

Learning From The Best: Kirinyaga County Assembly Committee On Powers And Privileges Benchmarks With The National Assembly

By Cathrine Njiru

In a strategic move aimed at fortifying the efficiency of its legislative framework and operations, the committee on Powers and Privileges of Kirinyaga County Assembly embarked on a benchmarking exercise with their counterparts at the National Assembly, spearheaded by the Chairperson of the Committee who also serves as the Speaker of the County Assembly Hon. Muteti Murimi. The initiative aimed to draw best practices observed by the National Assembly to enhance the functionality of the County's legislative body. The committee comprising of Hon. Muteti Murimi- Chairperson, Hon. Timothy Kariuki - Njukiini Ward, Hon. Joseph Mathura Karamu- Thiba Ward, Hon. Milker Thoithi- Specially Elected, Hon. Geoffrey Murimi Gakuru- Kiine Ward, Hon. Lucy Njeri Mwaniki- Specially Elected and Hon. Charles Nyaga Nyamu- Murinduko Ward identified the National Assembly based on its recognition as the best for its robust parliamentary practices and procedures.

The Committee members were received by their counterparts at the National Assembly led by Vice chairperson of the Powers and Privileges Committee and Member of Parliament for Laisamis Constituency Hon. Joseph Lekuton. The goal of the committee was to engage with their counterparts, driven by a common goal of enhancing accountability and responsiveness within the County Assembly.

In-depth discussions ensued between the two committees, covering a spectrum of operational themes including parliamentary privileges, investigation processes for breaches of privileges, review of committee matters, and mechanisms for upholding parliamentary integrity. At the conclusion of the session, both committees exchanged valuable reference materials, enriching the repository of research materials for the County Assembly Committee on Powers and Privileges.

Themes explored

The two committees explored various

Members of the Powers and Privileges Committee in a meeting with their counterparts from the National Assembly



aspects of their operations including:

- **Parliamentary privileges and immunities**

The committee delved into parliamentary safeguards and legal provisions that guarantee parliamentary privileges. Parliament derives its privileges, powers and immunities from Article 117 of the Constitution of Kenya, The Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act, 2017, The Standing Orders and precedents set by Speakers' rulings and orders.

Privilege in the National Assembly of Kenya is designed to remove any impediments or restraints to the legislature going about its work, and to enable it deal with challenges to its authority. Privileges are necessary for the proper exercise of the functions entrusted to Parliament by the Constitution and other Statutes.

Parliament is the guardian of its own privileges: it is not only the sole judge of any matter that may arise which in any way infringes upon those privileges but can, if it deems it advisable, punish, either by warning or reprimanding, any person whom it considers to be guilty of contempt.

The Committee on Powers and Privileges is tasked with ensuring that parliamentary privileges are respected and upheld. From safeguarding the freedom of speech to

investigating breaches of parliamentary privilege, the committee is integral to maintaining the dignity and independence of the legislative branch.

The Powers and Privileges Committee is responsible for maintaining the integrity of parliamentary proceedings. Independence is essential to prevent external pressures, political considerations, or partisan influences from compromising the committee's ability to address issues related to privilege objectively. The National Assembly Committee on Powers and Privileges has been thorough in the conduct of its activities which has contributed to building public trust in the parliamentary system. It has been viewed regionally as a reliable arbiter in matters of parliamentary privilege.

Committee effectiveness

A comprehensive review of committee effectiveness highlighted the importance of focused mandates, optimal resource utilization, consensus-building, and transparent proceedings. The exchange underscored the significance of commitment, cooperation, and time management in preserving parliamentary integrity.

- **Technological integration**

Exploring the integration of technology in parliamentary operations, both committees showcased innovative approaches to public engagement, research, and data analytics. Embracing social media platforms, data analytics tools, and updated parliamentary websites, the committees emphasized the importance of leveraging technology to enhance transparency and public participation.

Diversity and Representation

The committee has implemented gender inclusive policies to ensure a balanced representation of men and women in the committee. It has also strived to incorporate a diverse range of professional backgrounds, and encouraged the participation of individuals with expertise in various fields relevant to the committee's work. The political representation of the committee is guided by the provisions of the National Assembly Standing Orders.

The benchmarking exercise yielded invaluable insights and takeaways for the Kirinyaga County Assembly Committee on Powers and Privileges:

• Education and training.

Prioritizing public education initiatives and continuous improvement strategies to enhance committee effectiveness

Strategies employed by the committee including information campaigns to disseminate key information about its work, education materials and publication that outline its functions, on-going committee activities, and the impact of its decisions on the public. Continuous improvement culture

Cultivating a culture of continuous learning and improvement through training sessions, workshops, and knowledge sharing initiatives. The workshops focus on effective investigative techniques, including evidence gathering, interviewing witnesses,



Hon. Muteti Murimi- Speaker of the County Assembly of Kirinyaga and Chairperson of the Powers and Privileges Committee

and conducting fair and impartial inquiries.

To enhance the committee's communication skills, committee members have been trained on effective public communication and media relations. This ensures that the committee can articulate its decisions and findings clearly to the public, maintaining transparency and building public trust.

The committee has also been intent on fostering an environment where communication and feedback are encouraged. Members of the County Assembly have also been empowered to share ideas, express concerns and propose improvements to the committee. The committee has remained responsive to the needs of the County Assembly.

There has also been a robust evaluation of areas of strength and areas that require improvement. The committee has been

keen on establishing a repository of best practices and case studies that provide a valuable resource for current and future committee members.

Research

Using comparative analysis and research to inform decision-making and recommendations.

The Powers and Privileges Committee has also been vigilant to adapt to evolving circumstances by monitoring legal developments in Kenya and globally, changes in parliamentary procedures and emerging issues that relate to its mandate. This has continued to enrich the committee's research capabilities.

Collaboration with other committees and institutions

Strengthening collaboration with other committees and institutions to enhance legislative integrity and effectiveness.

The committee has continued to leverage on the expertise and experience of Members of the County Assembly to ensure they serve the best interest of the County Assembly and the public while upholding the legislative integrity. The committee has further established collaborative relationships with legal experts and institutions to secure access to a broad range of expertise.

• Technological and Digital Considerations

The committee has stayed attuned to digital and technological advancements that may impact parliamentary privileges. It appreciates the implications of digital communication, data security and electronic evidence in the context of parliamentary privilege. The committee has continued to thoughtfully incorporate the use of digital technology in its operations, contributing to the effectiveness, accessibility and transparency of its operations.

As the guardians of parliamentary privileges at the county level, the Committee on Powers and Privileges of the Kirinyaga County Assembly stands committed to upholding legislative integrity and responsiveness. By drawing insights from national perspectives and fostering collaboration, the committee is poised to shape a more resilient and accountable legislative system for the benefit of devolution and the people of Kirinyaga. In an ever-evolving political landscape, the pursuit of excellence remains paramount for the Kirinyaga County Assembly



Members of the Powers and Privileges Committee and the Committee Secretariat

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