

Press Release
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Many Kakamega residents are uncertain about open government

Many residents feel that public participation and democracy are not (yet) working for them

Wednesday 10 December 2025, Kakamega: Two out of three Kakamega residents are dissatisfied with how democracy is working in Kenya, two out of three say it is difficult to access details of county budgets and plans, and two out of three say they have never seen or heard of any consultations taking place about county government planning. Nevertheless, the County's decision to join the Open Government Partnership presents a big opportunity to move forward in these areas, and to prove the benefits of open government to residents.

These findings were released by Twaweza in a research brief titled *Open Government in Kakamega: Residents' views and experiences on open budgets, citizen participation and governance*, based on data from *Sauti za Wananchi*, Africa's first nationally representative high-frequency mobile phone survey. The panel for this brief was established through random sampling from an existing database of contacts from previous surveys to develop a nationally representative panel. For this brief, data were collected from 3,658 respondents nationwide, including 402 in Kakamega, in the thirteenth round of the special Sauti za Wananchi panel, conducted in March and April 2025.

Four in ten Kakamega residents (41%) say they have participated in a public participation meeting over the past year, slightly above the national average of 38%. Moreover, one in four (24%) went a step further, speaking up to ask a question or raise an issue at such a meeting, and those who attended overwhelmingly report that they were given opportunities to make their voices heard. Nevertheless, residents are uncertain as to whether public input to County planning processes is meaningful or tokenistic. Six out of ten residents (64%) feel that public participation in county decision-making is merely a way of informing citizens about choices that have already been made, though half say they believe public participation does make a real difference – that citizens can indeed influence the direction their county takes.

Compared to the national picture, Kakamega residents tend to be a bit less active. They are less likely than other Kenyans to attend rallies, talk politics online, discuss with friends/family or take to the streets in protest, though they are more likely to attend public meetings.

In a factsheet launched alongside the brief, titled *Life in Kakamega County: Residents' views and experiences*, Kakamega residents ranked the cost of living as the country's biggest challenge. Unemployment, corruption, health services and hunger also rank high on the list. Residents' concerns differ considerably across different demographic groups, particularly between the better-educated and the less educated. The cost of living is a concern shared by most, but those with higher levels of education are more likely to point to unemployment, corruption and crime, while those with lower levels of education are more likely to highlight hunger/drought as an issue.

Most residents of the County had to find ways of surviving without basic essentials several times in the previous year. This includes over eight out of ten (85%) who had to cope without cash income several

times or more. Seven out of ten had to cope several times without medicines or medical treatment (69%), and six out of ten without electricity at home (58%). A majority had to survive several times without having enough food (54%) and without clean water (55%), and almost as many had to cope without sufficient fuel to cook their food (49%).

Residents of Kakamega County are generally dissatisfied with the country's direction on respect for the rule of law and the constitution (54% dissatisfied) and addressing the cost of living (71% dissatisfied). However, County residents are more positive about devolution, with a small majority (55%) saying they are satisfied with the country's direction in this area.

James Ciera, Country Lead for Twaweza in Kenya, said: *"This survey shows us that while Kakamega County has bold plans for open government, delivering on this will be challenging. Making transparency the new normal will be part of this. More importantly, the County will need to prove to sceptical residents that public participation is not merely a tokenistic process providing legitimacy to pre-made decisions, but that it actually offers citizens genuine opportunities to shape the County's decision-making. If that can be achieved, the potential is huge."*

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Notes to Editors

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at www.twaweza.org / www.twaweza.org/sauti
- Twaweza works to demonstrate how citizens can come together to collectively address their problems and make government work better for them; enable citizens' voices, interests and experiences to be heard and taken seriously in decision-making; promote and protect open civic space which enables citizens to freely assemble or organise, speak and act in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. @TwawezaKe (Facebook), @Twaweza_Ke (Twitter), Twaweza East Africa (Instagram).