

JANUARY 2025

**SHUJAAZ INC.**

# RECLAIMING TOMORROW

**REBUILDING YOUNG PEOPLE'S  
FAITH IN THE FUTURE**



**UNITED NATIONS  
KENYA**



**United Nations  
Futures Lab  
NETWORK**

**SHUJAAZ  
INC.**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project was conducted in partnership with the United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator's Office in Kenya and the UN Futures Lab/Global Hub, in the lead up to the UN Summit of the Future (held in September 2024). The project supports broader efforts by the UN in Kenya to promote long-term programming that enables young Kenyans to contribute to a strategic 'vision of the future' for their country, as well as work by the UN Futures Lab/Global Hub to help incorporate futures thinking and strategic foresight into planning, policy making and decision making. The objective was to hear from Kenyan youth about their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the future and gather insights for potential ways forward.

Qualitative and quantitative data for the report (research, surveys, interviews and focus groups) was collected before, during and after the 2024 'Gen Z protests'. These protests, unlike those before them, involved diverse, self-organising young people from disparate backgrounds. The protests were mobilised on social media, and expressed different demands.

The report traces how the differing realities and challenges faced by the current generation of young Kenyans have shaped their perspectives on, and attitudes towards, the future of Kenya. Alongside a snapshot of Gen Z youth trends and demographics in 2024, the report also explores young Kenyans' hopes and desires, their changing understanding of and engagement in democratic processes, and their eagerness to help Kenya's government shape different youth-friendly policies.

### KEY FINDINGS OF THIS REPORT

#### **Young Kenyans are more engaged than ever with how their country is governed.**

This is the result of a five-year journey of upheaval, beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic, moving through the 2022 General Election, and culminating in the Gen Z protests of 2024. These events assured young people of their power to use democratic processes for good – but also underscored their frustration at years of economic hardship and a perceived struggle to be heard.

**But young Kenyans are not all the same: they have diverse concerns and needs.** To understand the challenges affecting young people, and their needs for the future, we must recognise they are not a homogenous group. This is the first step to engaging them in a meaningful way. There are critical differences in the circumstances of young Kenyans' lives and in what they want from their government. One-size-fits-all approaches to youth policy will not work.

**We mapped six groups of young Kenyans, categorised by differing attitudes to the future.** Research for the report included a series of group activities and one-to-one conversations with more than 2,500 young people aged 18–29 in 34 of Kenya's 47 counties. This process revealed that young Kenyans divide into six distinct groups, each with different expectations of the future, different priorities, and different needs from the Government:





**These groups allowed us to form five targeted policy recommendations.** From among the six groups, the largest and most urgent demands are:

- A stronger focus on growth in the informal economy through the streamlining of regulations, taxes and new opportunities that help Kenya's young entrepreneurs to flourish and grow;
- Concessions to those struggling to provide for families and dependents, for whom health, education and subsistence costs are overwhelming and improved public services are critical;
- More visible public accountability and justice for those frustrated by unemployment and exacerbated by perceived unfairness and corruption.

We used this information to work with the Government, the UN and other key stakeholders to form five targeted policy recommendations, detailed in Section 5:

1. Growth-focused taxation
2. Reduce barriers for new businesses
3. Stabilise the cost of basic commodities
4. Strengthen accountability and justice
5. Support the growth of the informal economy.

## **FORGING A NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT**

The report finds that there is an unprecedented opportunity for the Government to forge a new, mutually beneficial relationship with young Kenyans by addressing their priorities and involving them more in the design of future solutions.

In the final stage of the report process, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Kenya convened a panel of Kenyan youth policy experts to reflect on the findings and propose a series of policy recommendations. These recommendations aim to help the Government address the needs expressed by young Kenyans and to help them to reclaim tomorrow.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research for this project has been grounded in futures thinking and strategic foresight approaches. By focusing on creating and maintaining a coherent and functional forward view these approaches can detect hidden opportunities, guide policy, shape strategy, and explore new products and services, breaking free from present boundaries and imagining new possibilities. This project brought together young Kenyans, civil society, government and the UN to demonstrate the value of foresight, providing an opportunity for young Kenyans to co-author a strategic vision of the future.

The core data and insights that informed this report were collected through a dedicated *Reclaiming Tomorrow* study conducted by Shujaaz Inc on behalf of the UN (UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Kenya and the UN Futures Lab/Global Hub) between June and August 2024.

- This mixed-method study engaged 2,500 Kenyans aged 15–39 across 34 out of 47 counties in Kenya. The selection of counties for this study was guided by the presence of the community research network (see below), and security and accessibility concerns.
- The data were collected and analysed by researchers from Shujaaz Inc, with the support of a network of trained community researchers, the WaCurious, who were recruited and trained by the Shujaaz research team.
- The study consisted of two phases: qualitative and quantitative. During the qualitative phase, around 150 young Kenyans from 12 counties were invited to take part in 14 focus group discussions (FGDs).
- The objective of the FGDs was to conduct an in-depth exploration of young Kenyans' aspirations for and perspectives on the future, the barriers they see, and the support they need. FGDs lasted for 90–120 minutes, and the tools were based on a combination of traditional data collection approaches, as well as human-centred design and participatory-research techniques.
- FGD participants were recruited through a combination of recruitment at convenience locations, referrals, and snowballing techniques:
  - *Convenience locations, youth groups and youth-gathering locations:* In each county, the team visited locations where young people were gathering to discuss hot topics and important news and events, including video dens, youth initiatives and creative hubs.
  - *Referrals:* The team contacted youth leadership and educational agencies to ask for referrals for debate clubs and similar groups that meet regularly to discuss important youth issues.
  - *Snowballing recruitment:* Once researchers identified the initial group of participants, they were asked to suggest other people they knew (e.g. friends or colleagues, but not relatives), who would be a good fit for the study.
- Once the initial analysis of qualitative data was completed, the research team converted emerging themes into a set of questions, which was then used in the second phase of the study: a face-to-face, CAPI (computer-assisted personal interview) national survey of 2,500 young Kenyans in 34 counties.
- The objective of the survey was to verify the themes emerging from the qualitative data analysis, test their generalisability across geographies and demographic subgroups, and expand the findings by adding additional details, nuances and clarifications to be derived from the quantitative data. The interviews lasted for 15–20 minutes. The tool consisted of a mix of structured/close-ended and open-ended questions and a gamified CAPI-embedded perception tool.



- The participants in the survey were recruited using the in-person intercept technique. Members of the WaCurious network identified public spaces in their areas, and then recruited five potential respondents in each location using a screener questionnaire. Candidates who were identified as eligible and who consented to the study were immediately interviewed. The interviews were conducted in 500 locations in the 34 counties.
- The analysis of the qualitative data in the survey was done using a combination of software and manual coding, cross-coder verification. Expert validation of the findings was also part of the analysis. The emerging findings were also presented to the WaCurious research community for validation prior to the launch of the survey. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software, version 30.

In addition to the *Reclaiming Tomorrow* study, this report is informed by a collection of qualitative and quantitative studies conducted and published by Shujaaz Inc since 2016:

- **Annual nationally representative survey of Kenyan youth aged 15–24:** Shujaaz launched its series of annual surveys in 2016. We have now conducted nine such surveys, with samples ranging from 1,750 to 2,950 young people, from all 47 counties in Kenya. The sample and the questionnaire allow us to generalise the findings to the entire population of Kenyans aged 15–24. The data for the surveys is typically collected in Q1 of the respective year.
- **COVID-19 Barometer studies:** In 2020, Shujaaz conducted 10 rounds of mixed-method studies to collect routine data that informed our media content and provided valuable on-the-ground insights to international development stakeholders. Each round of data collection included: (1) 2–3 digital focus group discussions with the Shujaaz audience; (2) an SMS survey of 500–1,000 Shujaaz audience members; (3) social media content analysis, qualitative and quantitative; and (4) a USSD poll with 1,000+ Shujaaz audience members.
- **Youth Pulse studies, 2022–2024:** During critical periods or events for Kenya's governance, Shujaaz conducted multiple rounds of mixed-method studies before, during and after the event to: (1) understand youth sentiment that led to or shaped the event; and (2) describe how the sentiment evolved during the period of the event. For example, in 2022 Shujaaz conducted three rounds of research with young Kenyans dedicated to the 2022 General Elections – a month prior to the elections, immediately after the elections, and three months after the elections. All data collection rounds included qualitative methods, quantitative methods, and digital content analysis.





## 1. THE CONTEXT:

# WHY IS THIS AN IMPORTANT TIME FOR YOUNG KENYANS?

This report was written as global leaders were gathering in New York for the UN Summit of the Future – a ‘once-in-a-generation opportunity to reinvigorate global action’ and build multilateral alliances capable of tackling global challenges, from inequality to climate change to geopolitical shifts.<sup>1</sup>

As part of negotiating the ‘Pact for the Future’ (which was ultimately adopted),<sup>2</sup> global leaders were eager to hear the voices of young people. They wanted to learn about young people’s struggles and hopes, not least to ensure that the proposed actions generated throughout the Summit were aligned with the aspirations of the generation of future leaders.

Kenya, like many other countries, has been struggling amid multiple intersecting challenges, ranging from its exploding youth population to digital transition, economic transformation, and an evolving political environment. As this study was unfolding, the country also experienced a series of youth-led protests. These reflected the new generation’s discontent, and desire to be heard and consulted in regards to the country’s governance. While the protests have ceased at the time of writing (December 2024), many of the concerns young Kenyans have about democracy and the future appear to remain.

This report brings to the fore the voices and experiences of young Kenyans. It traces the five-year journey of Kenyan Gen Zs that culminated in 2024’s political activism, and it maps of that journey on their expectations of the Government and governance – with a view to forming a new partnership between young Kenyans and the Kenyan Government.

“  
**WE ARE THE  
CHANGE.**

- Female, 20 – Century, Nakuru County



<sup>1</sup> ‘Summit of the Future’, [United Nations](#).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Pact for the Future’, [United Nations](#).



## A GROWING MAJORITY

Young people form the majority of Kenya's population. Between 2016 and 2024, the number of 15–24-year-olds rose by 43%: from 8.4 million to 12.0 million.<sup>3</sup> Among them, the number of potential voters – 18–24-year-olds – grew to 8.3 million, marking a 73% increase.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, young Kenyans are yet to embrace the traditional democratic channels – in the 2022 General Elections, Kenyans aged 18–24 represented 28% of potential voters but only 10% of people who cast their vote.<sup>5</sup> This indicates, in part, a lack of faith among young people in the power of the elections to deliver positive transformation in Kenya.

Nevertheless, the majority of young Kenyans are concerned about their country and communities and are eager to contribute to the social, economic and political shifts they would like to see happen. Data from seven years of Shujaaz Inc's annual, nationally representative surveys of young Kenyans demonstrates, year after year, that more than 60% of 15–24-year-olds believe young people have a role to play in governance.<sup>6</sup> This current study, however, indicates that young people consistently believe they are denied this positive role.

## THE 2024 PROTESTS: A NEW VOICE

Until 2024, young Kenyans' engagement in governance was either small-scale or led by people in positions of power. Then, in May 2024, young Kenyans stepped into the spotlight.

Young people organised and led a wave of protests against the Government's Finance Bill, which proposed additional taxes. They mobilised online under the banner #RejectFinanceBill2024. Dubbed the 'Gen Z protests', this movement delivered extraordinary success for the protestors, including the withdrawal of the Bill by President Ruto, a reshuffle of the cabinet, and an announcement of austerity measures to manage public spending.

However, the protests were not without controversy – and tragedy. The infiltration of peaceful marches by criminals and rioters threatened to distract from their purpose and led to the destruction of property, including at the Parliament buildings. Clashes with the police ended in the deaths of protestors, and have been followed by the abduction of some perceived protest leaders and other alleged human rights abuses.

Nevertheless, young people saw the protests as a win for the country and for themselves. More than half who took part believed they had affected positive change, and over 80% believed this would be sustained in the long term.<sup>7</sup>

This reflects a new attitude to governance and level of engagement in the future of Kenya. However, as the next section shows, this shift did not happen overnight. Rather, it is a result of a five-year journey which has led to young Kenyans becoming steadily more engaged and organised.

# 68%

OF YOUNG KENYANS BELIEVE  
**YOUTH** HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN  
**LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

# 60%

OF YOUNG KENYANS BELIEVE **THEY**  
PERSONALLY HAVE A ROLE TO  
PLAY IN **LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

OVER

# 80%

OF YOUNG KENYANS (AGED  
18–29) WHO TOOK PART IN THE  
*RECLAIMING TOMORROW* STUDY  
BELIEVED THAT SOMETHING  
**POSITIVE** CAME OUT OF THE 2024  
YOUTH PROTESTS IN KENYA.

<sup>3</sup> 'Kenya', Population Pyramid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, Voter Registration Age Distribution per County, September 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Shujaaz Inc, Annual nationally representative survey of young Kenyans aged 15–24 years old, 2017–2024, N=1500+.

<sup>7</sup> Shujaaz Inc, *Reclaiming Tomorrow* Study, July–August 2024, N=2500.

## 2. THE TREND:

# WHAT LED YOUNG KENYANS TO BECOME MORE POLITICALLY ENGAGED?

Over the past five years, young Kenyans have been on a journey characterised by important milestones, each of which assured them of the power of democracy and their own power to use democratic processes for good.

These events also underscored their frustration at years of economic hardship and a perceived struggle to be heard, understood and supported.

## A FIVE-YEAR JOURNEY

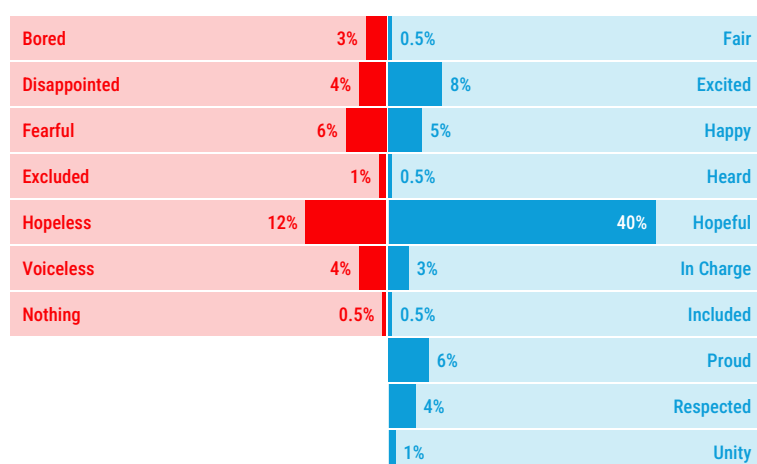
### 2020: COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The pandemic brought Government into young people's lives more than ever before. Many felt the COVID-19 response at the time ignored their reality, with rules worsening their financial struggles.<sup>8</sup> The experience heightened their awareness of governance and fuelled a desire to be heard. For example, in the April 2020 SMS survey of young Kenyans (aged 15–24) conducted by Shujaaz Inc, 81% said their voices, hopes and struggles were not well represented or not at all represented by Kenya's COVID-19 strategy. In a repeat survey conducted in August 2020, this figure had increased to 84%.<sup>9</sup>

### 2022: GENERAL ELECTION

Young Kenyans saw the 2022 election as a moment of hope. William Ruto, a self-proclaimed 'hustler' with a rags-to-riches story, was elected president. Many young people believed the new president would understand their struggles and act on their behalf.

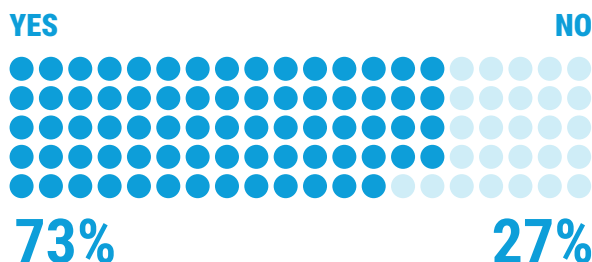
#### HOW YOUNG KENYANS FELT ABOUT THE 2022 GENERAL ELECTION





President Ruto's victory strengthened young Kenyans' belief in the power of democracy and their power to affect change. It also raised their levels of interest in, and scrutiny of, public affairs.

DO YOUNG KENYANS FOLLOW WHAT THE PRESIDENT SAYS AND DOES?

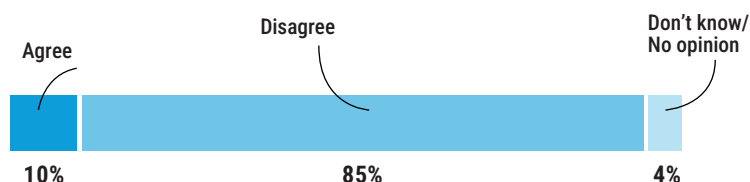


## 2023: COST OF LIVING PROTESTS

Following the General Election, many young Kenyans began to monitor events more closely, expecting positive action from 'their' president. Growing disappointment came to a head when the 2023 Finance Bill introduced new taxes that raised the cost of basic goods, fuelling a wave of opposition protests.

Young Kenyans' feelings shifted from post-election optimism to disillusionment. Early in 2024, 85% said they did not think the Government cared about their issues.<sup>10</sup>

DO YOUNG KENYANS THINK THEIR GOVERNMENT CARES ABOUT YOUTH ISSUES?



## 2024: GEN Z PROTESTS

The 2024 Finance Bill led to fresh protests. This time, young people did not just participate in protests – they led them.

This movement resulted in the President cancelling the bill and reshuffling his cabinet. It gave young Kenyans a new sense of democratic engagement: their success empowered them to express their discontent with the socio-economic situation and political leadership and promote their eagerness for a bigger role in governance.

At least the youth voice was heard.

- **Female, 24** – Machakos, Machakos County

The protests have put leaders on their toes.

- **Female, 27** – Kilifi Town, Kilifi County

For me, honestly, these Gen Z Protests show us that the future is bright. People are informed now

- **Male, 27** – Kwa Ngewa, Machakos County

I'm just happy how the president created time to hear the youths (because of the protests)

- **Female, 25** – Mbeme, Kisumu County

Because of the protests, so many young people have gotten a chance to be heard

- **Male, 24** – Kenlands, Nakuru County

## A NEWLY ENGAGED GENERATION

Kenya's young people have emerged from the turbulence of recent years with a new attitude to governance. This is characterised by two main beliefs:

- They believe in the importance of being listened to: 75% believe having their voice heard is 'important' or 'extremely important' to having a good life.<sup>11</sup>
- They believe in democracy and their role in it, and have ideas on how the Government can improve their lives.<sup>12</sup>

Young Kenyans understand that the key characteristics of a functioning democracy are transparency, fairness, equality and the rule of law.

When asked in August 2024 what wisdom they would share with the President if they had a chance to meet him (Figure 7), young people's answers fit into two main categories:

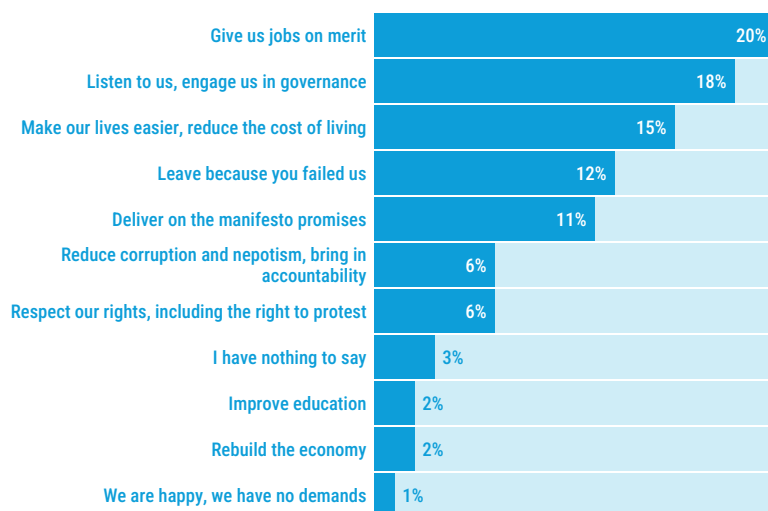
1. Strengthen democracy and the visible rule of law: make transparent decisions in consultation with young people and the population in general; punish corruption and nepotism; respect the rights of citizens, including the right to protest.
2. Support young people by removing the barriers to their success: build the economy so it is easier for young people to run businesses or find jobs; improve the relevance of education so young people are better prepared for the reality of the labour market; deliver promises that were made in the Government's manifesto.

“Your parents have paid to educate you, but when you finish school you don't get a job.

**-Female – Ukunda, Kwale County**



### WHAT WISDOM WOULD YOUNG KENYANS SHARE WITH THE PRESIDENT?<sup>13</sup>



“I am educated but I have looked for a job for 6 years without success because of nepotism in interviews, now we just have to help ourselves where we can

**- Male – Thika, Kiambu County**

<sup>11</sup> Shujaaz Inc, Annual nationally representative survey of young Kenyans aged 15–24, Wave 2022 (N=2006) December 2021–January 2022, Wave 2023 (N=1501) December 2022–January 2023, Wave 2024 (N=2002) December 2023–January 2024.

<sup>12</sup> Shujaaz Inc, Reclaiming Tomorrow Study, July–August 2024, N=2500.

<sup>13</sup> Shujaaz Inc, Reclaiming Tomorrow Study, July–August 2024, N=2500.



# DATA SNAPSHOTS

## WHO ARE KENYA'S GEN ZS?

### NATIONAL YOUTH TRENDS

- Steady population growth
- Rural-to-urban migration has stalled since 2020
- The proportion of young people in education is still not to the level of 2016
- There is a further increase in young people with secondary and post-secondary education
- The number of potential voters had doubled since 2016

Source: Shujaaz Inc annual nationally representative survey of 15-25-year olds

|   | 2016 | 2023 | Change +/- |
|---|------|------|------------|
| Total Youth 15-24                                   | 8.4m | 12m  | +3.6m      |
| % Urban   | 33%  | 39%  | +18%       |
| % Secondary completed or above                      | 27%  | 44%  | +63%       |
| Full-time student in the previous 12 months         | 72%  | 61%  | -15%       |
| Believe their lives will be better in 1-year's time | 89%  | 87%  | -2%        |
| Potential voter as of today (18+)                   | 4.8m | 8.3m | +3.5m      |

### Young Kenyans are...<sup>14</sup>

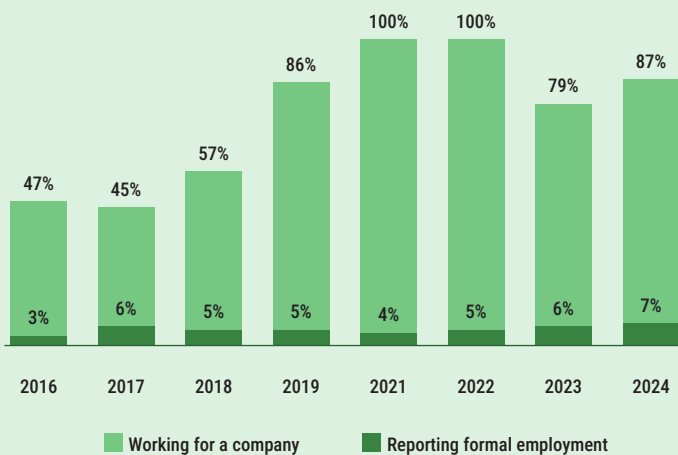
- **Connected:** Access to smartphones and the internet continues to rise among young Kenyans. This means they can easily coordinate and mobilise locally, but it also means they have more exposure to global trends, ideas and solutions (including on governance) than any generation before them.
- **Organised:** Young people increasingly self-organise online, with social media boosting political participation.
- **Active in their communities:** Young people feel responsible for creating positive change in their communities. When describing social activities in their communities, many talk about engaging with their neighbours, religious leaders, peers and others for social events and activities to benefit the community. When they talk about political activism, this entails working together with other people to exercise their rights and engage in democratic processes, e.g. petitioning

local governments, reporting crime and misconduct to the police, engaging in political rallies, working with local elected officials on implementing policies, etc.

### But they are also...

- **Struggling financially:** Economic hardship has been exacerbated by a rise in the cost of living and a depreciating currency.
- **Lacking jobs:** Many young people are forced to work in the informal sector when they want to study or find formal jobs

PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE REPORTING INCOME VS PROPORTION WORKING FOR A COMPANY



Young Kenyans are working – but not in the formal economy. Only 7% report formal employment. Many are frustrated that their education did not prepare them for the reality of their working lives, while for others, the job they hoped for is not available.

## 3 IN 5 YOUNG KENYANS NOW OWN A SMARTPHONE

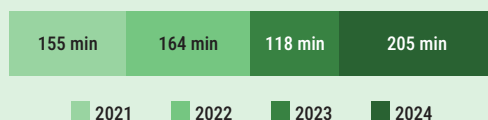
71%

GO ONLINE FROM THEIR OWN OR SHARED PHONES

65%

HAVE ACCOUNTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

AVERAGE TIME ONLINE IN MINUTES PER DAY



Smartphone ownership, internet access and time spent online grow year on year. The ability to share and interconnect has grown exponentially. Most young Kenyans learned about, and participated in, the 2024 protests online.

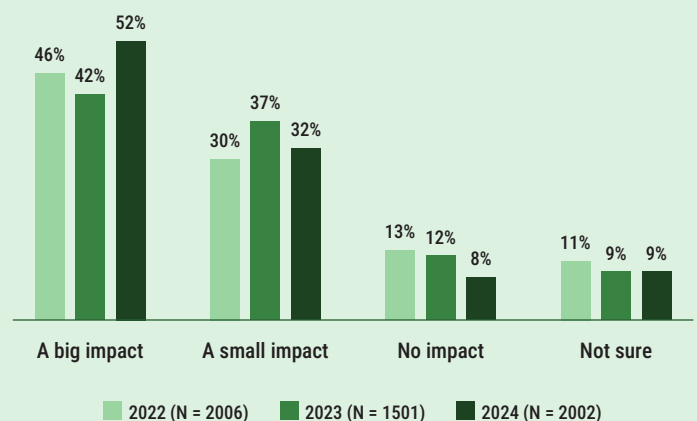
**37%** ARE POLITICALLY ACTIVE, I.E., TAKE PART IN ACTIVITIES RELATED TO ENGAGING WITH THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ITS AGENCIES

**87%** ARE SOCIALLY ACTIVE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES I.E., TAKE PART IN INFORMAL GATHERINGS AND EVENTS

**27%** BELONG TO A FORMAL OR INFORMAL YOUTH GROUP

Young people are also meeting in parallel to Government structures, making it easy for them to organise now and in the future.

HOW MUCH IMPACT DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE IN MAKING THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD/VILLAGE A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE?



Young Kenyans feel a strong sense of personal agency in local Government. They want to be more involved in decisions that affect them.<sup>15</sup>



### 3. THE OPPORTUNITY:

## A CHANCE TO SHAPE A BETTER FUTURE

Young people are Kenya's future. And right now, they are more concerned than any generation before them about how the country is governed.

#### THE OPPORTUNITY

This new engagement means there is an unprecedented opportunity to transform the dialogue between young Kenyans and their leaders.

Young people feel stronger than ever about how their society should work. They are realistic, they have ideas and they're willing to talk.

#### THE RISK

However, this level of engagement also carries a risk. Young Kenyans have been empowered by their journey and emboldened by the success of the 2024 protests. As the 2027 General Elections approach, ignoring young people's concerns may lead to further misalignment between them and the Government,

leading to the risk of security and human rights violations.

#### WHAT NEXT?

This is a chance for the Government to forge a new, mutually beneficial relationship with a generation of its citizens – to listen to them and involve them in designing solutions that lead to a better future.

And while young people will benefit, so too will their leaders. For Kenya's Government, this is a chance at genuine transformation and an opportunity to benefit from the demographic dividend.

The key to harnessing this positive youth energy and to regaining their place in tomorrow will be a new, more nuanced understanding of this generation.

Government should hold regular meetings, report on progress. Let them come on social media (...) come live on Facebook, TikTok.

- **Female** – Machakos, Machakos County

The President should listen to us, youths. We might be young, but we make up most of the population.

- **Male, 28** – Nkubu, Meru County

The President should sit down and talk to us people who work at the car wash and roast maize by the road. Us the hustlers. He should come to us to understand what we want.

- **Female, 25** – Gitune, Meru County

### 4. THE KEY

## A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT YOUNG KENYANS WANT

#### THE KEY: YOUNG KENYANS ARE NOT THE SAME

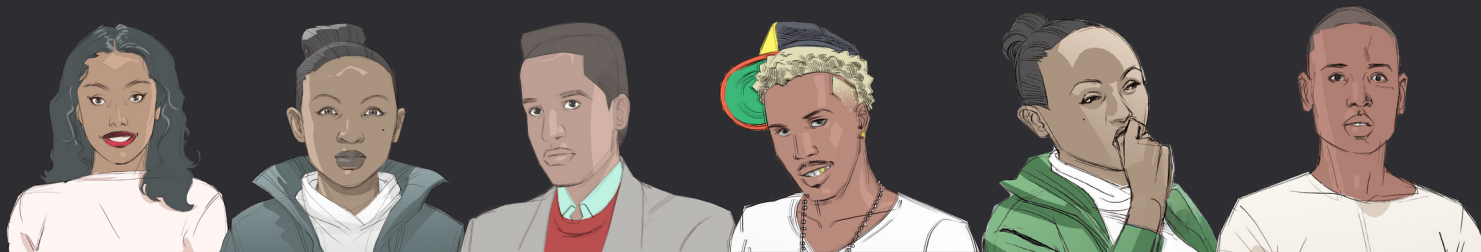
Understanding the concerns affecting young people is a vital first step. But to take effective action, one point is key: young people are not a homogenous group.

Though they share many fears and frustrations, reaching young Kenyans in a meaningful way requires us to go one step further. We must understand their differences: in the circumstances of their lives and what they want from their government.

#### WE MAPPED SIX GROUPS OF YOUNG KENYANS, TO INFORM BETTER POLICY

Working together with young Kenyans, we identified six distinct groups, each united by their attitudes towards the future.

Through additional qualitative and quantitative research, we were then able to do two things: assess the prevalence of each attitude among the youth population, and understand what each group wants from their government. This is what we found:



## THE BUILDERS



**26%** of young people in Kenya

### What do I think of the future?

- Where others see risk, I see opportunity.
- I've got the skills to turn uncertainty into a business, and the confidence to see it through.
- I might be a micro entrepreneur now, but I'll be running a bigger business in a few years – part of the economy, supporting my community, becoming someone.

### How can you help me?

- I want clearer regulations. Rules that affect my business need to be consistent, so I can get on with making money.
- I'm happy to pay taxes, but I want to see the results – like better infrastructure to help business.
- I want Kenya to admit the importance of the informal economy. Give training in schools, prepare young people to succeed in the real world – not the imaginary one.
- I see a community-based future: more skills training and social support, so everyone can have a better life.

## THE SURVIVALISTS



**19%** of young people in Kenya

### What do I think of the future?

- Life is hard. Every day I'm shocked by new prices and regulations.
- I have no control of what happens to me and no say in my future.
- I'm not asking for much – some stability, so I can earn a small income to feed and educate my children, make sure they have a bed to sleep in and medical care.
- I don't have time to think about my own future. I'm too busy surviving today

### How can you help me?

- I need more stability and more time to adapt to everything that's happened.
- I need support to make life more manageable, especially when it comes to my kids: lower food prices and school fees, better government healthcare and affordable housing.
- I need to be confident in the direction Kenya is going, so I know the future will be brighter for my children.

## THE TRADITIONALISTS



**19%** of young people in Kenya

### What do I think of the future?

- In the future I want what I've been working for – a stable job.
- I've listened to my family and teachers. I've studied and followed the rules. But still I have no job.
- Now I'm forced to hustle. I hate it. This is not what I worked for.
- It feels like I've been robbed of the future I was promised, by crooks who cheat their way to the top.

### How can you help me?

- I want to see accountability. If the government makes promises and doesn't deliver, there should be consequences.
- I want to see justice: an end to corruption and visible action taken against those who cheat.
- I want proof that the jobs that are available are genuinely open to all, and that decisions will be based on merit, not contacts or money.
- I want evidence of progress towards the goals I voted for.

## THE OPPORTUNISTS



**13%** of young people in Kenya

### What do I think of the future?

- In uncertain times, you either eat or be eaten. So I'll take whatever chance comes my way, even if I have to step outside the law.
- Life is short and I have no intention of staying poor.
- Don't ask me about the future, my life is now – and if I'm still here when the future arrives, I'll make a plan then.

### How can you help me?

- I need a way out of this life. If you show me a path to normality, maybe I can settle down one day with a family and stable business.
- I need positive role models and to learn the skills to work in the informal economy. Because right now, I don't know what a normal life looks like.



## THE POWERLESS



**12%** of young people in Kenya

### What do I think of the future?

- I have no income and no plan. I don't know anyone who could help me. I don't even know when I'll next eat.
- Where I stay, other people are in charge. They decide what happens, not me.
- I know some people doing crime – maybe I'll join them? I know some people doing drugs – maybe that would help?
- But I have no power, so I'll just let fate take its course.

### How can you help me?

- I may not know it yet, but I need agency over my life.
- If I knew more and had more confidence, I'd ask for services – better education and shelter – so I could start to feel like someone whose life matters.
- Support for me will probably come from NGOs and social services.

## THE INHERITORS



**10%** of young people in Kenya

### What do I think of the future?

- My family has enough money and connections to ensure I will always be fine. My future will be like my life today, only better.

### How can you help me?

- I don't need change.
- Sure, I'd like faster internet or easier visas to the US. But better basic services? That doesn't affect me.

## 5. TAKING ACTION:

# A NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH KENYA'S YOUNG PEOPLE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report highlights the significant engagement of today's young Kenyans in governance and their evolving attitudes towards the future.

Over the past five years, young Kenyans have become more politically active, driven by key moments in recent history such as the 2020–2022 COVID-19 pandemic, the 2022 General Election, and the 2024 Gen Z protests. These events have shaped their belief in democracy and their role in it, as well as their desire to be heard, to be listened to, and to be more central in the decision-making processes that affect them.

Thousands of conversations held with young people around the country made it clear that young Kenyans have several distinct, differing realities and needs. To build a new partnership with Kenya's young people, a one-size-fits-all approach to youth policy will not work.

The report identified six distinct and significant groups of young Kenyans, each with differing attitudes towards the future and specific needs and expectations from their Government and society.

These groups, categorised and named by their defining characteristics for the purpose of the report, are the Builders, Survivalists, Traditionalists, Opportunists, Powerless and Inheritors. Understanding that these groups want and need different services is crucial for developing effective policies that can be acceptable to young Kenyans, help re-engage them after a series of turbulent protests, and avoid future conflict.

Among these six groups, the Builders, Survivalists and Traditionalists comprise the vocal majority, constituting two-thirds (64%) of all young Kenyans. Each comes with clear requests for improved systems and services to help them thrive in future, including:

- A stronger focus for Builders on growth in the informal economy through the streamlining of regulations, taxes and new opportunities that help Kenya's young entrepreneurs to flourish and grow;
- Concessions to the Survivalists struggling to provide for families and dependents, for whom health, education and subsistence costs are overwhelming and for whom improved public services are critical;
- More public accountability and justice for Traditionalists frustrated by unemployment and more so by perceived unfairness and corruption.

Taking visible action to address these needs presents an unprecedented opportunity for the Government to forge a new, mutually beneficial relationship with young Kenyans, actively addressing their priorities and involving them more in the design of future solutions.

“ I want to achieve my dreams and to develop the country, so end corruption.

- **Male, 28** – Garba Tula, Isiolo County



## WE HAVE LISTENED TO YOUNG KENYANS, NOW LET'S RESPOND TO THEIR REQUESTS WITH RELEVANT ACTIONS

Young people don't just want their leaders to hear them – they want to see evidence that their concerns have been acted on, in the form of relevant policies that make a real difference to their lives.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Kenya organised a workshop with policy experts to review the early findings of this report and develop five priority recommendations for policy makers.

The experts included representatives from Siasa Place, the Ministry of ICT, Innovation & Youth Affairs, Build Up, the Government of Kenya, Badili Africa, Zeze Digital, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Kenya, and UNDP.

The policy recommendations are primarily focused on targeting the Builders (the largest group at 26%).

#### #1: Growth-focused taxation

The Government could consider prioritizing growth-based taxation strategies that prioritise informal sector expansion over growing revenue. This should involve tax incentives and structures that reduce the licensing and tax burden on start-up and new micro and small businesses, promoting investment, innovation and job creation by and for young, informal sector entrepreneurs.

- This policy aims to stimulate long-term economic growth in the informal economy, particularly among ambitious and entrepreneurial Builders, by creating an environment where micro, small, and start-up businesses can flourish.
- Rather than focusing solely on short-term tax revenue, it acknowledges the importance of the informal economy and seeks to reduce barriers to growth and investment. By lowering taxes on growth-focused businesses, the Government can accelerate entrepreneurship and job creation.
- Research in Shujaaz Inc's 2020 Compass report – Meet Kenya's 3 Million Young Micro-Entrepreneurs – found that millions of jobs would be created from small incremental gains in income among informal entrepreneurs.<sup>16</sup>

#### #2: Reduce barriers for new businesses

The Government could consider implementing policies that reduce entry barriers for small and micro businesses, including offering targeted tax incentives and ensuring that licensing and quality controls are consistent and transparent, with a two-year tax holiday for newly established more formal businesses run by young Builders.

- This policy is designed to encourage entrepreneurship and facilitate the creation of new businesses. By removing financial barriers at the onset, the policy aims to create a more competitive and dynamic business environment for Builders who have a desire to contribute to the economy and their communities.
- The two-year tax break would also provide young Builders and their start-ups with a financial cushion, allowing them to focus on scaling their operations without the immediate pressure of taxes.

The Government know what we want and all they need to do is to do that. Let them deliver the promises they made.

- **Female, 30** – Kikuyu, Kiambu County

Politicians should be present at the grassroot level, so as to understand the demands of the youth.

- **Female, 25** – Juja, Kiambu County

For startup businesses, give entrepreneurs time before they have to pay taxes

- **Male, 28** – Makueni





- Research by Shujaaz Inc found that supporting 2 million micro-entrepreneurs to go full-time with their businesses could add KES 14 billion (USD 110 million) a month to the economy.

### #3: Stabilise the cost of basic commodities

The Government could consider introducing policies that manage and lower the cost of basic commodities through the use of incentives and subsidies, aiming to buffer consumers from inflationary pressures.

- This policy intends to protect the purchasing power of citizens, especially those in lower-income brackets, like Survivalists, by ensuring that the prices of essential goods remain stable and affordable.
- Through targeted subsidies and other incentives for suppliers, the Government can reduce the impact of rising inflation and ensure that basic needs are accessible to Survivalists, who depend on a small, daily income.

### #4: Strengthen accountability and justice

The Government could consider enforcing visible and transparent actions of justice, with a specific focus on holding leaders and systems accountable, particularly in respect to systems related to recruitment. This includes implementing rigorous oversight mechanisms to reinforce the values of justice and merit in public office and ensuring that practices of nepotism and unfair recruitment are eradicated.

- A vital component of this policy is transparency. To restore their faith in the Government, Traditionalists need and expect visible action to be taken against perpetrators of corruption, and want evidence of merit-based recruitment.

### #5: Support the growth of the informal economy

The Government could consider implementing policies that enhance the business environment for the informal economy, including access to financing and regulatory support for small businesses.

- This policy aims to provide support to both Builders, who run micro-enterprises, and Survivalists, who work within the informal sector.
- For the Builders, this policy would provide access to working capital through inclusive financial mechanisms, such as micro-loans, grant programmes, and low-interest credit lines, tailored for informal businesses.
- The Government can achieve this by developing targeted new partnerships with financial institutions to ensure they offer more products, services and options for small businesses.
- In addition, the Government can support accessible financial literacy programmes to help Builders better manage finances and improve their chances of accessing credit. This policy also provides regulatory support for Builders by streamlining regulatory requirements and compliance processes for small, informal businesses.
- By bolstering the Builders as they start and run informal micro-enterprises, this policy would also benefit the Survivalists, who equally depend on the informal sector for their livelihoods and to navigate economic shocks.

Ruto should reduce the cost of living, especially cooking flour, and bring affordable housing so that everyone can see a benefit

- **Male, 24** – Siaya,

I want our president to focus on the issues of the elderly including Linda Mama to keep it as long as it is free for our mothers who give birth and also for the elderly to get the old age money without any discrimination

- **Male, 25** – Mombasa, Mombasa County

I feel like the root cause of the problems we have is corruption, and if we didn't have corruption, at least we would have accountability and know where money is going. The finance bill would not have been rejected because people would have known where that money is going but because of corruption, people don't have jobs and can't pay taxes.

- **Female** – Kariobangi South, Nairobi County

I work in a salon. The products I use come from abroad. The government should reduce importation tax to make my life easier

- **Male, 28** – Nkubu, Meru County

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