



## ENHANCING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN KENYA'S GOVERNANCE



# Enhancing Youth Engagement and Service Delivery in Kenya's Governance

## Key Highlights

Youth involvement is crucial for good governance as it fosters innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability in society. The youth bring fresh perspectives, adaptability, and creative solutions to governance, leading to more efficient and responsive decision-making. Their participation ensures that the needs of all generations are considered, promoting social equity and reducing the risk of marginalization. This policy seeks to strengthen good governance in Kenya by focusing on four key pillars: service delivery, youth engagement, transparency and accountability. Through research, capacity building and advocacy, the policy brief explored innovative ways to enhance citizen involvement in governance, promote open and accessible information, empower young people as agents of change and strengthen mechanisms for holding public officials accountable. The key highlights of the brief are:

☒ **Youth Unemployment:** Policies on youth unemployment that do not include impactful youth engagement often result in weak programs that lack the creativity and effectiveness this group can offer. As a result, such programs generate limited economic opportunities for the citizenry and below-standard economic progress. This slowed growth, in turn, has led to increased unemployment with the youth bearing the brunt of this economic outlook. Notably, Kenya has a 39.1% youth unemployment rate (KIPPPRA 2016) compared to the national average of 7.4% (KNBS 2018). Enhanced youth participation would lead to pro-  
the economy.

☒ **Public Service Satisfaction:** Persistent use of political patronage and tokenism instead of robust public engagement discourse leads to increased levels of mistrust and distrust of those in authority by those being led. Obstructing the process of public participation limits the responsiveness of policies to change and their adaptability to the current needs of the members of the public. The colonial top-down structure of handling public discourse serves to create discontentedness and disconnectedness in policy approach, implementation, and impact. Recent statistics indicate that only 40% of Kenyans express satisfaction with public services with a greater majority expressing distrust and mistrust. The result of this reflects the recent cataclysmic uprisings by the youth and greater society.

☒ **Inefficient resource allocation in Kenya** has severe economic repercussions. Corruption alone siphons billions of shillings annually from the public coffers (KNBS 2023). These funds, intended for development projects and social services, are diverted, leading to underdevelopment, inequality, and reduced service delivery. For instance, highlights a shortfall in healthcare funding, directly impacting maternal and infant mortality rates. Such inefficiencies hinder economic growth and erode public trust (KNBS 2022).

☒ **Youth Representation:** Youth representation in governance in Kenya stands at a mere 18.2% (Global data on national parliaments, 2022-09). This limited involvement significantly hampers the effectiveness of decision-making processes, as the perspectives and needs of the younger generation are inadequately addressed. Increasing youth participation is crucial for more inclusive and representative governance.



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## Introduction

Good governance is pivotal for sustainable development. However, the country continues to grapple with challenges such as limited public participation, lack of transparency, and weak accountability mechanisms. These issues hinder the realization of devolution's potential and impede overall progress. The underutilization of youth, a demographic powerhouse, in governance processes accelerated these challenges. Consequently, there's a growing disconnect between the governed and the governors, manifested in public discontent, protests, and strikes. The resultant unrest and political instability is a governance crisis that demands urgent attention and innovative solutions.

As we gear up for the International Youth Day celebrations this year (2024), there is need to prioritize public participation, transparency, youth engagement, and accountability, to create a more inclusive, responsive, and effective governance system in Kenya. Increased citizen engagement will lead to better informed decision-making, while transparency and accountability will build trust between the government and citizens. Empowering youth will ensure that their voices and perspectives are incorporated into governance processes, leading to sustainable solutions for the future. Ultimately, contributing to Kenya's democratic consolidation and socio-economic development.

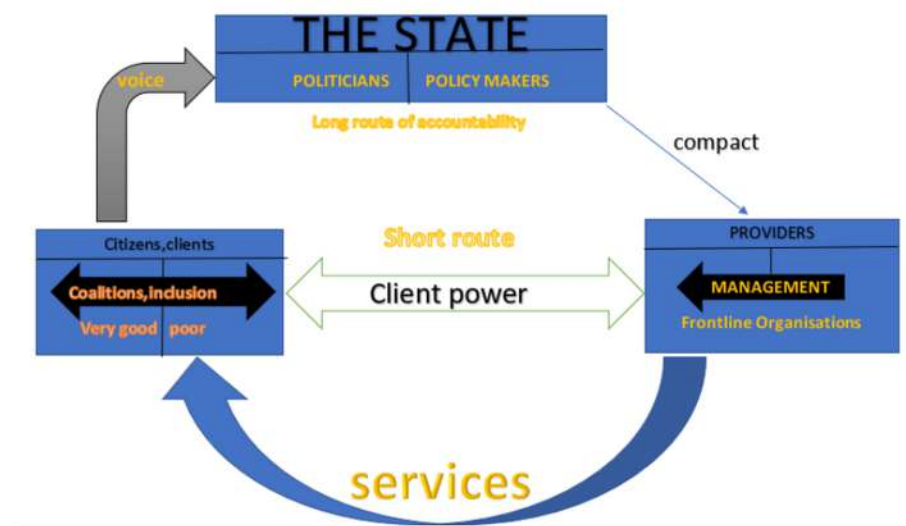
## 2.0 Policy Issues

Policy issues concerning youth are critical areas that require attention to ensure effective service delivery and meaningful engagement in governance. These issues encompass both the challenges young people face in accessing services and the barriers that prevent them from fully participating in decision-making processes. Addressing these policy issues is essential for empowering youth, enhancing their contributions to society, and ensuring that their voices are heard in the governance structures that shape their future. Below are the issues at hand:

## 2.0 Policy Issues

Kenya's public service delivery is marred by a host of challenges that impede its effectiveness and impact on citizens' lives. Understaffing is a persistent issue, leading to overburdened employees, extended wait times, and a decline in service quality. Moreover, the quality-of-service delivery is compromised by inadequate staff training, resulting in inefficient processes and dissatisfied citizens. Corruption, a pervasive problem, diverts resources from essential services, erodes public trust, and undermines the government's credibility.

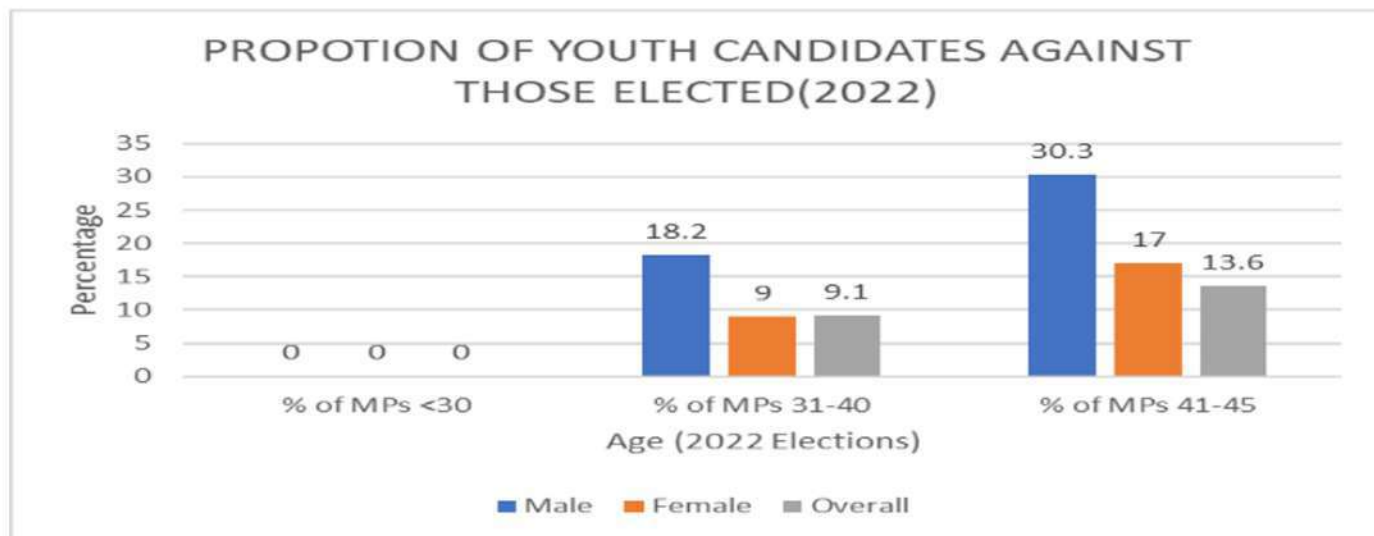
To address these multifaceted challenges, a comprehensive approach is necessary. Investing in robust staff training programs is crucial to enhance the skills and knowledge of public servants. Strengthening anti-corruption measures is essential to restore public confidence and ensure that resources are utilized for their intended purposes. Additionally, embracing technology is vital for modernizing service delivery. Implementing an efficient electronic queue management system can significantly reduce wait times and improve overall service experience. Furthermore, expanding digital infrastructure can facilitate online service access, enhance transparency, and promote accountability. By implementing these strategies, Kenya can transform its public service into a responsive, efficient, and citizen-centric institution.



## 2. Limited Youth Involvement in Governance:

There is a gap in integrating Kenya's youths into the country's economic, social, and political life. Kenya's youth represent enormous potential as well as challenges, particularly in preparing millions of young citizens for active participation in the nation's development. Data indicates that youth between 18-35 constitutes about 29% of Kenya's population. Despite the significance of this demographic, a substantive proportion of this segment are inadequately engaged in governance and national development agenda. This has resulted in development of policies and programs that do not adequately mainstream youth issues and perspectives. Despite the provisions of the Constitution and the existence of ratified state instruments on youth engagement and participation, including the African Youth Charter and the World Plan of Action for Youth, youth engagement and participation remains low. Of concern also is that the few engagements are often based on tokenism. Politically, the youth who are holding political positions are often used only for political gains rather than being given substantial roles in decision-making processes (Youth Empowerment in Policy Making, 2022).

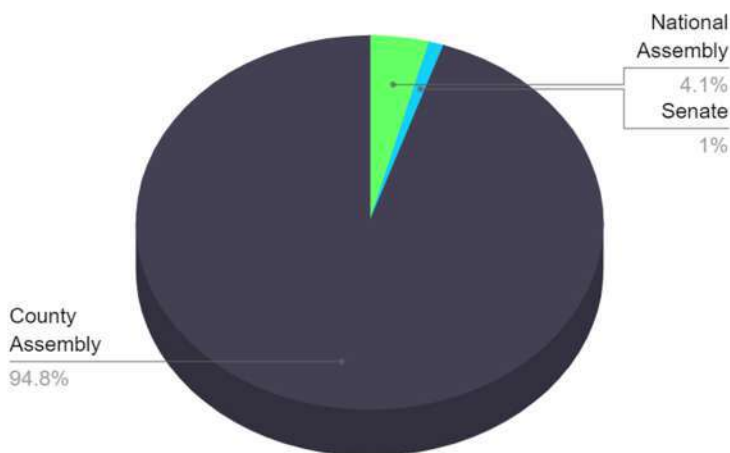
**Figure 1.0 Representation of Young people in Parliament (2022)**



Source: IEBC, 2022

**Figure 1.1 The pie chart below illustrates the proportion of youth candidates elected in 2022 general election (Youth Cafe)**

Pie Chart



Source: Youth Cafe (2023)



## 2.Lack of Transparency and Public Participation:

Public participation is recognized as a national value and principle of governance under Article 10 of the constitution. Despite efforts made by the national and county governments, public participation as a principle of governance is yet to be fully realized in Kenya resulting in the recent court rulings voiding laws and policies made by the government[ <https://ntvkenya.co.ke/news/blow-to-ru-to-as-court-of-appeal-rules-finance-act-2023-unconstitutional/>]. Currently public participation has been marred by conflicting legal and institutional frameworks leading to weak norms and practices that would guide on proper implementation and management of public engagement. For an elaborate public participation process to ensue, leadership should be held accountable through enforcing transparency by ensuring information is made available to all with a variety of user-friendly and accessible formats as safeguarded under Article 35 of the Constitution. In the recent past, however, statistics indicate that Kenya has consistently been ranked below 50 percent on the corruption perception index (Figure 1). This is contributed by the corrupt officials, restricted civic space and limited access to justice.

**Figure 1: Corruption Perception Index**



Source: Transparency international, 2023

## Policy Recommendations

### 1.To enhance service delivery:

The Ministry of ICT, in collaboration with the State department for Immigration and Citizen services to spearhead the implementation of e-governance solutions to streamline public services. Additionally, digital platforms for real-time feedback should be established to boost accountability. While E-Citizen in Kenya has significantly improved access to government services, gaps still exist, such as limited digital literacy among some users, which makes it difficult for them to navigate the platform. Additionally, inconsistent internet connectivity in rural areas can hinder access to these essential services, leaving some citizens underserved. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure that E-Citizen is truly accessible to all. Furthermore, many youth empowerment centers have ICT infrastructure, but they often require upgrading of software and hardware and ensuring adequacy to meet the growing demand and to support digital literacy initiatives effectively.

### 2.To promote youth engagement:

Restructuring the National Youth Council and establishing youth advisory bodies at the county level is crucial for amplifying youth voices. Legislative reforms by the national assembly to mandate youth representation in governance, coupled with robust voter and civic education by IEBC, are essential. Capacity building for youth organizations and implementing policies to ensure youth inclusion in public offices are equally important.

### 3.To expand financial access:

Tailoring financial services to youth-led initiatives and streamlining access to funding through sector working groups and the influence of the Private sector like KEPSA and KNCCI also Organizations that have access to funding to work as a collaborative. Although the YEDF, Uwezo Fund, and KEYOP are tailored to the youth in terms of accessing youth development funds and enhancing digital financial literacy, improvements are needed in simplifying the application processes, increasing awareness about these funds, and providing ongoing support and mentorship. Additionally, enhancing digital financial literacy will ensure that young entrepreneurs can effectively access and manage these resources.

### 4.To strengthen transparency and public participation:

Developing user-friendly public documents, ensuring widespread access to information, and promoting civic awareness are crucial. Decentralizing public participation and establishing clear guidelines for participation will enhance citizen engagement. Equipping ward administrators with necessary resources will facilitate access to information at the grassroots level.

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