

JP GEWE Knewsletter

A Caucus making a difference on gender equality in Kenya!

What is a Caucus?

A caucus is a meeting of members of a legislative body from a particular political party to select candidates or decide policy. When members combine their efforts, the impact and contribution towards policy and legislative development is more extensive than individual efforts.



“The caucus is important in realizing the equality of men and women in raising issues and articulating women’s voices in leadership in the oversight role the parliament plays on issues of national significance.”

**– Zebib Kavuma, Country Head –
UN Women Kenya**

Why create a women’s caucus?

When women are empowered as political leaders, countries experience higher standards of living and positive developments in education, infrastructure and health (Bearman et al., 2007). Several other studies show that women’s political participation has resulted in noticeable change in democratic governance, responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines and sustainable peace building efforts. Women’s caucuses can also provide the primary entry point to women legislators for information and support as well as bridge the gap with the civil society. Women’s organizations can provide the research, experts and draft policies on a range of issues that might affect the welfare or empowerment of women.

The situation in Kenya in the past

- In the last 67 years of Kenya’s political history, women have been under-represented in the parliament at less than 25%. The low representation has resulted in sidelining of issues that concern women and girls in the legislative and political process.
- In the past, none of the parliamentary committees were chaired by women and gender related bills and house agendas were not treated seriously in committees or the Parliament.
- Women representatives were absent from the Parliamentary Service Commission and the policies and practices in place were mostly gender insensitive and overlooked issues regarding the welfare of women members.
- The national budget – the main tool to mobilize and allocate public resources was blind to women’s needs and their contribution towards a productive economy.



“KEWOPA more often had to take its positions on agenda pertinent to its cause and adopt silent agreement so that we could mobilize support on the floor of parliament given the dismal numbers of women parliamentarians.”

– Hon. Rachel Shebesh

What is the Kenyan Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) and where did it all begin?

The Kenyan Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) was formed in May 2001 by nine women parliamentarians in the eighth Parliament. Hon. Beth Mugo, Hon. Martha Karua and Hon. Charity Ngilu were the three founding members of KEWOPA. The primary objective of this caucus is to strengthen the capacity of women parliamentarians to contribute towards gender responsive and women centered policies and laws. At the time of its conception, there were no women chairing parliamentary committees or sitting in the Speakers’ Panel. In addition, there was a lack of gender related provisions for women parliamentarians such as maternity leave and prevention of sexual harassment policies.

The formation of KEWOPA increased the visibility and effectiveness of women leaders and influenced key political parties to support the entry of more women into the Parliament through direct elections and nominations to special seats reserved only for parties. As a result, the number of women increased from 8 to 18 by 2007. KEWOPA became a registered organization in 2004. In the 10th Parliament, KEWOPA was represented by 6 Cabinet Ministers, 13 Assistant Ministers, 3 Chairpersons and 4 Vice-Chairpersons of Parliamentary Committees.

After the 2013 General Elections, Kenya has moved into the 11th Parliament. KEWOPA is led by an Executive Committee headed by a Chairperson and supported by a complete secretariat. The Secretariat is supported by a Gender Advisor seconded by UN Women. The members include all elected and nominated women parliamentarians from all the political



parties. The association has a mandate to promote the knowledge and understanding of democratic governance and assist in the networking of women parliamentarians for socio-economic development in Kenya.



“We had to use cross-cutting networks to lobby male parliamentarians on the FGM/C issue, I gave a personal story and we tried as caucus members to lobby male members who enjoy the numerical strength to help us pass the Bill in parliament”

– Hon. Sophia Abdi

KEWOPA Partners

In the 10th parliament (2008 to February 2013), KEWOPA worked on the following key legislative and policy areas with support from its partners:

1. Mainstreamed gender in the Standing orders of the Parliament in 2011.
2. Increased representation of women parliamentarians in leadership roles in parliamentary committees.
3. Actively lobbied and advocated for the enactment of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation/Cut (FGM/C) Bill.
4. Established an Equal Opportunity Committee in the Parliament to benefit both men and women.
5. Developed the Gender Responsive Budgeting Guidelines for the Parliament.
6. Supported the women parliamentarians in moving several key private members' bills such as the Counter Trafficking in Persons Act 2010.
7. Lobbied to ensure that the parliamentary committees have adopted the “not more than 2/3 of one gender in leadership” principle from the constitution. This has led to women parliamentarians chairing important parliamentary committees such as the speakers' panel and house business committee which are key decision making bodies.
8. 15 countries have sent their delegations to learn from KEWOPA's experience.
9. KEWOPA was actively involved in the launch of the Africa UNiTE Kenya Chapter in November 2012.
10. KEWOPA Members have mentored 66 women (3 women by each member) for political leadership positions and 3 of them were elected to the 11th Parliament as Members of the National Assembly (2) and County Representative (1).
11. Managed the Team of Eminent Persons that lobbied for implementation of affirmative action in party nominations at all levels and peaceful elections in March 2013 through the Women's Situation Room.



“The Caucus created strategic partnerships with institutions within and outside parliament to ensure that its legislative and parliamentary program became a success, these alongside the passing of a progressive constitution created a facilitating environment for our achievements” - Maureen Gitonga, Gender Advisor

– KEWOPA

For more information on KEWOPA, log on to its website at:
<http://www.kewopa.org/>