

CIRCLES OF CONSCIENCE: IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY, ACCESS & COMBATING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

YOUTH CASE STUDY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL KENYA



SUMMARY

The Chambua Uongozi (“Analyse Leadership”) Campaign was implemented by Amnesty Kenya’s predominantly youth-led Circles of Conscience (COCs). This campaign, as well as the COCs’ work on gender-based violence (GBV) and access to healthcare and justice, in particular for communities that face barriers, has led to more inclusive and diverse governance at the community level and changes in policy which particularly benefit marginalised groups.



WHAT ARE CIRCLES OF CONSCIENCE?

COCs are the backbone of Amnesty International Kenya. They are organised groups of human rights campaigners, supporters and partners across different identities, interests and geographical locations which advocate for the protection and promotion of human rights. By the end of 2022, Amnesty Kenya had supported the establishment of 75 Circles of Conscience in communities, schools, and universities in 14 counties across the country. These COCs offer a practical platform for activists to self-organise and engage various levels of government. They are mainly led by an emerging young and dynamic generation of human rights defenders that are forging social movements beyond traditional offline, bureaucratic structures to realise change. Of the 70 COCs in Kenya, 61 are youth-led (by youth is meant between 18 and 35 years old).

CHAMBUA UONGOZI: IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY

Ahead of the elections in 2022, the Circles of Conscience carried out the Chambua Uongozi campaign (“Analyse Leadership”). The campaign was designed to educate the general public on the role of Members of the County

Assembly (MCA) and to ensure greater accountability through hosting debates bringing together MCAs and community members to discuss issues affecting the community and sign a joint manifesto. COCs across six counties facilitated community-level discussions on human rights, governance, and accountability issues that incoming governments and representatives should address, and what constitutes leadership with integrity. They brought greater clarity and citizens’ intentional shaping of accountability narratives and leadership debates through the campaign.

OBJECTIVES

1. To educate the public on the role of MCAs
2. To increase accountability of elected officials
3. To make local governance more inclusive and representative

IMPACT

- The Chambua Uongozi campaign reached 6,737 people from Nakuru, Kisumu, Uasin Gishu and Tana River directly, and, indirectly reached 3,000,000 viewers on television, and 135,000 through streamed live events.
- The campaign led to citizens’ increased understanding of leaders’ commitments and positions before voting for them.

- Community members entered into a signed social contract with the potential leaders based on community needs. COCs across the country will use the manifestos to hold the elected leaders to account.
- These efforts contributed to greater diversity of elected leaders, with the county of Nakuru electing the greatest number of women compared to other counties in the country and two members from the minority community in Tana River (who are politically side-lined and had been marginalised from politics since independence in 1963).

COMBATTING GBV AND INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND JUSTICE

In addition, the COCs have engaged policymakers on topics such as GBV, women's land rights, LGBTI rights, and extrajudicial killings, among other pressing human rights issues. Amnesty Kenya had among the greatest numbers of partnerships with youth-led and focused organisations in the movement in 2022 (21). The Kisumu Circle of Conscience collaborated with Talanta Africa, Transalliance and the Men Against AIDS Youth Group for the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Lesbophobia and Transphobia. They jointly held consultative discussions with the County Government of Kisumu Health Department and Kenya Police Service on improving access to healthcare and access to justice.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enhance responses to GBV by law enforcement officers in the respective counties
2. To forge partnerships with law enforcement and state organs to uphold law and order and promote respect for human rights
3. To ensure protection of the human rights of LGBTI communities, including access to justice
4. To solicit commitments by duty bearers and civil society to ensure an end to police brutality and guarantee electoral justice

IMPACT

- As a result of the joint advocacy efforts of Amnesty Kenya and partners, county government officials made commitments to ensure that key populations such as LGBTI individuals can access healthcare, especially sexual reproductive healthcare.
- The police made a commitment to create a safe space for LGBTI people to report cases of intimidation and intimate partner violence.

PROMOTING DIGITAL RIGHTS

In 2022, the COCs have engaged on digital rights issues as part of the [RIGHTS Click](#), a six-year Programme enabling children and young people to co-create online platforms and other digital technologies that protect their rights – and their health and well-being. Children between the ages of 13 and 18 were engaged in discussions on child online safety, and a university MOOT court on Digital Rights was organised. A children from a Human Rights Clubs at Kabianga High School joined the Digital Rights Champions, a volunteer group advising the program on children and youth participation.

TIPS AND TRICKS

- *Social media pages* for the Circles of Conscience ensured the engagement of youth and children.
- The COCs have thrived due to *continuous engagement and building of community agency*.
- Amnesty Kenya's approach has been one of '*leading from the back*', which has been successful.
- *Technical and capacity building* of human rights defenders has ensured they are well placed to lead actions and campaigns.



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