

International Governance Institute (IGI – Kenya)

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IGI KENYA ASPIRANTS FORUM PROGRESS REPORT

Aspirants’ Forums are citizen-centred, community-led ‘public vetting’ meetings where those seeking election to public office subject themselves to public scrutiny, responding to questions from the electorate as they expound on their election manifesto and agenda for the community. Some of the key issues covered in the forums we have held so far include:-

- i. **Academic background of the candidates:** Some of the candidates hold forged certificates, some attended institutions that are not recognized by the Commission for University Education, others did not meet the minimum entry requirements for the institutions they attended and therefore the electorate wants to know how they gained admission without meeting admission requirements and others hold the dubious records of having cheated during examinations in the institutions they attended. Where the members of the community hold any such information about a candidate, they raise it up and require response, clarification or rebuttal where one holds contrary evidence.
- ii. **Career path of the candidates:** Some candidates have headed public institutions which collapsed under their watch, others recruited friends and relatives during their tenure in high office without following the laid down procedures. Others awarded themselves and companies associated with them contracts thereby precipitating conflict of interest, some have been mentioned in Public Accounts Committees as having embezzled public funds or received kickbacks while in office and the electorate would want an explanation. If one is suspected to have acquired a job, a promotion or even a transfer or conferred upon himself a benefit unprocedurally, the matter is brought to light and the candidate responds to the claims.
- iii. **Personal integrity of the candidates:** Some candidates have criminal cases in courts, some longstanding feuds with their spouses over infidelity, some have been mentioned in public reports regarding their hateful public utterances, instigation of political violence, involvement in drug trafficking or voter bribery. Some have been known to make lofty campaign promises which they never follow through or attempt to fulfil. All the matters touching on the personal integrity of the candidate are brought forth and responses required within the allocated time.

iv. **Previous performance of the candidates:** Since the candidates have previously been legal practitioners, teachers, civil servants or politicians, questions are raised about their track record. What difference have they created in their initial postings, what new ideas, technologies or products did they initiate in their previous work stations. What improvements or achievements did they attain in people's lives where they worked. Citizens are encouraged to assess previous performance as an indicator of possible success or failure if the candidate is elected.

The Methodology: Usually, we don't pass a verdict...we remain neutral through out the conversation and act only as moderators. The purpose is to ensure an informed electorate – so we leave the public to judge from what they see and hear as they ask questions - then they go make their own decisions regarding the specific candidates and the offices they aspire to hold as the election date approaches. IGI Kenya stipulates the areas to be covered, the timings and sends out invitations to candidates. The rest of the work is carried out by the local electorate according to their abilities, expectations and interests.



Participants watch as various candidates are introduced before the Forum formally begins at the Municipal Social Hall in Nakuru County.



Participants asking questions during the Questions Time at the Aspirants Forum at the Municipal Social Hall in Nakuru County



A candidate responds to Questions about his background and experience as he makes his case during the Aspirants Forum in the Central Rift Valley area.



A candidate stresses a point as he tries to win the minds and hearts of the electorate in Kivumbini Ward.



Local citizens follow proceedings at the Aspirants Forum as candidates for Member of County Assembly present their election manifestos at St. Theresa's Primary School in Nakuru Town East Constituency.

CHALLENGES

- **Candidates unless strictly monitored want to change the platform from a citizen controlled vetting forum to a politician controlled marketing forum.**
- **Some of the integrity issues being raised against candidates are easily picked up by opponents, twisted, exaggerated and taken out of context to outmanoeuvre their competitors on the campaign trail.**
- **Participants, whom we have urged to be neutral through out the forum easily identify with particular candidates and start cheering them; creating an awkward situation of looking like a forum for so and so's supporters.**
- **Instilling discipline in both the contestants and participants have proved a tall order as rules are easily flouted as the slightest provocation.**