

EMPOWERING WOMEN'S VOICES IN POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

Shibuye Community Health Workers: From Grassroots Organizing to Policy Influence



Shibuye CHW members engage a farmer leader at their exhibition stand during the 2022 Governor's Day with Farmers.

About Shibuye Community Health Workers

Shibuye CHW is a grassroots women-led organisation founded in 1999 by 15 women caregivers. Originally established to enhance women's health during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Shibuye CHW has expanded to advocate for women's rights to land and resources, and their inclusion in policy discussions. With over 2,040 members including caregivers, community paralegals, women farmers and market vendors, they work in 18 wards across Kakamega County and collaborate with other women-led organisations in nine other counties.



Shibuye CHW's director, Violet Shivutse, shakes hands with the Governor of Kakamega County after handing the signed Farmers' Declaration to him at GDF 2023.

The Challenge

Women in rural Kenya are the backbone of agriculture, yet face significant barriers to participating in policy discussions that directly impact their livelihoods. Traditional power structures often exclude women from decision-making spaces, while limited awareness of their rights and lack of platforms for engagement prevent their voices from shaping agricultural policies, budget allocations, and resource distribution.

Without representation in policy forums, women's specific needs—such as access to affordable farm inputs, extension services, and equitable resource allocation—remain unaddressed. This exclusion perpetuates inequalities and undermines the crucial role women play in achieving food security and sustainable rural development.

Shibuye CHW has pioneered approaches to bridge this gap by creating platforms for women to engage directly with policymakers and ensuring their voices influence decisions that affect their communities.

From Caregivers to Changemakers

When Shibuye CHW was founded in 1999, the 15 women caregivers could not have imagined they would one day shape county policies and hold positions of authority. Through persistent advocacy and collective action, this transformation demonstrates the power of grassroots organizing.

The journey from home-based care to influencing agriculture policies shows how women's collective voice creates concrete change. Whether at Governor's Day with Farmers, submitting budget petitions, or localizing SDGs, women came prepared with evidence and clear demands.

The results: Fertilizer at ward level. Affordable 25 kg packages. 170 extension officers. Millions for weather stations and soil testing. Communities tracking budgets. Women at decision-making tables—Florah on the Land Control Board, Mercyline as Chief of Virhembe Location, Shinyalu Sub-county, and over 2,000 engaging with county leadership.

This is transformational change—transformed power dynamics where women's voices carry weight and women's leadership is recognized.

Transformational Changes

- **Shifting power dynamics:** Women move from policy recipients to policy shapers with voice and representation
- **Improving service delivery:** County governments respond with increased budgets, staff, and decentralized services
- **Building leadership pipeline:** Women gain skills, confidence, and pathways to formal leadership positions
- **Creating accountability:** Farmers track government commitments and hold leaders responsible
- **Demonstrating scalability:** Success in Kakamega inspires replication in other counties

Moving Forward

Shibuye CHW continues scaling these approaches by expanding GDF to additional counties, strengthening women's caucuses and leadership development, building capacity in policy advocacy, documenting outcomes for evidence-based policy, and advocating for institutionalization of participatory governance mechanisms.

CONTACTS

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