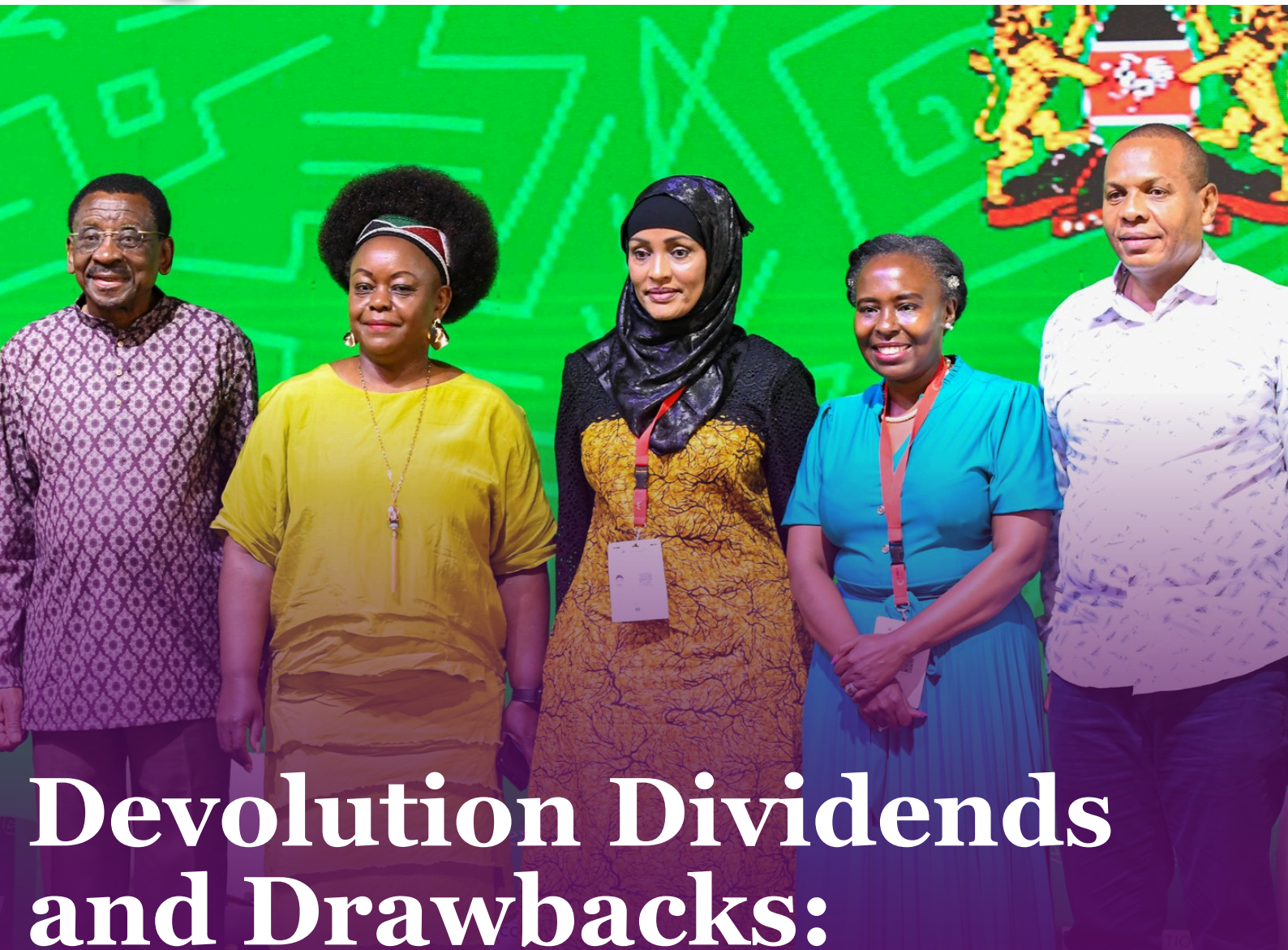




EQUALITY BULLETIN



Devolution Dividends and Drawbacks:

Progress made, but Kenya's most vulnerable still pay the price of exclusion

HOMA BAY — Kenya's devolution journey is showing results—but the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) says some counties are still dropping the ball on equality and inclusion.

At the 2025 Devolution Conference, NGEC Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa told a high-level panel that while women's representation in county assemblies has risen and some counties comply with the two-thirds gender rule, major gaps remain. Youth, persons with disabilities, and other special interest groups continue to be underrepresented.

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Wired for Change: NGEC Marks a Decade of Digital Empowerment for Indigenous Women

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A Message from the Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to the **21st edition** of the Equality Bulletin, which highlights our experience and reflections from the **2025 Devolution Conference in Homa Bay County**.

This issue captures key lessons and takeaways from the conference, both those we shared and those we learnt. We engaged deeply with county governments, civil society, the private sector, and citizens on the practical steps needed to make devolution more inclusive. From policy dialogues to grassroots conversations at our information booth, the conference reaffirmed the importance of centering equality and non-discrimination in all aspects of public service.

Beyond the conference, this edition also features updates on the Commission's wider initiatives, partnerships, and engagements across the country. It gives you a window into the momentum we are building to advance our constitutional mandate.

We invite you to read, reflect, and engage with the work we continue to do together.



Purity Ngina, PhD, MBS

Chief Executive Officer

National Gender and Equality Commission

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Pay What You Owe, NGEK tells Counties over AGPO



Commissioner Mbithuka Nzomo engages participants during the session

As the 2025 Devolution Conference concluded in Homa Bay, a message delivered on Day One continues to echo with urgency and clarity: county and national governments must stop delaying payments owed to youth, women, and persons with disabilities under the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) programme.

This strong call came through from Commissioner Mbithuka Nzomo, during a session hosted by Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO). Frustrated by persistent bottlenecks facing youth-led enterprises, he spoke plainly about the human cost of delayed payments and hollow implementation.

“Young people are delivering on AGPO contracts but are being left in debt and despair because payments don’t come through. This is no longer a matter of administration. It’s an accountability issue,” said Commissioner Mbithuka.

He drew directly from the Commission’s engagement with youth across Kenya, citing examples of stalled businesses and shrinking trust in public procurement systems. While AGPO was designed to unlock opportunities for special interest groups, he said, failure to pay suppliers on time is undercutting its very purpose.

“Digitization can be a game changer, but only if it comes with real support systems,” he added. “We need to pair

digital procurement systems with ICT mentorship and financial safeguards that protect small businesses run by youth, women and persons with disabilities.”

The session took place on Good Governance Day, officially opened by President William Ruto, and focused on advancing transparency, participation and inclusive development in counties. NGEK’s presence was strong and visible throughout the day, led by Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa. Commissioners Thomas Koyier and Caroline Lentupuru were also present during the SHOFCO session, underscoring the Commission’s collective focus on accountability in procurement.

The Commission has consistently advocated for the full and substantive implementation of AGPO, not as a token programme, but as a legally grounded instrument for economic inclusion. That means not only awarding contracts fairly but ensuring payments are timely, predictable and protected from political or bureaucratic interference.

The call aligns with NGEK’s broader oversight role, which includes monitoring how counties comply with constitutional obligations on equality, inclusion and fair treatment of special interest groups. At the conference, the Commission made clear that it would continue pressing for deeper reforms,

including dedicated budget lines for SIG programmes, enforcement mechanisms for AGPO obligations, and public tracking tools to measure compliance.

“Counties cannot say they are empowering youth or women while failing to honour basic commitments like payment for services already delivered,” Commissioner Mbithuka said. “It’s time to stop managing inequality and start correcting it.”

As counties return to business after the conference, the Commission’s message stands as a clear benchmark: inclusion must be real, not rhetorical—and that starts with paying what is owed.



A delegate makes a point during the event

Decoding Dyslexia: Nairobi Summit Champions Inclusive Classrooms

Forum focuses on shifting stigma to strength through inclusive education

Nairobi, Kenya — The Dyslexia Rising Africa Conference 2025 officially opened today at the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), bringing together educators, researchers, policymakers, and advocates from across Africa to address dyslexia and its impact on learning.

Themed “Rewriting the Neurodiversity Narrative: From Stigma to Strength”, the conference is co-hosted by KISE and Bloom Dyslexia Centre and aims to raise public awareness, promote

evidence-based solutions, and advocate for inclusive education systems that embrace learners with dyslexia.

Speaking at the event, National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) Commissioner Mbithuka Nzomo emphasised the need for systemic reform: “Inclusion is not a favour, it is a right. Learners with dyslexia deserve early screening, teachers who are well-trained, and strong parental support.”



Commissioner Mbithuka Nzomo speaking at the event

The forum provides a platform where lived experiences intersect with research and policy, highlighting the need for early interventions, teacher capacity-building, and stronger parental involvement.

New Data Spurs Call for Targeted County Action on Women and Children



Mr. Kuria Paul moderates a session during the 2025 Devolution Conference.

The Commission (NGEC) joined development partners and government leaders at the 2025 Devolution Conference to mark a major step forward in the fight for equity and inclusion. On Day 3 of the conference, a high-level session convened by UNICEF saw the launch of two national reports that bring clarity and urgency to long-standing social challenges. The first report, focused on child poverty, revealed that 55 percent of children in Kenya are experiencing multidimensional poverty. This goes beyond income to reflect deprivations in health, nutrition, education, shelter and protection.

The findings are especially stark in counties like Mandera, Turkana, Wajir, Samburu and Tana River, where nine in ten children lack at least three critical necessities for their wellbeing. These insights are a wake-up call for stronger county-level investments in children's health, education and protection systems.

The second report examines the state of women's empowerment in Kenya and shows that only 40.6 percent of women meet the criteria for being classified as empowered. It highlights persistent inequalities in education, income, decision-making power and access to resources.

The reports were jointly unveiled by Principal Secretary for Economic Planning Dr. Bonface Makokha and NGEN CEO Dr. Purity Ngina. Their release comes at a time when NGEN has been pushing for more accurate data to guide policy on equality and inclusion, especially at the county level where devolved functions touch most directly on the lives of women, children and other vulnerable groups.

For the Commission, participating in this session was not only timely but also strategic. The data strengthens NGEN's mandate to monitor progress on gender equality and special interest groups, and it provides an essential evidence base to inform county planning, budgeting and service delivery.

The Commission continues to advocate for budgeting practices that go beyond compliance to truly reflect the realities faced by women and children in every part of the country.



Principal Secretary for Economic Planning Dr. Bonface Makokha joins NGEN CEO Dr. Purity Ngina in unveiling the report.

As counties begin preparing their medium-term plans and budgets, NGEN calls on county governments to adopt the insights from these reports and align their investments with the real needs of their most vulnerable populations. Data without action is wasted potential.

These reports offer a clear picture of what needs to change. The task ahead is to translate that into meaningful outcomes on the ground.

NGEC, Huduma Kenya in Talks to Set Up Information Desks Nationwide

The Commission (NGEC) has initiated discussions with the Huduma Kenya Secretariat to establish NGEN information desks in select Huduma Centres across the country. The move is part of the Commission's efforts to bring its services closer to the people and enhance public access to information on equality, inclusion, and the rights of special interest groups.

Huduma Kenya is a Vision 2030 flagship programme with the mandate to transform public service delivery. It provides citizens with efficient and citizen-focused services through One-Stop-Shop service centres located nationwide.

Technical teams from both NGEN and the Huduma Kenya Secretariat recently held a working session to firm up the modalities of the proposed partnership.



Technical teams from NGEN and the Huduma Kenya Secretariat pose for a group photograph during their engagement

The planned deployment of NGEN desks will provide citizens with direct access to information, referral services, and advisory support on matters related to gender equality and non-discrimination. The initiative also aligns with the shared commitment of both institutions to improve access, accountability, and service delivery at the grassroots.

Highway of Horror: Maai Mahiu at Centre of Child Trafficking Crisis

The National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) has warned of an alarming rise in child trafficking in Maai Mahiu, a transit town along the busy Nairobi-Nakuru highway.

At a meeting convened by NGEN's Nakuru

Regional Office, partners from Nakuru Town East and West resolved to petition the county government for urgent action, including accelerated investigations, prosecution of perpetrators, and

stronger safeguards for vulnerable children.

Civil society and child protection officers described Maai Mahiu as a trafficking hotspot, with organised networks preying on poverty and weak enforcement. NGEN reaffirmed its constitutional mandate to protect children and urged communities to unite in ending the scourge.

» CONTINUATION

Devolution Dilemma: Counties Caught Between Promise and Reality

At the 2025 Devolution Conference in Homa Bay County, the Commission (NGEC) carved out a strong presence, using every platform, from the plenary hall to side sessions, to press for deeper accountability on equality and inclusion within county governments. The Commission's message was consistent: devolution has delivered real gains, but glaring gaps still threaten its promise for the most vulnerable.

During a key session on human rights and social justice, NGE Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa joined a high-level panel that included Siaya Governor James Orengo, MP Millie Odhiambo, Senator Danson Mungatana, Hussein Khalid of VOCAL Africa, and Ruth Okul of Young Women Leaders Connect. The discussion focused on how counties are measuring up to the challenge of protecting rights and advancing social justice on the ground.

The Chairperson gave a pointed assessment of how far counties have come—and how far they still need to go. She focused on Article 10 of the Constitution, which commits all public institutions to uphold equity, inclusion, human dignity, and non-discrimination. While some counties have embraced this mandate, the Chairperson noted that others are falling behind, especially when it comes to the representation of special interest groups (SIGs), access to services, and the resourcing of institutions tasked with advancing inclusion.

There are signs of progress. Women's presence in county assemblies has grown steadily, increasing from 82 MCAs in 2013 to 115 in 2022. However, leadership roles have declined. Only two counties had female Speakers in 2022, down from seven in 2017. Youth representation is also inching forward, though inconsistently. While more young people were elected as MCAs in 2022,



Rehema Jaldesa engages in a high-level panel alongside Governor James Orengo, MP Millie Odhiambo, Senator Danson Mungatana, Hussein Khalid of VOCAL Africa, and Ruth Okul of Young Women Leaders Connect.

the number of young women declined from 18 to 14. On disability, 21 counties still have no representation of persons with disabilities in their assemblies, a critical failure to meet inclusion standards.

In the executive, a few counties are setting the pace. Kiambu, Kilifi, and Kirinyaga have not only complied with the two-thirds gender principle but have also assigned women to powerful dockets like finance and planning. On the other hand, some counties are still non-compliant, either because they have too few departments or are entangled in legal disputes.



Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa

Access to basic services continues to reflect deep inequality. While nearly every household in Nairobi uses an improved source of water, in Kitui only 21 percent do. Urban households tend to live within a 30-minute walk of a water source, but in Samburu, only 29 percent have that -

access. Health indicators like antenatal care and facility-based deliveries have improved overall, though counties such as Turkana, Tana River, and Mandera continue to lag behind.

Most counties now have at least one policy focused on SIGs, with Taita Taveta leading in this area. Still, the Chairperson warned that many of these policies are undermined by weak funding and limited institutional support.



Rehema Jaldesa with Gov. James Orengo, MP Millie Odhiambo, Sen. Danson Mungatana, Hussein Khalid, and Ruth Okul after the panel.

To push counties toward compliance, NGE has deployed a suite of tools. These include Equality and Inclusion Technical Working Groups, structured engagement platforms, policy support for county assemblies, and handbooks to guide MCAs.

The Usawa Awards, an annual county ranking based on performance in inclusion, have become a signature initiative. Nairobi topped the rankings in 2024.

Other support tools include guidelines on gender-responsive budgeting, model policies on gender-based violence, and standards for inclusion in vocational training institutions. NGE is also piloting digital dashboards that allow the public to track how counties are performing on inclusion indicators.

"Devolution was never about simply bringing government closer in distance. It was about bringing justice, inclusion, and accountability closer to the people," Jaldesa said.

Looking ahead, the Commission is calling on counties to go beyond symbolic gestures. It wants concrete measures: increased representation of vulnerable groups, ring-fenced funding for SIG programs, enforceable county legislation, and robust GBV response systems. NGE is also advocating for regular social audits and the expansion of safe spaces such as shelters for survivors.

NGEC Booth Shares Rich Insights at Devolution Conference

At the sidelines of the 2025 Devolution Conference in Homa Bay County, the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) mounted a vibrant information booth at Homa Bay High School, drawing steady interest from members of the public, private sector professionals, and representatives of county and national government institutions.

Throughout the event, the Commission undertook targeted public education by disseminating its key publications on gender equality, inclusion, and the rights of special interest groups. These included simplified guides, brochures, research briefs, and strategic frameworks designed to help both institutions and individuals understand and engage with the Commission's mandate.



NGEC information booth at Homa Bay High School

Staff at the booth fielded a wide range of questions from visitors, including how NGEK monitors compliance with equality laws, the steps citizens can take when they witness discrimination, and what tools are available to support inclusive governance. Frequently asked questions were handled promptly, and materials were provided in both English and Kiswahili to ensure accessibility.

The Commission's leadership, including the Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa, Vice Chairperson Commissioner Thomas Koyier, Commissioners, and the CEO, made a point of visiting the booth to check on progress and interact directly with visitors.



NGEC's Alice Njeri engaging students at the information booth

Their presence affirmed the Commission's commitment to public engagement and accountability, and gave the public a chance to share feedback and suggestions. The high level of foot traffic and interest underscored the relevance of NGEK's work and the value of direct community outreach during national forums like the Devolution Conference.

Shadows of Silence: Communities Unite in Homa Bay to Combat Gender-Based Violence

Conference highlights urgent need for stronger survivor support, justice, and prevention mechanisms

HOMA BAY – A two-day Gender-Based Violence (GBV) conference convened in Homa Bay has cast a sobering spotlight on the silent epidemic of sexual violence sweeping through communities across western Kenya. Under the theme "Strengthening Community Action Against GBV: Prevention, Protection and Response," the forum brought together more than 35 stakeholders, including the National Police Service, teachers, children's officers, civil society organisations, and paralegals, in an urgent call for united action.

The conference, attended by the Kisumu Regional Office of the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), revealed disturbing trends: defilement and rape cases are on the rise, yet survivors remain trapped in a cycle of fear, stigma, and silence. Reporting rates are dismally low, enforcement is weak, perpetrators



Stakeholders engage during the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) conference convened in Homa Bay

often move unchecked between communities, and the absence of safe shelters leaves victims exposed to further harm.

"We cannot continue to watch survivors suffer in silence while perpetrators walk freely. Communities, duty-bearers, and policymakers must act in unison to strengthen prevention, deliver justice, and restore dignity to those affected," said Davis Okeyo from NGEK during the deliberations.

Stakeholders painted a stark picture of the systemic gaps frustrating the fight against GBV. Survivors often find themselves without medical, psychosocial, or legal support. In some instances, cultural taboos and family pressure push victims to remain quiet, allowing abusers to escape accountability.

Children's officers reported cases where young survivors were withdrawn from school to avoid

public shame, only deepening their trauma. Civil society groups noted that inadequate coordination among law enforcement, health providers, and community structures continues to weaken response efforts.

NGEK's participation in the Homa Bay conference is part of its broader mission to foster equality and inclusivity and to ensure no Kenyan is left behind due to discrimination or violence.

Stakeholders called for urgent interventions: expanding safe shelters, training law enforcement on survivor-sensitive handling of cases, establishing rapid response systems in rural areas, and scaling up community awareness campaigns to dismantle stigma.

Indigenous Women Mark 10 Years of Progress as NGEC Champions Digital Inclusion

The Commission (NGEC) joined Indigenous women leaders, community champions and rights advocates in Laikipia County to mark the 10th anniversary of the Indigenous Women Council (IWC), an event that also coincided with the global commemoration of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on 9th August 2025.

Hosted by the Samburu Women Trust under the theme “10 Years, 10,000+ Women Voices,” the celebration brought together voices from across Kenya to reflect on a decade of activism, policy engagement and leadership by Indigenous women. The Commission was represented by Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa and Commissioner Caroline Lentupuru, both of whom have deep roots in the pastoralist and Indigenous women's movement.

In her keynote address titled “A Decade of Courage: Indigenous Women and Girls Rising to Shape Policy and Influence Inclusion,” Hon. Jaldesa commended the courage and persistence of Indigenous women who have steadily made their way into spaces of power and decision-making. She noted that more Indigenous women today occupy senior leadership roles in government and civic life than ever before, a shift driven by sustained advocacy and greater political will to uphold equality and inclusion.

The Chairperson highlighted a notable policy achievement: the recent establishment of the Minority and Marginalised Affairs Unit under the Office of



Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa with Commissioner Caroline Lentupuru during the 10th anniversary of the Indigenous Women Council

the President. This development followed an advisory by the Commission and represents a critical step toward implementing Article 56 of the Constitution, which calls for affirmative action measures to enhance the participation of marginalised groups in national development.

Alongside the celebrations, the Commission provided direct services to members of the public attending the event. These included free legal aid, a public complaints desk, and awareness forums on equality, non-discrimination and access to justice. The outreach underscored NGEC's continued commitment to bringing services closer to communities that are often overlooked in mainstream governance.

The timing of the celebrations offered an opportunity to reflect more broadly on the place of Indigenous communities in a rapidly evolving world, particularly in relation to digital transformation. This year's International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples was marked under the theme “Indigenous Peoples and AI: Defending Rights, Shaping Futures,” a timely reminder of both the promise and

the risk that emerging technologies hold for marginalised communities.

In its official statement on the Day, the Commission expressed concern that the benefits of Artificial Intelligence (AI) could bypass Indigenous groups if deliberate efforts are not made to include them. The Commission observed that while AI is reshaping key sectors such as education, health, agriculture and governance, it also introduces new forms of exclusion. These range from algorithmic bias and digital invisibility to surveillance, data exploitation and the erasure of Indigenous languages and traditional knowledge systems.

At the same time, the Commission noted that AI, when developed ethically and inclusively, has the potential to advance Indigenous rights. For example, local innovations such as the “Simba” chatbot, which interacts in Indigenous languages, and the “Namunyak” environmental monitoring app, developed with Samburu communities, show how technology can support cultural preservation and sustainable land use.

The Commission however cautioned that such progress must be grounded in community ~

participation, respect for Indigenous data sovereignty and adherence to principles of free, prior and informed consent. Kenya's National AI Strategy (2025–2030) provides a foundation for this work, but implementation must be deliberate in addressing historic inequalities and ensuring that no community is left behind.



Participants dancing in celebration of the Indigenous Women Council's 10th anniversary

The Commission called for greater investment in digital infrastructure, innovation hubs and literacy programs that target Indigenous youth, women and persons with disabilities. It also urged faster action in finalising the national policy on ethnic minorities and marginalised communities, a key instrument for strengthening protections and promoting inclusive development.

Pictorial Highlights



NGEC, Australia Chart Path Toward Inclusive Development Partnership

The Commission has opened a new chapter in international collaboration following high-level talks with the Australian High Commission in Nairobi. The meeting, held at the Australian High Commission offices, brought together NGEN Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa and Australian High Commissioner H.E. Jenny Da Rin in a strategic dialogue that could shape joint action on some of Kenya's most pressing equality and inclusion challenges.

The discussions were grounded in a shared commitment to human rights, gender equality, and inclusive development. With both institutions expressing strong alignment in values and approach, the meeting focused on identifying concrete areas where mutual support can deliver tangible impact on the ground.

At the centre of the conversation was climate justice, particularly the need to design locally responsive, inclusive resilience strategies in arid and semi-arid regions.



NGEC Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa, Commissioner Mithuka Nzomo, and Australian High Commissioner H.E. Jenny Da Rin pose for a group photo.

The two institutions noted that climate change is not just an environmental issue, but also a driver of gender-based vulnerability, displacement, and deepening inequality. They explored how targeted support could empower communities—especially women and girls in high-risk regions—to lead in climate adaptation efforts.

Another focal point was women's economic empowerment. Hon. Jaldesa and High Commissioner Da Rin explored opportunities to support skills development and vocational training for girls, young mothers and women in hardship areas.

The role of the Australia Awards Alumni network emerged as a key bridge for knowledge transfer and mentorship, particularly in building local leadership and enterprise capacity among women.

The talks also turned to the state of political participation and safety for women, especially ahead of the 2027 general elections. The Commission highlighted the need for robust civic education, legal support and community-based protection measures to ensure women can fully and safely participate in political processes. There was mutual interest in supporting women-led peacebuilding initiatives in conflict-prone regions, drawing on Australia's experience in mediation and community dialogue.

Accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities also featured in the dialogue, with specific interest in advancing inclusive infrastructure, digital access to public services and rights-based planning frameworks. Both sides acknowledged the value of technical cooperation in these areas, particularly through staff exchanges and shared learning opportunities.

The meeting closed with a joint expression of readiness to co-create measurable, pilot-ready initiatives that can be rolled out in the short term. Australia's Direct Aid Program was identified as a possible entry point to activate initial collaborations.

NGEC, Partners Launch Youth Employment Research Project in Nairobi

Nairobi, Kenya— The National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) has launched a policy research project aimed at improving youth employment in Africa.

The initiative, unveiled at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Nairobi, is being implemented in partnership with the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) and the Centre for African Policy Youth Employment Initiatives (CAPYEI).

The launch took place during the Youth Futures Policy Research Dialogue, which brought together policymakers, researchers, civil society, private sector leaders, youth organisations and development partners.



Principal Secretary for Youth Affairs & Creative Economy, Fikirini Jacobs, joins partners for a group photo

The project aims to generate evidence and identify solutions to expand job creation, improve access to training, and promote dignified work for young people.

"Kenya's Constitution requires the State to provide young people with opportunities for education, training and employment. This project will support those goals through research and partnerships," NGEN said in a statement.

Participants discussed barriers to employment, including skills gaps and structural inequalities affecting women, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups. The forum also provided youth representatives with an opportunity to share their experiences and recommendations.

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