of Women Pastoralists, the Isiolo Youth Network among others. Over 100 male and female participants attended, women representing each corner of the vast Isiolo County, and many others reached through live broadcast on 102.7 Baliti FM. The radio presenters observed that youth and women voices in governance are not given prominence and they expressed satisfaction that they could amplify them through the radio.

Admitting that women had largely been left out of the 2013/14 budget, Mr Hassan Kumpa, Member of County Assembly representing Cherab Ward promised the forum that there will be deliberate efforts to ensure that women effectively participated in the budget processes, this year. His sentiments were echoed by many at the forum, including listeners who participated through mobile phone texts (sms), with consensus that concrete strategies need to be put in place by all the relevant institutions to make sure that concerns and priorities of women were adequately captured in the 2014/15 budget.

Speaking during the event, the County's Woman Representative Ms Tiyah Ali Galgalo urged the county government to fully include women in the budget making process who would in turn identify projects that will engage thousands of idle youth who have resorted to chewing Khat all day in the name of passing time.

"The County leadership must at once develop strategies to ensure that women at all levels are effectively involved in budgeting" said Ms Galgalo adding that this was the only way to ensure that development planning was purposeful, since women were the backbone of the Isiolo economy.

"It is a high time that the budgets reflected the real concerns of women in the county and prioritised them. These include issues related to reproductive health, provision of water, trade and marketing infrastructure amongst others," added Sadia Hajj Abdi, a nominated member of the County Assembly. Echoing this, one of the panellists, Ms Norah Ringera reminded the forum of women's worth: "The economy is controlled by women, they sell milk, foodstuffs, make beads, they own schools ... they make great managers, and hence should be involved in budgeting so as to support their projects."

According to the Kenya integrated Household Baseline Survey 2011, 72 per cent of Isiolo's population is poor, a larger percentage being women. Ms Zeinab Kina, one of the village women representatives, expressed her disappointment in the Isiolo County leadership for losing touch with the electorate since their election to office. According to her, most of the promises particularly on involvement and inclusion of women in development planning have not been fulfilled.

And Ms Mumina Konso, one of the panellists, criticised most county governments across the country for "lack of focus on priorities that were of concern to women, wasting the limited resources on extravagant expenses related to overseas trips and purchase of fuel guzzlers". "Women need to be involved in the county budgeting processes because they will focus more on issues related to education, environment, water and health, which are key development priorities," she said.

One of the recommendations by the women was to work towards electing their own during elections. Ms Sadia Hajj Abdi, a nominated Member of County Assembly recounted: "The nominated women county assembly members face difficulties pushing the women agenda since the elected members perceive themselves as having a stronger mandate, hence we need to elect our own."

Isiolo remains a highly patriarchal and traditional setup with cultural values largely dictating gender perceptions. The Borana for example believe that women ought not to "carry the burden" of decision making as was succinctly put by the Chairman of the Borana Council of Elders. Ironically, men of this community feel they value their women by shielding them from mainstream leadership yet admit that they sometimes have to consult their female family members in private to help them take tough decisions in conflict mediation.

Most male participants who spoke at the forum supported the recommendation that cultural traditions that inhibit women development and growth be done away with. The Turkana community is in the lead in this regard, as demonstrated by its Council of Elders which includes a few women. One of the women, Ms Grace Lolim is appointed Secretary/Coordinator, something that would not have been thought of in the olden days. According to Mr Nicholas Asuran, the Chairperson of the Turkana Council of Elders, this ensures that the voice of women was present during in all their deliberations and was effectively considered in final decision making.

In support of this move, Mr Hassan Guyo Shano, a nominated Member of County Assembly, said: "Men should forget about the misleading taboos that violate the right of women to participate in decision making that affects the community."

The forum was a success in providing a safe space to discuss women's concerns and expectations in taking part in County planning and budgeting. This Gender Forum was unique in enabling male and female participants to dialogue on women's agenda and participation. However, one participant was quick to sound a warning that women must remain vigilant to claim their rights and take up their spaces on the decision making table. "Men seem to say the right thing while in these meetings but fail to demonstrate their commitment to support women when out there," said one female participant who had travelled from Kinna, a far flung part of Isiolo.

Many participants expressed their satisfaction with the day's deliberations and urged the leadership to hold more of such forums. "if we had such forums then a mutual understanding would have been long achieved", Ms Zahra Godana, a participant at the forum said, adding: "We are grateful for the opportunity to have sat down with men and expressed our concerns and expectations. The commitment by the Members of the County Assembly that they will ensure women are more visibly involved in this year's budget is promising and we are hopeful that more such forums can be organised to emphasise the importance of including women when making important decisions that concern the county".