

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

**EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES,
ADVANCING JUSTICE AND
ACCOUNTABILITY**



**ONE VOICE...
ONE PURPOSE**

www.cso-network.org

Team Leader's Message



As I look back on the progress made in 2025, I am struck by how our mission has evolved from simply raising awareness to the need to build permanent infrastructures for transparency, accountability and justice. This year was defined by our the need to bridge the gap between policy and the person and our progress continues to be guided by a clear strategic vision that acknowledges the overlapping identities of those we serve. At the heart of our approach is the co-creation of

solutions alongside the community, directly addressing the unique economic, social, and political gaps that specifically disadvantage communities. In line with our mission, we have prioritized coordination and collaboration across the justice and security sectors, by leveraging localized collected data and the lived realities of those we serve, to advocate for quality service delivery so as to leave no one behind.. Above all, our commitment to capacity building through continuous mentoring and coaching has empowered the communities and partners we work with to transform the justice landscape into one that is truly inclusive and equitable for all.

As we move into 2026, our focus remains clear. We will continue to integrate peacebuilding, gender justice and governance and ensure that it results in more systemic transformation and leads towards more equitable development for all.

Betty Okero - Team Leader

Strategic Engagement

The strategic engagement for 2025 focused on building local resilience and institutional capacity to address systemic inequalities and emerging security challenges across our operational clusters. We also continued with strengthening the capacity of county based grassroots organizations for enhanced governance, accountability and protection of human rights of the people of Kenya

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

Our operations in 2025 were strategically concentrated in high-impact clusters:

- **Western Cluster:** Bungoma, Kakamega, Vihiga and Busia.
- **Nyanza Cluster:** Kisumu, Homa Bay, Migori and Siaya.

Our Approach

Our approach focused on high-level policy advocacy and measurable accountability outcomes. By integrating intersectional strategies, we aimed to empower marginalized groups and hold duty bearers accountable through the following core activities

1. Transforming GBV Response from Policy to Action with a focus on strengthening legal frameworks and referral pathways while enhancing the technical forensic capacity of justice actors, including police, medics, and prosecutors, to ensure survivor-centered outcomes.
2. Institutional Strengthening and Accountability of grassroots CSOs and CBOs by developing their organizational and project management capacities. This included the use of digital monitoring tools and social audits to track government

actions and ensure fiscal transparency.

3. Localization of Gender Equality Frameworks in alignment with UN Resolution 1325 and the Kenya National Action Plan (KNAP II), by increasing women's participation in formal and informal governance, peace and security structures at both the county and ward levels, securing long-term budgetary commitments for gender-responsive governance
4. Resilience Against Radicalization (PVE, focusing on identifying and mitigating the multi-dimensional socio-economic drivers of women and youth vulnerability in informal settlements, working to address the economic gaps through targeted empowerment and participation in existing economic opportunities provided by County Government.



Gender Equality, Women Peace and Security (WPS)

Our strategic engagement focused was on the prevention, participation, recovery and reintegration of the WPS agenda and localization of gender equality frameworks. A primary focus of the year was the localization of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Bungoma and Vihiga Counties. Recognizing that women constituted only 28% of peace committee members despite representing half the population, the project focused on breaking cultural stereotypes and building women's agency.

Key Achievements:

- In a landmark achievement, a woman Human Rights Defender (WHRD) was formally recognized and admitted into the traditionally male-dominated Council of Elders in Mt. Elgon. This marks the first such inclusion since the Council's establishment, significantly impacting the mediation of the Mabanga Peace Accord.
- Engagement and presentation to duty bearers of 2 memorandum to the County Government describing strategizing for engendering development projects by women peace actors.
- Formed to lead community-based initiatives and develop County Action Plans (CAPs).
- The project successfully established county-level chapters in Bungoma and Vihiga, empowering grassroots women to to lead community-based initiatives. develop and implement County Action Plans (CAPs).
- A total of 768 women were engaged in leadership roles, including 390 through chief barazas and 40 specifically trained on the Public Finance Management Act to influence county budgeting processes.





Courtesy call to H.E. Wilber Ottichilo, Governor of Vihiga County, alongside representatives from the Embassy of the Netherlands and UNDP, ahead of the launch of the GBVRC.

Strengthening Access to Justice



Embassy of Netherlands & UNDP Amkeni WaKenya
Funded Project (2024 - 2025)

While county governments have shown growing commitment through existence of policies and stakeholder platforms, implementation is frequently hindered by bureaucratic delays, limited interdepartmental coordination and social barriers such as entrenched cultural norms and fear of stigma. Economically, survivors face income disparities that restrict access to justice, while technological gaps necessitate modernized tools for real-time data collection and accountability.

The project prioritized bridging the gap between existing legal frameworks and actual survivor outcomes by enhancing the technical and operational capacities of key justice actors.

- We focused on the supply side of justice by building the capacity of duty bearers. Specialized technical sessions were conducted for service providers, including doctors, police officers and representatives from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP). These sessions focused on standardizing forensic evidence collection, investigation protocols and ethical procedures to ensure that GBV

cases are prioritized in court hearings.

- Our strategic engagement in policy advocacy, realized significant milestones through the validation of the cabinet paper for the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Recovery Centre (SGBVRC) in Kisumu County, which led to a commitment to establish 6 GBVRC centres, the launch of the GBVRC in Vihiga County and SGBV and Children's Protection and Welfare policies. Our support towards the Gender sector working groups in Vihiga, Kisumu, Kakamega and Homabay was the because of important role they play in providing a comprehensive, one-stop

shop for survivors to access medical, legal and psychosocial aid.

- The community and stakeholder engagement meetings provided an opportunity to track the impact of capacity-building efforts and improve grassroots referral pathways.
- Our strategic goal was to leverage the evidence-based data from the GBV Tracker to influence policy. The project successfully upgraded the online GBV Tracker into a real-time mobile application, which has significantly improved case documentation and effective follow-ups by grassroots case managers. This technological advancement ensured real-time data collection essential for accountability and that geography does not hinder survivor's access to justice. 20 Case Managers used the app to document 172 cases of violence.
- Developed a dedicated forensic management toolkit and training manual, ensuring duty bearers are better equipped for professional evidence collection and investigation.
- Secured a commitment from the Vihiga Law Courts to consolidate and give priority hearings to cases where doctors have attended court sessions, significantly reducing judicial delays for survivors).





Meeting with duty bearers in Busia County alongside Civic Action and Community Empowerment Grantees (CACEG) to discuss ongoing projects and explore opportunities for collaboration.

Bridging the gap through Community led accountability

Funded by European Union, Implemented by KIOS,
Information & CSO Network.
Duration 2023 - 2026

Local CSOs faced increasing pressure to demonstrate institutional transparency while navigating a landscape where duty bearers were often unresponsive to demands for accountability. The year 2025 was defined by a shift to Human Rights, respect for freedoms and fiscal accountability.

The CSO Network, through the Haki Ni Yetu project, successfully integrated diverse projects into a unified front against inequality and violence. Our work this year was characterized by empowering grassroots organizations to strengthen advocacy and demand transparency from duty bearers.

- Technical mentoring enabled CSOs in Busia, Bungoma and Siaya to strengthen their civic oversight capacity, successfully petitioning duty bearers for transparency regarding service delivery issues and projects implementation
- Rigorous Due Diligence and coaching have ensured that internal controls and financial management

- at the grassroots level are handled with high integrity, resulting in organizations being able to access more resources for their projects
- Communication became a tool for advocacy and we provided platforms for grantees to share their own stories, transforming them from passive beneficiaries into active change agents.
- By leveraging project evidence, we influenced policy-makers in areas of environmental justice and gender equality and were able to document successful models of community engagement for replication replicated in other parts of the Country.



OSR report validation meeting with the Kisumu County government and stakeholders, including Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI) and Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM).

Strengthening Public Participation for Accountability in Service Delivery in Kisumu County

Funded by UKAID through Act!
Duration: 2024-2025

CSO Network is a member of the Budget Action Groups (BAGs) which was formed in 2018 by non-state-actor organizations working in western Kenya counties specifically Kisumu, Kakamega and Homabay counties. The focus areas include agriculture, climate change and natural resource sectors. CSO Network also hosted the **‘Strengthening Public Participation for Accountability in Service Delivery in Kisumu County’** project implemented from September 2023 – March 2025.

The Project Objectives included:

1. To enhance the capacity of marginalized groups (including the women, youth, persons with disability and the fisher folk) in 4 Wards on the county budget making processes and social accountability with particular emphasis to agriculture, blue economy and climate change sectors.
2. To map Own Source Revenue (OSR) generation of two (2) key revenue streams in Kisumu County in the selected Wards of Kisumu County focusing on the gaps in collection and allocations of the revenue collected.
3. To develop a documentary on economic and social impact of the pollution of Lake Victoria, analyze the existing legal framework and share recommendations to the public and lobbying of relevant government agencies for action.
4. Conduct Social Audits on non-implementation and poor execution of the development projects in approved budgets.
5. To enhance health provision at Kombewa, Ojola and Ahero sub county hospitals.

Project outcomes/results

1. Commitments of remedial measures by the relevant county government officials regarding the gaps of the past and ongoing projects in agriculture, blue economy, health and climate change.
2. 24 citizens proposals Four (4) Community Ward Development Plans developed for presentation during public participation while developing the Annual Development Plan and County Fiscal Strategy Paper (CFSP)
3. Revenue generation report and analysis from 2 revenue streams in 4 wards of Kisumu County produced and shared for influencing resource equalization
4. Development of a video documentary on the impact of pollution on social and economic and environmental health with recommendation of behavioral change by communities, private sector and other stakeholders towards pollution and environmental integrity of the Lake Victoria.
5. Adoption of the policy recommendations on improvement of health services at Ahero Hospital, improvement of County's own source revenue (OSR) and Projects implementation in the County.



Presentation of the OSR Report to the County Executive of Kisumu County, led by H.E. Prof. Anyang' Nyong'o, Governor.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY-BASED PREVENTION AND RESPONSE AND YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR PEACE BUILDING (PEV)



Building resilience and economic empowerment skills for youth through a training focused on financial literacy and business development.

Peacebuilding and Violence Prevention (PVE)

Funded by KOICA through UNDP Amkeni WaKenya
Duration: July - December 2025

The Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) project was designed to identify features of youth vulnerability to radicalization and strengthen communities as the first line of defence. Our interventions included:

- Conducting a comprehensive ecosystem analysis in informal settlements, including Nyalenda, Obunga, Manyatta, and Kondele, to identify drivers of identity crises and structural marginalization.
- Organizing multi-stakeholder inception meeting to form a project Steering Committee involving the County Government, National Government, peace and policing structures and FBO leadership.
- Peer learning and inter-religious learning exchanges to reflect on PVE, mediation and early warning reporting and scale up on best practice. Secured a commitment from FBO leaders to integrate peace messages and proactive follow-up on reported security concerns into their sermons
- Established a functional Steering Committee to provide strategic oversight, coordination, and guidance throughout the project implementation phase.
- Targeted economic empowerment training sessions for at-risk youth and women, focusing on market-driven skills to reduce susceptibility to political mobilization.
- Established a unified advocacy roadmap for religious leaders to engage with County duty bearers on youth vulnerability and the trust deficits in state security.



Youth leaders, student leaders, and artists convened for a discussion on movement building for youth-led social accountability.

Youth Mobilization for Elections Integrity

We supported the 2025 Youth Advocacy Forum by Civic Voices to address the significant decline in civic interest and electoral turnout among young people. The engagement sought to dismantle barriers to participation and build a sustainable framework for youth-led social accountability. The engagement redefined youth participation as a strategic necessity for national transformation. By equipping young leaders with the tools to navigate the electoral process and advocate for their rights, the initiative has laid a foundation for strengthening youth-inclusive governance model by:

- Equipping young leaders with the tools to navigate the electoral process and advocate for their rights
- Active participation and leveraging their numbers to build a youth movement that prioritize electoral integrity and influencing policy Influence and effectively integrating youth perspectives into formal governance structures.
- Identifying new young leaders and building their capacity in essential skills essential skills in negotiation, alliance-building and collaboration with and government bodies.



STUDY

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVERS OF YOUTH VULNERABILITY BEYOND UNEMPLOYMENT



In 2025, the organization undertook a critical mapping exercise to analyze the ecosystem of youth mobilization and vulnerability within Kisumu County's informal settlements, including Nyalenda, Obunga, Manyatta and Kondele informal settlements. This research objective was to identify existing systemic issues that limit alternative entry points for young people into the local economy.

Findings and Analysis

- The research revealed that youth vulnerability is primarily driven by a lack of dignity rather than just a lack of jobs. In these settlements, safety is defined as the ability to lead normal lives in the presence of crime.
- The study identified a structured political market for youth radicalization operating on a transactional arrangement where political actors provide immediate financial compensation and social protection in exchange for labor provided in the form of crowd mobilization, security or intimidation services.
- High levels of state mistrust and family disruption were identified as primary social drivers. Educated or skilled youth often experience a sense of injustice when comparing

their struggle to survive to that of the political class, leading to an erosion of loyalty to state structures.

- A missing link identified in current Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) efforts is that PVE work is ineffective without an economic empowerment component.

Strategic Recommendations

The mapping exercise concluded that young people in Kisumu are open to alternative opportunities that offer income, employment and dignity. To effectively mitigate susceptibility to violent extremism and criminal mobilization, the report advocates for:

- Genuine economic inclusion and youth-demand-driven programs.
- Identifying the multi-dimensional drivers including structural marginalization and identify crisis that increase susceptibility to radicalization.
- Advocating for transparent access to information on economic empowerment opportunities to provide youth with a viable way out of current deprivation.

Acknowledging Our Partners

Our achievements in 2025 would not have been possible without the support, shared vision and strategic alliances of our partners. As we reflect on a year defined by systemic change and community-led accountability, we extend our gratitude to the organizations and institutions that walked alongside us in the pursuit of justice, peace, equity and strengthening of grassroots organizations for the human rights of our communities

Your support went beyond financial contributions; it enabled us to move from policy awareness to tangible action. Through your backing, we were able to launch critical initiatives like the SGBV Recovery Centers, breaking cultural gender barriers upgrade our digital tracking tools, and conduct research into youth vulnerability. Your commitment to evidence-based interventions has laid the groundwork for the impactful development in Western Kenya. We have proved that when we integrate social and economic dignity with legal accountability, we can create a community that demands recognition of their human rights.

Frontline defenders, Embassy of Netherlands, UNDP, Embassy of Ireland through UN Women and UNCHR, OSF Civic Forum, EU and UKAID through Act!

