



EVENT REPORT

Youth Leadership as Drivers of Gender Equality in Kenya

Date	11 May 2026
Venue	Hyatt Regency, Nairobi, Kenya
Organizers	Club de Madrid • Nuru Trust Network • SDGs Kenya Forum

EVENT AT A GLANCE

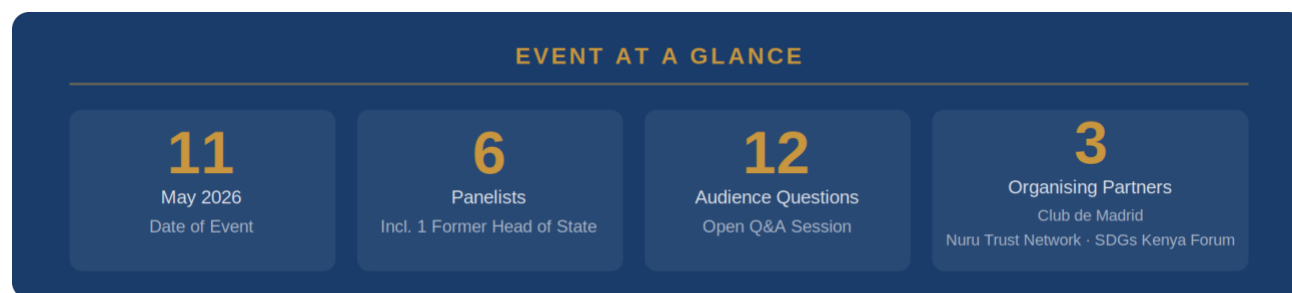


Figure 1: Event at a Glance

1. Executive Summary

On 11 May 2026, Club de Madrid, Nuru Trust Network, and the SDGs Kenya Forum convened a high-level dialogue at the Hyatt Regency, Nairobi. The event brought together former Heads of State and Government, senior UN officials, national government representatives, civil society organizations, youth leaders, and international partners to examine how young people, particularly young women, can become more effective drivers of gender equality in Kenya. The session moved through a welcome and opening, a high-level panel discussion, a moderated exchange, an open audience Q&A, and closing reflections. Discussions consistently returned to one central tension: Kenya possesses a progressive and constitutionally grounded gender and youth policy framework, yet the distance between

policy and lived reality remains wide. Panels and exchanges examined why this gap persists, who is responsible for closing it, and what concrete steps are needed ahead of the 2027 elections.

Key Outcomes

- An urgent call to shift the policy agenda from legislating to implementing existing frameworks, including the two-thirds gender rule and constitutional youth provisions.
- A proposal to establish a Kenya Youth and Gender Public Accountability Scorecard with six-monthly public reporting, managed by a multi-stakeholder coalition.
- Recognition of mentorship and intergenerational dialogue as critical tools, with a commitment by UN Women and UNDP to expand structured mentorship platforms.
- Elevation of the Creatives Bill 2026 as a high-priority legislative vehicle to unlock capital for young creative entrepreneurs.
- Consensus that anti-corruption measures must be applied with equal rigour regardless of gender or age.

2. Event Objectives

- Create a focused space for exchange between young leaders and senior political figures to reflect on advancing more inclusive and gender-responsive governance in practice.
- Identify the main barriers that continue to limit meaningful youth political participation, with a specific focus on the experiences and challenges faced by young women.
- Move the discussion beyond principles by generating practical, policy-relevant recommendations that build on existing national frameworks and institutions.
- Highlight concrete entry points through which young people, especially young women can engage more directly in policy processes, including design, implementation, and accountability.
- Strengthen the positioning of young leaders as credible and capable actors in governance spaces, with a deliberate focus on supporting young women's leadership.
- Open pathways for continued engagement, including opportunities for collaboration, joint advocacy, and follow-up actions linked to ongoing policy processes.

3. Welcome and Opening

The session was opened by three speakers who set the substantive frame for all that followed.

Mary Yvonne Ododah (Nuru Trust Network)

Mary Yvonne opened by situating the event within a broader demand for meaningful, not merely symbolic youth participation. She argued that young people, and young women in particular, must not only be invited into policy spaces but trusted with genuine influence, resources, and leadership.

Florence Syevuo (SDGs Kenya Forum)

Florence Syevuo grounded the discussion in the SDG framework, noting that gender equality anchored primarily in SDG 5 connects to fourteen of the seventeen SDGs through gender-sensitive indicators. The more than eighty gender-related indicators spanning the framework track progress on eliminating violence, addressing legal discrimination, redistributing paid care work, and achieving equal political and economic participation.

Cristina Barrios (European Union)

Cristina Barrios underscored the importance of youth leadership and gender equality, citing the Nairobi Girls networking initiative as a model for opening access to decision-making spaces. She drew attention to the structural cost barriers facing women in Kenyan politics ahead of the 2027 elections, and to the risks of online and offline gender-based violence faced by women in public life.

4. Panel Discussion

The panel was moderated by Nathaniel Mong'are and featured six speakers drawn from government, intergovernmental organisations, and civil society.

Mokgweetsi Masisi <i>President of Botswana (2018–2024); Member, Club de Madrid</i>	Gloria Wawira <i>CEO, National Youth Council of Kenya</i>
Madelena Monoja <i>UNDP Resident Representative, Kenya</i>	Harriette Chiggai <i>Special Advisor on Women's Rights to the President of Kenya</i>
Antonia N'Gabala-Sodonon <i>UN Women Country Representative, Kenya</i>	Yvonne Wamucii <i>Office of the President's Special Programmes; Club de Madrid WYDE Network</i>

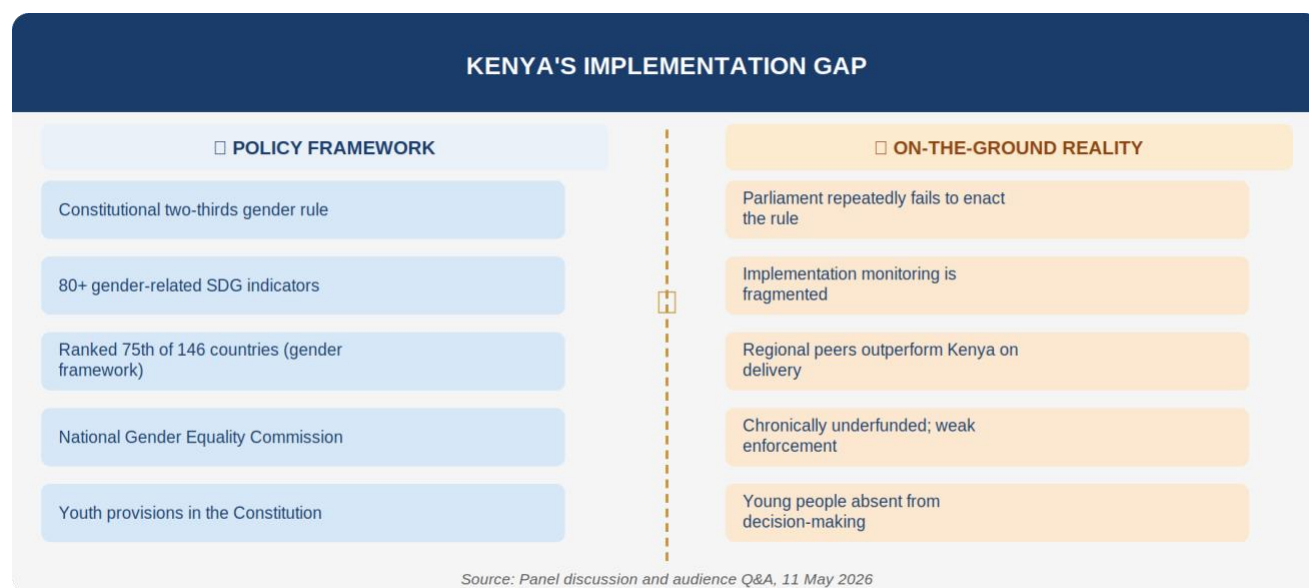


Figure 2: Kenya's Policy-to-Implementation Gap

Framing the Discussion

The moderator opened by acknowledging that participants came with diverse perspectives on gender equality and the role of feminism in contemporary governance. The panel was framed around two core questions: how to build resilient and inclusive democratic societies that actively support gender equity; and how to mobilise communities beyond conference spaces to translate policy commitments into grassroots change.

Panel Contributions

Mokgweetsi Masisi — Former President of Botswana

President Masisi argued that meaningful inclusion must be institutionalised, not treated as a temporary political concession. He called on male leaders to engage in honest self-reflection and to become active advocates for women's and young people's leadership.

"Political will should be driven by foresight and willingness to see the future—not just a focus on the present."

Harriette Chiggai — Special Advisor on Women's Rights to the President of Kenya

Harriette identified a persistent gap between women's increased visibility and their actual power: many positions given to women remain symbolic, without the authority to drive change. She highlighted technology-facilitated gender-based violence as a growing deterrent to women's participation.

Antonia N’Gabala-Sodonon — UN Women Kenya

Antonia situated Kenya’s challenge in comparative terms: the country’s constitutional gender framework ranks 75th of 146 countries globally, yet implementation consistently lags behind regional peers. She identified the bottlenecks as political—weak enforcement, parliamentary inaction on the two-thirds rule, systemic impunity for non-compliance, and insufficient funding for accountability institutions.

Madelena Monoja — UNDP Resident Representative

Madelena recommended enforcing gender and age diversity at the nomination stage, ensuring dedicated media time for women candidates, and using the National Gender Equality Commission as an accountability lever. She highlighted the Young Women Fellowship as a structured mentorship vehicle.

Gloria Wawira — National Youth Council of Kenya

Gloria described the Council’s structured engagement model connecting youth representatives from grassroots to national level, and stressed that empowering young women requires sustained capacity-building, not merely access to platforms.

Yvonne Wamucii — Office of the President’s Special Programmes

Yvonne described the establishment of the Special Project Office following the 2024 Gen-Z demonstrations as a government response to the creative economy’s longstanding exclusion from formal support structures and spoke to work ensuring digital platforms support rather than undermine young creatives.

5. Audience Dialogue and Key Exchanges

An open Q&A session generated twelve substantive questions from participants including civil society, academia, intergovernmental organisations, and frontline youth leaders. The exchanges surfaced themes not fully addressed in the panel and pushed panelists toward greater specificity and candour.

On Institutional Barriers

Asked to name the top three institutional barriers preventing gender equality from translating into lived outcomes, Harriette Chiggai identified fragmented policy implementation, the absence of cross-government accountability systems, and cultural norms embedded within institutions that persist even when formal barriers have been removed.

“Gender equality policies exist within organisations—but they are tucked in a drawer somewhere. We must make them visible, interact with them, and implement them. The best advocates for women are men.”

On Accountability and Defiance

When asked what can be done when those in power are defiant, Antonia N’Gabala-Sodonon proposed a scorecard-based accountability framework assigning institutional responsibility for each gap, with public reporting every six months managed by a coalition of young people, UN agencies, and civil society.

On Tokenism and Corruption

A question from Transparency International Kenya on tokenism and Gender and Corruption Survey 2025 findings (women at 36% vs men at 31%) generated one of the session’s most candid exchanges.

“The only solution to tokenism is collective action and political goodwill, coupled with us getting into the room. It is one thing to get in on a quota—it is another to demonstrate your credibility and purpose once you are there. — Gloria Wawira”

“Corruption should know no gender and no age. It is the assault on corruption that should be universal. — President Masisi”

On Building Transformative Systems Beyond Numbers

A participant drew on ILO research to raise the uncomfortable question of whether numerical representation automatically produces equality. Harriette Chiggai responded that without clear mandates and performance indicators, no occupant regardless of gender will produce transformative change.

6. Key Outcomes

The session produced a set of shared findings and institutional commitments. The infographic below summarises the seven key outcomes.



Figure 3: Seven Key Outcomes from the Session

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to event organizers, partner organisations, government, civil society, and youth organisations.

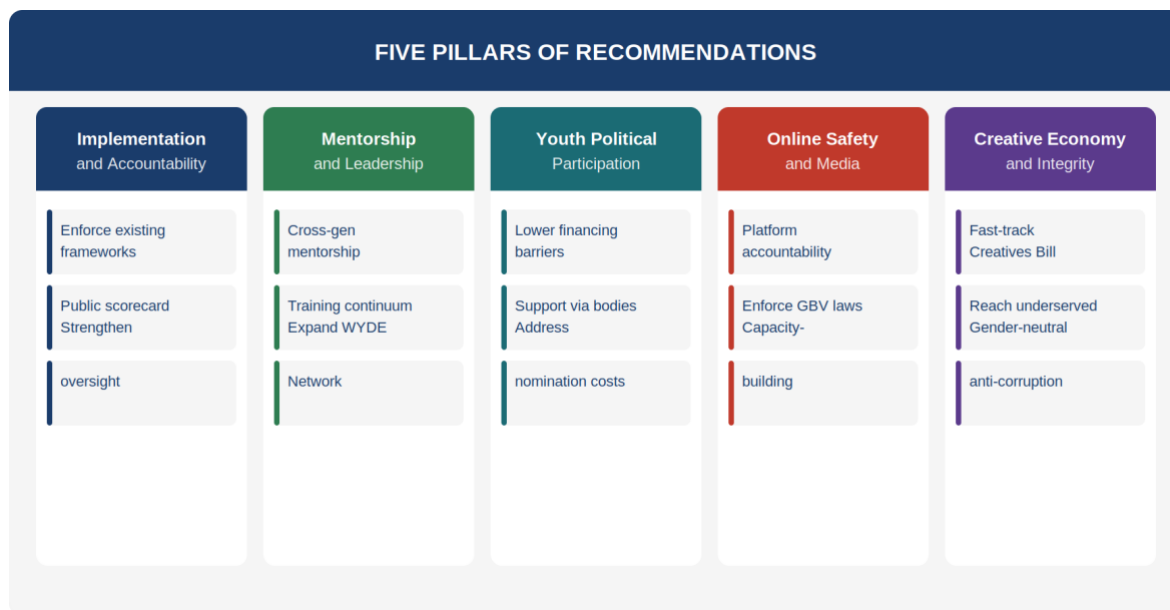


Figure 4: Five Pillars of Recommendations

On Implementation and Accountability

- Shift the policy agenda from new legislation to the full implementation of existing frameworks, including the two-thirds gender rule and constitutional youth provisions.

- Establish a Kenya Youth and Gender Public Accountability Scorecard with six-monthly public reporting, managed by a multi-stakeholder coalition.
- Strengthen parliamentary oversight with clear consequences for non-compliance at the ministry level.

On Mentorship and Leadership Development

- Institutionalise cross-generational mentorship programmes that pair emerging leaders with experienced mentors to develop successors, not dependents.
- Adopt a training-to-accompaniment-to-monitoring continuum for women's leadership development, with structured support during the electoral process.
- Expand the Club de Madrid WYDE Network in Kenya and leverage UNDP and UN Women platforms and fellowships.

On Youth Political Participation and Campaign Financing

- Expand funding channels and lower campaign financing barriers for young candidates, particularly young women, ahead of the 2027 elections.
- Route electoral support through organised bodies youth groups, civil society, and the registrar of political parties rather than individuals.
- Address the structural cost barriers to women's political participation through targeted regulatory and financial support mechanisms.

On Online Safety and Media

- Enact and enforce regulation to hold social media platform owners accountable for online gender-based violence.
- Scale capacity-building programmes with UNICEF and UNESCO to equip women communicators with skills and protective frameworks.

On the Creative Economy and Integrity

- Fast-track the Creatives Bill 2026 through Parliament with broad civil society and youth participation in public hearings.
- Implement gender- and age-neutral anti-corruption measures and build societal norms of accountability through civic education.

8. Closing Reflections

Yvonne Wamucii

Yvonne closed by urging young people to actively seek and accept mentorship, framing it as a tool that compresses the learning curve and reduces avoidable mistakes. She called on Club de Madrid to expand its Kenyan membership, linking broader network participation directly to greater representation at decision-making tables.

Antonia N’Gabala-Sodonon

Antonia offered a candid self-critique of the UN system’s approach: organisations count women trained but fail to document how many become effective leaders, or to provide meaningful support during the electoral process. She committed to establishing a training-to-accompaniment-to-monitoring continuum.

Moderator’s Closing

Nathaniel Mong’are closed with a parable about four people: Everybody, Somebody, Nobody, Anybody, in which a critical task went undone because each assumed another would act. The recommendations made require named actors, clear ownership, and deliberate follow-through.

“I hope we will not end up like the story of the four people. I hope we can fix this.”

9. Calls to Action

- Network and build coalitions among participants to sustain momentum from the session.
- Young people are encouraged to apply for the UNDP African Union Fellowship and UN internship programmes.
- Civil society and youth organisations to support public participation in Creatives Bill 2026 parliamentary hearings.
- Club de Madrid to expand its Kenyan membership, increasing the number of young Kenyans at decision-making tables.
- Antonia N’Gabala-Sodonon committed to establishing a training-to-accompaniment continuum within the six-month scorecard cycle.