



REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE REPORT

Rethinking Inter-Party Dialogue and Consensus Building

2-3 December 2025, NAIROBI, KENYA

The African Inter-Party Dialogue Network (AIPDN) is hosted by:



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Introduction

The African Inter Party Dialogue Network (AIPDN) convened in Nairobi, Kenya, a regional Roundtable on the Role of Political Parties in Africa. The meeting brought together more than fifty delegates representing political parties, Civil Society Organizations, academia and policy think tanks from Eastern, Western and Southern Africa.

Overview and Context

The roundtable provided a platform for constructive engagement through expert panel discussions, peer learning and open question and answer sessions. It created an opportunity for delegates to reflect on the central role of inter party dialogue in democratic development and to explore practical mechanisms for strengthening consensus building as a credible pathway to inclusive, responsive and effective governance across the continent.

Through the various exchanges, participants highlighted the importance of structured dialogue frameworks that support cooperation among political actors, promote tolerance, and enhance the stability of democratic institutions. The discussions also underscored the need to strengthen political parties as key drivers of participatory governance and as essential channels through which citizens engage in the political process.

The AIPDN partner organizations that facilitated the round table included Center for Multiparty Democracy-Kenya CMD-K, National Democratic Institute (NDI), TrustAfrica, East and Horn of Africa Elections Observers Network (E-Horn), The Oslo Center (TOC), Elections Observers Network (E-Horn) and Prospect Peace Institute-Africa (PPI-Africa).

Key Objectives

- ✓ Interrogate the current role and relevance of political parties in Africa's evolving democratic landscape.
- ✓ Map and evaluate existing inter-party dialogue mechanisms across the continent.
- ✓ Critically assess inter-party dialogue and consensus-building as tools for democratic consolidation.



Opening Addresses

Welcoming Remarks

Mr. Kenneth Mpyisi, Head of the Secretariat of AIPDN, highlighted that AIPDN is a continental platform that brings together leading institutions dedicated to strengthening democratic governance, fostering political dialogue and promoting peaceful and inclusive politics across Africa.

Keynote Address

Mr. Kiraitu Murungi, Chairperson of CMD-Kenya and former Senator for Meru County, underscored the central role of political parties as the primary institutions for advancing dialogue and consensus building.

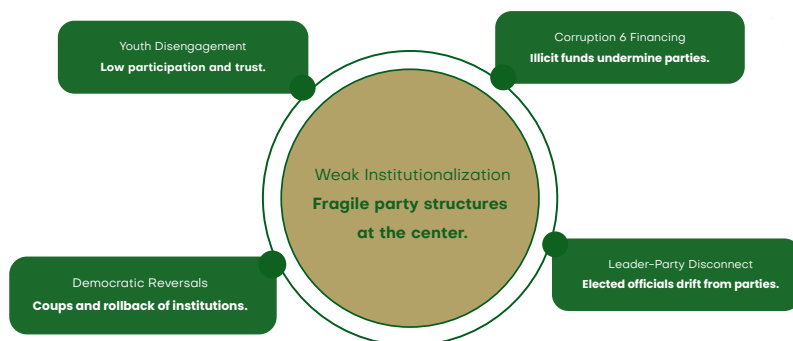
"We must re-think the adversarial approach to democracy in Africa, lest we want to witness continuous conflict and exclusion."

~Hon. Kiraitu Murungi

Mr. Kiraitu invited the delegates to reflect critically on the region's prevailing electoral model, the first past the post system, which reinforces a winner takes all approach closely associated with pure presidential systems. He observed that this adversarial model often fuels conflict, exclusion and intense political rivalry. According to him, such outcomes undermine the foundational values of democracy, including liberty, equality and inclusivity.

He further emphasized that multiparty democracy remains essential for protecting the plurality of ideas, safeguarding political choice and preventing dominance by any single party. Despite this, he cautioned that the persistent exclusion of young people from mainstream governance processes, coupled with the limited responsiveness of political parties to youth aspirations, has contributed to growing disenchantment with political parties. He cited the recent Gen Z demonstrations in Kenya, where many young people rejected traditional political structures and described themselves as 'party-less and leaderless'

The Current Landscape of Political Parties and Dialogue in Africa



The session examined the evolving role of political parties in Africa's democratic systems and assessed the status of inter-party dialogue frameworks across the continent. The panelists noted that the institutionalization of political parties remains inadequate in many countries.

While electoral processes often receive significant attention, political parties themselves require deeper structural reforms to enhance their effectiveness as vehicles of representation. Delegates emphasized that political parties must undergo the same level of reform directed at institutions such as legislatures, the judiciary and other public bodies in order to function as genuine agents of democratic governance.



Youth Disengagement

Young citizens are increasingly disengaged from party politics due to economic hardship, limited opportunities for meaningful participation and the high cost of political processes. Many young people face a stark choice between basic survival and active involvement in political dialogue.

Corruption and Financing

Concerns were raised about the influence of illicit financial flows and corruption on political party financing. The commercialization of politics was identified as a major threat to democratic governance, as monetized electoral processes encourage corrupt behavior and undermine public trust.

Democratic Reversals

Reversals in democratic gains and the rise of coups signal deep frustration with political systems that fail to provide peaceful avenues for engagement. This trend underscores the need for stronger inter-party dialogue mechanisms.

"Develop a framework for national peace and reconciliation and healing and agree on a mechanism to prepare credible and transparent election."

~ James Kueth Chuol

Lessons From Established Inter-Party Dialogue Mechanisms in Africa

The session presented a comparative analysis of existing dialogue platforms across Africa, articulating shared advocacy priorities and consolidating political voices to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Ghana: The Inter Party Advisory Council

The Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) provides a structured space where the electoral management body engages political parties to build consensus on electoral processes. It documents gaps and emerging challenges within the electoral system and shares this information with relevant agencies, the media and the public to stimulate policy and legislative action.

Ghana: The Inter Party Dialogue

The Inter Party Organization for Dialogue (IPOD) serves as a forum for political parties to engage with each other and with national stakeholders on the advancement of democracy.

Initially established as a civil society initiative, the platform has since evolved into a statutory body institutionalized through an act of parliament and financed by public funds.

Kenya: The Political Parties Liaison Committee

The Political Parties Liaison Committee (PPLC) was established to facilitate dialogue between political parties and electoral and regulatory agencies. The platform has been instrumental in addressing trust deficits through consistent engagement, information sharing and joint review of policy and legislative proposals before implementation.



Dialogue in Fragile, Conflict-Afflicted and Transitional Contexts

Using South Sudan, Somaliland and Ethiopia as case studies, the session examined how fragile contexts shape inter-party dialogue processes and what safeguards are required to protect and strengthen these mechanisms.



Participants observed that entrenched political factionalism within security institutions, particularly the army, remains a major driver of violence and a significant obstacle to dialogue. Fragmented public institutions, including parliaments, judiciaries and political parties, often remain aligned to narrow factional interests, making it difficult to build broad based consensus on national priorities.

The session emphasized the importance of leveraging traditional governance structures and integrating them into modern political systems to enhance legitimacy and acceptance. A hybrid approach that draws from established community institutions was identified as critical for building credibility, especially where formal state institutions are weak or contested.

Delegates noted that existing legal frameworks designed to support dialogue often lack public trust. This trust deficit is particularly pronounced in contexts where ruling parties dominate political processes. As a result, political parties, government and communities struggle to find common ground. Participants recommended the development of compromise-based mechanisms that can facilitate dialogue even when parties to the conflict have low levels of confidence in one another.

Concerns were raised about the consistent exclusion of key groups affected by conflict, including women and persons with disabilities. The session underscored that meaningful representation must go beyond tokenistic measures. Genuine participation requires civic knowledge, empowerment and recognition of the distinct contributions these groups bring to peacebuilding.

The discussion also highlighted the need for shared identity and ideological clarity as foundations for resolving conflict. Agreeing on common aspirations strengthens the basis for dialogue and reduces divisions driven by ethnicity, region or political loyalty.

Key Insight

Even in active conflict settings, dialogue has served as a critical safeguard against the complete disintegration of societies.



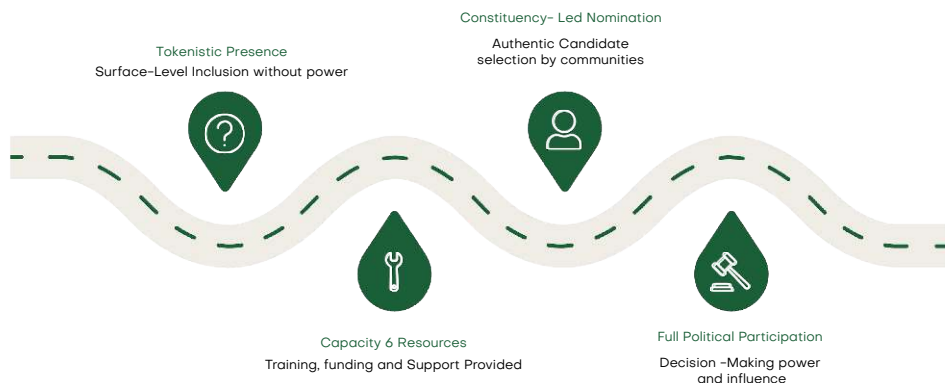
Case studies such as South Sudan illustrated how elite pacts, negotiated primarily among political and military leaders, often exacerbate tensions and disrupt grassroots support for dialogue. These agreements may temporarily halt violence but can generate friction and impede long term stability. Participants reiterated that silencing the gun is only the first step. Dialogue must follow as the central vehicle for reform, reconciliation and rebuilding trust.

"We must silence the gun and dialogue; that is the only option for democratic stability in fragile nations."

~Hon. James Kueth Choul

Innovating for Inclusion: Youth, Women and Marginalized Group

The session noted that inter-party dialogue platforms continue to mirror long-standing systemic patterns in which women, youth, and persons with disabilities are brought into political conversations as an afterthought rather than as central actors. This is due to persistent disconnect between these platforms and the lived realities of these groups.



Digital Divide Barriers

Hybrid or fully digital engagement frameworks unintentionally exclude young people in rural and remote areas where internet connectivity is unstable and where daily socioeconomic pressures take precedence. Such structural limitations effectively lock them out of political conversations that shape their futures.

Merit-Based Affirmative Action

Affirmative action frameworks must prioritise merit, competence, and knowledge to ensure that representation within political parties and legislative structures is not only inclusive but also effective.

Resource Allocation

Delegates urged political parties to allocate a defined proportion of their resources to support marginalized groups, helping level the playing field in campaigns and electoral processes, since access to financial muscle remains one of the strongest determinants of political voice.

Civic Education

The existing knowledge gaps within these groups remain a significant barrier to effective engagement, underscoring the need for sustained civic education and capacity building.

"Without civic knowledge among women, gender affirmative actions will remain beholden to the whims of the ruling elite."

~Ms. Sarah Nyanath Yong Dier



Civil society organisations therefore have a critical role in strengthening the institutional capacities of political parties and dialogue mechanisms to meaningfully interface with youth, women, and PWDs. This includes supporting parties to internalise inclusivity norms and adopt gender-responsive practices.

The nomination and seconding of women and youth into dialogue spaces should be driven by their constituencies, ensuring authenticity and avoiding co-optation by vested interests. The participants highlighted that systemic checks and balances often designed by elite actors continue to limit the full participation of marginalized groups. These constraints must be challenged to recognise women, youth, and persons with disabilities as political actors in their own right, capable of shaping democratic development rather than acting as proxies for elite agendas.

Media institutions also have a responsibility to highlight the contributions of underrepresented groups, expanding public recognition of their roles and strengthening their legitimacy within political formations.

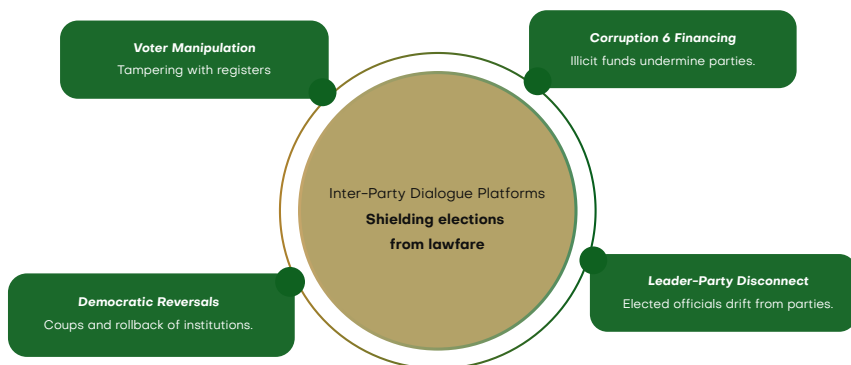
Furthermore, the meaningful participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in critical policy moments, such as constitutional reviews and budget processes, is essential to ensure that their priorities are captured and implemented.

Excluding organisations or communities with limited numerical strength diminishes the richness of dialogue outcomes and weakens the legitimacy of resulting policies. Broad-based participation is therefore vital for producing decisions that reflect diverse societal interests.

Embedding a culture of political tolerance within parties can help bridge the divide between rural-urban and the elites-citizens, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued. Additionally, dialogue processes must disaggregate issues to reflect the different experiences within demographic groups.

Countering Lawfare: Protecting Electoral Integrity

This session examined the growing phenomenon of lawfare in Africa's electoral processes and the role of inter-party dialogue platforms in safeguarding democratic competition. Lawfare was described as the deliberate use of legal and administrative tools to manipulate elections, restrict competitors, and predetermine outcomes. While overt repression has declined, legal repression has become the new method for undermining democracy.



Common Tactics of Electoral Manipulation

- ✓ Manipulating voter registers and blocking candidates.
- ✓ Imposing excessive signature requirements.
- ✓ Weaponizing public order and security laws.
- ✓ Judicial harassment through fabricated charges and fraudulent court rulings.
- ✓ Media censorship and intimidation of journalists.
- ✓ Non-enforcement of campaign financing regulations.
- ✓ Restrictive laws forcing civil society into self-censorship.

Participants noted that leaders across the continent do not fear elections but fear losing them. This fear drives these manipulative practices. In several countries, judicial officers serve in electoral management roles, raising concerns about their ability to deliver impartial decisions on election disputes.

The commercialization of political parties, particularly the purchase of nomination certificates, erodes internal democracy and weakens legislative integrity. Participants underscored the limited effectiveness of regional and continental mechanisms in addressing abuses. Many bodies prioritize diplomatic relations over democratic enforcement, leaving victims of electoral manipulation with inadequate recourse.

The Role of Inter-Party Dialogue Platforms

Inter-party dialogue platforms were highlighted as essential instruments for countering lawfare and promoting inclusive elections. Their convening power and political legitimacy enable them to unify parties around shared standards of electoral integrity.



Legal Resistance

Parties must retain strong legal departments to challenge Weaponized laws in domestic and regional courts. Dialogue platforms can coordinate litigation strategies.



Unified Advocacy

Platforms can mobilize political parties to issue joint statements, build consensus on contentious reforms, and apply pressure on incumbents to respect democratic norms.



Cross-Border Collaboration

Collaboration among organized professional groups and dialogue platforms enhances their influence in curbing emerging forms of legal repression.

Platforms can work with civic groups, independent candidates, and communities to cultivate active citizenry and build public rejection of predetermined electoral outcomes. Dialogue mechanisms should hold regular sessions with election observers to assess electoral preparedness and report malpractice while seeking their credible voices in the international stage. Alliances with trusted religious and moral institutions can strengthen calls for legal reforms.

Young people and women must be meaningfully involved in electoral governance discussions. Cross-generational dialogue supports knowledge transfer and broadens the resource base for democratic advocacy. As such, political parties should maintain continuous engagement with citizens on legal reviews and ensure information is shared in accessible formats to align reforms with public aspirations.

Dialogue platforms should promote mechanisms for reparation and reconciliation after elections to prevent disputes from escalating into conflict and to restore social cohesion.

Call to Action: Fifteen Priorities for Democratic Renewal

The roundtable concluded with a comprehensive call to action, outlining fifteen strategic priorities for strengthening inter-party dialogue and democratic governance across Africa.

1. Institutionalise Inter-Party Dialogue Platforms.

Strengthen their legal mandates, financing, and independence so they can consistently guide political reform, mediate disputes, and uphold democratic accountability.

2. Promote Cross-Generational Dialogue.

Bring together elders, youth, civil society, religious leaders, and independent actors to pool experience, legitimacy, and resources for democratic resilience.

3. Modernise Political Parties.

Transform political parties to adapt to the change in youth demography and shift them from personality-driven organisations to credible institutions grounded in ideology.

4. Strengthen Hybrid Engagement Systems.

Build inclusive platforms that combine technology with community-based methods to reach out to the young people and women across the regions.

5. Bridge Trust Deficit.

Encourage sustained dialogue among political actors, citizens, electoral bodies, and civil society to reduce mistrust, prevent conflict, and safeguard national cohesion.

6. Inclusion Beyond Tokenism.

Design and resource engagement pathways that give marginalized groups influence in decision making, not symbolic presence, ensuring policy reflects their lived realities.

7. Build Cross-Border Solidarity.

Facilitate regional cooperation frameworks among dialogue platforms to curb emerging authoritarian practices and create unified pressure on sub-regional and continental bodies to enforce democratic norms.

8. Localise Dialogue Mechanisms.

Take voter engagement, civic education, and consultation forums to rural and peri-urban areas where exclusion is most entrenched.

9. Resist and Litigate Against Lawfare.

Use inter-party consensus, public advocacy, and internal legal department for litigation to challenge the misuse of laws that exclude competitors or undermine electoral fairness.

Final Priorities and the Path Forward

10. Dedicated Resources to Marginalized Groups.

Require political parties to allocate funds for women, youth, and PWDs to reduce barriers to candidature, campaigns, and leadership roles.

11. Open Communication of Deliberations.

Promote immediate communication of dialogue deliberations through press releases, public reporting, and accessible information.

12. Reinforce Separation of Powers.

Advocate for reforms that prevent the co-opting of courts, electoral commissions, and oversight bodies, ensuring impartial adjudication of electoral disputes.

13. Media Spotlighting Inclusive.

Partner with media organisations to consistently highlight the contributions and voices of underrepresented groups and strengthen their legitimacy in political spaces.

14. Post-Election Healing Mechanisms

Institutionalise reconciliation, reparation, and review processes to address grievances, reduce polarization, and restore trust after elections.

15. Active Citizenry.

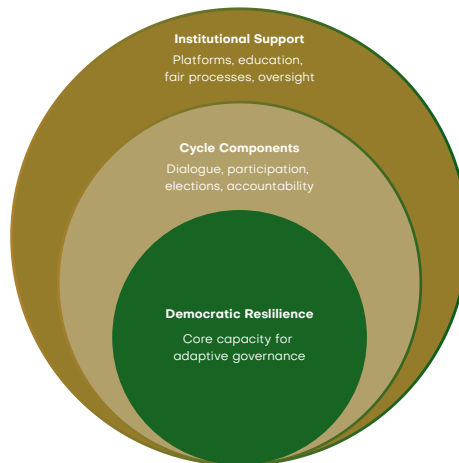
Invest in long-term programmes that equip citizens with democratic knowledge and skills to engage confidently in political and electoral processes.



Moving Forward Together

The African Inter-Party Dialogue Network roundtable in Nairobi demonstrated the critical importance of structured dialogue in advancing democratic governance across the continent. The fifteen priorities outlined represent a comprehensive roadmap for political parties, civil society, electoral bodies, and citizens to work collaboratively toward more inclusive, transparent, and resilient democratic systems. Success will require sustained commitment from all stakeholders, adequate resourcing of dialogue mechanisms, and the political will to implement reforms that prioritize the collective good over narrow interests. The path forward demands courage, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to the democratic values of liberty, equality, and inclusive participation.

The future of African democracy depends on our collective ability to transform dialogue from a periodic exercise into a permanent feature of political culture—one that genuinely includes all voices and builds consensus for the common good.





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