



DEVOLUTION CONFERENCE 2025



CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE DEVOLUTION CONFERENCE 2025

- Theme:** For the People, For Prosperity: Devolution as a Catalyst for Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice.
- Sub-theme:** Re-engineering County Governments to Accelerate Development and Close the Socio-Economic Divide.
- Goal:** Examine the place of devolution in the realization of equity, inclusion and social justice and generate practical proposals that can be adopted by state and non-state actors for bridging the socio-economic divide.
- Date:** 12th – 15th August 2025
- Venue:** Homa Bay County

Table of Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 BACKGROUND.....	4
2.0 PURPOSE AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE DEVOLUTION CONFERENCE 2025	5
3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE	5
3.1 CONFERENCE THEME AND SUB-THEME	5
3.2 OVERALL OBJECTIVE OF THE CONFERENCE	6
3.3 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE DEVOLUTION CONFERENCE.....	6
3.4 EXPECTED OUTPUTS.....	6
4.0 DEVOLUTION CONFERENCE THEMATIC DAYS	6
5.0 CONFERENCE FORMAT	8
6.0 PLANNING AND RESOURCING FOR THE CONFERENCE	9
7.0 LOGISTICS	9
8.0 DELEGATES	10
9.0 DURATION AND SCHEDULE OF CONFERENCE	10
ANNEX 1: DRAFT FLOW OF THE PROGRAM	11

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 (CoK) establishes two levels of government - the National Government and forty-seven (47) County Governments. Kenya's devolved system of governance is primarily aimed at transferring power, resources and responsibilities from the center to the subnational units. The main purpose of creating devolved units was to secure equitable distribution of development in the country- that every Kenyan is guaranteed a dignified and quality life with access to public goods such as healthcare, water, food, housing, education and transport. Creation of administrative units beyond County Governments- wards, villages, planning committees- is meant to ensure that communities are heard and that citizen needs are met. This is true for other jurisdictions that have adopted other decentralization models across the continent and the world- that services are taken closer to all citizens.

Article 174 of the CoK illuminates that the objects of devolution are:

- a) to promote democratic and accountable exercise of power;
- b) to foster national unity by recognising diversity;
- c) to give powers of self-governance to the people and enhance the participation of the people in the exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions affecting them;
- d) to recognise the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development;
- e) to protect and promote the interests and rights of minorities and marginalised communities;
- f) to promote social and economic development and the provision of proximate, easily accessible services throughout Kenya;
- g) to ensure equitable sharing of national and local resources throughout Kenya;
- h) to facilitate the decentralisation of State organs, their functions and services, from the capital of Kenya; and
- i) to enhance checks and balances and the separation of powers.

The general election of March 2013 ushered in devolved governments, with County Governors, Deputy Governors, Senators and Members of County Assemblies taking up their constitutional offices. The establishment of County Governments set in motion the implementation of Chapter Eleven (11) and the Fourth Schedule of the CoK. In the first cycle of devolution, County Governments focused on setting up of administrative structures, preparing inaugural County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) and budgets, transitioning staff of defunct local authorities and enacting laws for enabling service delivery.

Over the last eleven (11) years, County Governments have been at the frontline of service delivery in essential sectors such as health, early childhood development and education, roads, water, sanitation and agriculture. Since the inception of devolved governments in March 2013, it has not been business as usual in the policy and legislative front, with public finance management undergoing an overhaul and intergovernmental relations becoming central in implementing

devolution. This journey is laced with successes, challenges, lessons and opportunities that are still unexplored.

1.1 Background

The Council of Governors (CoG), in collaboration with partners, has hosted eight (8) Devolution Conferences in various parts of the country. Attracting domestic and international delegates, the conference has been known to shape devolution’s policy and legislative environment through the Joint Communique that is generated at the end of each event. It has become an instrumental platform through which stakeholders can evaluate the progress made in the performance of the fourteen (14) devolved functions.

The plenums, breakaway sessions and exhibition booths facilitate deep reflections and conversations on the milestones, challenges and opportunities experienced in implementing the devolved system of the governance. The event has proved to be a powerful platform for networking and peer to peer learning on innovations and best practices emerging in service delivery at the County level. Worthy of noting also is that over the years, the Conference has become a real economic booster for communities in the host Counties. All the conference reports can be accessed at <https://maarifa.cog.go.ke/reports>

Previous conferences were held and themed as below:

Year and Month of Conference	Venue	Theme
April 2014	Kwale County- Leisure Lodge	One Year into Devolution: Celebrating Milestones, Confronting the Challenges
April 2015	Kisumu County- Tom Mboya Labor College	Appreciating and Strengthening Devolved Governance: Working Together to Realize the Objectives of Devolution
April 2016	Meru County- Meru Technical Institute	The promise of devolution: Consolidating the gains after transition and looking into the future
April 2017	Nakuru County- Kenya Wildlife Training Institute	Devolution – Transforming Lives: Tell Your Story!
April 2018	Kakamega County- Kakamega High School	Sustainable, productive, effective and efficient governments for results delivery
March 2019	Kirinyaga County- Kirinyaga University	Deliver. Transform. Measure: Remaining Accountable
November 2021	Makueni County- Makueni Boys High School	Multi-Level Governance for Climate Action
August 2023	Uasin Gishu County- Eldoret Sports Club	10 years of Devolution: The Past, Present and The Future

The first seven (7) conferences were held annually, with the Eldoret event ushering the biennial convening of the conference. Indeed, after two (2) years, 2025 is due to host the mega event.

2.0 PURPOSE AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE DEVOLUTION CONFERENCE 2025

The selection of the focus areas for the 2025 Devolution Conference is driven by the pressing need to address equity, inclusion, and social justice in Kenya, the region and the world. Recent global and national discussions have exposed persistent socio-economic disparities, challenges in accessing essential services and economic opportunities, and inadequate participation in governance. ‘Reducing inequality within and among countries’ is Goal 10 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)- cementing the importance of state and non-state actors in sealing socio-economic and political differences amongst populations.

Across the continent and the world over, the conversations in social and mainstream media point towards the fact that our society is increasingly intolerant and divided- and it is time to recalibrate our individual and corporate actions and enliven the principles of equity, inclusion and social justice. To bring the discourse closer home, Kenya is currently grappling with unequal resource distribution, economic imbalances, and social exclusion of vulnerable populations. The rise in youth unemployment, inaccessibility to affordable healthcare and education in various parts of the country, and climate-induced vulnerabilities have further widened the socio-economic divide. The civil unrest experienced in Kenya in June and July 2024 because of the Finance Bill was an indicator that the voices of women, youth and Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) in development cannot be ignored.

Through high-level plenary sessions, sectoral discussions, and side events, the conference will explore actionable solutions that can enhance inclusivity and prosperity. Specifically, the conference will examine how subnational governments can position themselves as delivery agents of equity, inclusiveness and social justice. Participants will have an opportunity to propose policy, legislative, institutional and administrative measures that can be adopted to realize the promises of Article 174 of the CoK.

3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

3.1 Conference theme and sub-theme

The theme for the Devolution Conference 2025 is:

For the People, For Prosperity: Devolution as a Catalyst for Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice.

The conference sub-theme is:

Re-engineering County Governments to Accelerate Development and Close the Socio-Economic Divide.

3.2 Overall objective of the conference

The overall objective of the conference is to assess the role of devolution in promoting equity, inclusion and social justice; and provide an exploratory platform for consultations and dialogue on how devolved governance can be designed to accelerate development and close the socio-economic divide.

3.3 Specific Objectives of the Devolution Conference

The specific objectives of this conference include the following:

1. To assess the extent to which devolution has promoted equity and equality in socio-economic development and service delivery by comprehensively examining the successes and challenges therein.
2. To identify strategies that can be employed by subnational governments to promote inclusion and social justice and particularly protection of the rights of marginalized and minority groups, the youth, women and Persons With Disabilities (PWDs).
3. To identify collaborative strategies that promote good governance, transparency, and accountability in subnational governance in order to build public trust and enhance service delivery.
4. To discuss innovative approaches that can accelerate economic growth at the local level in order to close the socio-economic divide.
5. To facilitate networking, learning and exchange of ideas amongst stakeholders.

3.4 Expected Outputs

- 1) A joint communique.
- 2) Best practices in service delivery identified and documented.
- 3) Conference report.

4.0 DEVOLUTION CONFERENCE THEMATIC DAYS

The Devolution Conference has provided for the curating of side-events by participants. There is a detailed **Concept Note on the Expression of Interest for Hosting Side-Events**. In order to align discussions with the main theme and sub-theme of the conference, the discussions will follow the thematic sequence below:

a) Day 2: Good Governance Day- Wednesday 13th August, 2025

The aim of the *Good Governance Day* is to provide an opportunity to address the mainstreaming of principles of good governance and inclusive development in day to day operations of subnational governments. Delegates will have vibrant discussions on the strategies, plans of action and priorities that need to be adopted by devolved units with the ultimate goal of positioning local and County Governments as centers of excellence in service delivery.

The Good Governance Day includes:

- Morning: High-level Overall plenum for two (2) hours
- Afternoon: Side events on Good Governance, focusing on the following sub-sectors:
 - Public Participation
 - Citizen and community engagement
 - Social accountability
 - Citizen oversight
 - Civic education
 - Transparency
 - Rule of law

b) Day 3: Human Rights and Social Justice Day- Thursday 14th August, 2025

The *Human Rights and Social Justice Day* will focus on the mainstreaming of socio-economic, political, civil and cultural rights; and social justice principles of access to resources, inclusion, equality and diversity- in subnational governance. The participants will be able to reflect on the challenges that have been experienced so far in entrenching the human-rights based and social justice approach in governance and actions will be agreed on to place County and local governments at the center of realization of human rights.

The Human Rights and Social Justice Day includes:

- Morning: Overall plenum for two (2) hours
- Morning and Afternoon: Side events on Human Rights and Social Justice, focusing on the following sub-sectors:
 - **Civil and political rights:** right to participate in civil and political life without discrimination
 - **Cultural rights:** right to participate in cultural life, education, scientific research, and copyright
 - **Economic rights:** rights that focus on the well-being of individuals and communities through economics, social services, and cultural expression.
 - **Social Justice:** access to resources by all citizens, inclusivity in governance and diversity in public service.
- Topics falling within the above sub-sectors, include, but are not limited to:
Food security, Health, Water and sanitation, Low-cost and affordable housing/ elimination of informal settlements, Education- vocational centres/ youth polytechnics/ECD, Social security/ social protection, Land and tenure rights, Protection of marginalized groups and minority rights, Protection of special interest rights: youth, women, PWDs, elderly, Representation of indigenous communities and protection of indigenous knowledge, Transport and mobility, Children rights, Affirmative action, Labor rights

c) Day 4: Financing Equity and Inclusion Day- Friday 15th August, 2025

The aim of the *Financing Equity and Inclusion Day* is to trigger candid conversations on allocation of resources to address systemic inequalities and promoting fairness in the access of finances by all. The discussions will be two-fold:

- Examining access to finance by potential entrepreneurs- the role of subnational governments in promoting ease of doing business;
- Examining the division of revenue between national/central and devolved governments- strategies to guarantee equity and fairness.

The Financing Equity and Inclusion Day includes:

- Morning: Side events on Financing Equity & Inclusion, focusing, but not limited to, the following sub-sectors:
 - Access to finance by Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)
 - Consultation, cooperation and coordination in resource allocation
 - Pro-poor and vulnerability costing and financing
 - Development in marginalized areas
 - Sustainable financing
 - Financial prudence
 - Special Interest Group Funds- Youth Fund, Women Fund, etc
 - Access to procurement opportunities by special groups- AGPO

5.0 CONFERENCE FORMAT

The conference will adopt the following format in order to meet its objectives:

- **Pre-Conference Activities;**
- **Main Plenum discussions;**
- **Side-events;**
- **Exhibition booths; and**
- **Pavilions.**

The panel modality shall include the following: a video/snapshot with headlines on the impact of devolution in the specific sector or sub-theme; paper presentation/ sharing of best practices; a moderated plenary; and wrap-up by the moderator will give a summary highlighting the challenges being experienced and the progress made so far.

A call for hosting side- events/ breakaway sessions has been done and interested parties can bid for space through a formal Expression of Interest (EOI) process. A scientific committee will be established to vet the EOIs and ensure that proposed side-events are aligned to the conference theme and sub-theme.

The exhibition area is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. To showcase best practices and innovations.
2. To promote knowledge sharing and learning amongst conference participants.
3. To showcase technology in various sectors and trigger investment.

A total of 500 booths will be secured and an online platform created to enable interested stakeholders to book their preferred booths on a first come first serve basis. Further, there will be 15 partner pavilion booths for selection and executive meeting rooms.

6.0 PLANNING AND RESOURCING FOR THE CONFERENCE

The planning of the Devolution Conference will be spearheaded by two committees- the Steering Committee (SC) whose Chair is the Vice-Chair of CoG and the Planning Committee (PC) chaired by the CoG Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

The SC comprises of: the Vice-Chair of CoG; Principal Secretary (PS) State Department for Devolution; Speaker of the Senate; Chair of the County Assemblies Forum; and Representatives of Kenya Private Sector Alliance; National Youth Council; and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The Steering Committee (SC) will provide strategic direction and guidance on all aspects of the preparations leading up to the Conference. It will approve the conference concept note, overall program and breakaway sessions; receive and consider regular progress reports from the designated streams of work; and support resource mobilization for the conference.

The (PC) is twofold, internal and external. The internal PC consists of the members of the CoG secretariat while the external planning team incorporates partners from the National Government, Civil Society Organizations, non-governmental organizations among others. The PC coordinates and leads all the preparations of the conference including development of the program and side events; setting up of the exhibition booths; venue; registration of participants; security; and publicity.

The CoG will work with partners to deliver the conference. Roundtable meetings will be held with development partners, civil society organizations, private sector, media and others to seek collaboration in the upcoming conference. Different sponsorship packages will be provided for partners.

7.0 LOGISTICS

The 2025 DevCon will be fully digital. All the logistics about the conference will be available to the participants in an app and the website. Networking dinners will be organized to enable potential investors and partners meet with government representatives. A detailed logistical note will be developed and uploaded to the conference digital platforms.

8.0 DELEGATES

The conference is expected to attract representatives from County Governments, Ministries and their agencies, Parliament, Judiciary, Constitutional Commissions and Independent Offices, Civil Society Organizations, media, religious institutions, sub-national Governments from Africa and other regions, development partners, academia, private sector practitioners and professional associations and networks. This approach will facilitate the exchange of experiences and learning and provide a platform to develop practical solutions for local problems.

9.0 DURATION AND SCHEDULE OF CONFERENCE

The Conference shall be held from 12th to 15th August 2025 in Homa Bay County.

The conference schedule is as follows:

- i) Arrival and collection of registration badges on 12th August 2025.
- ii) Pre-Conference Activities on 12th August 2025.
- iii) Official Opening of the Conference and Side-events on 13th August 2025.
- iv) Conference Days 14th to 15th August 2025.
- v) Official Closing Ceremony and signing of Commitments 15th August 2025.
- vi) Departure 16th August 2025.

Annex 1: Draft Flow of the Program

Day 1- Tuesday 12th- registration/ badge collection/Pre-conference activities		
Day 2- Wednesday 13th		
High- level Overall Plenum/ Live show		
Opening Ceremony		
Side-events (afternoon)		
Cocktail/dinner		
Day 3- Thursday 14th		
Overall Plenum		
Side-events- morning and afternoon		
Cocktail/dinner		
Day 4- Friday 15th		
Side-events-morning		
Closing Ceremony		
Delegate experience- at the exhibition area, pavilions, field visits		
Gala dinner- for all delegates		