

STRENGTHENING POLITICAL PARTY REGULATION AND INCLUSION IN AFRICA

Comparative Analysis of Kenya, Malawi and Sierra Leone and the Establishment of the African Association of Political Party Regulatory Authorities (AAPRA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Regional Synthesis Report presents a comparative analysis of political party regulation, women's and youth inclusion, and prospects for institutionalised regulatory collaboration across Kenya, Malawi, and Sierra Leone. Commissioned under the Women and Youth in Democracy Engagement (WYDE) Political Parties Project, the study responds to growing recognition that effective political party regulation is central to democratic consolidation, inclusive participation, and accountable governance in Africa. Drawing on harmonised country studies, the report examines how legal frameworks, institutional mandates, and regulatory practices shape political party behaviour, with particular attention to inclusion outcomes. It also assesses opportunities and constraints for structured inter-country collaboration among political party regulatory authorities and explores the feasibility of establishing the Africa Association of Political Party Regulatory Authorities (AAPPRA) as a continental platform for cooperation, peer learning, and standard-setting.

The three countries operate within multiparty democratic systems but differ significantly in levels of party institutionalisation, regulatory capacity, and enforcement. Kenya represents a relatively mature system, characterised by a strong constitutional framework, advanced digital tools, and incentive-based enforcement. Sierra Leone demonstrates the transformative potential of recent legislative reforms, particularly statutory gender quotas and strengthened enforcement powers under the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC). Malawi, while normatively committed to democratic governance and inclusion, reflects the challenges of an emerging regulatory authority operating in a resource-constrained environment. Across all three cases, the report finds that legal provisions alone are insufficient to secure meaningful compliance or inclusive outcomes. Regulatory effectiveness is strongest where legal clarity is complemented by institutional capacity, credible enforcement mechanisms, and political support. Incentives, statutory obligations, and collaborative oversight each shape party behaviour, though with varying degrees of effectiveness. Despite reforms, women and youth continue to face persistent structural barriers, including entrenched patriarchal norms, gerontocratic leadership cultures, high costs of political participation, and uneven enforcement of inclusion measures. The report underscores that meaningful inclusion requires the alignment of legal reforms, institutional strengthening, and broader socio-political transformation.

The analysis identifies strong foundations for inter-country collaboration, including shared mandates, converging reform trajectories, and aligned priorities around inclusion and accountability. However, collaboration is constrained by uneven institutional capacities, differing legal mandates, political economy dynamics, and sustainability challenges. In response, the report proposes a phased and adaptive pathway toward establishing AAPPRA. It recommends beginning with an informal collaboration platform anchored in a Technical Working Group, joint learning activities, and baseline capacity mapping, followed by the development of foundational instruments, pilot initiatives, and eventual formalisation within Africa's broader governance architecture.

Overall, the report concludes that establishing AAPPRA is both feasible and strategically timely. By fostering structured cooperation, peer learning, and shared standards, AAPPRA can strengthen regulatory capacity, promote inclusive political party governance, and contribute meaningfully to democratic consolidation across Africa.



Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| AAACA | African Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities |
| AAPRA / AAPPRA | Africa Association of Political Party Regulatory Authorities |
| ACB | Anti-Corruption Bureau (Malawi) |
| ACDEG | African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance |
| AGA | African Governance Architecture |
| APC | All People's Congress (Sierra Leone) |
| APPWA | All Political Parties Women's Association (Sierra Leone) |
| APPYA | All Political Parties Youth Association (Sierra Leone) |
| APRM | African Peer Review Mechanism |
| AOMA | African Ombudsman and Mediators Association |
| AU | African Union |
| AUC | African Union Commission |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| DDI | Digital Democracy Initiative |
| ECF-SADC | Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries |
| ECONEC | ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions |
| EAC | East African Community |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| ENoP | European Network of Political Foundations |
| EU | European Union |
| FIA | Financial Intelligence Authority (Malawi) |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GEWE Act | Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (Sierra Leone) |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| International IDEA | International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance |
| IPPMS | Integrated Political Parties Management System (Kenya) |
| KIC | Christian Democratic International Centre |
| KII | Key Informant Interview |
| MEC | Malawi Electoral Commission |
| ORPP | Office of the Registrar of Political Parties |
| PAPS | Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (AUC) |
| PPF | Political Parties Fund (Kenya) |
| PPRC | Political Parties Regulation Commission (Sierra Leone) |
| REC | Regional Economic Community |
| SLPP | Sierra Leone People's Party |
| TWG | Technical Working Group |
| WYDE | Women and Youth in Democracy Engagement |

Contents page

| | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 07 | 1. Introduction |
| 10 | 2. Comparative National Context for Party Regulation and Inclusion |
| 14 | 3. Comparative Analysis of Legal and Institutional Frameworks (Objective A) |
| 20 | 4. Comparative Analysis of Regulatory Mechanisms and Practices (Objective B) |
| 28 | 5. Cross-Country Opportunities and Challenges for Collaboration (Objective C) |
| 34 | 6. Prospects for Establishing AAPPRA – Strategic Considerations and Recommendations |
| 38 | Concluding Reflections |
| 40 | References |
| 42 | Annex 1: Terms of reference for the interim Technical Working Group (TWG) on the establishment of the Africa Association of Political Party Regulatory Authorities (AAPPRA) |



Sierra Leone Elections march 2018. By Carol Sahley / USAID

1. Introduction:

1.1. BACKGROUND TO THE REGIONAL STUDY

Over the past two decades, reforms across many African states have sought to modernize political party regulation, strengthen electoral management, and expand opportunities for historically marginalized groups—including women and youth—to participate in political processes. These reforms have taken diverse trajectories reflecting variations in constitutional design, political settlements, levels of party institutionalization, and broader socio-cultural dynamics (Bleck & van de Walle, 2019; Lynch & Crawford, 2011). Some countries have introduced quotas, public funding incentives, and strict party registration requirements, while others continue to rely on voluntary party commitments to inclusion (International IDEA, 2022). Even so, meaningful participation by women and youth remains uneven and often limited by entrenched patriarchal norms (Tamale, 2020), gerontocratic political cultures that favour older elites (Young, 2022), the high cost of political competition (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007), weak funding frameworks for parties, and inconsistent enforcement of regulatory provisions (Matlosa, 2007).

It is within this framework that the Women and Youth in Democracy Engagement (WYDE) Political Parties Project—funded by the European Union and implemented by the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP)—commissioned this comparative assessment of political party regulation in Kenya, Malawi, and Sierra Leone. The three countries present distinct political trajectories and regulatory experiments that offer rich comparative insights.

By examining these three cases together, the project presents both shared continental challenges and country-specific possibilities that shape women’s and youth participation in political parties. It also provides an empirical foundation for exploring opportunities for harmonization, peer learning, and strengthened regulatory cooperation, including the potential establishment of the Africa Association of Political Party Regulatory Authorities (AAPRA).

1.2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This synthesis report consolidates and compares findings from the three country assessments to generate a regional analysis of political party regulation and inclusion as well as assess the prospects for an institutionalized cross-country collaboration and networking among the political parties’ regulatory authorities. Accordingly, this synthesis report seeks to:

Compare the legal and institutional architecture governing political parties in Kenya, Malawi, and Sierra Leone with the view of assessing inclusion outcomes for women and youth as influenced by regulatory frameworks, party practices, and socio-political contexts (Objective A).

Examine how regulatory bodies in each country—ORPP (Kenya), ORPP/Registrar General (Malawi), and PPRC (Sierra Leone)—operationalize their mandates (Objective B).

Identify opportunities and challenges for inter-country collaboration among party regulators (Objective C).

Outline the feasibility, rationale, and institutional design options for establishing AAPRA (Objective D).

The report focuses on national-level regulatory structures; internal party practices as they relate to compliance; cross-country similarities and differences; and emerging best practices with potential for regional uptake. The objectives provide the analytical structure used throughout the synthesis, ensuring coherence across the three country cases.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

The synthesis applies a comparative qualitative methodology, drawing on harmonized country research designs. It is important therefore to note that the country studies followed a standardized qualitative approach:

Desk Review of legal, constitutional, and policy documents; institutional reports; and relevant academic literature.

Key Informant Interviews (KIs) with ORPP/PPRC officials, political party leaders, civil society networks, gender and youth activists, and development partners.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with women and youth wings of political parties (especially in Sierra Leone and Kenya).

Legal and institutional mapping, using standardized matrices to compare inclusion provisions.

Comparative political analysis, identifying structural, cultural, and institutional factors shaping party regulation.

This synthesis triangulates evidence across the three countries, identifies patterns, and distils cross-national insights into a coherent analytical narrative.

1.4. LIMITATIONS

While the study offers valuable comparative insights, several methodological and contextual limitations should be acknowledged to appropriately frame the interpretation of findings.

First, the countries differ markedly in terms of regulatory maturity and institutional sophistication. Kenya's Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) benefits from more advanced legal frameworks, digital systems, and resource capacities, whereas Sierra Leone and (particularly) Malawi are still strengthening foundational regulatory mechanisms. These variations influenced the comparability of regulatory approaches, as certain mechanisms observed in one context were simply not present or not yet operational in another.

Second, political parties are inherently sensitive institutions, and internal dynamics—especially those concerning financing, leadership selection, and inclusion—can be politically delicate. As a result, some stakeholders were cautious in sharing information, limiting full disclosure on areas such as internal democracy practices, enforcement challenges, and informal decision-making processes. In some cases, data has had to be inferred from secondary sources or cross-validated with regulatory authorities.

Third and finally, the lack of uniform gender- and youth-disaggregated data from political parties posed a significant analytical constraint. While some parties track demographic variables, most do not systematically collect or report them, and where data existed, it was often incomplete or inconsistent across reporting periods. This made it difficult to construct a harmonised picture of inclusion outcomes across the three countries. Despite these limitations, the study's triangulated methodology—combining documentary analysis, key informant interviews, regulatory reviews, and cross-country comparative synthesis—provides a sufficiently informative and credible basis for drawing meaningful conclusions and identifying actionable policy recommendations.



2. Comparative National Context for Party Regulation and Inclusion

This section provides a comparative narrative of the political, social, and institutional contexts that shape political party regulation and the inclusion of women and youth in Kenya, Malawi, and Sierra Leone. It synthesizes lessons from the three country studies (Chingaipe, 2025; Maina, 2025; Sowa, 2025) and identifies cross-cutting dynamics influencing the way political parties are formed, governed, and regulated across the three countries.

2.1. POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND THE EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL PARTY LANDSCAPES

Kenya, Malawi, and Sierra Leone operate multiparty democratic systems, but the evolution and institutionalisation of political parties differ significantly, shaping distinct regulatory contexts.

In **Kenya**, the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s and the adoption of the 2010 Constitution established a robust legal and institutional framework grounded in democratic governance, equality, and political pluralism. This has produced a highly competitive yet fluid party system, characterised by shifting alliances, frequent party realignments, and electoral coalitions that often prioritise short-term electoral strategy over long-term institutionalisation (Maina, 2025).

Malawi's transition to multiparty democracy followed a similar timeline but has yielded a more personalised and patronage-driven party system. Political parties are central to electoral competition but remain weakly

institutionalised, marked by fragmentation, inter-party defections, and limited adherence to internal democratic norms. These dynamics constrain both effective regulation and the promotion of inclusive political participation (Chingaipe, 2025).

In **Sierra Leone**, the evolution of the party system has been shaped by post-conflict reconstruction and democratisation. Reforms following the civil war—culminating in significant legislative changes in 2022—have strengthened the legal and institutional framework for party regulation. Nevertheless, political competition remains dominated by a few major parties, notably the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All People's Congress (APC), alongside smaller parties with more limited influence (Sowa, 2025).

Despite these variations, the three countries share key structural features: competitive multiparty elections, political parties as the primary vehicles for leadership selection, and the continued influence of ethnicity, regionalism, and clientelism

in political mobilisation. These dynamics highlight the need for credible and effective regulatory authorities capable of managing complex and evolving party systems.

2.2. SOCIO-POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL DRIVERS OF REGULATION AND INCLUSION

The trajectory of political party regulation and inclusion in Kenya, Malawi, and Sierra Leone is deeply shaped by their historical and socio-political contexts. In all three cases, processes of democratisation or post-conflict transition created formal legal openings for equality and participation. However, entrenched socio-cultural norms and political economy constraints have limited the translation of these commitments into substantive inclusion.

In Kenya, the 2010 Constitution marked a critical turning point by embedding gender equality and non-discrimination as core principles. This provided a foundation for regulatory instruments such as the Political Parties Act and the Political Parties Fund, which introduced incentives to promote inclusion (Maina, 2025). Nevertheless, these advances continue to be constrained by entrenched ethnicised politics, patronage networks, and patriarchal norms that shape political competition in practice.

Malawi's post-1993 democratic transition fostered a participatory political culture and strong constitutional commitments to equality, including provisions for "positive action." However, these commitments have not translated into binding party-level obligations. Notably, the Gender Equality Act (2013) excludes political parties, reflecting resistance to affirmative measures perceived as limiting party autonomy (Chingaipe, 2025). Structural barriers—including the high cost of politics, limited economic empowerment of women and youth, and entrenched gerontocratic leadership—continue to constrain inclusive participation.

Sierra Leone's regulatory environment is shaped by its post-conflict reconstruction trajectory, with an emphasis on peacebuilding and inclusive governance. Recent legislative reforms, including the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (2022) and the Public Elections Act (2022),

represent deliberate efforts to institutionalise inclusion through quotas and strengthened legal mandates. However, these gains remain challenged by persistent patriarchal norms, economic barriers, and forms of political violence, particularly during candidate selection processes (Sowa, 2025).

Across all three countries, a clear pattern emerges: formal legal frameworks for inclusion have advanced more rapidly than the socio-political conditions required to sustain them. This underscores that legal reform, while necessary, is insufficient on its own. Meaningful inclusion requires a broader alignment of legal enforcement, institutional capacity, party incentives, and long-term socio-cultural transformation to bridge the gap between formal commitments and lived political realities.

2.3. INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND MANDATES OF POLITICAL PARTY REGULATORS

The effectiveness of political party regulation in promoting inclusion is closely linked to the mandates, autonomy, and operational capacity of regulatory bodies. Differences in institutional design shape their ability to enforce compliance, monitor party behaviour, and advance inclusion.

Kenya's ORPP is the most developed among the three, combining legal clarity, functional autonomy, and strong operational capacity. Its mandate covers party registration, membership verification, monitoring of internal processes, and oversight of the Political Parties Fund, which enables enforcement through financial incentives. Investments in digital systems, such as the Integrated Political Parties Management Information System, further enhance transparency and regulatory effectiveness (Maina, 2025).

Sierra Leone's PPRC has undergone significant transformation following the 2022 reforms, evolving from a registration-focused body into one with broader oversight powers. It supervises internal party democracy, enforces compliance—including inclusion requirements—and facilitates inter-party dialogue. Institutional innovations, such as the Gender and Youth Directorate and platforms like APPWA and APPYA, reflect growing regulatory

sophistication. Notably, the PPRC is the only body among the three with a constitutionally entrenched mandate (Sowa, 2025).

Malawi’s ORPP, established under the 2018 Political Parties Act and operationalised in 2024, remains at an early stage of institutional development. While it performs core functions such as party registration and compliance monitoring, its capacity to oversee internal party democracy remains limited, reflecting its formative status (Chingaipe, 2025).

Comparatively, the three countries reflect different stages of institutional maturity. Kenya illustrates how strong mandates, digitalisation, and administrative capacity enable effective enforcement. Sierra Leone demonstrates how statutory reform and institutional innovation can expand regulatory reach. Malawi highlights the importance of foundational capacity building to translate legal mandates into credible and consistent regulatory practice.

2.4. TRENDS IN WOMEN’S AND YOUTH INCLUSION ACROSS THE THREE COUNTRIES

The findings of this study show that all three countries have made progress in promoting the participation of women and youth in politics. However, the extent of inclusion varies. This variation tends to be influenced by different combinations of legal mandates, socio-cultural norms, and party practices.

Sierra Leone stands out for its recent legislative advances, particularly the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act, which mandates a 30% quota for women in elective and appointive positions. These reforms have contributed to relatively high levels of women’s representation, with over 30% female parliamentarians in the most recent election cycle (Sowa, 2025). Despite this progress, women continue to face barriers, including intimidation, online harassment, and male-dominated party structures, which require sustained institutional and cultural interventions.



Members of women’s forums are enjoying their newfound voice and role in cross border peace building.
By Tine Frank / USAID East Africa Regional

Kenya has likewise made notable progress, with constitutional provisions on gender equality and financial incentives for parties that meet inclusion requirements. Women’s parliamentary representation has gradually improved, and structures such as women’s and youth leagues within parties provide avenues for political engagement. However, the constitutional two-thirds gender threshold remains only partially implemented, and the cost of politics and entrenched ethnicised competition continue to marginalise women and youth (Maina, 2025).

Malawi demonstrates steady but slower progress. While the number of female candidates and elected officials has increased over successive election cycles, representation remains below regional benchmarks. Women and youth continue to face multiple barriers—including financial constraints, patriarchal party cultures, and gatekeeping during primaries—which limit their possibilities to take up leadership roles. Youth participation remains particularly low, reflecting deep-rooted gerontocratic norms and limited legal or institutional measures designed explicitly to advance youth representation (Chingaipe, 2025).

All the three countries therefore present a set of common structural barriers that continue to constrain the full participation of women and youth: persistent economic barriers, various forms of political violence—including gender-based and online harassment—informal power structures within parties, and the limited influence of women’s and youth wings in party decision-making processes. Yet the comparative evidence also shows that legal mandates, coupled with active regulatory enforcement, have the potential to substantially shift inclusion outcomes. Sierra Leone illustrates the most decisive example: legislated quotas, reinforced by a proactive regulatory commission, have produced measurable improvements in women’s representation within a relatively short period. Kenya shows a more incremental pathway, where constitutional guarantees and financial incentives have driven steady—though uneven—progress, constrained by broader political economy dynamics. Malawi’s experience highlights the limitations of relying on normative commitments without

robust statutory requirements or strong party-level enforcement mechanisms. These findings illustrate that advancing inclusion requires a combination of legal reform, targeted regulatory action, sustained political will, and deliberate cultural change strategies. Where such elements converge, as seen most clearly in Sierra Leone and to some extent in Kenya, inclusion outcomes improve; where they remain fragmented, progress is slower and more fragile, as illustrated by Malawi’s experience.

3. Comparative Analysis of Legal and Institutional Frameworks (Objective A)

A coherent legal and institutional framework is essential for effective political party regulation and for advancing the participation of women and youth in formal politics. While Kenya, Malawi, and Sierra Leone share normative commitments to constitutional democracy, their regulatory instruments, institutional arrangements, and enforcement capacities differ significantly. This section presents a comparative analysis of constitutional provisions, political party legislation, regulatory mandates, and inclusion-focused legal mechanisms, based on the respective country reports (Chingaïpe, 2025; Maina, 2025; Sowa, 2025).

3.1. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE FOUNDATIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTY REGULATION

Across all three countries, constitutional frameworks articulate the foundational principles of equality, democratic governance, and political pluralism. Yet the extent to which these commitments shape the political party regulatory environment varies.

In Kenya, the 2010 Constitution constitutes the strongest constitutional foundation among the three cases. It embeds gender equality, non-discrimination, and participation as fundamental rights. Article 91 of the Kenyan constitution outlines mandatory principles for political parties, including internal democracy, diversity, and gender balance. These constitutional bases underpin the Kenyan Political Parties Act as it grants comprehensive regulatory authority to the ORPP (Maina, 2025).

In Malawi, the 1994 Constitution articulates equality, non-discrimination, and political participation as foundational values. The Malawi Constitution's Section 13 promotes "positive action" measures for marginalized groups, while Section 20 prohibits discrimination on numerous grounds, including sex. The Political Parties Act (2018) builds on these principles to establish legal standards for registration, financing, and party conduct. However, inclusion-specific obligations for political parties remain limited because the Gender Equality Act (2013), while mandating quotas in the public sector, excluded political parties—reflecting political resistance to legislated party-level quotas (Chingaïpe, 2025).

In Sierra Leone, constitutional and statutory reforms—particularly those enacted in 2022—have significantly reshaped the regulation of political parties. The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act mandates a minimum

30% representation of women in elective and appointive positions, while the Political Parties Act (2022) and Public Elections Act (2022) strengthen regulatory provisions governing internal democracy and inclusivity within parties. These legislative reforms give Sierra Leone the most explicit statutory inclusion requirements among the three countries (Sowa, 2025).

In summary, the findings of this study across all the three countries show that comparatively, Kenya and Sierra Leone have relatively the strongest and most detailed statutory frameworks governing political parties particularly in relation to internal democracy and inclusion. Malawi on the other hand shows that its framework—although constitutionally progressive—remains less explicit and therefore less enforceable with respect to gender and youth representation. Furthermore, Kenya’s findings illustrate how a robust constitutional foundation, when complimented by a comprehensive legislation, can create a coherent regulatory system with clear standards and enforcement powers. Sierra Leone’s experience illustrates a different but equally significant finding: recent statutory overhauls, driven by political reforms and post-conflict commitments, have introduced some of the most explicit gender inclusion requirements on the continent, demonstrating how legislative innovation can rapidly reshape the regulatory landscape. By contrast, Malawi findings reflect the challenges of relying primarily on constitutional aspirations without reinforcing them through detailed statutory obligations, especially in the case where political will for party-level quotas is weak. The exclusion of political parties from the Gender Equality Act (2013) clearly demonstrates how political compromise can dilute formal commitments to inclusion.

These contrasts highlight that constitutional commitments alone are insufficient to guarantee transformative regulation. The effectiveness of political party oversight depends on the extent to which constitutions are operationalised through clear, binding legislation that assigns mandates, establishes sanctions, and creates enforceable inclusion standards.

3.2. INSTITUTIONAL MANDATES AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Legal mandates matter only insofar as they are supported by strong, autonomous institutions capable of enforcing compliance. Comparative research suggests that progressive political party laws translate into meaningful accountability only when regulatory bodies possess the independence, authority, and operational capacity required to implement them (Fombad, 2020; International IDEA, 2014; Levitsky & Murillo, 2009). The findings from Kenya, Malawi, and Sierra Leone illustrate this clearly: while each country has established a dedicated regulatory authority, the depth of their autonomy, resources, and administrative systems varies considerably, shaping their ability to enforce legal provisions and promote inclusive party governance

KENYA: A WELL-RESOURCED, HIGHLY INSTITUTIONALISED REGULATOR

The Kenyan ORPP is -arguably- among the most institutionalised political party regulators on the continent. Its mandate covers party registration, verification of membership registers, monitoring internal party democracy, overseeing party financing, and administering the Political Parties Fund (PPF). The ORPP’s strong legal authority is reinforced by substantial operational capacity—including digital infrastructure such as the Integrated Political Parties Management Information System (IPPMS)—which enhances transparency, data management, and compliance monitoring (Maina, 2025). This combination of statutory clarity and organisational sophistication positions Kenya’s ORPP as the most capable regulator among the three countries.

SIERRA LEONE: A STRENGTHENED COMMISSION WITH AN EXPANDING MANDATE

Sierra Leonean’s PPRC has undergone significant transformation following the enactment of major legislative reforms in 2022. The Commission’s mandate now includes supervision of internal party elections, enforcement of inclusion provisions, dispute resolution, and monitoring of party conduct throughout the electoral cycle.



Deputy President David Mabuza attends the inauguration of President-elect, H.E. William Samoei in Nairobi, Kenya. CC BY ND 2.0

Institutional innovations—such as the establishment of a Gender and Youth Directorate and the facilitation of inter-party bodies like APPWA and APPYA—signal a deliberate strengthening of regulatory architecture and a growing commitment to inclusive political governance (Sowa, 2025). Although capacity gaps persist, the PPRC’s recent reforms represent a notable shift toward a more assertive and structured regulatory role.

MALAWI: A LEGALLY INDEPENDENT BUT PRESENTLY UNDER RESOURCED BUT EVOLVING REGULATOR

Malawi’s ORPP, as noted above, is a relatively new autonomous institution established under the Political Parties Act (2018). Unlike earlier arrangements, the ORPP operates outside the Office of the Registrar General and reports directly to Parliament—an institutional design intended to safeguard its independence and enhance its credibility (Chingaïpe, 2025). However, despite having a clear legal mandate, the ORPP presently faces acute operational challenges. Limited staff, inadequate financial resources, and the absence of comprehensive monitoring systems constrain its ability to oversee internal party democracy, enforce

compliance with financing rules, or systematically monitor party activities. While partnerships with the Malawi Electoral Commission and the Malawi Human Rights Commission provide partial institutional support, the ORPP’s effectiveness is hampered more by weak institutional capacity than by weaknesses in legal design (Chingaïpe, 2025). It is however worth noting that the ORPP is already taking proactive measures to address these institutional capacity gaps as the office has embarked on a recruitment drive of key staff whose presence has the potential of enhancing the ORPP’s capacity in delivering its mandate.

Comparatively, a clear pattern emerges across the three case studies: legal authority alone does not determine regulatory effectiveness—operational capacity and institutional maturity are equally critical. Kenya demonstrates how strong statutory mandates combined with advanced administrative systems and digital infrastructure can enable consistent, credible enforcement. Sierra Leone shows how strategic legislative reforms and organisational restructuring can rapidly expand regulatory capability even in a resource-constrained context. Malawi illustrates the challenges faced by newer regulators, where strong legal autonomy is undermined by limited capacity, resulting in inconsistent enforcement and constrained oversight.

3.3. INCLUSION-RELATED PROVISIONS IN POLITICAL PARTY LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Across Kenya, Malawi, and Sierra Leone, inclusion-related provisions in political party laws reveal substantial variation in their scope, enforceability, and practical impact on party behaviour. These legal frameworks appear to shape how political parties organise their internal structures, select candidates, and mainstream gender and youth concerns. Studies have shown that the design and enforceability of such mechanisms play a critical role in determining whether formal commitments translate into substantive political inclusion (Fombad, 2020; International IDEA, 2014; Norris & Krook, 2011). The findings of our three-country study are supportive of this argument as the subsequent discussion illustrates.

KENYA: A HYBRID MODEL COMBINING STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS AND INCENTIVES

Kenya employs a hybrid regulatory approach that integrates legal obligations with financial and administrative incentives. The Political Parties Act (PPA) requires political parties to uphold gender equity, diversity, and inclusiveness in their governing bodies and membership structures (Maina, 2025). These statutory expectations are reinforced by the Political Parties Fund (PPF), which links public funding to compliance with inclusion-related criteria. This model aligns with findings from comparative regulatory research, which note that incentive-based frameworks can motivate parties to institutionalise women's and youth leagues, gender charters, and diversity policies (International IDEA, 2014; van Biezen, 2008).

Despite these mechanisms, implementation remains inconsistent, particularly during candidate nomination processes. Elite gatekeeping, high financial costs of participation, and the pervasive influence of ethnic-based mobilisation undermine the effectiveness of inclusion measures (Maina, 2025; Cheeseman, 2015). Kenya's model therefore reflects a system where legal and institutional incentives exist, but political economy dynamics continue to shape inclusion outcomes.

SIERRA LEONE: A QUOTA-DRIVEN, ENFORCEMENT-BACKED FRAMEWORK

Sierra Leone stands out for having the most explicit and enforceable inclusion provisions among the three countries. The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act (2022) mandates that a minimum of 30% of all elective and appointive positions be reserved for women (Sowa, 2025). Complementary provisions in the Political Parties Act (2022) and the Public Elections Act (2022) require political parties to reflect gender inclusion commitments in their internal structures, leadership hierarchies, and candidate lists.

Unlike many African countries where quotas exist but are weakly enforced, Sierra Leone's provisions are backed by meaningful oversight powers vested in the Political Parties Regulation Commission

(PPRC). This reflects broader comparative evidence showing that quota systems generate significant improvements in women's representation when supported by strong regulatory institutions (Muriaas et al., 2017; International IDEA, 2022). The PPRC's mandate to monitor compliance, conduct gender audits, and sanction non-compliant parties has contributed to Sierra Leone achieving over 30% women's representation in parliament—one of the highest in the region (Sowa, 2025).

MALAWI: A NORMATIVELY SUPPORTIVE BUT NON-BINDING FRAMEWORK

Malawi's legal framework does not impose binding gender or youth inclusion requirements on political parties. As already noted, although the Gender Equality Act (2013) introduces 40% representation quotas for public-sector appointments, it explicitly excluded political parties—reflecting political sensitivities around party autonomy and resistance to legislated quotas (Chingaipe, 2025). The Political Parties Act (2018) encourages internal democracy and adherence to equality principles but does not specify enforceable inclusion standards.

Consequently, inclusion within political parties remains largely voluntary, shaped by party-level commitments, civil society pressure, and donor-supported initiatives rather than statutory obligation. Research however shows that voluntary inclusion frameworks often result in weak or inconsistent outcomes, especially in contexts characterised by strong patriarchal norms and limited internal party democracy (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007; Tamale, 2020). Malawi's experience aligns with this pattern in that while some parties operate women's or youth wings, their influence on candidate selection, resource allocation, and strategic decision-making remains limited (Chingaipe, 2025).

Our findings from the three country studies therefore show that, inclusion mechanisms reflect three distinct regulatory philosophies that shape political party behaviour and inclusion outcomes:

Sierra Leone exemplifies a quota-based, legally binding, and enforcement-driven model, consistent with global evidence showing that strong statutory

quotas combined with regulatory oversight produce the most rapid shifts in women's representation (Muriaas et al., 2017; International IDEA, 2022).

Kenya pursues an incentive-based, partially enforceable model, where statutory obligations exist but are reinforced primarily through financial inducements and administrative checks rather than compulsory quotas (Maina, 2025; International IDEA, 2014).

Malawi represents a voluntary, norm-driven framework where legal encouragement exists but is neither binding nor strongly enforced, limiting its impact on substantive representation (Chingaipe, 2025; Gyimah-Boadi, 2007).

In comparative terms, these models indicate that that the structure, clarity, and enforceability of inclusion provisions directly influence political outcomes. Quota-driven systems tend to deliver

measurable improvements where regulatory capacity is strong, as seen in Sierra Leone. Incentive-based systems generate moderate progress but remain vulnerable to entrenched political economy constraints, as observed in Kenya. Voluntary frameworks, such as Malawi's, produce the weakest inclusion outcomes, illustrating that normative commitments alone are insufficient without statutory obligations or regulatory incentives.

3.4. ENFORCEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The legal frameworks establish the formal standards for political party conduct. Beyond this, the real test of regulatory effectiveness lies in enforcement and implementation. The three case studies show that comparatively, across Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Malawi, the most significant divergences do not arise from differences in legal text, but rather from the institutional capacity, political will, and broader political economy conditions that shape how



Imran Mohammed (right), during a Civic Engagement Forum at Majengo Village Hall, Kenya
By Alex Kamweru / USAID

these laws are applied in practice. This reinforces a well-established conclusion in the comparative governance and regulatory literature that even the most progressive legal frameworks can be rendered ineffective when enforcement institutions lack capacity, when political elites resist compliance, or when monitoring systems are inadequate (Fombad, 2020; Levitsky & Murillo, 2009; International IDEA, 2014). The evidence from the three country case studies illustrates this dynamic in distinct yet mutually reinforcing ways.

KENYA: ENFORCEMENT STRENGTHENED BY DIGITAL SYSTEMS AND FINANCIAL LEVERAGE

Kenya demonstrates the strongest and most systematic enforcement environment among the three countries. The ORPP benefits from a combination of digital monitoring systems—notably the IPPMS—and financial leverage through the Political Parties Fund (PPF). These tools enable the ORPP to verify membership registers, monitor internal party processes, and assess compliance with reporting requirements (Maina, 2025). The Kenyan study findings however further show that the political economy constraints continue to limit enforcement, particularly during candidate nomination processes. Elite gatekeeping, factional competition, and the high cost of primaries often undermine formal inclusion norms, resulting in enforcement that is stronger on administrative requirements than on transforming internal party power relations (Cheeseman, 2015; Maina, 2025). Thus, Kenya demonstrates how institutional capacity can strengthen enforcement, but cannot fully override entrenched political dynamics.

SIERRA LEONE: EXPANDING ENFORCEMENT UNDER A REFORMED LEGAL MANDATE

Sierra Leone's PPRC has made significant strides in expanding its enforcement capacity following the 2022 legislative reforms. These reforms provide the Commission with clearer authority to monitor internal party democracy, enforce inclusion requirements, supervise candidate selection processes, and adjudicate intra-party disputes (Sowa, 2025). Early evidence suggests that the PPRC is increasingly

assertive in applying its mandate, particularly in relation to gender quota enforcement.

Nonetheless, the ambitious nature of the new legal provisions requires sustained capacity strengthening, including increased staff, better logistical support for nationwide monitoring, and technological tools to enhance data collection and oversight. As other studies have shown, new regulatory mandates can only be effective when accompanied by targeted investments in institutional capacity (International IDEA, 2014; Muriaas et al., 2017). Sierra Leone therefore represents a promising case of enforcement expansion, but one still in a formative stage.

MALAWI: THE EMERGING REGULATORY AUTHORITY WITH PRESENTLY LIMITED CAPACITY

While Malawi has a constitution that strongly endorses equality, non-discrimination, and political participation, the emerging regulatory authority has—unsurprisingly—the weakest enforcement environment. As already noted, the ORPP is still in its early stages of setting itself up having become fully operational only since 2024.

In practice, Malawi's enforcement presently often relies on persuasion, stakeholder dialogue, civil society pressure, and collaboration with institutions like the Judiciary, Malawi Electoral Commission and Malawi Human Rights Commission, rather than statutory enforcement mechanisms. Such informal or voluntary enforcement approaches however tend to produce inconsistent outcomes, particularly in contexts with strong patronage networks and weak institutionalisation of political parties (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007; Tamale, 2020). The extent to which this will be the case in Malawi remains to be seen as the ORPP becomes increasingly more assertive in discharging its mandate with enhanced capacity.

4. Comparative Analysis of Regulatory Mechanisms and Practices (Objective B)

Effective political party regulation depends not only on the strength of legal and institutional foundations, as outlined in Section 3, but also on the practical mechanisms and regulatory behaviours through which oversight bodies implement their mandates. Regulatory practice is shaped by institutional capacity, political context, available tools, and the evolving relationship between regulators and political parties. Drawing from the three country cases—Kenya, Malawi, and Sierra Leone—this section presents a comparative analysis of how regulatory authorities operationalise their roles, highlighting innovations and persistent gaps, and lessons for regional cooperation under future frameworks such as AAPPRA.

4.1. DIVERSITY OF REGULATORY TOOLS ACROSS THE THREE COUNTRIES

The findings from the three case studies show that political party regulatory authorities across the three countries employ a wide range of tools to oversee party formation, internal governance, candidate nomination, financial management, and adherence to inclusion norms. The scope, the extent of sophistication, and enforceability of these tools varies.

KENYA: A COMPREHENSIVE AND SYSTEMATISED REGULATORY TOOLKIT

Kenya's ORPP operates one of the most advanced regulatory systems among the three Regulatory Authorities in question:

- Stringent party registration procedures, requiring verified membership lists, evidence of national presence, and compliance with constitutional principles.

- Digital monitoring through the Integrated Political Parties Management Information System (IPPMS), enabling real-time oversight of membership data and compliance indicators.

- Financial oversight and leverage, particularly through the Political Parties Fund (PPF), which ties access to public funding to compliance with inclusion and accountability requirements.

- Structured review processes for party constitutions, internal elections, and dispute-resolution frameworks.

- Enforcement mechanisms, including suspension of funding and deregistration for persistent non-compliance.

These tools translate Kenya's robust legal framework into practical regulatory oversight. However, as discussed in Section 3, persistent political economy constraints—especially elite

dominance in candidate nominations—limit the regulator’s reach during internal party primaries (Maina, 2025).

SIERRA LEONE: STRENGTHENING MECHANISMS THROUGH THE 2022 REFORMS

Sierra Leone’s PPRC has significantly broadened its regulatory tools following the 2022 legislative reforms. Its mechanisms now include:

- Supervision of internal party elections, including reviews of compliance with party constitutions and democratic procedures.
- Oversight of candidate nomination processes, specifically enforcing the statutory 30% gender quota.
- Investigative and quasi-judicial powers to inquire into violations of the Political Parties Act.
- Structured engagement platforms through APPWA and APPYA, enabling systematic interaction with women and youth.

— Civic and political education programmes aimed at improving party governance and public understanding of political rights.

— Enhanced compliance reporting, including mandatory submissions of party financial accounts and organisational information.

These tools represent significant progress and signal Sierra Leone’s transition toward an enforcement-oriented regulatory culture. However, practical constraints—such as limited staffing, insufficient field monitoring capacity, and logistical challenges—continue to limit full implementation (Sowa, 2025).

MALAWI: A REGULATORY TOOLKIT WITH POTENTIAL BUT (PRESENTLY) LIMITED REACH

Malawi’s ORPP uses a narrower but evolving set of tools, shaped heavily by its young institutional age and present capacity limitations:

- Party registration and compliance checks under the Political Parties Act (2018), including scrutiny of constitutions and membership criteria.



Leaders sign a commitment to peaceful elections in Kilifi, Kenya. By Alex Kamweru / USAID

— Monitoring of political financing, including the prohibition on political handouts during campaigns.

— Review of financial reports, though enforcement is only starting to be effectuated as the ORPP increasingly evolves into a fully operational regulatory authority.

— Inter-agency collaboration with the MEC, MHRC, and civil society organisations, compensating for gaps in monitoring.

— Promotion of intra-party democracy, although without strong sanctioning powers to ensure compliance.

These tools demonstrate Malawi’s regulatory potential but also reveal the constraints of a low-capacity environment in which legal mandates outpace institutional ability (Chingaïpe, 2025).

4.2. HOW REGULATORS OPERATIONALISE THEIR MANDATES: EMERGING PATTERNS

Although the three regulatory authorities—Kenya’s ORPP, Sierra Leone’s PPRC, and Malawi’s ORPP—operate within distinct legal and political environments, they all demonstrate increasing efforts to operationalise their mandates beyond the minimal legal requirements. What differs, however, is the depth, consistency, and effectiveness with which these regulators translate legal frameworks into day-to-day oversight. This section identifies emerging patterns in regulatory behaviour across the three countries, illustrating how institutional capacity, political context, and regulatory philosophy shape the exercise of oversight functions.

KENYA: PROACTIVE AND STRUCTURED ENFORCEMENT

Kenya’s ORPP demonstrates the most proactive, systematised, and structured regulatory approach among the three cases. This mode of operation reflects both the maturity of the institution and the comprehensive legal and digital infrastructure at its disposal. Key features include:

— Periodic formal inspections of party offices, allowing the regulator to verify compliance with organisational and administrative requirements.

— Auditing of membership registers using digital verification tools embedded in the Integrated Political Parties Management Information System (IPPMS).

— Review and approval of internal party leadership elections, ensuring alignment with democratic principles and statutory requirements.

— Monitoring of adherence to inclusion standards, including the representation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in party structures.

— Involving structured communication channels, capacity-building sessions, and technical guidance on compliance obligations.

These practices are supported by Kenya’s advanced digital systems, which enable real-time data collection, automated verification processes, and transparent documentation. As a result, the ORPP can maintain a Continuous engagement with political parties predictable, rules-based regulatory environment that is less prone to political interference and more aligned with best practices identified in comparative scholarship on party regulation.

However, as we have already observed, while the ORPP’s administrative and financial oversight is strong, the institution faces challenges during internal party primaries, where entrenched political elites, informal patronage networks, and ethnic mobilization often limit the regulator’s reach. This reflects a broader finding in the political economy literature whereby regulators may enforce technical compliance effectively but struggle to shift deeper power relations within political parties (Cheeseman, 2015; Maina, 2025).

SIERRA LEONE: TRANSITIONING TOWARD ENFORCEMENT-LED AND INCLUSION-FOCUSED REGULATION

Sierra Leone’s PPRC is undergoing a notable transition from a primarily administrative and

conflict-mediation institution into a more robust enforcement-oriented regulatory authority. This shift has been driven largely by the 2022 legislative reforms, which expanded the Commission’s mandate and clarified its powers concerning internal party democracy, candidate nomination processes, and statutory inclusion requirements. Emerging patterns in the PPRC’s regulatory practice include:

— Enhanced supervision of internal party elections, with the Commission now reviewing electoral procedures, leadership selection processes, and compliance with party constitutions. This marks a departure from the PPRC’s earlier, more passive role and reflects a deliberate institutional effort to strengthen internal party democracy.

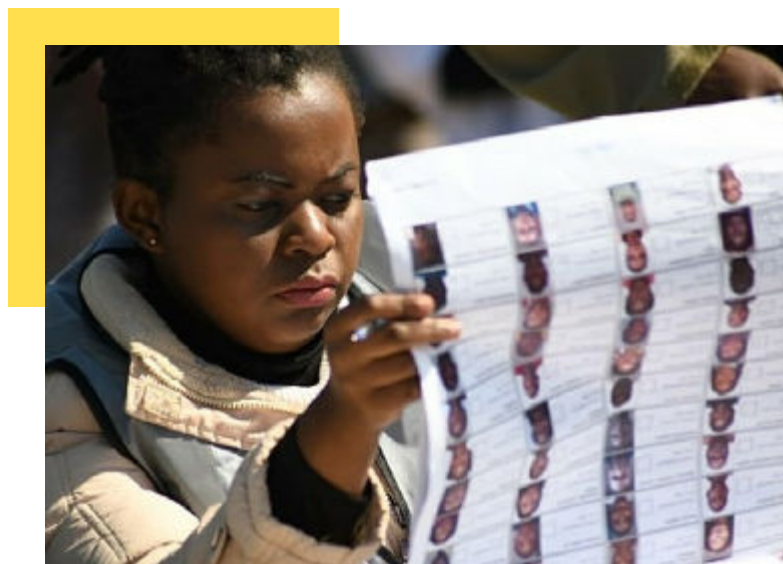
— Active monitoring of candidate nomination processes, particularly regarding compliance with the mandatory 30% gender quota under the GEWE Act. This involves pre-election scrutiny of party lists, verification of gender representation thresholds, and engagement with parties to rectify non-compliance.

— Investigation and adjudication of intra-party disputes, using strengthened quasi-judicial powers to address violations of the Political Parties Act and mediate conflicts that threaten party cohesion or fairness.

— Institutionalised engagement with women and youth, facilitated through structured partnerships with the All Political Parties Women’s Association (APPWA) and the All Political Parties Youth Association (APPYA). These bodies act as parallel accountability mechanisms that inform regulatory decisions and promote continuous dialogue on inclusion.

— Expansion of civic and political education initiatives, designed to enhance public understanding of party governance, promote compliance, and foster an informed electorate.

Together, these shifts reflect a strategic repositioning of the PPRC within Sierra Leone’s political governance architecture. While capacity constraints—particularly around field monitoring and staffing—continue to limit the Commission’s ability to conduct real-time oversight across



*Citizens participate in an election activity in Malawi.
By Thoko Chikondi / USAID*

the country, the overall regulatory posture is increasingly assertive and rule-based. This emerging model aligns with comparative evidence showing that quota implementation and internal democracy reforms are most effective where regulators combine statutory powers with routine engagement and monitoring (Muriaas et al., 2017; International IDEA, 2022; Sowa, 2025).

MALAWI: COLLABORATIVE, CONSENSUS-ORIENTED, AND CAPACITY-CONSTRAINED BUT EVOLVING REGULATION

Malawi’s Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) exhibits a markedly different regulatory profile, shaped by both its recent establishment as an independent institution that became fully operational in 2024 and presently with limited capacity. Instead of adopting a strongly upfront enforcement-driven approach, Malawi’s ORPP has developed a consensus-based and collaborative regulatory style that relies on persuasion, partnership, and inter-institutional cooperation to influence party behaviour. Key emerging patterns include:

— Dialogue-driven engagement with political parties- the ORPP frequently convenes consultative sessions and informal discussions to clarify legal obligations, encourage compliance, and address emerging disputes.

— Reliance on inter-agency collaboration— particularly with the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC), and civil society organisations—which compensates for gaps in the ORPP’s monitoring capacity. Through joint trainings, election-related monitoring, and shared observation missions, these partnerships seem to enable a broader enforcement reach than the ORPP could achieve independently.

— Soft enforcement of intra-party democracy—the regulator reviews party constitutions and organisational structures but presently has limited statutory tools and operational capacity to allow the ORPP to effectively compel compliance through sanctions.

— Monitoring of political financing- including oversight of the statutory prohibition of handouts during campaigns. Although monitoring occurs, enforcement remains limited partly because of the ORPP’s present limited institutional capacity as the Office is still in its setup phase.

— In the course of the 2024 general elections, the ORPP has demonstrated that it has potential to be progressive in enforcing implementation of party registration and compliance checks. That said, it needs to be noted that to influence systemic and transformative change in deeper political structures within parties will remain a challenge in a context where there the culture of party regulation is yet to be entrenched

Malawi’s regulatory approach presently demonstrates a situation in which legal autonomy exists without sufficient operational capacity, resulting in a regulatory style that prioritises relationship-building and persuasion over compulsion. As other scholars (Gyimah-Boadi, 2007; Tamale, 2020) have noted, this collaborative regulation can indeed foster trust and gradual reform. However, it (the collaborative approach) may often struggle to enforce substantive change in contexts dominated by patronage networks and limited institutional resources. In the case of Malawi, it is too early to be conclusive considering the very limited time the ORPP has been fully functional beyond its formal legal creation.

4.3 INCENTIVES AND SANCTIONS: COMPARATIVE EFFECTIVENESS

A regulatory framework is said to be as effective as the incentive structures and sanctioning mechanisms that underpin it. In this regard, it can be argued that while legal mandates and institutional responsibilities of the political parties’ regulatory authorities in three countries under review define what political parties should do, incentives and sanctions determine what they (the parties) are likely to do in practice.

KENYA: INCENTIVE-LED ENFORCEMENT ANCHORED IN FISCAL REWARDS

Kenya’s regulatory framework is distinguished by its strategic reliance on positive incentives, particularly through the Political Parties Fund (PPF). The PPF operates as a powerful compliance mechanism, rewarding parties that meet statutory thresholds related to gender inclusion, national representation, and internal democracy. As we know from other empirical studies (van Biezen, 2004; Scarrow, 2007), political parties tend to respond strongly to such financial incentives, especially when the rules governing allocation are predictable and consistently enforced. In Kenya, exclusion from the PPF therefore functions as a de facto sanction with tangible financial consequences, pushing parties to adhere to administrative and reporting requirements more rigorously over time (Maina, 2025).

SIERRA LEONE: QUOTA-BASED ENFORCEMENT SUPPORTED BY CLEAR LEGAL MANDATES

Sierra Leone’s approach reflects a model that is driven by statutory obligations and is reinforced by an empowered enforcement authority. The 30 percent gender quota introduced under the GEWE Act (2022), alongside the PPRC’s expanded mandate, creates a comparatively robust legal framework for enforcing party compliance. Research on party regulation demonstrates such legal clarity and predictable sanctioning possibilities do increase the deterrent effects of regulation (Nassmacher, 2009; Baldwin et al., 2012). In Sierra Leone, the threat of non-acceptance of candidate lists for non-compliance with quotas therefore serves as a powerful sanction,



Nairobi, Kenya.
By Amani Nation
on Unsplash

even as implementation challenges remain (Sowa, 2025). Over time, as enforcement practices mature and institutional capacity deepens, Sierra Leone's model is positioned to generate substantial behavioural change, consistent with patterns observed in other contexts with strong legal mandates (LeBas, 2011).

MALAWI: WEAK SANCTIONING TOOLS AND RELIANCE ON VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE

Comparatively, Malawi at present has a relatively weak enforcement environment among the three countries. Although the Political Parties Act (2018) requires annual financial reporting, disclosure of funding sources, and audited accounts, these obligations appear not to be accompanied by any known incentives at the moment. The sanctions for non-compliance are equally limited. In this case compliance becomes largely voluntary. The Malawi ORPP, is of course still setting up the necessary mechanisms for purposes of ensuring it effectively discharges its mandate.

COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS

A cross-country comparison reveals that:

— Sierra Leone exhibits the strongest legal obligations, supported by statutory quotas and a clearly mandated regulatory body with authority to enforce compliance.

— Kenya presents the strongest incentive system, using financial rewards to shape party behaviour in measurable and sustained ways.

— Malawi has—presently— the weakest combination of sanctions and incentives, resulting in a regulatory framework largely dependent on goodwill, civil society/public pressure while the ORPP is increasingly asserting itself as the Office continues to build its capacity.

These findings are consistent with similar insights from comparative regulatory scholarship which show that effective political party regulation requires an integrated mix of legal clarity, credible sanctions, and meaningful incentives. Jurisdictions that depend solely on one dimension—whether incentives (Kenya), legal mandates (Sierra Leone), or voluntary compliance (Malawi)—face predictable limitations in achieving consistent behavioural change (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992; Scarrow, 2007; LeBas, 2011).

4.4. INNOVATIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Beyond formal mandates and enforcement mechanisms, regulatory effectiveness is also shaped by innovative tools and institutional practices that enhance transparency, inclusion, and administrative efficiency. The three countries have varied approaches to strengthening political party governance through digital systems, cross-party inclusion platforms, and collaborative institutional frameworks. These innovations illustrate how regulators can overcome resource

constraints, improve oversight, and promote compliance even in environments with uneven or limited sanctioning power.

KENYA'S DIGITAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS: A MODEL FOR TECHNOLOGICAL REGULATION

Kenya's adoption of digital administrative tools—most notably the Integrated Political Parties Management System (IPPMS)—represents one of the most progressive innovations in political party regulation. The system centralises key regulatory functions, including party membership records, leadership structures, financial disclosures, and compliance documentation. By digitising these processes, IPPMS reduces opportunities for manipulation, enhances transparency, and allows the ORPP to conduct real-time verification of party data.

This digital architecture not only streamlines administrative oversight but also complements the country's incentive-based regulatory framework by making it easier to determine eligibility for the PPF. Such digital systems, as international regulatory scholarship has shown, significantly improves enforcement by lowering monitoring costs and increasing information accuracy (Baldwin, Cave, & Lodge, 2012). In Kenya, these gains help strengthen compliance in areas where clear incentives already exist and enhance the ORPP's capacity to detect irregularities or inconsistencies, thereby reinforcing the overall regulatory environment.

SIERRA LEONE'S INCLUSION PLATFORMS: CROSS-PARTY INSTITUTIONAL SPACES FOR ADVOCACY AND MONITORING

Sierra Leone has pioneered a different form of institutional innovation through the establishment of cross-party inclusion platforms, notably the All Political Parties Women's Association (APPWA) and the All Political Parties Youth Association (APPYA). These bodies function as structured, permanent mechanisms for advancing inclusion within and across political parties, providing spaces for advocacy, dialogue, capacity-building, and peer monitoring.

APPWA and APPYA complement the country's relatively strong legal framework—particularly the gender quota under the GEWE Act—by supporting parties to internalise inclusion norms and develop practical pathways for meeting statutory obligations. Research on political institutionalisation suggests that such cross-cutting bodies enhance compliance by building norms of cooperation, reducing intra-party resistance, and promoting collective accountability (LeBas, 2011; Bleck & van de Walle, 2019). In the Sierra Leonean context, these platforms appear to have helped reduce the political costs of implementing quotas by framing inclusion as a shared, system-wide responsibility rather than as an externally imposed burden. Thus, although implementation challenges remain, the existence of these institutional platforms positions Sierra Leone well for sustained progress in advancing women's and youth participation.

MALAWI'S INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION FRAMEWORK: LEVERAGING COLLECTIVE CAPACITY IN LOW-RESOURCE CONTEXT AND AN EMERGING REGULATORY AUTHORITY

Malawi's most notable innovation lies in its inter-agency collaboration framework, spearheaded by the ORPP. In a context characterised by limited financial and technical resources, the ORPP has developed a cooperative oversight model that leverages institutions such as the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), the Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA), and civil society organisations. While it is too early to effectively evaluate this innovative approach, it is apparent that given its relatively emerge nature, this collaborative approach allows the ORPP to leverage external expertise, expand its monitoring reach, and compensate for its limited coercive powers. Evidence from other comparative regulatory studies indicate that in low-capacity environments, multi-actor collaboration can significantly enhance compliance by dispersing oversight functions and creating multiple points of accountability (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992; Baldwin et al., 2012). Thus, the Malawi's collaboration framework demonstrates how institutional creativity can partially offset systemic weaknesses, offering a pragmatic model for countries confronting similar regulatory capacity challenges.



5. Cross-Country Opportunities and Challenges for Collaboration (Objective C)

The three country studies demonstrate a clear and growing appetite among political party regulatory authorities for cross-country collaboration, peer learning, and coordinated institutional strengthening. Although their institutional trajectories differ, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Malawi share common regulatory mandates and confront comparable structural challenges—including weak internal party democracy, limited inclusion of women and youth, and uneven compliance with financial and administrative reporting requirements.

This section synthesises the opportunities and constraints that shape prospects for structured inter-country collaboration. Drawing from the comparative findings, we outline shared foundations, emerging areas for joint action, and the practical challenges that must be addressed to support the establishment of a continental platform such as the AAPRA.

5.1. EXISTING FOUNDATIONS FOR COLLABORATION

Despite the absence of a formal continental mechanism dedicated to political party regulation, the three case studies reveal a set of institutional, normative, and strategic foundations that make inter-country collaboration both feasible and potentially transformative. These foundations arise from shared mandates, converging reform trajectories, aligned strategic priorities, and favourable institutional attitudes toward peer learning. Together, they form the bedrock upon which a future regional framework could be constructed.

SHARED MANDATES AND CONVERGING REFORM TRAJECTORIES

The regulatory authorities in Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Malawi—though situated in different political contexts—operate under broadly similar statutory mandates. They are each tasked with:

- promoting and safeguarding internal party democracy,
- overseeing transparency, accountability, and compliance with party laws,
- managing party registration processes and enforcing legal eligibility criteria, and
- advancing inclusion, particularly for women, youth, and other historically marginalised groups.

These shared responsibilities establish an immediate basis for collaboration, as regulators confront similar governance challenges and pursue comparable institutional objectives. It is also worth noting that the reform trajectories across the three institutions demonstrate a clear pattern of convergence that further provide the basis and value for inter-country collaboration despite varying levels of institutional consolidation.

Kenya's ORPP stands as one of Africa's most mature regulatory authorities, underpinned by advanced digital systems (IPPMS), predictable compliance procedures, and an institutionalised political parties fund that creates routine incentives for compliance (Maina, 2025).

Sierra Leone's PPRC is undergoing rapid institutional strengthening following the 2022 reforms, which expanded its mandate, clarified its enforcement authority, and repositioned the Commission as a central actor in shaping internal party democracy and inclusion (Sowa, 2025).

Malawi's ORPP, though newly operationalised, reflects a reformist trajectory characterised by legal autonomy, growing administrative authority, and emerging collaboration with oversight institutions (Chingaipe, 2025).

This shared movement toward more structured, empowered, and rule-based regulatory institutions provides a strong platform for standard-setting, joint training, and the development of shared regulatory tools. Importantly, the diversity of institutional maturity across the three cases also creates opportunities for tiered learning, where more advanced institutions support peer regulators undergoing consolidation.

SHARED STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: INCLUSION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

A second foundation for collaboration lies in the alignment of strategic priorities across the three regulators. Across Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Malawi, political party regulation increasingly centres on:

promoting sustained institutionalisation of political parties, particularly through adherence to constitutional principles and internal rules.
enhancing transparency in party financing and resource mobilisation
strengthening the participation and representation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities, and
improving the quality and democratic character of internal party elections and leadership structures,

This convergence reflects wider trends in African governance and resonates with international debates on party institutionalisation, inclusion, and political finance. The shared focus on these priorities creates natural thematic entry points for collaboration, including:

- development of regional inclusion benchmarks,
- harmonised reporting templates for financial disclosures,
- cross-country training on internal democracy standards,
- joint knowledge products on the implementation of gender quotas, and
- peer review mechanisms for assessing party organisational practices.

The thematic alignment across countries therefore constitutes not only a foundation for collaboration but also a strategic imperative, given the cross-cutting nature of political party governance challenges.

FAVOURABLE ATTITUDES TOWARD REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

A third enabling factor is the strong institutional openness to regional engagement observed across the three regulators. Findings from the KIIs across the three countries show that regulatory authorities:

- express willingness to learn from peers with more advanced tools or stronger enforcement cultures,
- demonstrate openness to coordinated reforms aimed at strengthening continental governance norms, and



Youth from Kisumu Ndogo Maskani in Nyali constituency participate in a Gumzo Mtaani. By Alex Kamweru / USAID

- articulate a desire to be part of a broader community of practice dedicated to political party regulation.

This positive disposition is not incidental. It reflects a growing recognition that:

- many regulatory challenges—such as political finance oversight, party institutionalisation, and gender inclusion—are regional and systemic, not merely national;
- peer learning offers access to proven methodologies, tested tools, and practical innovations; and
- participation in a continental body enhances the legitimacy, authority, and visibility of national regulatory institutions.

These attitudes constitute an essential precondition for the creation of AAPPRA or any other regional platform. Effective collaboration requires institutional willingness, and in all three countries, the foundational appetite for cooperation is already present and well articulated.

5.2. CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR COLLABORATION

While the opportunities for collaboration among Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Malawi are strong, the comparative analysis shows that effective and durable cooperation must be designed with a clear understanding of the structural, political, and institutional challenges that may impede its success. Being aware of and addressing these challenges upfront—rather than retroactively—will be essential to building a resilient and equitable regional platform such as AAPPRA. The following discussion expands on these constraints and proposes mitigation strategies and principles for collaboration design, drawing on comparative examples from other governance networks in Africa and beyond.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY GAPS

Regulatory authorities will inevitably vary with respect to their resource and capacity strengths. As the findings from the three case studies illustrate, even among the three countries, one (Kenya) demonstrates some level of superiority in this regard vis-à-vis Malawi and Sierra Leone. The latter two regulatory authorities on the continent inevitably face notable resource and capacity limitations. These variations risk creating asymmetric collaboration, where more advanced institutions (e.g., Kenya's ORPP) may dominate agenda-setting, while others struggle to meet expectations or are reduced to mere following. Regional bodies such as the East African Association of Electoral Commissions (EAAEC) faced similar disparities in their early years. They addressed this through graduated participation: financially or technically weaker members engaged primarily in training and peer learning, while more advanced commissions led standard-setting. Drawing from such insights and lessons, the political parties regulatory authorities may consider the following risk mitigation strategies in their pursuit towards an inclusive regional platform:

Establish tiered membership roles, allowing regulators to engage based on capacity (observer, regular, or lead roles).

Create a shared technical assistance pool, supported by donors or member contributions.

Introduce "twinning arrangements" where stronger regulators mentor weaker ones (e.g., Kenya supporting Malawi on digitalisation).

Develop a capacity index and use it to tailor support.

UNEVEN LEGAL MANDATES AND ENFORCEMENT POWERS

Another potential challenge that may constrain inter-country collaboration is the fact that the Regulators possess different levels of legal authority. As the three case studies reveal for instance, Sierra Leone arguably has a strong statutory quotas and

enforcement powers while Kenya benefits from its incentive-based enforcement through the Political Parties Fund. On the other hand, Malawi can be characterized as being predominantly normative and collaborative in the enforcement of its mandate as well as presently also having limited coercive power. These disparities may make uniform compliance standards difficult. This is an experience that also happened within SADC Gender Protocol Alliance. In that case, member states with weaker gender laws were allowed to adopt voluntary benchmarks while others implemented statutory quotas. Over time, most converged toward stronger norms. It would therefore be advisable that in order to deal with or manage the challenges emanating from uneven legal mandate and differentiated enforcement powers, collaboration frameworks must reflect the real legal powers of regulators, not idealised expectations. Other measures to mitigate this potential risk may include the following:

Developing a "minimum standards" framework that all regulators can reasonably meet, regardless of legal strength.

Using a modular approach—countries adopting standards in stages.

Allowing domestication flexibility, enabling each regulator to adapt standards to national legal constraint, and

Establishing peer advisory missions to help regulators navigate legal reform processes.

POLITICAL WILL AND POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS

Understandably, collaboration does not occur in a political vacuum. IN this regard, it is important to acknowledge that Regulators operate within political systems that may:

- **resist** stronger oversight;
- **politicise** regulatory decisions;
- **exert** pressure on regulators to adopt or reject regional norms;
- **limit** participation in peer review due to reputational concerns.

In this regard, the political parties regulators may draw some lessons from the African Ombudsman and Mediators Association (AOMA) who faced with such a challenge whereby some of their members experience political interference, they adopted rule that made peer reviews to be confidential unless all parties consent. This encouraged honest engagement without political backlash.

Thus, realizing that political economy dynamics are inevitable, collaboration among the Regulators would have to accommodate political realities while at the same time protecting regulators' independence. Other risk mitigation measure may also include the following:

Guarantee political insulation mechanisms, such as confidential peer learning and anonymised reporting.

Introduce rotating leadership of regional bodies to prevent perceived dominance by a single country.

Ensure that regional standards emphasise capacity-building, not punitive measures.

Engage broader stakeholders—civil society, parliaments, gender commissions—to build multi-level support.

COORDINATION COSTS AND SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

Admittedly, establishing a collaborative mechanism requires significant investments in areas such as:

- administrative infrastructure (secretariats, staff);
- coordination meetings (virtual or in-person);
- shared ICT systems;
- research programs;
- training initiatives;
- monitoring and peer review.

Without predictable funding, collaboration risks becoming episodic and donor-driven rather than institutionalised. In this regard, the lesson that we draw from the African Electoral Justice Network is instructive. In their case, the network avoided collapse by introducing a flexible membership contribution system—wealthier countries contribute

more, while limited-capacity institutions participate without financial burdens. The political party Regulators may also consider other measures if they are to proactively respond to the potential risk of costs and sustainability:

Adopt a hybrid financing model, combining member contributions, government support, and donor grants.

Start small and grow as capacity and resources allow. For instance establish a lean secretariat initially, expanding gradually as resources grow.

Leverage digital platforms to reduce travel and meeting costs.

Encourage co-hosting of events to distribute logistical burdens.

5.3. TOWARD A RESILIENT COLLABORATION FRAMEWORK: PROSPECTS FOR ESTABLISHING AAPRA

The foregoing comparative evidence from Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Malawi demonstrates that cross-country collaboration among political party regulatory authorities is not only feasible but increasingly necessary for strengthening the governance of political parties across Africa. Despite operating in diverse political and institutional contexts, the three regulators share a common commitment to enhancing transparency, inclusion, internal democracy, and accountability within political parties—an alignment that forms a strong foundation for structured cooperation.

Thus, the creation of the AAPRA presents a timely and strategic opportunity to institutionalise cross-country collaboration in political party regulation, strengthen democratic governance, and build a continental platform for harmonising regulatory standards. The combined insights from the three country studies therefore highlight compelling reasons for establishing AAPRA. In other words, AAPRA is not only feasible but strategically positioned to address existing regulatory gaps, promote inclusive political party governance, and support democratic consolidation across the continent.

At the same time, the diversity of countries to be involved -especially in institutional capacity, legal mandates, enforcement powers, and political environments- offer opportunities for mutual learning and complementary strengths. For instance, Kenya’s digitalisation and incentive-based systems, Sierra Leone’s statutory enforcement and cross-party inclusion platforms, and Malawi’s collaborative and inter-agency regulatory model each bring distinct and valuable contributions to any regional collaboration framework.



6. Prospects for Establishing AAPPRA- Strategic Considerations and Recommendations

While the rationale, the desirability as well as the readiness for the participating countries to institutionalise their collaboration into a regional body is apparent, the roadmap towards the realization of such an entity will require a careful and intentional reflection on a number of strategic considerations that will need to be acted upon if this initiative is to succeed. In this section, we identify such considerations that we hope the founding member countries will carefully look at. It is not our intention to be prescriptive regarding how these factors will have to be dealt with. As those tasked with provision of technical assistance to this process, we do need to exercise a great caution to ensure that the actual positions and decisions on the issues identified are those of the actual owners: The Regulators. It is for this reason that instead of us being conclusive on the issues that we are presenting, we adopt the approach of raising more questions and/or issues than we can address.

6.1. ENSURING THAT THERE IS A SHARED UNDERSTANDING ON ADDRESSING THE IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR COLLABORATION

Under section 5.2, a number of challenges and constraints for collaboration have been identified. These include the varied institutional capacities, legal mandates and powers of the ORPPs, the political economy dynamics and the operational costs and sustainability questions. While tentative suggestions have been made regarding how these may be addressed if the proposed framework for collaboration is to be effective, it is important that these challenges and constraints are interrogated further and in great detail by the

participating member countries with the view of ensuring that there is consensus on how these will be addressed. In some instances, further research and peer learning may be necessary to generate more insights into the proposed pathways.

6.2. CLARITY REGARDING THE MANDATE AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Successful regional bodies tend to have well-defined mandates, clear thematic priorities, and focused programming. For instance, ECF-SADC concentrates on electoral integrity, elections related capacity building, and harmonisation of election management standards. ECONEC

emphasises peer support, electoral conflict prevention, and technical cooperation while the AAACA focuses on strengthening anti-corruption agencies through training, experience-sharing, and collective advocacy. These networks/ regional platforms illustrate how clarity in the mandate and operational focus enhances clarity of purpose, improves resource mobilisation, and strengthens the coherence of activities. For AAPPRA, this will mean that from the outset, members avoid setting up a regional platform that has an overly broad or diffuse mandate. Instead, it would be advisable that the AAPPRA anchors its work in core regulatory functions for political party regulators in order to ensure strategic discipline and measurable impact.

6.3. LEADERSHIP AND SECRETARIAT STRUCTURES

The findings from the three case studies show that the relevant stakeholders and actors are aware of the importance of a clearly defined (political) leadership as well as a functional secretariat for such a regional platform. Insights from other similar regional bodies illustrate that regional associations tend to employ governance models that balance national ownership, institutional stability, and operational continuity.

The ECF-SADC for instance has a permanent secretariat while it uses rotational chairpersonship among member Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) to provide political and policy direction. The rotational political leadership arrangement also ensures that there is inclusion and fairness in the way the regional body is to be run. The same arrangements is practiced by ECONEC that combines rotational leadership with a semi-permanent secretariat, enabling consistency in programming. On the other hand, AAACA maintains a small permanent staff supported by members seconded from national institutions.

The hybrid approach that these potential like-minded regional bodies have adopted help mitigate risks of dominance by any single institution, ensures continuity of programmes, and reduces political sensitivities around leadership. From these insights, it would appear it may

be advisable for AAPPRA to consider a dual governance structure that combines a rotational chairpersonship among the regulators and a lean professional and inclusive/diverse secretariat that may initially be hosted by a willing regulator or through a partnership a REC that may offer to host. This model would promote both inclusivity and stability.

6.4. EXPLORING AND ESTABLISHING STRONG INSTITUTIONAL LINKS WITH CONTINENTAL AND REGIONAL BODIES

Experience shows that regional networks thrive when they are embedded within or are strategically linked to the broader institutional ecosystems. The ESF-SADC for instance has an MoU with not only SADC and the SADC Parliamentary Forum but also the with the AU itself. In the same way, ECONEC has a formal alignment with ECOWAS protocols on democracy and governance while the AAACA works in a close relationship with the AU Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC). These linkages provide political legitimacy, access to continental frameworks, and alignment with regional norms. Inspired by these experiences, AAPPRA may consider exploring and eventually establishing a formal relationships with the following regional bodies:

- the African Union Commission (AUC), particularly the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS),
- Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as ECOWAS, SADC, EAC, and COMESA,
- AU organs such as the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

These linkages will strengthen the association's legitimacy, visibility, and long-term sustainability.

6.5. ADOPTING A PHASED APPROACH AS PATHWAY TO THE ACTUAL ESTABLISHMENT

Given the diversity of institutional maturity, legal mandates, and resource environments across Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Malawi and also

considering that this initiative will increasingly have to attract more members, the establishment of the AAPPRA would have follow a phased, adaptive, and capacity-aware trajectory. This approach ensures that the association grows organically, consolidates legitimacy gradually, and avoids front-loading institutional demands that emerging regulators may struggle to meet. Lessons from regional governance networks (ECONEC, ECF-SADC, AOMA, and AAACA) show that successful institutions rarely emerge fully formed; rather, they evolve through iterative phases marked by learning, experimentation, and incremental institutionalisation.



Sierra Leone Elections
march 2018.
By Carol Sahley / USAID

With regard to the envisaged AAPPRA, the following phased approach may be considered if the founding members are to design a regional platform that build confidence, promote ownership, strengthen capacity, and create the institutional foundations necessary for a sustainable continental platform.

PHASE 1: INFORMAL COLLABORATION PLATFORM

The first phase would focus on preliminary activities or initiatives that seek to build trust and cross-country institutional familiarity, generate early deliverables by focusing on low-hanging fruits that demonstrate relevance as well as reduce political and administrative risks by avoiding premature formalisation. Some examples of such actions during this phase may include the following:

Establishing a Technical Working Group (TWG) composed of focal persons from ORPP Kenya, ORPP Malawi, and PPRC Sierra Leone.

Initiating joint activities, including thematic workshops, peer learning exchanges, and experience-sharing sessions on themes such as digital regulation, inclusion, and internal party democracy.

Developing harmonised communication channels, such as a shared platform for document exchange, monthly virtual meetings, and joint statements.

Conducting a baseline mapping of regulatory tools, capacities, and priority gaps across the three institutions.

PHASE 2: DEVELOPMENT OF AAPPRA FOUNDATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

Following the consolidation of the informal collaboration, the next phase would entail formulation of the legal and institutional foundations necessary for a formal continental association. These may include

Drafting of the AAPPRA's Charter outlining the mandate, governance structures, values and principles, membership criteria, decision making processes as well as accountability mechanisms among others.

Developing internal governance rules, including codes of conduct, peer review guidelines, conflict-of-interest provisions, and financial management frameworks

Identifying host arrangements for the Secretariat, including the possibility of rotating or co-hosted models to reduce political sensitivities.

Mobilising initial funding, including seed contributions from founding regulators and targeted donor engagement.

These activities would lay down the institutional architecture, position AAPPRA as a credible actor for resource mobilisation as well as signal seriousness to broader stakeholders, including potential members and AU organs.

PHASE 3: PILOT INITIATIVES UNDER THE AAPPRA BANNER

Pilot initiatives allow AAPPRA to its practical value, test the thematic areas before regional scale-up, enhance confidence among prospective members and donors as well as build portfolio of early achievements to showcase during the formal launch. Drawing insights from the three case studies, some of the actions during this phase may include the following:

Digital Compliance Pilot (Kenya-led) – Leveraging the IPPMS model to support Malawi and Sierra Leone in developing modular digital tools as well as testing regional data standards and secure information-sharing protocols.

Inclusion Scorecard Pilot (Sierra Leone-led) – Developing a standardised regional scorecard for gender and youth representation and piloting such a tool across the three regulators and refining indicators based on feedback.

Internal Party Democracy Monitoring Pilot (Malawi-led) – Developing a low-resource monitoring toolkit suitable for emerging regulators and also testing the inter-agency collaboration approaches and peer support mechanisms.

PHASE 4: FORMAL LAUNCH OF AAPPRA

The final phase focuses on institutionalising AAPPRA, expanding membership, and integrating the association into the continental governance architecture would entail its actual formal launch. At this point, the membership would, among other actions undertake the following:

Adopt the AAPPRA Charter formally at a founding General Assembly.

Launch a membership expansion drive, targeting regulators across all regions

Engage the African Union, particularly the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), to secure recognition under AU governance frameworks (e.g., AGA, ACDEG).

Formalise partnerships with RECs, Election Management Bodies, anti-corruption agencies, and research institutes.

Establish a permanent or hybrid Secretariat, staffed with technical, administrative, and research specialists.

Concluding Reflections

The proposed sequenced actions offer a realistic and strategic pathway for building the African Association of Political Party Regulatory Authorities (AAPRA) into a credible and sustainable continental institution. They provide the foundation for enhanced legitimacy, firmly situate the initiative within Africa's broader governance ecosystem, and enable long-term planning, stable financing, and programmatic continuity. By proceeding in phased steps, AAPRA can evolve in a manner that is methodical, context-sensitive, and aligned with continental priorities. This approach ensures that the Association develops:

Organically — emerging from genuine collaboration among national regulators rather than from merely symbolic declarations or top-down decisions. Early activities would be driven by shared regulatory challenges, peer learning, and joint technical exchanges, enabling trust-building and nurturing a sense of collective ownership. This organic development ensures that the eventual institutional architecture reflects actual practice, real needs, and lived regulatory experience across member countries.

Credibly — by demonstrating concrete value and delivering measurable outputs even before AAPRA is formally launched. Through joint studies, harmonisation dialogues, pilot initiatives, and communities of practice, the Association can show clear benefits to regulators, political actors, and governance institutions. Early results will signal professionalism, improve regulatory consistency across borders, and reinforce confidence among stakeholders, thereby strengthening AAPRA's legitimacy.

Sustainably — through the establishment of appropriate financing mechanisms, robust governance arrangements, and an institutional model capable of supporting long-term functions. Sustainability requires diversified resourcing, predictable support from member institutions, and clear administrative structures. Attention to these foundations reduces operational risk and ensures that AAPRA can transition seamlessly from an informal collaborative network into a permanent continental body guided by transparent systems and accountable leadership.

Inclusively — by intentionally accommodating the wide range of regulatory capacities, political contexts, and institutional mandates found across African states. An inclusive AAPRA would provide flexible membership pathways, ensure equitable representation in its governance structures, and prioritise capacity support for emerging or resource-constrained regulators. Such inclusivity prevents domination by stronger institutions and promotes a genuinely pan-African platform that reflects the diversity of the continent's regulatory landscape.

Strategically — through deliberate alignment with continental governance norms, African Union policy frameworks, and ongoing reform initiatives. Positioning AAPRA within the African Governance Architecture (AGA), APRM processes, and AU instruments on elections, political parties, and democratic governance will enhance its relevance, avoid duplication, and strengthen opportunities for partnership. This alignment reinforces AAPRA's role as a key technical actor supporting Africa's democratic consolidation agenda.

Together, these dimensions offer a coherent and forward-looking roadmap for transforming AAPPRA from a compelling concept into a functional, respected, and effective continental institution for political party regulation. By balancing ambition with pragmatism, and principles with practical steps, this phased approach ensures that AAPPRA becomes both a catalyst for regulatory professionalism and a cornerstone of Africa's evolving governance landscape.



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Annex 1:

Terms Of reference for the Interim Technical Working Group (TWG) on the establishment of the Africa Association of Political Party Regulatory Authorities (AAPPRA)

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The Regional Synthesis Report on the *Comparative Analysis of Political Party Regulation, Women and Youth Inclusion, and Prospects for Establishing the Africa Association of Political Party Regulatory Authorities (AAPPRA)* was adopted by participating regulators at the regional meeting held in Sierra Leone. Chapter 6 of the Report outlines the strategic considerations and a phased pathway for institutionalising collaboration among political party regulatory authorities in Africa.

In line with Phase 1: Informal Collaboration Platform, the meeting resolved to establish an Interim Technical Working Group (TWG) to guide, coordinate, and technically support the initial stages of collaboration toward the eventual establishment of AAPPRA. The TWG is conceived as a regulator-owned mechanism that enables structured reflection, peer learning, and incremental institutional development without premature formalisation.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WORKING GROUP

The Interim Technical Working Group is hereby established as a time-bound, regulator-led mechanism to operationalise the recommendations contained in Chapter 6 of the Regional Synthesis Report, with particular emphasis on:

- building shared understanding among founding regulators;
- coordinating early collaborative actions;
- laying the technical and institutional groundwork for AAPPRA.

COMPOSITION

The TWG shall comprise:

CORE REGULATORY MEMBERS

Senior officials from:

- Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP), Kenya (Lead Institution)
- Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP), Malawi
- Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC), Sierra Leone

TECHNICAL SUPPORT MEMBERS

Regional and country researchers involved in the WYDE Political Parties Project, incorporated in an advisory and technical support capacity.

The TWG may, by consensus, co-opt additional technical experts or observers on a needs basis, provided that regulator ownership and leadership are maintained.

LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION

- The TWG shall be led by ORPP Kenya, in line with the agreement reached at the Sierra Leone meeting.
- Leadership responsibilities shall include convening meetings, coordinating agendas, and serving as the primary liaison among members.
- The TWG shall operate on the principles of collegiality, consensus, inclusivity, and rotational responsibility, reflecting emerging good practice in regional regulatory cooperation.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of the TWG is to guide and support the phased establishment of AAPPR, beginning with structured informal collaboration among founding regulators.

Specific objectives are to:

- I. Clarify and progressively define the proposed mandate, scope, and strategic focus of AAPPR.
- II. Coordinate early collaborative activities that demonstrate value, relevance, and feasibility.
- III. Provide technical direction for the development of foundational instruments and pilot initiatives.
- IV. Ensure that the process remains regulator-owned, context-sensitive, and aligned with continental governance frameworks.

SCOPE OF WORK AND KEY FUNCTIONS

Guided by Chapter 6 of the Regional Synthesis Report, the TWG shall undertake the following functions:

STRATEGIC REFLECTION AND CONSENSUS-BUILDING

Facilitate peer learning and, where necessary, commission or recommend further analytical work to support evidence-based decision-making.

MANDATE AND GOVERNANCE DESIGN

- Develop options and recommendations on:
 - I. AAPPR's core mandate and thematic priorities;
 - II. governance and decision-making arrangements;
 - III. membership criteria and participation modalities;
 - IV. accountability and peer-review principles.
- Ensure strategic discipline by anchoring proposals in core regulatory functions of political party regulators.

LEADERSHIP AND SECRETARIAT MODELS

- Explore feasible leadership and secretariat arrangements, including:
 - I. rotational chairpersonship;
 - II. lean or hybrid secretariat models;

- III. hosting arrangements (temporary or permanent);
- IV. iv.secondment-based or partnership-supported staffing options.

INSTITUTIONAL LINKAGES AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Identify and assess pathways for engagement with:
 - I. African Union Commission (especially PAPS);
 - II. Regional Economic Communities (ECOWAS, SADC, EAC, COMESA);
 - III. AU governance platforms (AGA, APRM).
- Propose principles for formal and informal partnerships that enhance legitimacy, coherence, and sustainability.

PHASED IMPLEMENTATION OVERSIGHT

- Coordinate Phase 1 activities, including:
 - I. thematic workshops and peer exchanges;
 - II. harmonised communication and information-sharing mechanisms;
 - III. baseline mapping of regulatory tools and capacity gaps.
- Prepare for Phase 2 by initiating technical groundwork for:
 - I. drafting AAPRA's Charter and internal governance instruments;
 - II. identifying resource mobilisation options.

DOCUMENTATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

- Produce concise technical notes, options papers, and progress updates for consideration by regulators.
- Ensure that lessons learned and emerging good practices are systematically documented.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The TWG shall operate in accordance with the following principles:

Regulator Ownership: Decisions and positions remain the prerogative of participating regulatory authorities.

Non-Prescriptiveness: The TWG facilitates options and pathways rather than imposing conclusions.

Inclusivity and Equity: Accommodates varied institutional capacities and contexts.

Phased and Adaptive Approach: Emphasises learning, experimentation, and incremental institutionalisation.

Confidentiality and Trust: Encourages candid peer exchange, with confidentiality safeguards where appropriate.

MODALITIES OF WORK

- Meetings shall be held primarily virtually, with in-person meetings convened subject to resources and agreement.
- The TWG shall meet at least quarterly, with additional meetings convened as required.
- Decisions shall be taken by consensus.
- Technical support members shall provide analytical and drafting support but shall not substitute regulatory decision-making.

DURATION AND REVIEW

- The TWG is established for an initial period of 12 months, corresponding broadly to Phases 1 and early Phase 2 of the AAPPRA roadmap.
- The ToR and the functioning of the TWG shall be reviewed and refined at the first meeting and periodically thereafter.
- Continuation, modification, or transition of the TWG shall be determined by participating regulators.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

- Key outputs of the TWG shall include:
- Agreed concept and options paper on AAPPRA's mandate and governance.
- Draft AAPPRA Charter and foundational governance instruments (Phase 2).
- Technical design notes for pilot initiatives.
- Progress reports to participating regulators.

