



Enriching public and policy discourse in Kenya, one poll at a time:

A look at Sauti za Wananchi in Kenya, one year on

By Samuel Otieno



Key findings

- *Sauti za Wananchi* has been positively received by a range of stakeholders, and is seen to be effectively filling the identified gaps in public opinion polling in Kenya through its focus themes, frequency, credibility and impartial nature.
- *Sauti za Wananchi* is recognised as a reliable vehicle for gathering public opinion on governance issues, and as having the potential to boost the inclusion of public voices in policy making. Several policy actors have shown interest in using it to gain insight into citizen views.
- The poll results have been used most actively by stakeholders from media, policy and government sectors.
- The main targets for *Sauti za Wananchi* poll information are the media and policy makers; this however is not well understood, as many actors suggest it should be further disseminated to the wider public.
- *Sauti za Wananchi* can help government understand citizen views, public perception on service delivery and help citizen track the delivery of election promises.
- Policy actors criticize the fact that the findings of *Sauti za Wananchi* cannot be disaggregated at the sub-national level.
- Many actors also still struggle with the methodology; there is concern that it may have an influence on the findings.
- Less than one year since inception, 15% of Kenyans have heard about *Sauti za Wananchi*. Close to 10% can describe it accurately but only 6% can recall a specific topic.

1.0 Introduction

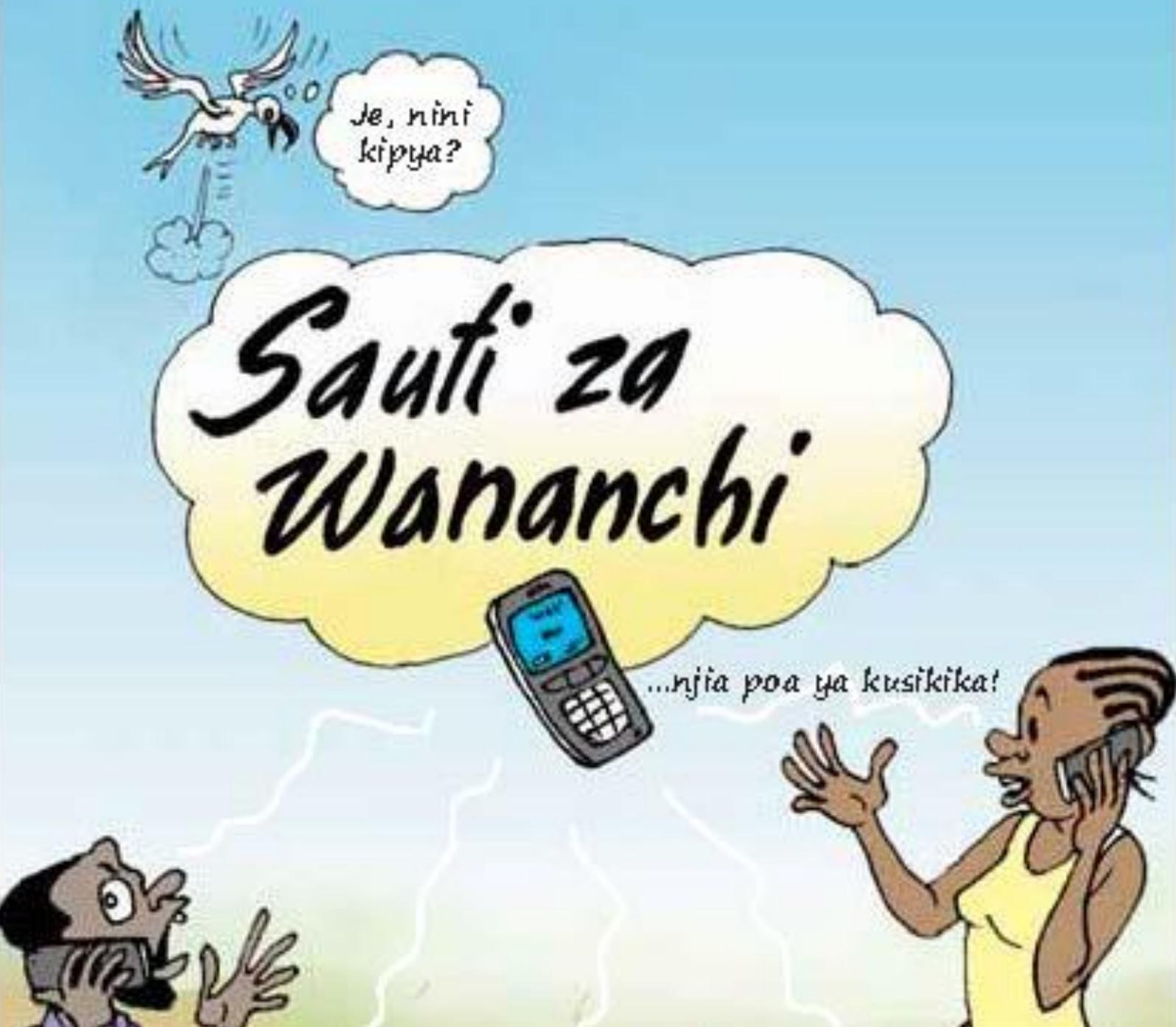
Twaweza means “we can make it happen” in Swahili. Twaweza works on enabling children to learn, citizens to exercise agency and governments to be more open and responsive in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. We have programs, staff and offices across all three countries, and a world respected practice of learning, monitoring and evaluation. We undertake effective public and policy engagement, through powerful media partnerships and global leadership of initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership. 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, originally in Tanzania. *Sauti za Wananchi (Sauti za Wananchi)* launched in Kenya on 15 March 2016.

2.0 Contextual background to the findings

Prior to the launch of *Sauti za Wananchi* in Kenya Twaweza commissioned a formative study to examine the Kenyan polling space. The study found that, despite Kenya having a vibrant polling market, the polling space was dogged with claims of a lack of professionalism, low credibility and political bias especially on polls that focus on governance and elections. It further revealed that there are no laws that explicitly govern the conduct of opinion polls except when it comes to the publication of polls related to elections, and that despite the constitutional requirement for public participation, there is no clear framework or law that compels those in public and policy spaces to incorporate public opinion. The media was identified as the key intermediary in opinion polling.¹ Some of these findings were validated by one of the early rounds of *Sauti za Wananchi* poll which revealed that less than two out of ten citizens feel that their opinion counts to a large extent at the national (15%) and county (18%) levels.²

¹ *Sauti za Wananchi* formative study: Understanding the Kenyan public opinion polling landscape <http://www.twaweza.org/go/sauti-formative-study>

² Into the light: Citizens and Access to information brie- *Sauti za Wananchi Brief no 3, May 2016*



The formative study highlighted that Kenyan public and policy discourse was missing:

- a poll that would be able to facilitate discussion and debate on critical public interest issues such as education, health, governance, and other topics.
- a poll that would be credible with sound methodology and sampling, timely, open and transparent often involving critical stakeholders
- a poll that would disseminated through effective channels.

Fortunately, these are the very values that are espoused by *Sauti za Wananchi*.

Since early 2016 *Sauti za Wananchi* Kenya has run several rounds on the themes outlined in Table 1 below. Based on the findings of the formative study, the mode of dissemination has been varied, and has included public launch events, targeting specific spaces and forums, and press briefings. Toward the end of 2016, Twaweza carried out a focused feedback study, to assess what *Sauti za Wananchi* had added to the Kenyan polling space, whether *Sauti za Wananchi* was gaining traction, and how it could be improved to have meaningful impact.

Table 1: Main themes of *Sauti za Wananchi* Kenya rounds in 2016

Thematic area	Output/brief title	Release/launch method
Devolution & Public Participation	Taking Government closer to the people: What citizens think about devolution	Public Launch (March 2016)
Access to Public Information	Into the light: Citizens and access to information	Public Launch (May 2016)
Electoral Issues	Kenyans' views on elections	E-mail (Short output - PDF) (June 2016)
Persons with Disabilities	Pity versus power: Citizens' views on people with disabilities	E-mail (July 2016)
Education	What's going on in our schools? Citizens' views on recent developments in education	Press Briefing (Short output- PDF) (August 2016)
Healthcare	The status of our healthcare sector: A citizen diagnosis	Press Briefing (October 2016)
Social issues	Citizens' views on problems facing Kenyans	E-mail: Short output/ (Ms PowerPoint Presentation) (October 2016)
Corruption and governance	Citizens views on corruption and other governance Issues	E-mail: Short output (Ms PowerPoint Presentation) (October 2016)
Politics	Monkey cage	Article in the Washington Post (October 2016)
Local Security Issues	Are we safe? Citizens' views on safety and security in Kenya	Press Briefing (November 2016)
Radicalization	The roots of radicalization: Citizens' views on the causes and solutions for insecurity in Kenya	Public Launch (November 2016)
Financial Matters	Money matters: Citizens and financial inclusion	Press Briefing (December 2016)

3.0 Methodology

The study consisted of in depth interviews conducted with key respondents from the public sector, civil society, media and the private sector who had accessed the polls or participated directly in launches or press briefings. A total of 11 key informants were interviewed, in the period between December 2016 and January 2017. All interviews were carried out by Twaweza staff.

At the end of 2016, Twaweza East Africa also commissioned Ipsos Kenya to gather feedback on a number of our areas of work, through a nationally representative “omnibus” survey, including a few items related to recall of *Sauti za Wananchi*. The survey consists of face to face interviews with randomly selected respondents, aged 18 or over, using a semi-structured questionnaire administered through smart phones. A sample size of 2,000 interviews was determined with a margin of error +/-2% at 95% confidence interval. This sample was distributed evenly based on the estimated population size, and is also representative of the rural/urban and regional (former provinces) clustering. We therefore draw data from this survey to illustrate the levels of awareness and recall of *Sauti za Wananchi* among Kenyan citizens, as an additional data point – although, as noted in the introduction, the core target audience of the *Sauti za Wananchi* data are media and policy makers.



4.0 Key findings

The main findings from the qualitative interviews, omnibus survey as well as our Twaweza internal observations are outlined below under the following five emerging themes:

- General perceptions on *Sauti za Wananchi* in the Kenyan polling space
- *Sauti za Wananchi* effects on Kenyan media thus far
- *Sauti za Wananchi* effects thus far on inclusion of citizens’ voice in policy making and governance
- Views on the current *Sauti za Wananchi* dissemination and packaging
- Major concerns around the *Sauti za Wananchi* poll
- Perceived and expected potential effects of *Sauti za Wananchi* in the Kenya

Theme 1: General perceptions on *Sauti za Wananchi* in the Kenyan polling space

Fact 1: *Sauti za Wananchi* has been positively received by a range of actors

Sauti za Wananchi has been positively received by the various actors who have had access to it. It is considered a unique platform whose selling points are independence, credibility, relevance of topics and innovative methodology. It is also considered quite different from other polls in Kenya which focus mainly on political popularity and elections.

“When I first interacted with the Sauti za Wananchi poll, I was pleasantly surprised that there is an organisation in the public space that focuses on issues that affect everybody in the public sphere.” Media

“What stands out compared to other polls is that Sauti za Wananchi covers various topics, beyond just politics. The fact that you are funded independently ensures objectivity and credibility.” Civil Society

“Polls in Kenya tend to raise many questions and we have very little faith because they focus only on the would be elected president. On the other hand Sauti za Wananchi polls focus on issues that directly affect the lives of the people like healthcare.” NGO representative

“I trust Sauti za Wananchi because it is unbiased, is independent, it has no vested interests and is not for profit.” Media

“Sauti za Wananchi data is very useful and my hope is that the national and county governments will use it to inform governments on what people think about service delivery.” (Private Sector)

Policy actors in Kenya have also approved of the high frequency of the poll and said that with time, it has the potential to become a very big pool of information that would be used for reference by policymakers.

Theme 2: *Sauti za Wananchi* effects on the media

In terms of positioning, feedback suggests that *Sauti za Wananchi* is a unique offering in the Kenyan polling space and that it is already gaining prominence in the policy and public discourse. Feedback indicates that it has had more effect on the media than any other sector because it is viewed as a 'ready to use' source of news, stories and evidence. It has specifically enriched media in the ways outlined below.

Fact 2: *Sauti za Wananchi* polls enrich news, provide a new source of information and help maintain focus on some of the most pressing (but often less covered) topics.

The three journalists interviewed said they liked *Sauti za Wananchi* because it gives them ideas on what issues and themes to cover. They say media houses like focusing on 'hot topics' while sometimes forgetting other issues that are of national importance such as health, security and devolution. By *Sauti za Wananchi* not focusing solely on current affairs it keeps journalists' eyes on some of the pressing national issues.

"Sauti za Wananchi is a breath of fresh air in the Kenyan polling space. Unlike other polling organizations that wait for something politically exciting you are doing polls on issues that are of great importance and are of concern to the nation." Media

Media houses have also used *Sauti za Wananchi* poll findings to engage audiences during news. The *Sauti za Wananchi* findings on security for example were also the basis of a prime time newscast opinion poll question on KTN, the second largest television where they asked, ***'Do you agree with the Twaweza findings that unemployment is the major contributor to young people joining Al shabaab?'***

Fact 3: *Sauti za Wananchi* provides factual information and evidence for media to cover sensitive issues.

Media practitioners said that issues around violence and national security can be very sensitive to cover and many of them shy away from them for lack of evidence. They find *Sauti za Wananchi* useful in enabling journalists to not only put the issues into perspective but also to confidently cover the issues while quoting the evidence.

"Previously it was so hard to convince editors on the stories on security because there was no data backing it up but with Sauti za Wananchi evidence, editors are running stories without questioning its credibility." Media

Fact 4: *Sauti za Wananchi* is providing media with evidence to ask hard questions to duty bearers

In addition, some media practitioners report that the poll has on several occasions provided critical data and evidence that not only enhance their ability to ask questions but also serve to push government officials to respond to issues when they become evasive.

*“Previously questions on radicalization have been denied by the spokesperson of the ministry of interior as a fabrication of media but on presenting to him factual information from Sauti za Wanachi polls, he admitted to radicalization in Kenya.” **Media***

*“Sauti za Wananchi data forms a credible source of news and information. When I am covering a specific topic, this data informs my analysis and gives me a basis for asking relevant questions to government officials who previously accused us of making up stories.” **Media***

Theme 3: Sauti za Wananchi effects on citizens’ voice in policy making and governance

Fact 5: Sauti za Wananchi is viewed as a platform for including citizens’ voice in governance and policy making

The Kenyan constitution has many provisions that support the infusion of public opinion into policy making yet there is no clarity on how this is to be achieved. Various policy actors see *Sauti za Wananchi* as a platform and space that is already helping to include citizens’ voices in some aspects of governance especially around service delivery and policy making. It should be noted, however, that Sauti remains a tool for sourcing opinions from a representative sample of citizens and making sure these views are included in important national public and policy dialogues. However, it is not a method or a tool for systematically promoting citizen participation in policy making.

*“Where interest overrides public good, the Sauti za Wananchi poll helps policymakers to be aware on what citizens think. Once this happens and the information is disseminated then you will find that among the citizens, some will demand for accountability.” **Media***

Fact 6: There are instances when Sauti za Wananchi findings have contributed directly to the policy discourse

The findings on devolution for instance, were reportedly used internally by the Commission for Revenue Allocation (CRA) as the poll results came at a time when they were discussing the devolution of health services across the Kenyan counties. Based on the interest that these findings of perceptions on health services generated in Commission for Revenue Allocation (CRA), the commissioners reached out to Twaweza with questions on what else was covered that could be useful to them.

*“Our mandate as the Commission for Revenue Allocation (CRA) is to delegate power and resources to sub units. So when you released findings about people’s perceptions of delegation of power, it couldn’t have come at a better time as we were engaged in a discussion about health. The finding about decentralizing health was interesting and this prompted us to reach out to Twaweza for a full report to be shared in several meetings.” **Public Sector***

Similarly, the findings on security (especially the perceptions on the police) and radicalisation were also closely followed by the top officials in the interior ministry as evidenced by their high attendance during the launch. They subsequently had a further meeting with Twaweza to interrogate the findings more and seek clarifications on methodology. Additionally, both the Independent Police Oversight Authority and internal security have initiated talks with Twaweza with an aim of loading some questions in the next *Sauti za Wananchi* rounds.

*“When we heard that Twaweza was releasing a poll on security and citizens’ perceptions about the likelihood of violence in the coming elections, we made a decision that all spokesmen of key departments in the ministry of interior should attend this event because we needed to understand citizens’ fears on the likelihood of violence. We held a meeting with Twaweza to understand the findings and later held our own internal meeting about how to avert citizen fears on post-election violence.” **Public Sector***

Fact 7: *Sauti za Wananchi* informs government and policy makers on people’s views and opinions

Sauti za Wananchi was also said to be a tool through which the government and policy actors were getting updated on what citizens think about what government is doing and nudging them on things that they may want to ignore or just wish away.

*“The fact that the entire national security and intelligence machinery was here to have a discussion with Twaweza on the poll means they are concerned and they care about what people think. I definitely believe they will use this information to sharpen their strategies in ensuring national security.” **Media***

*“As a governance organization, we are constantly on the lookout for data on different issues especially on service delivery. *Sauti za Wananchi* has been instrumental in providing this through the poll on health services and recently on security.” **Civil Society***

Theme 4: Views on the *Sauti za Wananchi* methodology, dissemination and packaging

Fact 8: Many stakeholders are not clear on the aims of *Sauti za Wananchi*

There was often confusion on the aims of *Sauti za Wananchi* poll with many respondents citing the need to reach as many Kenyans as possible with the findings. Even among those who seemed to understand the aims of *Sauti za Wananchi*, they often suggested we need to target wider, including citizens in our dissemination. While not the original aim of *Sauti za Wananchi*, it could be explored further. However, likely because of the perception that *Sauti za Wananchi* ought to reach citizens, many respondents also commented that the findings need to be simplified further. Suggestions included the use of vernacular media to let everyone have access to the information in their own language.

*“Twaweza needs to think more strategically about the dissemination of *Sauti za Wananchi* information so it reaches as many people as possible because the information is critical for every Kenyan to know.” **NGO Representative***

Fact 9. Some aspects of *Sauti za Wananchi* methodology are being questioned

There are still a number of issues that consumers of *Sauti za Wananchi* struggle to understand in the methodology, especially the science around the use of a panel rather than different people in every round. There are also reservations about Twaweza buying mobile phones for respondents and questions on whether this could influence the findings.

"I am so concerned and didn't like that you give Sauti za Wananchi respondents mobile phones. I think by doing this, the views of the people are biased. If I am given a phone, isn't there a chance that I may just start responding on issues in one way?"

Media

"The only challenge is that, Sauti za Wananchi works with people already earmarked, I am afraid their opinions could be biased because they may have an expectation and think they are supposed to answer in a certain way which essentially could be a limitation"

Civil Society

Fact 10: *Sauti za Wananchi* reports are considered complex and difficult to understand

As seen in table 1 above, the *Sauti za Wananchi* findings have been mostly disseminated through briefs that seek to communicate in simple English and to explain findings as well as possible. For each launch also, a press release inviting and explaining findings to the media is often sent out. However, journalists still think the findings are difficult for most of their colleagues.

"What I don't like about Sauti za Wananchi is that you have not positioned yourself well in terms of dissemination. There are still people especially journalists who struggle with interpretation of your data, you know when you make statements including numbers, and most are not able to interpret them correctly. You need to break it down more." **Media**

Fact 11: Some people do not like the fact that *Sauti za Wananchi* data is only nationally representative

Actors feel *Sauti za Wananchi* is so general and so much at the national level. Most of them felt strongly that *Sauti za Wananchi* data could be more useful at the sub-national especially county level. They want data that speaks to the nuance and context of each county.

"This poll should be the basis for real policy making if it reaches the relevant policy makers. It is critical that the information be [dis]aggregated to the regional level so the leaders in the area are able to get factual information on issues that affect their areas as opposed to keeping it national all the time." **Public Sector**



Fact 12: Sauti za Wananchi framing should be more bold, deliberate and targeted

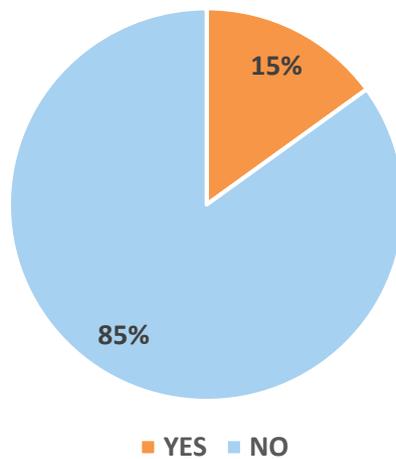
In terms of the framing of the poll findings, some actors feel that *Sauti za Wananchi* needs to be bolder at pushing policy makers towards action and more deliberate about engagement with the findings rather than just presenting the findings in public events or the media.

“There is need to have an end game beyond just giving the data. Twaweza should either take-up the initiative to start initiatives around the findings or start mobilising the relevant organisations to use the data. It not just enough to share data. You share data then what?” **Private Sector**

“I think you people need to push more. When you carry out a poll, it’s important to ensure you go to the respective government departments and present it to them, ask them if they think this is useful and have a discussion, put them to task and ask them how they intend to use it. This will make it more effective.” **Civil Society**

Theme 5: Awareness of *Sauti za Wananchi* poll nationally.

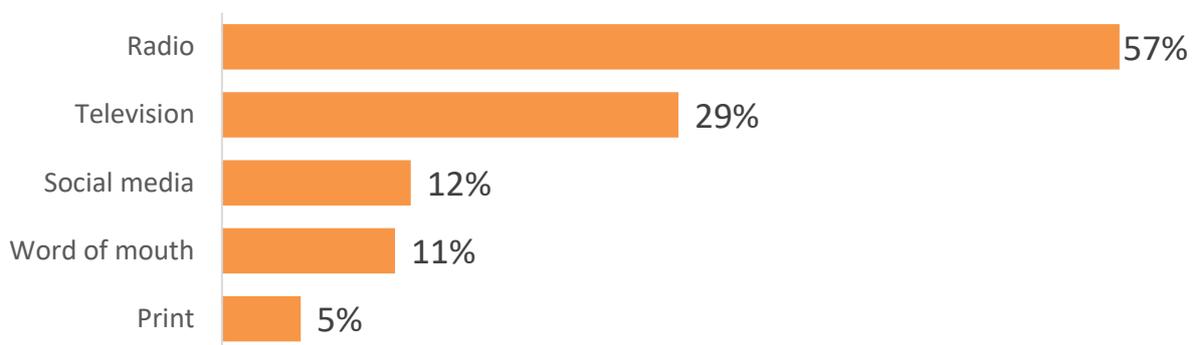
Figure 1: Have you heard of Sauti za Wananchi? (n=2057)



Fact 13: 15% of Kenyans have heard about *Sauti za Wananchi*, 10% can describe it and 6% can recall a topic that was covered. Nationally, 15% of the 2057 respondents polled said they have heard of *Sauti za Wananchi* (Figure 1). There are variations in the levels across regions with the highest levels of awareness being recorded in Western (30%), Nairobi (25%), and Coast (25%). The lowest levels of awareness were recorded in North Eastern (4%), Central (9%) and Rift Valley (9%). Eastern and Nyanza recorded 11% and 17% respectively. More people from urban areas (19%) were aware of *Sauti za Wananchi* as compared to rural areas (14%). There were no major variations across age or gender.

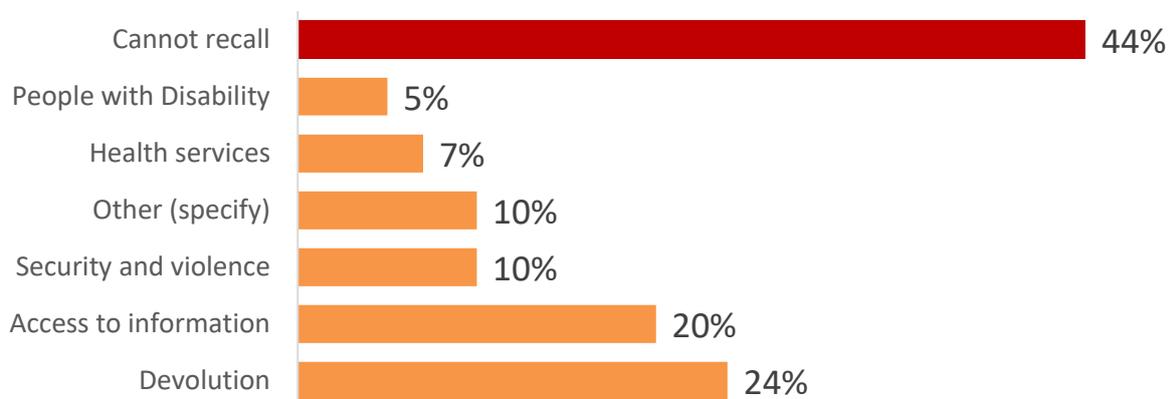
More than half (57%) of the citizens who knew *Sauti za Wananchi* had heard about it through radio. Other channels include television (29%), social media (12%), from other people (11%) and newspapers (5%).

Figure 2: In what ways have you heard about the *Sauti za Wananchi*? (n=314)



Those who said they were aware of *Sauti za Wananchi*, were also asked to describe it in their own words. In evaluating the answers, the interviewers had a prescribed description of the product against which they cross-checked the respondents' answers. Seven out of ten respondents (65%) were able to describe *Sauti za Wananchi* correctly. Just over half (56%) of those who had heard about *Sauti za Wananchi*, which translates to 6% nationally, could recall a topic or theme covered by *Sauti za Wananchi*. Devolution, access to information and security and violence are the best known topics.

Figure 4: What themes do you recall? (n=314)



Theme 5: Expectations for *Sauti za Wananchi* in Kenya

Expectations for what *Sauti za Wananchi* could achieve were framed around three main topics.



1. *Sauti za Wananchi* could track and report government performance

Respondents felt *Sauti za Wananchi* should focus on informing government and policy makers on their performance and service delivery quality, hold leaders accountable by helping track the promises they make during elections campaigns, and deepen knowledge on constitution and devolution. This is in line with *Sauti za Wananchi* structure which has a group of 200 citizen monitors³ who apart from following up on the panel, are also supposed to check the availability of essential services in the enumeration areas.

“There is a lot that Sauti za Wananchi can do beyond just getting perceptions. They can propose to the national government on how to scale up participation and move to the ‘how to’s’ so that you are able to help in operationalizing laws or lobbying and working with strategic partners based on the findings.” Private Sector

2. *Sauti za Wananchi* could gather information on citizen’s priorities

Some actors think that *Sauti za Wananchi* has the potential to do more in gathering information on citizens’ priorities on different public services and governance, and how important various public sectors are to citizens. This could then be communicated to policymakers for better planning and resource allocation.

3. *Sauti za Wananchi* could play a role in the coming elections

Most significantly, most respondents believe that the ultimate test for *Sauti za Wananchi* will be in how it plays in the elections space. For example, they believe that the independence with which *Sauti za Wananchi* covers election topics will ultimately determine its positioning and levels of public and government trust in the findings.

“We are going to watch how Twaweza plays next year. We want to see an organization that will ensure we have independent and credible information on political parties and who will up the stake on issues such as corruption when political temperatures are high.” Media

“Sauti za Wananchi needs to move into the elections, your methodology remains solid, scientific and you are able to vary and explain your methodology.” Civil Society

³ *Sauti za Wananchi* Citizen Monitors are carefully selected individuals numbering 200 nationally (1 in each of the enumeration areas) tasked with following up on the panel members on behalf of Twaweza but also doing performing spot check on various issues including essential services when needed.

5.0 Conclusions and discussion

From above feedback, it is fair to conclude that *Sauti za Wananchi* has already added value to the Kenyan polling space, and caught the attention of policy makers and the media in the following ways:

- The poll is already gaining traction both among policy makers and opinion poll intermediaries who consider it independent, relevant and credible. Its high frequency has also been noticed especially in the policy arena. At the citizen level about 6% of Kenyans are able to describe *Sauti za Wananchi* effectively and can recall a topic, this is no mean achievement for a poll that has been out for less than a year and especially one that is not targeted at ordinary citizens.
- Among the media, the poll is significantly contributing to and enriching news, acting as a credible information source and helping the media maintain focus and interest on some of the most pressing (but often less covered) topics. *Sauti za Wananchi* is also providing media with evidence, not just to create news and stories, but to ask hard questions to duty bearers as well.
- The press briefing component of the engagement activities seems to be effective in reaching citizens as these are the topics that most citizens can name
- *Sauti za Wananchi* is also viewed as a platform for the Kenyan public to raise their voices on key governance issues and input into the policy making process.
- *Sauti za Wananchi* has helped in enriching policy making with some actors reaching out to Twaweza to partner on assessing the public temperature around critical issues.
- There are growing expectations for *Sauti za Wananchi* moving forward

The following insights will help Twaweza to further strengthen the brand and positioning of *Sauti za Wananchi* in the Kenyan polling space;

- Although policy actors are the main targets for *Sauti za Wananchi* data, many of the respondents interviewed here encourage mass dissemination to citizens. This could be because of a lack of awareness about *Sauti za Wananchi's* aims or because they believe the insight contained is relevant for a wider audience. For Twaweza any decision on expanding dissemination will need to have clearly articulated aims and be weighed against logistical and financial considerations.
- While there is appreciation for the issue-based and service delivery focus of *Sauti za Wananchi*, Twaweza is also being encouraged to enter into the election polling arena
- Although policy-makers are positive about *Sauti za Wananchi's* credibility and integrity, there is the sense that it is too early to tell whether this will hold strong especially as Kenya enters into election season in earnest when political tensions and stakes are high. Past experience with polls that started out as credible and then got bogged down by politics contributes to this concern.
- Of course in light of a polling market that is considered biased and highly partisan, the key players place a huge responsibility on *Sauti za Wananchi* to fill in the gap of credibility and impartiality. The coming elections will without a doubt present the opportunity for shaping long-term perceptions among the public and other actors about *Sauti za Wananchi*.