

From Dialogue to Action Youth Leadership Confronting Gender Based Violence

Written by Joy Njeri

On Monday, 15th December, I had the privilege to be part of the Youth Leadership Forum as a representative of Nuru Trust Network, organized by the National Youth Council in partnership with ActionAid on the topic of Gender Based Violence (GBV).

Over the past five years, reported cases of GBV in Kenya have risen significantly, highlighting an urgent national crisis requiring stronger preventive and protective measures. The forum was convened under the theme, "Creating Safe Spaces, Strengthening Youth Leadership and Advancing GBV Prevention for Peaceful Communities." In attendance were representatives of diverse organisations working with youth, women and marginalized groups, including Nivalishe Pads Initiative, FIDA Kenya, Pink Belts Project, NGAAF (National Government Affirmative Action Fund), Organization of African Youth, My Body My Body, Youth Care Africa, among others.

Gender Based Violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. Through insights shared by various speakers, GBV is not selective, it affects people across all ages and genders. In Kenya, there have been distressing cases involving infants violated by family members, children assaulted and killed, young men murdered, women subjected to domestic violence under the guise of discipline, and elderly women raped and killed in their own homes. A key conclusion reached collectively was that violence remains violence, regardless of the victim, motive, or method used.

The forum featured an informative high-level panel discussion that examined societal norms that perpetuate GBV. These include sexist remarks, victim-blaming, harmful cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), gender wars, wife beating and economic abuse. One of the highlighted interventions was economic empowerment, particularly through initiatives such as NGAAF, which provides small grants to women and youth to start businesses. Such programs help reduce vulnerability to abuse arising from financial dependence, including situations where individuals are assaulted for requesting basic necessities.

Participants were encouraged to normalize male engagement in GBV discussions and to create safe spaces for men to express their emotions acknowledging that men can also be victims of GBV. Additional recommendations include fostering open discussions with friends, campaigning for equal treatment across genders; government enforcement of existing policies and ensuring youth representation in decision-making platforms. Importantly, we were reminded of our responsibility as citizens to take action at the individual level and remain accountable.

The forum demonstrated strong inclusivity, particularly for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). A sign language interpreter was present, and the panel discussion addressed access to funding and clear reporting pathways for PWDs facing GBV. One of the most impactful

contributions came from Mr. Anthony Buluma, the CEO of the Kenya Young Parliamentarians Association (KYPA). He emphasized the importance of adopting a solution-oriented mindset rather than constantly lamenting about the government shortcomings, cultivating a culture of accountability, especially in leadership, and maintaining credibility by prioritizing the collective agenda over personal interests.

