



Open Government in Kakamega

Residents' views and experiences on open budgets, citizen participation and governance

1. Introduction

This brief explores how citizens experience governance in Kakamega County, Kenya, with a particular focus on three out of the four commitment areas of the County's Open Government Action Plan¹, part of the County's participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP). Specifically, these include open budgets and access to information, participation and engagement, and County assembly openness.

What are the experiences of residents of the County on matters of open government?

How easy (or difficult) do they say it is to access information from County authorities? How satisfied are they with the way democracy is working, and why? In what ways are citizens participating in governance matters in practice, and do they see opportunities to do so as meaningful? And how much do they trust County leaders, relative to other officials?

Data for the brief come from Twaweza's Sauti za Wananchi mobile-phone panel survey. The panel was created randomly, sampling from an existing database of over 250,000 contacts to establish a nationally representative panel. For this brief, data were collected from 3,658 respondents

1 See <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/kakamega-kenya/> for the Action Plan. The commitment on climate change is not included here due a lack of sufficient data.



nationwide, including 402 in Kakamega, in the thirteenth round of the Sauti za Wananchi panel, conducted in March, 2025. In some cases, data has been disaggregated by gender, age and other factors. It should be noted that this leads inevitably to smaller sample sizes in each case. As such, values generated from these sub-groups should be treated as indicative rather than definitive, and strong inferences should be avoided in these cases.

Key findings include:

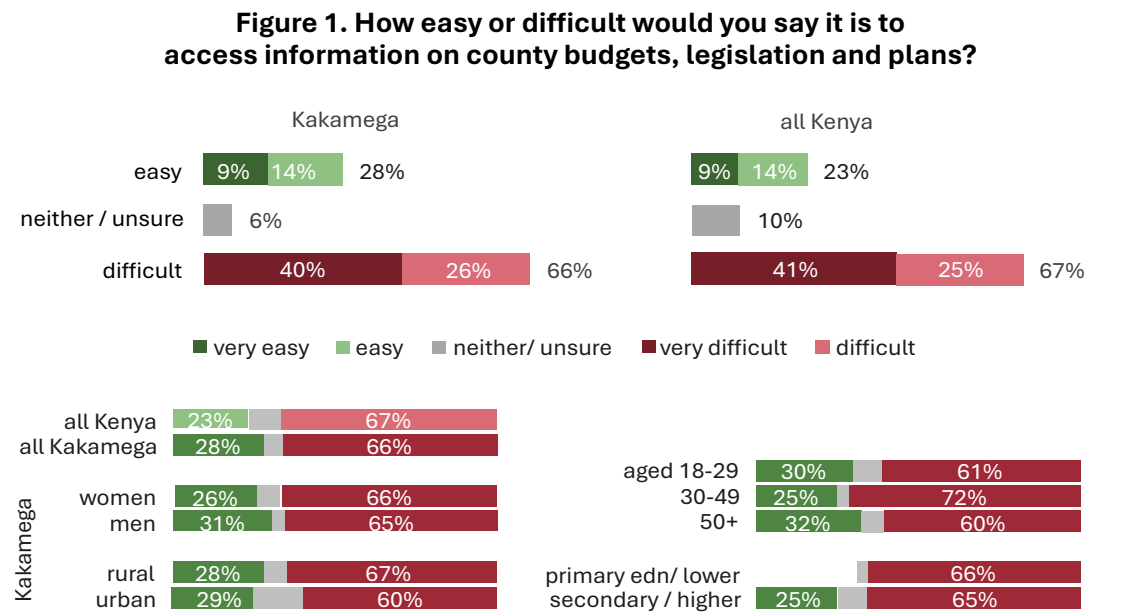
- Most residents say it is difficult to access details of county budgets and plans
- Most residents are dissatisfied with how democracy is working in Kenya
- Most residents have engaged in political conversations in the past year, but fewer have engaged in other ways
- 4 out of 10 residents attended a public participation meeting in the last year
- Most say they are given space to speak at public participation meetings
- Residents are uncertain as to whether public input to County planning processes is meaningful or tokenistic
- Most residents have never seen or heard of any consultations taking place about county government planning
- Residents are divided on whether Kenya is doing well on citizen participation
- Most residents say it is difficult to influence county decisions
- Residents are more likely to trust their own MCA and MP than the national and county parliaments as a whole

2. Ten insights on Kakamega residents’ experiences and opinions on open governance

Insight 1: Most residents say it is difficult to access details of county government budgets and plans

About two-thirds of residents (66%) say it is hard to get information about their county government’s budgets, laws, and plans; with 40% saying it is very difficult and another 26% saying it is somewhat difficult. At the national level, the picture is largely the same, with 67% of Kenyans across the country sharing this view.

Within the county, there are only minor differences among different demographic groups; most people, regardless of age, gender, or background, find it similarly challenging to access this kind of information.



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 402 Kakamega)

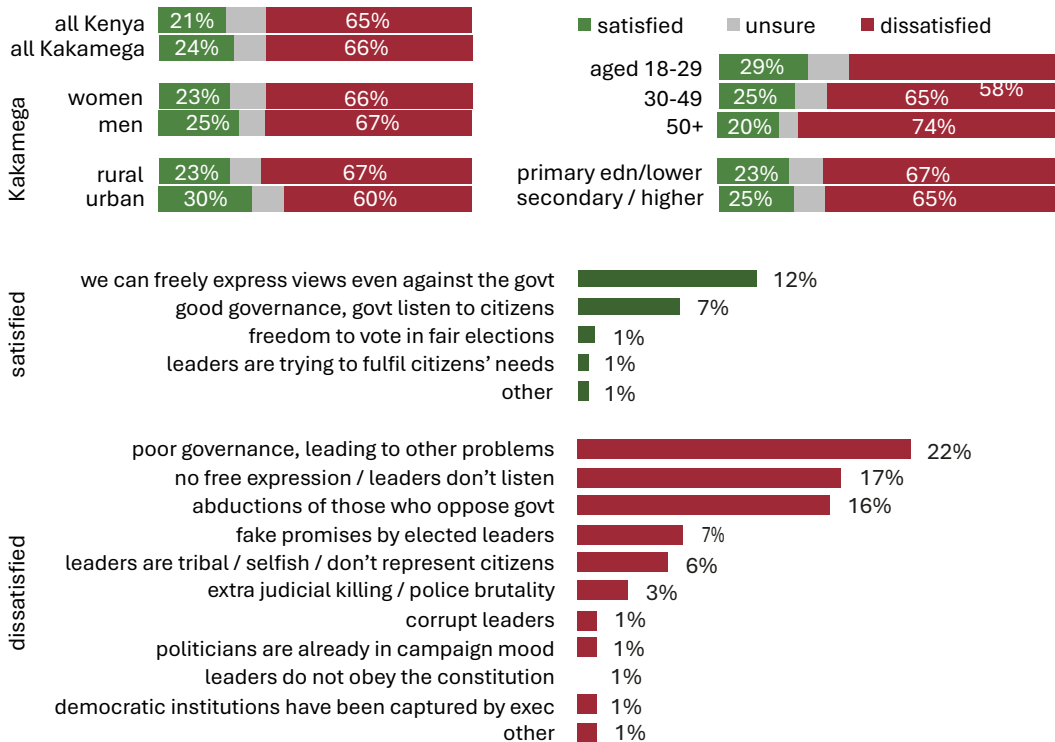
Insight 2: A majority of Kakamega residents are dissatisfied with how democracy is working in Kenya

Two out of every three Kenyans (66%) say they are unhappy with how democracy has been working in recent years; a sentiment that far outweighs the one in four (24%) who say they are satisfied.

Dissatisfaction is especially strong among older citizens and those living in rural areas, where people often feel more distant from the decisions that shape their lives. Many point to poor governance, shrinking space for free expression, and the abductions of government critics as the main reasons behind their frustration.

On the brighter side, for those who are content with how democracy is functioning, their optimism comes from a powerful belief: that Kenyans still have the freedom to speak their minds, even when their views challenge those in power.

Figure 2. How satisfied are you with the way democracy has been working over the past three years?
Why do you say so?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 402 Kakamega)

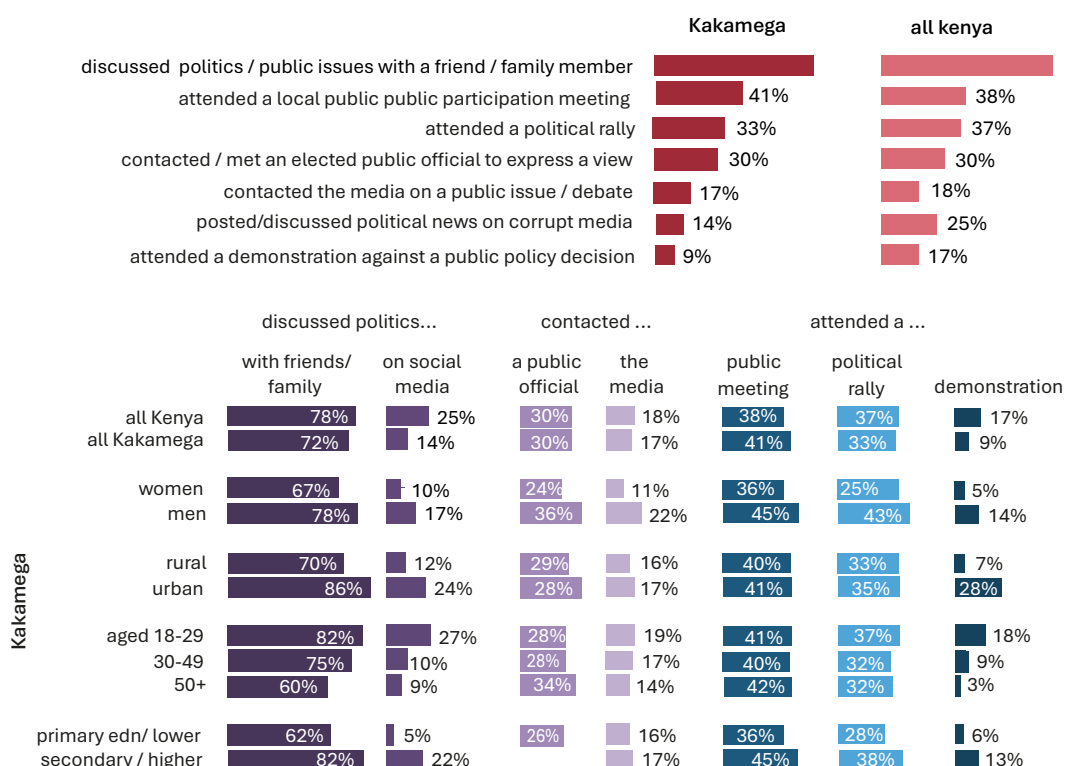
Insight 3: Most residents have engaged in political conversations in the past year, but fewer have engaged in other ways

About three in four (72%) say they have discussed public affairs related issues with friends or family in the past year. However, when it comes to taking part in more formal political activities, enthusiasm drops off. Fewer than half have attended a public participation meeting (41%), about one in three have gone to a political rally (33%) or reached out to a public official (30%), and only a small fraction (9%) have joined a public demonstration.

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.

Furthermore, within the county, political engagement varies. Men, younger people, those with more education, and residents of urban areas are generally more politically active.

Figure 3. Which of the following have you done, in the last year?



Source: Sauti za Wananchi mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)

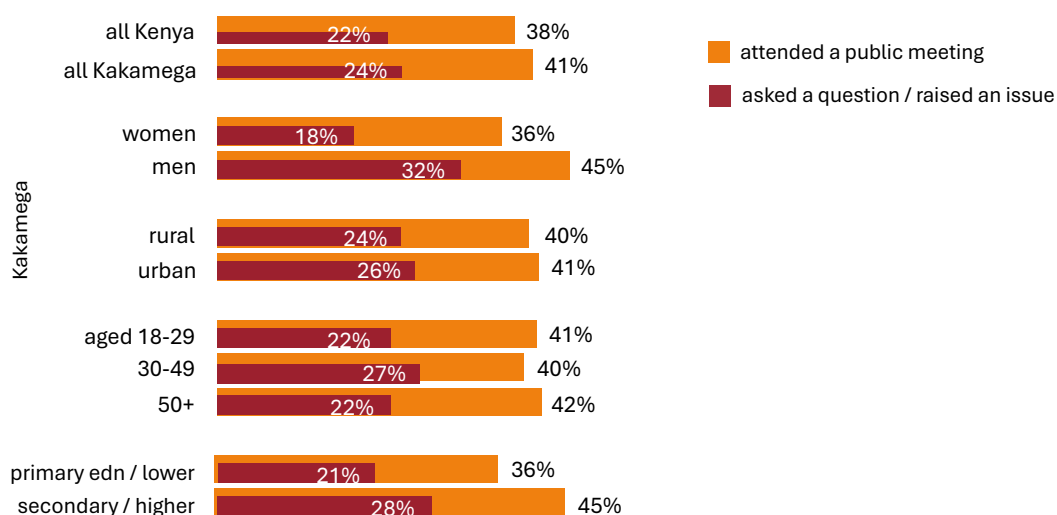
Base: all respondents (n=402 Kakamega)

Insight 4: 4 out of 10 residents attended a local public participation meeting in the last year

Four in ten Kakamega residents (41%) say they have taken part in a public participation meeting over the past year, a little more than 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.

Furthermore, men and those with higher levels of education are the most likely to show up and speak out in these forums. When it comes to age or where people live, be it urban or rural areas, attendance and participation looks similar.

Figure 4. % who attended a local public participation meeting in the past year, and % who asked a question or raised an issue:



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)

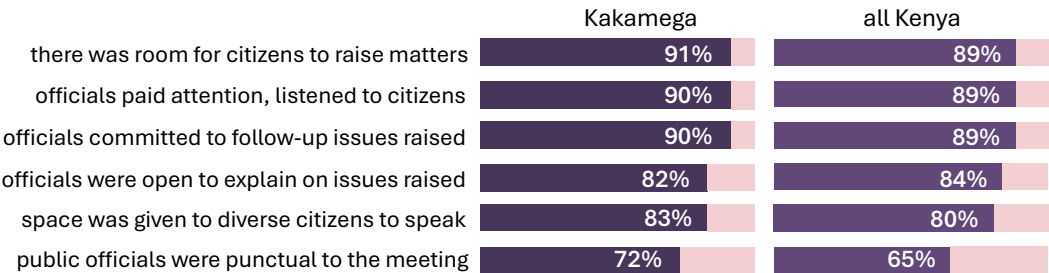
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 402 Kakamega)

Insight 5: Most residents report that they are given space to speak at public participation meetings

In Kakamega County, those who showed up for public participation meetings over the past year have mostly come away with positive experiences. An overwhelming majority (91%) say they were given space to raise their issues and be heard. Nearly the same number felt that officials listened attentively (90%) and even committed to act on what citizens shared (91%).

Most participants also noted that officials were open and responsive (82%) said their questions were answered, and 83% appreciated that the meetings created room for a wide range of voices from different backgrounds. While slightly fewer (72%) felt officials were punctual to the meeting. All these figures are broadly similar to national averages.

Figure 5. Which, if any, of the following were the case during the last public village/street/ward meeting that you attended ...?
(among those who attended a public meeting in the past year)



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: respondents who attended a public meeting in the past year
(n=1,415 nationwide; 166 Kakamega)

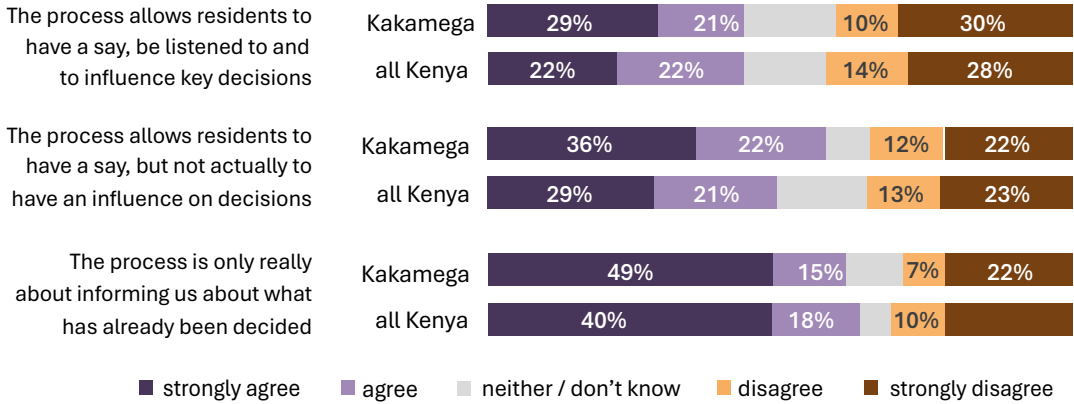
Insight 6: Residents are uncertain as to whether public input to County planning processes is meaningful or tokenistic

Six in ten Kakamega residents (64%) feel that public participation in county decision-making is more of a formality – a way of informing citizens about choices that have already been made. Nearly half (49%) hold this view very strongly. Another 58% believe that while the process gives people a platform to speak, it doesn’t necessarily give them the power to shape the final decisions.

Nevertheless, there’s still a spark of optimism. Half of the residents (50%) say they believe public participation does make a real difference; that citizens can indeed influence the direction their county takes.

Kakamega residents are more uncertain on this than the national average.

Figure 6. How much do you agree / disagree with the following statements about public input to county government planning processes?



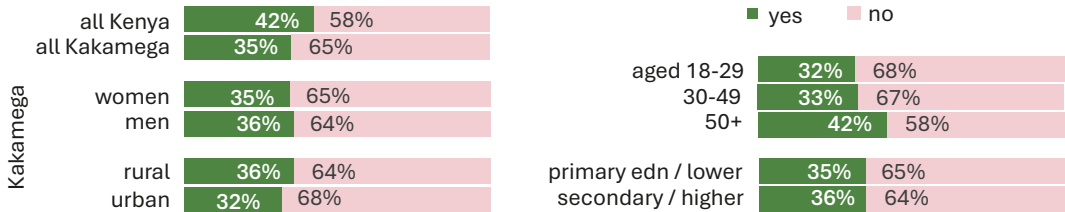
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 402 Kakamega)

Insight 7: Most residents have never seen or heard of any consultations taking place about county government planning

Two out of every three Kakamega residents (65%) say they have never seen or heard of any consultations about county government planning. That leaves just one in three (35%) who have. Awareness of these consultation meetings in Kakamega (35%) lags slightly behind the national average (42%).

Across different groups- young or old, men or women, rural or urban- awareness of public consultation meetings on county planning remains low, although older residents seem to be slightly more aware.

Figure 7. % who have ever seen or heard of any consultations taking place about county government planning:



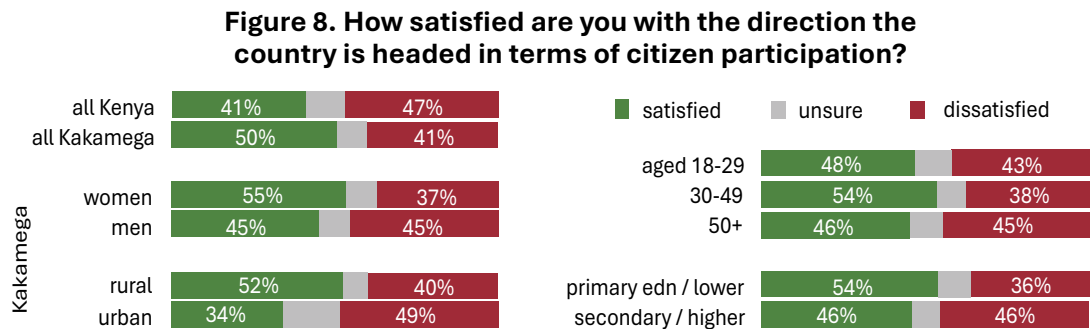
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 402 Kakamega)

Insight 8: Residents are divided on whether the country is doing well on citizen participation

Kakamega residents are almost evenly split on how they feel about the country’s progress on citizen participation; half (50%) are satisfied, while about four in ten (41%) are not. Still, people in Kakamega tend to be a little more upbeat about this than Kenyans overall.

Interestingly, women in Kakamega are more likely than men to feel satisfied with the country’s direction on public participation. The same is true for residents with lower levels of education, who express more confidence than their more educated counterparts.

Moreover, most striking is the substantial difference between rural and urban residents: those living in rural areas are far more content with how things are going with the country’s direction on public participation.



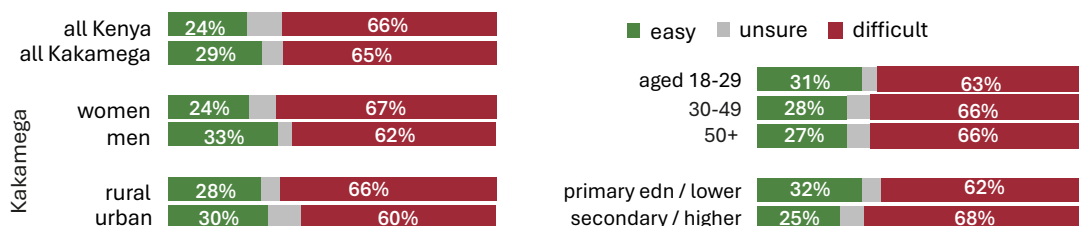
Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 402 Kakamega)

Insight 9: Most residents say it is difficult to influence county decisions

Most residents say it is difficult to influence county decision making (65%), similar to the number across Kenya as a whole (66%).

Within Kakamega, men are a little more likely than women to say it is easy to influence County decisions. Similarly, younger residents and those with lower levels of education are more likely than others to say this is easy.

Figure 9. How easy or difficult is it to influence county decision making?



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)

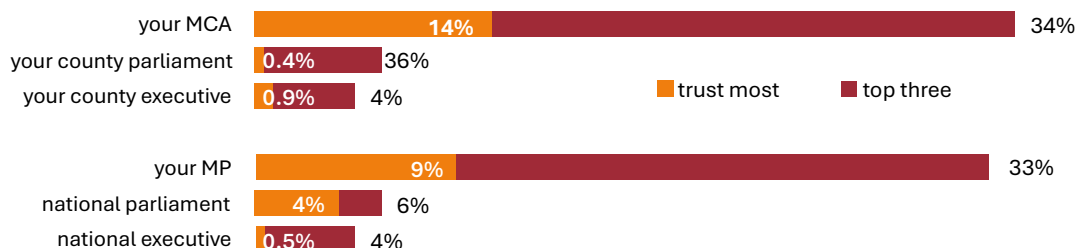
Base: all respondents (n=3,658 nationwide; 402 Kakamega)

Insight 10: Residents are more likely to trust their own MCA and MP than national and county parliaments as a whole

Kakamega residents are much more likely to rank their Member of County Assembly (MCA) as being among the top three institutions most likely to act in citizens' interests than they are to say this about their county parliament/ assembly in general. Similarly, citizens are more likely to trust their Member of Parliament (MP) than the national assembly/parliament as a whole to act in the interest of citizens.

Broadly speaking, there is little difference in citizens' levels of trust in County leadership relative to citizens' trust in national level representatives and officials.

Figure 10. Kakamega: % who say they would trust the following among the top three for acting in the interest of citizens:



Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* mobile phone survey, special r13 (March 2025)

Base: all respondents (n=402 Kakamega)

3. Conclusions


The findings from this Sauti za Wananchi survey paint a vivid picture of both the challenges and the opportunities ahead for Kakamega County in its journey toward open and participatory governance. The message is clear: while the ambition for openness exists, turning that vision into tangible change remains an uphill task.

Many residents say it is difficult to access information about county budgets, plans, and laws. Most are dissatisfied with how democracy is working. Levels of citizen participation trail behind the national average, and many people remain unsure or unaware of how public participation processes actually work. In fact, most residents say they have never heard of any public consultations taking place.

Yet within these findings lies a silver lining. Kakamega's decision to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP)² is a strong signal of intent; a declaration that the County is ready to walk the talk on transparency, accountability, and inclusion. The OGP, a global alliance that unites governments and civil society to strengthen open governance, encourages bold steps toward greater openness and citizen engagement. And in Kakamega, the evidence suggests there is tremendous room to grow and to lead by example.

Based on the citizens' feedback from this brief, to make real progress, two priorities stand out. First, the County must become more transparent. Information about plans, budgets, and decisions should not be hard to find; it should be everywhere, proactively shared, and easy for residents to understand. When citizens know what is happening and where to find information, trust begins to take root. Second, public participation must be genuine, not symbolic. True participation means giving residents real influence, not just inviting them to listen, but empowering them to shape outcomes. For now, many citizens feel uncertain about whether participation actually changes decisions or merely announces them after the fact. This lack of clarity likely stems in part from a lack of experience – most citizens have never even heard of public consultations taking place – as well as a dose of cynicism about government in general. Overcoming this scepticism will require consistency, openness, and visible proof that when residents speak, the County listens and acts. The plan to launch a call centre, for example, is a promising step the county is taking in the right direction.

2 See <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/who-we-are/>



Seen in a hopeful light, this survey provides a valuable baseline for Kakamega's journey under OGP. It highlights where things stand now and sets the stage for measuring future progress. The road ahead may not be easy; open government demands courage, commitment, and a willingness to do things differently. But if Kakamega can seize this moment – if it can transform dialogue into action and ambition into accountability – it could become a shining example of what open governance truly looks like in practice.

Change won't happen overnight, but it begins here: with honest reflection, shared purpose, and the determination to make openness more than a promise, but a living reality for every resident.