

## Women's Role in Governance at County Level

### The Heinrich Boell Foundation's Travelling Gender Forum



The monthly Gender Forum took place in Kajiado East Constituency, Kajiado County on the 31st October 2014.

The constituency broke all Maasai custom norms by electing the first woman **MP, Hon. Peris Tobiko** (left) as their representative in Parliament. Tobiko beat all the men to clinch the ticket in this very patriarchal community.

“Women must not to shy away from aiming for elective political seats”, urged the guest speaker, the former nominated **MP, Sophia Abdi Nur**. In 1997, Ms. Abdi

Nur became the first woman in Kenya's North Eastern Province to vie for a political seat when she ran for parliament

representing Ijara district. She lost the race but didn't give up. She was nominated in 2008 and became the first woman member of parliament from her region.

Ms. Abdi Nur while answering questions from the audience pointed out that the belief that women are not supposed to hold top positions in the society is still rife in the county and advised women to shun such notions. She encouraged women not to give up when they lose in a political race. "Even when I lost that race, I continued my work for women's rights and did not give up my political aspirations. I joined politics because I wanted to elevate the region's issues to the national level and to advocate for women's issues. Some of the policies that were crucial to the development of the region needed political will. I could still do that even if I was not elected into Parliament", she said.

The Maasai community who are the majority of voters in Kajiado East Constituency are just like Ms. Abdi Nur's own conservative Somali community. The two communities still discourage women from contesting elective posts. But the Gender Forum which included about 150 men and women from all walks of life heard that the new constitution allows women to vie for elective office.

However, contributing from the floor many of the audience members stated that a major obstacle is the political culture of handouts and costly campaigns. Women are disadvantaged as the process largely favours wealthier candidates – often men.



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The **Gender Forum** took place at Sidai Hotel in the centre of Kitengela Town, Kajiado East and was organised in conjunction with a project partner, The League of Kenya Women Voters (LKWV).

The Executive Director of LKWV, **Sarah Muhoya**, said, “Women keep away from the top seats because of the electorate's voting attitude. All elected county assembly members are men in this constituency, hence it is only through affirmative action that we have a few women”.

But she said LKWV is keen to see that this is no longer the case and hence her organisation with support from Heinrich Boll Foundation is lending support to women MPs in each of the 16 constituencies in the country that elected a woman as a Member of Parliament from a dual gender elective post. This would increase their visibility and effectiveness in championing transformative gender policies.

The Heinrich Boell Foundation's Gender Component contributes to the transformation of gender relations in Kenya and the region in order to realize human rights for all members of society. Our main focus areas enhance women's effective political participation, through regional learning, capacity building and mentorship of female leaders, studies and documentation of experiences of women leaders. We together with our partners mobilize strong male constituencies in Kenya to combat and prevent gender based violence and create opportunities for regional cross-learning to champion positive masculinity. By providing platforms for public dialogue this enhances understanding of gendered dimensions of social and political issues in Kenya and the region. We also build knowledge and facilitate discourse on gender diversity.

The Gender Forum is a monthly public dialogue convened by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung since 2001, encouraging dialogue on pertinent national social issues with a gendered lens. It brings together scholars, law makers and implementers, civil activists, government institutions, students and the general public, aiming at increasing knowledge and effectiveness of policy and programmes. The forum is convened in Nairobi, in Kisumu (in conjunction with Kenya Female Advisory Organization KEFEADO) and it travels around Kenya in response to County interests.