

Kenya Program Summary

Kenya's historic March 2013 national elections put in place a devolved system of government – transferring certain state authority, resources and key services from the national to subnational level of government. The elections and Kenya's transition are two landmarks in a constitutional reform process that culminated with Kenyans voting overwhelmingly for a new constitution in August 2010. Devolution, in particular, represents a drastic departure from Kenya's historical centralized governance system, which has at times, hampered the country's democracy and contributed to an uneven development process resulting in vast sections of the population being marginalized.

The country's March 4, 2013 elections marked the second phase of the devolution process. With a push towards decentralization, it is important that elected county governments have the ability to take on a larger share of responsibility for governance, especially service delivery to citizens. To help the devolved government's ability to meet local needs, the International Republican Institute (IRI) promotes engagement between citizens and elected officials, while simultaneously working with elected county officials on their roles and responsibilities to the citizens of Kenya. To achieve this goal, IRI hosts civic education activities and public forums, and sponsors radio talk shows on devolution and local governance issues.

IRI has been working in Kenya since the early 1990's, working with political parties, members of Parliament and civil society to promote democratic governance. One of IRI's priorities has been to bring together civil society and elected officials and also to empower marginalized groups, such as youth, women and persons with disabilities, to increase participation in the political process.

Democratic Governance

IRI's democratic governance program helps strengthen the skills of elected local leaders, who currently only receive a brief two-day induction training upon being elected. To supplement elected leaders' job training, IRI hosts leadership workshops for elected members of the county assemblies. IRI has also partnered with county assemblies to conduct grassroots level budget forums as way for citizens and county legislators to engage each other on local resource and development priorities. IRI is also working with local civil society organizations to begin the formation of coalitions to provide effective oversight and serve as another channel for citizens to engage their elected county governments. Eventually, as civil society and county governments become more familiar with their new roles, IRI will bring these two important stakeholders in the governance process together in order to improve constituency services, begin a dialogue between state and non-state actors and ultimately strengthen democratic governance at the county level. Through the support of the [National Endowment for Democracy](#), IRI has been able to work with local governments to empower democratic governance throughout Kenya.

Civil Society Work

In recent years, IRI has forged strong relationships with civil society organizations and worked closely with these groups to empower them to engage citizens and encourage them to participate in their government. With funding from the [United States Agency for International Development](#), IRI has partnered with key institutions such as the [Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission](#), to engage marginalized constituencies, empower them to vote and to encourage them to actively participate in the devolution process.