



Press Release
19 May 2016

More than 8 out of 10 Kenyans think their opinion doesn't matter to authorities At both County and National levels citizens feel excluded

19 May 2016, Nairobi: A large majority of Kenyans think that their opinion does not matter at all or matters very little when it comes to national and county level decision-making. At the county level, 6 out of 10 citizens (61%) say their opinions matter very little when authorities make decisions and 2 out of 10 citizens (21%) think their opinions do not matter at all. At national level 64% say their opinion matters little and 21% again say their opinion does not matter at all. Almost six years into the new Constitution, and three years into devolution, it seems that Kenyans have not yet tasted the fruits of greater participation.

These findings were released by Twaweza in a research brief entitled *Into the light: Citizens and access to information*. The brief is based on data from *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative high-frequency mobile phone survey. The findings are based on data collected from 1,818 respondents between 23 February and 19 March 2016.

Citizens also lack confidence that they will be given information by government officials. Citizens are most confident about getting information on how to formally complain about a broken water point. But even then only 4 out of 10 (42%) think they could get this information. When it comes to more sensitive information, citizens are even less confident: only 27% think they would be given information on how to report corruption; 31% think they would get information on the availability of medicine from a health centre; and 32% think they could get information about receipt of the Free Primary Education funds from their local school.

So where do citizens get their information and which sources do they trust? Radio continues to be king: only 3% of citizens say they do not use this source and 60% of citizens overall say they trust information they hear on the radio a lot. Similarly 47% of citizens trust what they see on TV but close to 1 out of 4 (23%) say they do not watch TV. Interestingly more than half of Kenyans (56%) say they do not use social media. Public meetings or forums are also a source of information for many people (only 7% report not using them at all) but citizens have mixed feelings about whether they trust the information there: 56% say they somewhat trust these meetings as a source and only 28% trust them a lot.

And what type of information are citizens most interested in? At county and national levels citizens report wanting to have more information on general development progress: 66% want this for their county while 52% want this information at a national level. In comparison less than 15% were interested in information about budgets, income and expenditure at both county and national levels. Despite the desire for innocuous-sounding information, citizens are still skeptical: 6 out of 10 (59%) think they would not be able to get this general development information if they asked.

Despite their lack of interest in public financial information like government expenditure and income, citizens do not trust government financial management. Half of all Kenyans (52%) or 3 out of 4 of those who have heard of it, believe that the corruption allegations surrounding the missing Eurobond money are true.

This low level of trust carries across the system: 6 out of 10 citizens who have heard of unreported crime or wrongdoing say reporting would not have changed anything.

John Mugo, Director of Data and Voice at Twaweza, said *“Citizens have low expectations and low trust in government. They do not believe they will be given even fairly basic information from officials, they don’t think their voices count in decision-making and they seem to assume corruption allegations around huge sums of public money are true. We must wake up to ensure people have information, not just because they need it, but because it’s their constitutional entitlement”*.

Aidan Eyakuze, Executive Director of Twaweza added *“The deep cynicism demonstrated by Kenyans through this data is troubling. The Access to Information Act that was passed by Parliament and is now before the Senate could be a critical step in reversing this trend of distrust. A strong access to information law with transparency as a default condition, clear modes of operation and appropriate mechanisms for grievance redress will send a strong signal to all Kenyans that they do have the right to access public information and that their voices do count.”*

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Notes to Editors

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at www.twaweza.org, or www.twaweza.org/sauti
- Twaweza works on enabling children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be more open and responsive in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. We have programs, staff and offices across all three countries, and a globally respected practice of learning, monitoring and evaluation. Our flagship programs include *Uwezo*, Africa’s largest annual citizen assessment to assess children’s learning levels across hundreds of thousands of households, and *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa’s first nationally representative mobile phone survey. We undertake effective public and policy engagement, through powerful media partnerships and global leadership of initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership
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