

SCS Kenya: Safeguarding Democratic Space in Kenya (SADES-K)

Overview

The Safeguarding Democratic Space in Kenya (SADES-K) project (2018 – 2021, \$6.35 million) is a USAID-funded initiative supporting Kenyan government and civil society organizations (CSOs) to strengthen Kenya's governance-reform agenda and secure democratic gains enshrined in the 2010 Constitution. SADES-K promotes national dialogue and governance reform, builds social cohesion and safeguards democratic space through support to independent media and rule of law processes.

Kenyan Context

In recent years, Kenyan democracy has experienced high points, such as the passage of the 2010 Constitution and the initiation of the devolution process, as well as low points, such as varying degrees of election violence and widespread corruption. To support healing and reconciliation following the contentious 2017 election, President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga agreed to engage in a national dialogue process, leading to the creation of the Building Bridges to Unity Initiative (BBI). This initiative, as well as grassroots efforts led by civil society, demonstrates national support for dialogue as the most promising way to resolve Kenya's deep historical and social issues.

Major Program Components

Revisiting and strengthening Kenya's governance architecture through:

- Grants that support institutional and legal reform and enhance democratic and accountable governance
- Supporting citizen-owned initiatives focused on ensuring that the BBI achieves its mandate

Strengthening social and ethnic cohesion by:

- Awarding grants to CSOs for convening inter-communal dialogue processes and initiatives that address drivers of boundary conflicts
- Supporting reconciliation and healing initiatives related to historical, recent, and on-going grievances facing various groups and communities

Protecting civic and democratic spaces through:

- Grants that support civil society initiatives to promote independent media, Public Benefits Organizations Act implementation, and protect civic space

Monitor national dialogue and implementation of governance reforms through:

- Creation of a monitoring and feedback mechanism that tracks the progress of the BBI process and outcomes
- Conduct opinion polling to measure citizens' views on the BBI dialogue process

Achievements

- Supported the BBI Taskforce in conducting 12 county-engagement forums, in Isiolo, Laikipia, Garissa, Baringo, Nyandarua, Homa-Bay, Kakamega, Elgeyo Marakwet, Uasin Gishu, Kericho, Muranga and Taita Taveta counties
- Hired six senior researchers to support the BBI to draft recommendations
- Awarded 10 CSO grants to support governance reform, social inclusion, and protecting civic space, along with one subcontract to the Institute for Development Studies to monitor public perception about the BBI's work
- Supported the women-led EMBRACE platform to raise awareness on women's engagement in the BBI process at national and local levels, who presented their views in a memorandum to the BBI Task Force
- Completed a co-creation process to explore challenges and opportunities in Kenyan governance and to determine the focus of support for civil society grantees
- Raised awareness about the BBI through strategic communications initiatives, leading to significant increases in related media stories on the national dialogue process

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