



# EQUALITY BULLETIN

## CAN YOU HEAR US NOW?

### *Deaf Kenyans Demand More Than Laws, They Want Action*

The Commission, led by chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa, marked the September 23 commemoration with a blunt reminder that while sign language has been written into law, the Deaf remain locked out of classrooms, hospitals, workplaces, and public services that fail to provide interpretation or inclusive systems.

Kenya has made historic strides. The Constitution of 2010 recognised Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) as an official language. Parliament went further with the Kenyan Sign Language Act of 2022 and the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2025, which expanded “communication” to cover sign language, Braille, tactile methods, and accessible multimedia. But the Commission insisted that laws without enforcement have left the Deaf stranded at the periphery of society.

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## A Message from the Chief Executive Officer

Kenyan Sign Language (**KSL**) is more than a tool of communication — it is a key that opens doors. It unlocks opportunity, connection, and dignity for thousands of deaf and hard-of-hearing Kenyans who for too long have been excluded from full participation in public life.

As we reflect on our journey in this **23rd Edition**, I am reminded that true progress is measured not by the laws we pass but by the lives we change. The recognition of KSL in our Constitution and subsequent legislation was a critical milestone, but recognition must now be matched with meaningful implementation.

For a child in school, KSL is the difference between silence and understanding. For a patient in hospital, it can be the difference between confusion and care. For a young person seeking work, it can be the difference between rejection and opportunity. That is why we must move beyond symbolic commitments and ensure KSL is embedded across classrooms, workplaces, public services, and digital platforms.

As we release this edition, I urge all stakeholders — government, private sector, educators, healthcare providers, and communities — to act with urgency and purpose. Let us not wait for another generation of deaf Kenyans to be sidelined. The time to make KSL accessible everywhere is now.

**Purity Ngina, PhD, MBS**

Chief Executive Officer

**National Gender and Equality Commission**



## THE COMMISSION



Hon. Rehema Jaldesa  
**Chairperson**



Thomas Okoth Koyier, **EBS**  
**Vice Chairperson**



Caroline N. Lentupuru, **MBS, HSC**  
**Commissioner**



Michael Nzomo  
**Commissioner**



Dr. Margaret Karungaru, **MBS**  
**Commissioner**

## Usawa in the City: Nairobi Honoured, but the Work is Far from Done

*NGEC recognises Nairobi County's strides in gender equality – yet calls for deeper reforms to make inclusion a lived reality for all*



Thomas Koyier, Vice Chairperson, and Commissioner Michael Nzomo present an award to Hon. Rosemary Kariuki, Nairobi County Executive Member

The National Gender and Equality Commission has conferred the Usawa Award on the Nairobi City County Government, hailing its efforts to embed gender equality and social inclusion into governance. The recognition underscores the county's progress through deliberate policies such as the Gender Mainstreaming Policy, the Gender Guidelines for County Health Services, and a bold move to publish reports on gender actions – a practice that signals accountability and transparency.

Commission Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa described the honour as both a recognition and a responsibility. "Progress must not end with celebration. The work of equality is continuous, and the challenge now is to deepen it," she noted during the presentation.

Among the achievements singled out were the county's fight against sexual and gender-based violence through safe houses and the establishment of Tumaini Clinics for survivors. The flagship Dishu na County school feeding programme and menstrual health initiatives were also commended, with NGE

observing that such measures address not just health and education, but dignity and opportunity.

For persons with disabilities, the county has taken steps toward improving accessibility, gradually introducing features that allow fairer participation in daily life. These measures, though partial, reflect a shift towards meeting obligations under Kenya's Constitution and the Persons with Disabilities Act.

Yet even amid celebration, the Commission emphasised that the road ahead remains demanding. It called for the operationalisation of a Centre of Excellence for survivors of gender-based violence, inclusive disaster preparedness for communities repeatedly affected by floods, and stricter enforcement of accessibility ~

standards in public buildings and transport systems. It further urged Nairobi to strengthen accountability by publishing a standalone Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Report, consolidating data across departments.



George Kimani hands over the Usawa Award recognition letter to the Nairobi City County team

The Usawa Award – "usawa" meaning equality – is a marker of progress, but also a mirror held up to leadership. Nairobi has shown that inclusion is possible, that deliberate policy choices can shift the fortunes of entire communities. Yet the city also carries the weight of expectation. As the country's capital, what Nairobi does sets the tone for all 46 other counties.

Nairobi's challenge now is to prove that leadership in gender equality is not symbolic but systemic. That safe houses become centres of justice, that school meals become guarantees of opportunity, that ramps and accessible transport become the norm, not the exception.

## No More Excuses: Push for Real Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities



Disability Division with Kenyan Paraplegic Organisation during a consultative meeting

The National Gender and Equality Commission's Disability Division held a consultative meeting with the Kenyan Paraplegic Organisation this week, a session that brought to the fore both the

challenges and the untapped potential in advancing equality for persons with disabilities in Kenya.

The Commission emphasised its unwavering commitment to mainstreaming disability rights across all levels of policy and practice. It noted that partnerships with organisations like KPO provided the practical bridge between constitutional ideals and community realities.

The meeting signalled more than a formal exchange. It was a reminder that accessibility is not a favour but a right, that participation is not symbolic but essential, and that equality is not an aspiration but a constitutional duty. For the millions of Kenyans with disabilities, progress will not be measured by the eloquence of policies but by whether pavements can be navigated, schools can be entered, and opportunities can be seized without discrimination.



## Isiolo Elders Trained to Safeguard Children in Bold Gender Equality Push

*Workshop brings together traditional leaders to strengthen child protection and inclusive care*

Isiolo — Traditional leaders, clan elders and customary arbitrators from across Isiolo converged for a two-day workshop that reshaped familiar roles and recast age-old authority as a force for protecting the county's youngest and most vulnerable. The event, organised by the Isiolo Regional Office in partnership with Plan International Kenya, introduced referral pathways, gender-responsive strategies, inclusive care approaches and psychosocial support frameworks into discussions that until recently had been held mainly in clinics and county boardrooms.

The workshop treated customary institutions not as obstacles to modern child-rights frameworks but as essential partners in delivering them. Facilitators guided participants through scenarios in which chiefs, elders and traditional birth attendants became the first link in a chain that carried survivors of violence to services, connected families to early childhood development centres and ensured children with disabilities were enrolled and accommodated. By the close of the second day, many of those present described a shift in outlook: the authority that once punished could now protect.



Isiolo Regional Anthony Alyaro addresses participants during the workshop

Plan International Kenya's regional coordinator framed the training as a practical step towards closing persistent gaps. Participants examined how gender norms influenced care at

home and how referral systems could be made accessible to those often excluded from formal services, including nomadic families, persons with disabilities and girls at risk of dropping out of school. Trainers used role-play to demonstrate how an elder could accompany a parent to a clinic, how a clan meeting could be leveraged to expose harmful practices, and how community gatekeepers might flag cases to psychosocial support teams.

Traditional institutions pledged to integrate referral information into public pronouncements and clan meetings, to advise families where to seek help, and to partner with local health centres and education officers. Plan International Kenya and the Isiolo Regional Office are committed to follow-up support, promising mentorship and printed referral guides to reinforce the training. Participants acknowledged gaps in infrastructure, funding and staff capacity that could frustrate even the best intentions. Referral pathways remain only as effective as the services they lead to. Without reliable clinics, trained counsellors, or schools equipped for inclusive learning, a signed pledge could quickly become a paper promise.

County officials attending the event praised the emphasis on early childhood development (ECD). The county director responsible for social services noted that robust ECD interventions were vital to long-term social resilience. He explained that ensuring children received early stimulation, nutrition, and protection was not merely a moral obligation but a pragmatic investment in the county's future. "When our children are safe, healthy and supported in their earliest years, we build a more stable, productive community," he told participants.

Gender-responsive strategies animated candid debate. Women leaders in attendance challenged long-standing customs that limited girls' access to education or normalised harmful practices. Men in the room listened as facilitators explained how shifts in customary messaging had reduced teenage pregnancies and improved school attendance in other counties.

Inclusion of persons with disabilities remained a sensitive but central strand of discussion. Facilitators urged participants to recognise physical and attitudinal barriers that prevented equal participation.

Isiolo's two-day exercise underscored a truth too often overlooked: protecting children is not solely the work of agencies or counties but of communities themselves. The partnership between the Isiolo Regional Office and Plan International Kenya demonstrated that reform grounded in respect for tradition gains traction.

## KICK, TALK, PLANT: KITUI'S HARD TACKLE ON VIOLENCE

TSEIKURU, Mwingi North — The dusty grounds of Tseikuru Primary School turned into an unlikely arena of peace on September 21, as the Kitui Regional Office led this year's International Day of Peace celebrations under the theme "Act Now for a Peaceful World." What unfolded was more than commemoration; it was a deliberate attempt to transform a community accustomed to conflict into one rooted in dialogue and coexistence.



Participants join in a peace match during International Day of Peace celebrations in Tseikuru, Mwingi North

The morning began with football. Makeshift goalposts framed a spirited contest that drew villagers from across Tseikuru Ward. Organisers said the sport was chosen deliberately: teamwork and fair play mirrored the cooperation that peace demands. Amid cheers and tackles, the unspoken message was clear — the same energy used to fight could be redirected to build.

The Kitui Regional Office, backed by local NGOs and faith groups, framed the blend of sport, dialogue and planting as a new model of civic peacebuilding. Football pulled people in, dialogue aired grievances, and tree planting tied the future to the present. Yet there was no illusion that a single day could resolve all challenges. Poverty, scarce resources and contested boundaries still threaten harmony in Mwingi North.

The Kitui Regional Office and its partners had not promised an end to disputes, but they had staged a public refusal to accept violence as the only script.



» CONTINUATION

## Louder Than Words: Deaf Kenyans Demand More Than Lip Service on Sign Language Rights



Stakeholders pose for a group photo during the consultation meeting

Kenya's celebration of the International Day of Sign Languages this week carried more than symbolic weight. Behind the speeches and commemorations, the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) issued a stinging reminder: legal recognition of Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) has been achieved, but the reality for many Deaf Kenyans remains a daily struggle for inclusion.

The event, marked globally every September 23, unfolded under the theme "Sign Language Unites Us." But in Nairobi, it became clear that unity remains a promise, not yet a lived reality. NGEC Chairperson Hon. Rehema Jaldesa called on the government, schools, employers, and healthcare providers to "move from paper promises to tangible action," insisting that the Deaf community cannot continue to be spectators in a society where they are constitutionally recognised but practically sidelined.

Kenya's 2010 Constitution enshrined KSL as an official language. The Kenyan Sign Language Act, 2022, and the newly enacted Persons with Disabilities Act, 2025, further entrenched communication rights — extending them beyond signs to include Braille, large print, accessible multimedia, and tactile

communication. Yet, as the Commission observed, too many Deaf Kenyans still encounter locked doors: doctors' consultations without interpreters, classrooms where children fall behind because teachers are untrained in KSL, and workplaces where exclusion is masked as indifference.

"Recognition without implementation is injustice," Jaldesa declared, her words echoing the frustration of a community that has long been told to wait. "Justice for the Deaf is when they can walk into a hospital and be understood, when they can learn alongside their peers, when they can earn a living without communication being the barrier."



NGEC Chairperson, Hon. Rehema Jaldesa,

Kenya has one of the largest Deaf communities in the region, with government estimates placing them at more than 11 percent of the country's 1.3 million persons with disabilities. For them, the International Day of Sign Languages was less about celebration and more about demanding a future where sign language is not a token of charity but a bridge to dignity.

The Commission warned that delayed access to sign language in early childhood education robs Deaf children of their full potential, widening inequalities that later spill into adulthood. It urged universities and teacher training colleges to integrate KSL instruction into their programmes, arguing that a pipeline of skilled interpreters and educators was essential if Sustainable Development Goals on inclusive education and gender equality were to be met.



Deaf rights advocates use Sign Language to amplify the call for inclusion

Stakeholders at the consultation meeting convened alongside the celebrations noted that progress has been made, including the integration of KSL into the national curriculum and the growing presence of interpreters in major national events. But they agreed the momentum risks stalling without dedicated funding and robust policy enforcement.

For Deaf rights advocates, the message was clear: sign language is not an optional courtesy but a constitutional right. It is also a cultural identity, carrying the history, traditions, and resilience of communities that for too long have been muted in national discourse.



## Youth Cry Foul: Kenya's Job Market Locks Out a Generation



NGEC Vice Chairperson Thomas Okoth Koyier, EBS, and Commission Secretary/CEO Dr. Purity Ngina, MBS, pose with delegates during the Youth Consultative Meeting

Kenya is sitting on a demographic goldmine—yet one that increasingly resembles a social time bomb. With nearly 67 per cent of its young people unemployed and another 26 per cent neither in school nor training, the country's future workforce is trapped in a vicious cycle of exclusion, despair and wasted potential.

The National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) brought this crisis into sharp focus at the Kenya School of Monetary Studies during a Youth Consultative Meeting under the banner “Centering Youth Voices in Shaping the Employment Landscape.” It was more than just another policy dialogue—it was a blunt reckoning with the harsh reality confronting a generation that feels locked out of the promise of dignified work.

Each year, an estimated one million young Kenyans pour into the job market. For many, the excitement of graduation or the relief of completing training programs quickly gives way to frustration. Structural barriers—ranging from nepotism and corruption to gender discrimination and inaccessible systems—shut them

out before they even get a foot in the door. For those who do find work, it is often in the shadows of the informal economy, stripped of contracts, fair wages, or social protection.

Inside the forum hall, the frustration was palpable. Youth participants spoke of broken pathways from classrooms to careers, of job adverts demanding experience they could not possibly have, and of networks of privilege that suffocate talent. They lamented how merit often counts for little in a system where connections, not competence, determine opportunity.



Youth representatives speak during a panel at the Youth Consultative Meeting

For many, the indignity is not just about being unemployed—it is about being underemployed. Young people recounted stories of working long hours in unstable jobs for pay that barely covers

transport, let alone rent or food. Others spoke of being pushed into “volunteer” roles that promise experience but deliver only exploitation.

The Commission, in partnership with the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) and CAP-Youth Empowerment Institute (YEI), used the platform to stress that the employment crisis cannot be treated as just another statistic. It is a lived emergency. Officials underscored that young people's voices must no longer be relegated to footnotes in development blueprints but must shape bold, actionable reforms for dignified and inclusive work.

NGEC warned that if the nation continues to sideline its youth, the social consequences will be dire. A restless, jobless generation is not just an economic liability—it is a ticking time bomb that threatens national cohesion, political stability and even security. The cost of inaction, they argued, will be far greater than the price of systemic reform.

The consultative meeting marked a turning point, not just for those in the room but for a policy discourse that has too often spoken about youth without speaking with them. By amplifying their frustrations and solutions, the Commission sought to bridge the gap between aspiration and reality—transforming lived experiences into policy influence.

For Kenya's young people, the demand is simple yet urgent: jobs that respect their dignity, reward their effort, and secure their future. For the nation, the challenge is whether it will continue to squander its most vital resource—or finally invest in unlocking its promise.

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