

3 out of 4 Kenyans (75%) agree that devolution has led to better services But 7 out of 10 Kenyans (70%) say it is not easy to influence decisions in their county

Monday 27 November 2023, Nairobi: The majority of Kenyans agree that devolution has brought a number of positive changes: 3 out of 4 Kenyans (75%) say that devolution has led to an improvement in services and 6 out of 10 (58%) report seeing positive economic developments in their county.

Specifically, 7 out of 10 citizens (68%) say that devolution has improved health services in their county. Importantly, more women, young people and those who earn their income from agriculture are more likely to say health services have improved due to devolution than their older, richer male compatriots

Similarly, three out of ten Kenyans (32%, up from 23% in 2018) now say it is (very) easy to meet the leaders of their county, three out of ten (28%, up from 19%) say it is (very) easy to influence county decision making, and slightly more (32%, up from 20%) say it is (very) easy to access information.

But 7 out of 10 Kenyans say it is not easy to influence county decision-making (70%), to meet county leaders (67%) nor to access information on county laws, budgets or projects (65%).

These findings were released by Twaweza East Africa in a research brief titled *Power to the People? Kenyan citizens' experiences and opinions on ten years of devolution in practice* based on data from *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative high-frequency mobile phone survey. Respondents were selected through random sampling from a database of contacts from previous surveys to establish a new representative panel of the country's population. For this brief, data were collected from 3,746 respondents in the 10th round of the special panel, conducted between 19 and 27 July 2023.

Around half of Kenyans also agree that devolution has brought benefits in terms of inclusion and accountability including greater involvement in decision-making (50% agree); more transparency and accountability (49%); and fairer distribution of resources (53%).

Significantly 8 out of 10 Kenyans (83%) support devolution including 47% who support it strongly. Tana River, Marsabit and Turkana (grouped), Makueni and Elgeyo Marakwet are the counties in which more residents support devolution. Similarly, half of citizens (54%) say devolution is being implemented well; those in rural areas (59%) and those with an understanding of devolution (58%) are more likely to think so.

Kenyans also feel more included and involved. In 2015, 2 out of 10 citizens (19%) had attended a county meeting, which by 2023 has risen to 3 out of 10 (28%). Similarly, in 2015, 1 out of 10 citizens (8%) said they asked a question or raised an issue at such a meeting, which by 2023 has risen to two out of ten (18%). However, attendance and active participation are still dominated by men, older people and those in rural areas.

Despite these positive sentiments, Kenyans see the challenges of devolution. Interestingly however, One of the major issues is around resources: a small majority (56%) think that devolution has led to disparities in resource distribution between counties, half (52%) do not feel that there is sufficient budget allocated to county governments for service delivery including 1 out of 10 (13%) who think that

budgets are completely insufficient.

Relatedly, half of Kenyans (51%) are unhappy with their county's revenue collection while 33% are happy. Overall, 3 out of 10 Kenyans (30%) feel they are paying too many county taxes. And 62% of Kenyans report that corruption is the biggest challenge facing devolution, double the share of those who name any other problem.

Out of the counties and regions sampled, Elgeyo Marakwet and Makueni residents are more likely to: say devolution is being implemented well (Makueni 65%, Elgeyo Marakwet 61%, national 54%), say devolution has improved health services in their county (Makueni 78%, Elgeyo Marakwet 75%, national 68%), be positive about the impact of devolution (Makueni 45%, Elgeyo Marakwet 45%, national 37%), and attend meetings (and ask questions).

But perhaps the most striking finding from these data are more mixed. Firstly, close to half of Kenyans (47%) are unsure about the overall impact of devolution. This varies little between demographic groups. Although residents of Makueni and Elgeyo Marakwet are a little more positive, 4 out of 10 citizens in the two counties are unsure. This can be contrasted with 37% of Kenyans who say the impact has been positive and 16% who say it has been negative.

Secondly, when asked about whether those in authority take the views of ordinary Kenyans into account when making decisions, only 1 out of 10 Kenyans feel they do so at the national (10%) or county (12%) level. There is little variation between geographic and demographic groups.

James Ciera, Country Lead for Twaweza in Kenya, said: *“Reflecting on ten years of devolution, did government move closer to citizens and as a result deliver material improvements in their lives? There are some clear signals that yes – citizens engage more and experience better services. At the same time, citizens are highlighting some challenges. Money and financing – who controls it, where it is allocated, how much goes missing – are major concerns for citizens and government at both levels. The most critical message is that Kenyans still do not feel that government officials, however near or far, genuinely take their views into account when making decisions. This matters deeply for the next decade of devolution: if citizens genuinely think their governments care about their opinions, we will see more trust, more willingness to participate, more empathy and understanding when things are not delivered as expected. Devolution will be even more fully alive when citizens feel their governments listen to them.”*

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