The Chronicle
WEEKLY

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The country we want, the country we can afford

KENYA HAS AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR THE DECADES AHEAD. BUT DEBT, TAXES, JOBS AND HOUSEHOLD INCOMES ARE FORCING A HARDER CONVERSATION ABOUT WHAT DEVELOPMENT CAN REALISTICALLY COST

The Town Hall Test: What the SHA Q&A at KICC actually proved

RUTO TOOK QUESTIONS ON HEALTH REFORMS IN A SESSION BILLED AS CITIZEN VOICE. THE LEGAL BAR FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ASKS WHETHER IT EARNED THAT LABEL

Ninth in the world, one field in Nairobi: Kenya's Baseball5 paradox

KENYA HEADS TO THE YOUTH OLYMPICS AS ONE OF WORLD'S TOP BASEBALL5 NATIONS BUILT ALMOST ENTIRELY ON FOREIGN FUNDING THAT EXPIRES IN DECEMBER

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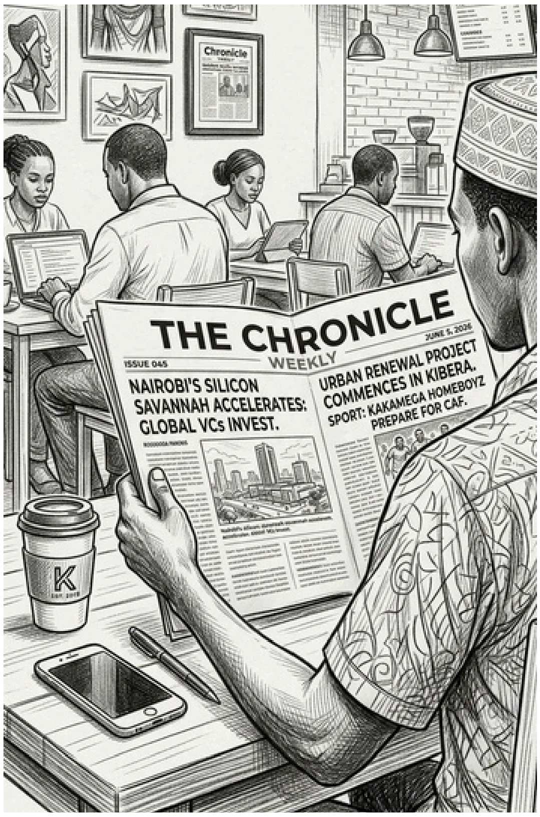

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PERSPECTIVE

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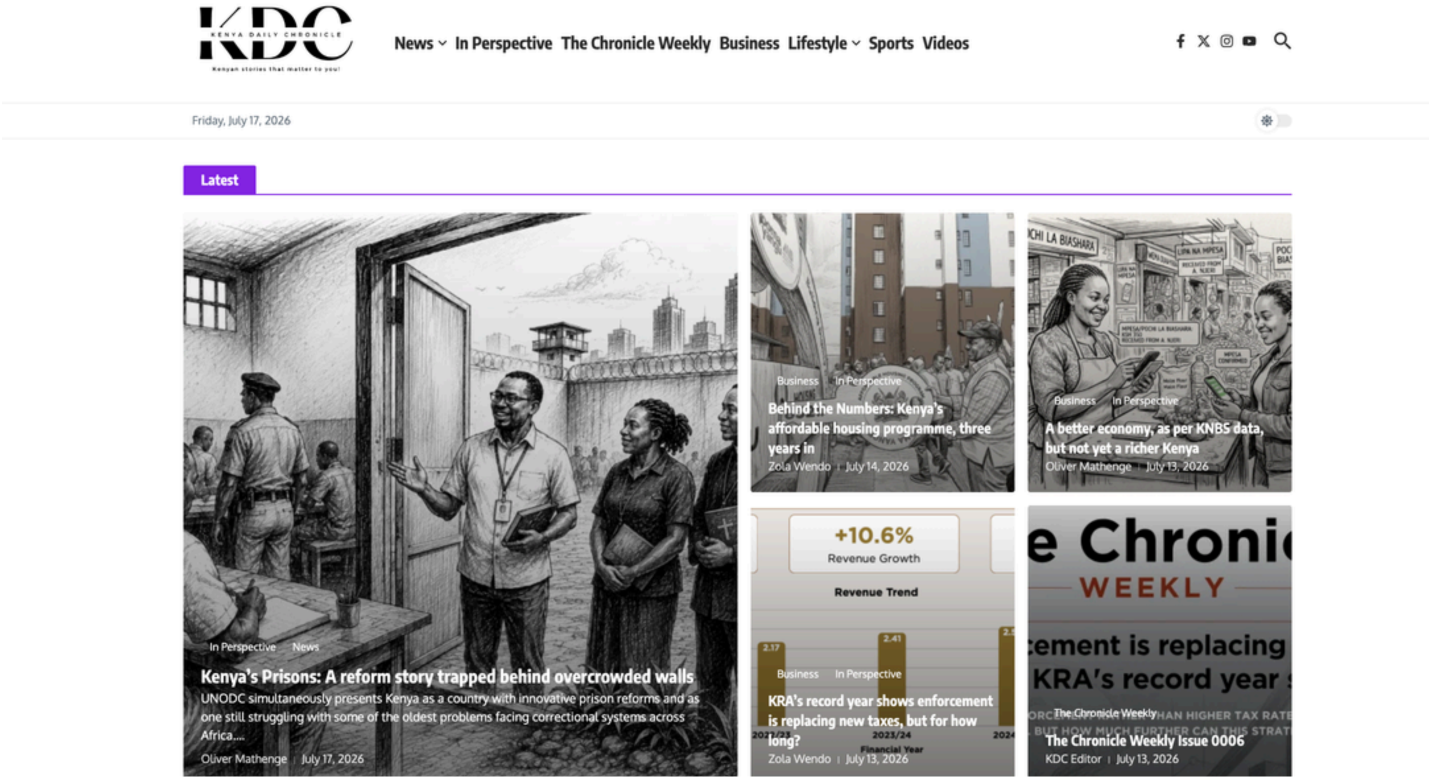

The Chronicle Weekly is the flagship publication of the Kenya Daily Chronicle, Kenya's trusted digital news platform owned by StrategiCrest Ltd.

While the Kenya Daily Chronicle delivers a mix of breaking news and real-time updates across politics, business, health, sports, and lifestyle, the Weekly is its considered, curated counterpart; a deeper read for audiences who want more than headlines.

Published every Monday, The Chronicle Weekly distils the most important stories of the preceding week into a single, authoritative edition. It brings together the Kenya Daily Chronicle's signature editorial strengths: rigorous political reporting, sharp business analysis, contextual perspectives, and vibrant community coverage, in a format designed to be read, saved, and shared.

The Chronicle Weekly occupies a distinct space in Kenya's media landscape: it is neither a wire-driven news feed nor a long-form magazine, but a weekly newspaper of record; structured, comprehensive, and grounded in the journalistic values that define the Kenya Daily Chronicle. Every edition is built around the belief that informed Kenyans make better decisions, stronger communities, and a more accountable nation.

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Editorial Note

This week we ask a version of the same question six different ways: what does Kenya's ambition actually cost, and who is being asked to pay for it?

On August 12, the government formally opened the national conversation on what comes after Vision 2030, a document imagining an industrialised, globally competitive Kenya by 2060. It is a legitimate and even necessary exercise.

A country of more than 54 million people cannot plan itself one election cycle at a time.

But this issue's lead argues that the distance between the Kenya being imagined and the Kenya that must finance it is widening, not narrowing.

Debt sits at 65.3 per cent of GDP. Of the 822,100 jobs created in 2025, 87.2 per cent were informal. Inflation is running at 6.5 per cent, driven hardest by the things households cannot substitute away from: food, transport, housing.

Whoever wins State House in 2027 inherits this arithmetic unchanged; our companion piece argues that the real 2027 question is not how many jobs a candidate promises, but what kind their policies can actually produce.

That same tension, ambition outrunning the institutions built to deliver it, runs quietly through the rest of the issue. Our read of President Ruto's SHA town hall at KICC asks whether a listening exercise dressed as deliberation meets Kenya's own constitutional bar for public participation.

Our Budget Watch data story shows July's actual Treasury disbursements, including a public debt bill that alone outspent the Teachers Service Commission, Defence and both education dockets combined.

Our business pages show a media market splitting quietly along income and geography lines, meaning the "national conversation" itself may not be reaching the households it claims to include.

And in Life & Culture, we look at a generation recalibrating the soft life into something closer to a spreadsheet than a lifestyle.

Even sport carries the theme this week: Kenya's Baseball5 team heads to the Dakar Youth Olympics ranked ninth in the world, built almost entirely on foreign grant funding that expires this December.

It is, in miniature, the story of the whole issue; real achievement, uncertain financing, and a hard question about what happens next.

As always, our approach is to support the ambition and interrogate the delivery record.

This week, that record runs from State House to the school sports calendar.

Kenya Daily Chronicle Team

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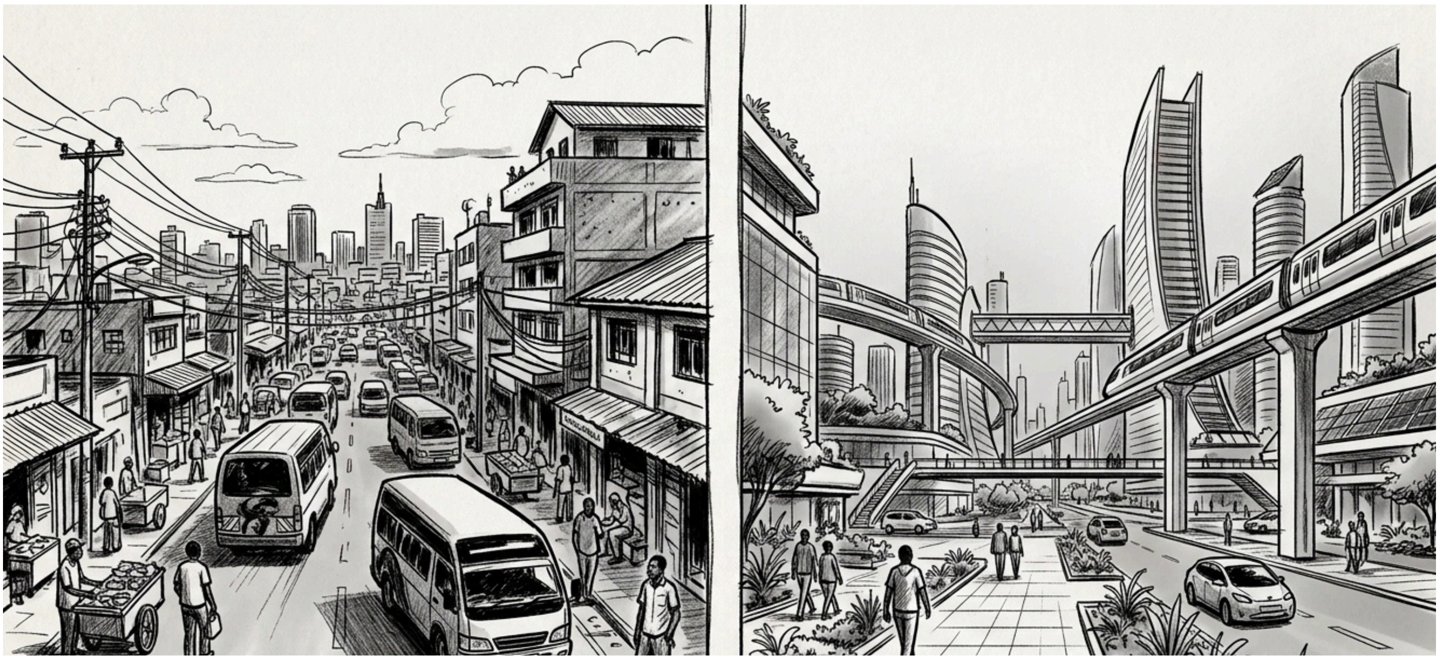
The country we want, the country we can afford



Kenya has never lacked ambition, and as it seeks to develop its Beyond 2030 Vision, the question is now whether the state, the economy and households can afford the country it is trying to build.

There is a particular contradiction at the heart of Kenya's development conversation in 2026. The country is talking about the next 30 years at precisely the moment when the government, businesses and households are being forced to think much more carefully about the next 30 days.

On August 12, Kenya formally began the national conversation on what comes after Vision 2030, with the government presenting the exercise as an opportunity to imagine a prosperous, industrialised and globally competitive country by 2060.

The process is deliberately being framed as broader than a government plan, with the State Department for Economic Planning saying that citizens across all 47 counties are expected to participate in determining the country's long-term development direction.

The ambition is difficult to fault. Kenya should indeed be thinking beyond the immediate political cycle, because a country of more than 54 million people cannot build its future one five-year election period at a time.

The problem is that the distance between the Kenya being imagined and the Kenya that must finance that ambition is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

The question facing the country is therefore not whether Kenyans should dream bigger. It is whether the country can build the institutions, jobs, tax base, productivity and public finances required to turn those dreams into something more tangible than another generation of policy documents.

The ‘Expiring’ Vision

Vision 2030, launched in 2008, was an ambitious attempt to transform Kenya into an industrialising, middle-income country by 2030. It created a framework for economic, social and political transformation and helped give successive governments a language to describe infrastructure, manufacturing, technology and human capital.

However, as the country approaches the end of that planning horizon, the conversation about its successor is arriving with a rather different economic reality. Kenya's economy grew by 4.6 per cent in 2025, down marginally from 4.7 per cent in 2024, according to the 2026 Economic Survey.

That is respectable growth, but it is not the kind of acceleration that transforms household living standards in a country whose population continues to expand and whose working-age population is growing rapidly.

Construction rebounded strongly, expanding by 6.8 per cent, while accommodation and food services grew by 15.6 per cent, financial and insurance activities by 6.5 per cent and information and communication by 4.8 per cent.

KENYA NATIONAL BUDGET (FY 2026/27)

TOTAL EXPENDITURE	TOTAL REVENUE	FISCAL DEFICIT	GDP GROWTH (PROJECTION)
KSh4.8tn	KSh3.6tn	KSh1.1tn	5.0%
23.0% of GDP	17.4% of GDP	5.3% of GDP	Revised down from 5.3%

BUDGET ALLOCATION & DEFICIT FINANCING

Allocations

Executive	KSh2.81tn
Consolidated Fund	KSh1.50tn
County Governments (Equitable Share)	KSh420bn
Parliament	KSh48.7bn
Judiciary	KSh30.4bn

Deficit financing mix

Net Domestic Financing	KSh995.7bn
Net External Financing	KSh116.2bn
Public Debt (% of GDP)	65.3%
Statutory Debt Target	55.0%

The headline growth rate, however, conceals another important reality: Kenya is creating work faster than it is creating secure employment. The 2026 Economic Survey estimates that total recorded employment reached 21.6 million people in 2025, up from 20.8 million the previous year, with 822,100 additional jobs created.

About 87.2 per cent of the new jobs were generated in the informal sector, which accounted for about 18.1 million jobs compared with roughly 3.5 million in modern jobs and other formal employment. This is perhaps the most important number in the country's long-term development debate.

A country cannot become a high-income economy merely by creating more economic activity. It must create sufficiently productive economic activity to raise incomes, expand the tax base, improve household resilience, and allow workers to move from survival-oriented employment into more secure and productive occupations.

Annual consumer inflation reached 6.5 per cent in July 2026, according to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, with food and non-alcoholic beverages, transport and housing-related costs continuing to exert pressure on household budgets.

For policymakers, 6.5 per cent is a macroeconomic indicator. For a household, it is an argument over what gets postponed when the money runs out before the month does. This is where the country's long-term vision meets its immediate economy.

Kenya wants better hospitals, schools, affordable housing, modern transport systems, reliable electricity, industrial parks, digital infrastructure, food security and millions of productive jobs. It also wants a government capable of providing social protection to citizens who cannot participate fully in the market.

All of those objectives are defensible individually, and the difficult question is what happens when they are placed together on the same balance sheet.

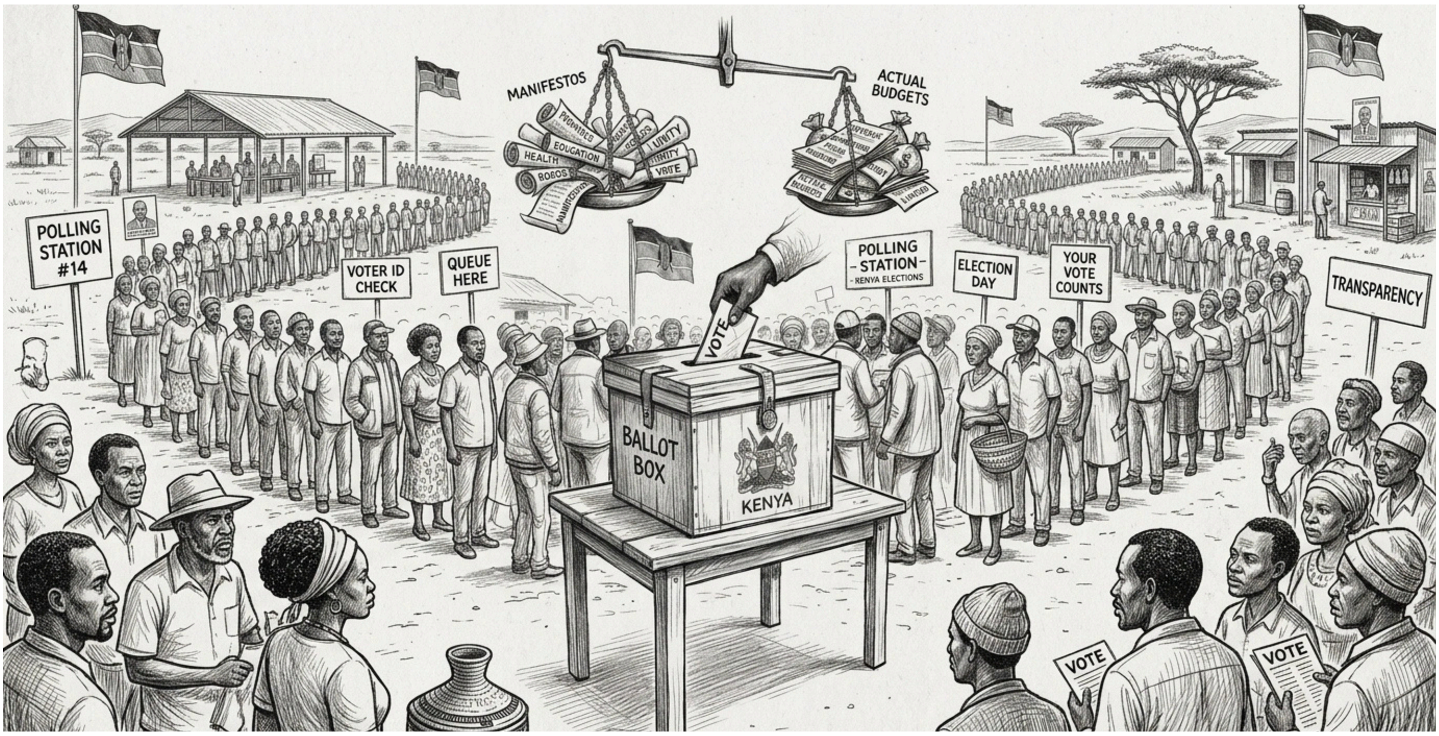
Budget Constraints

The 2026/27 national budget provides a useful illustration of that problem. The government's financial statement projects ordinary revenue of about Sh2.99 trillion, recurrent expenditure of Sh3.58 trillion, and development expenditure of about Sh810 billion.

More than Sh1.5 trillion is allocated under Consolidated Fund Services, including interest on domestic and external debt, pensions and other obligations. Domestic debt interest alone is budgeted at nearly Sh987 billion, while foreign debt interest is about Sh268 billion.

The government is therefore trying to finance development while carrying a very large historical bill. Its 2026/27 borrowing plan makes the tension even clearer. The National Treasury is targeting a fiscal deficit of 5.5 per cent of GDP, with net external financing of Sh247.2 billion and the balance coming largely through domestic borrowing.

At the same time, the government is exploring a range of financing instruments, including a possible $300 million panda bond, an $815 million Eurobond and more than $500 million from the Japanese market, while seeking to retire at least $500 million of expensive external debt.



The government is not necessarily wrong to seek cheaper or more diversified financing. A growing economy requires capital, and development cannot be funded entirely from today's tax receipts.

But the financing question cannot be separated from the development question. Every shilling borrowed today creates a future obligation, while every tax increase creates a present burden.

Every public project creates maintenance costs after construction, while every new government programme creates expectations that future administrations may find difficult to unwind.

This is why the Beyond Vision 2030 conversation deserves to be much more than another national consultation exercise. It should force Kenya to answer the questions that development plans traditionally prefer to leave in the background.

What kind of economy will finance the country we want? How many productive jobs will it need? How large will the tax base have to become? How much debt can the economy sustainably carry?

Which services should be provided by the government or the private sector and which through partnerships between the two? What should Kenya stop doing to afford what it says it wants to do?

These are not technical questions for economists alone, but ultimately questions about the quality of life Kenyans will experience.

If Kenya builds a world-class road network but households cannot afford to use it, the infrastructure has not solved the entire problem.

If the country builds hospitals but medical costs remain prohibitive, physical infrastructure alone cannot deliver universal healthcare.

If it creates universities but graduates enter an economy where most new work is informal and low-productivity, education alone cannot deliver economic mobility.

The central challenge is therefore not simply to build more but to build an economy capable of sustaining what it builds.

That distinction is particularly important because Kenya is entering a period in which political incentives are likely to pull in the opposite direction.

The closer the country moves towards the 2027 election, the greater the temptation for political competitors to describe the future in terms of what the government should provide rather than what the country can sustainably finance.

That is understandable politics, but dangerous economics.

A manifesto that promises universal healthcare, cheaper housing, more jobs, lower taxes, higher wages, better infrastructure and expanded social protection may sound attractive, but the credibility of such a programme cannot be judged by the number of promises it contains.

It has to be judged by its financing model, its implementation timetable and the trade-offs it is willing to acknowledge. This is where Kenya's new long-term conversation can become genuinely transformative.

Ambitions vs Reality

The most useful national vision would not be the one containing the largest number of ambitions. It would be the one that establishes a hierarchy of priorities and explains how the country will pay for them. That means confronting an uncomfortable truth: Kenya cannot afford to do everything at once.

The country will have to decide which investments produce the highest economic returns, which public programmes are essential, which subsidies are sustainable, which institutions need reform and which projects should be abandoned when they no longer make economic sense. It will also have to confront the other side of the equation where Kenya cannot tax itself into prosperity.

A sustainable development model requires businesses capable of expanding, workers earning more, firms investing more, farmers becoming more productive and households accumulating assets rather than simply servicing monthly expenses.

That is why the 87.2 per cent share of new jobs created informally in 2025 matters so much, as it tells us that the country's fundamental economic challenge is not merely unemployment; it is the quality and productivity of the economic opportunities being created.

As we argued in Issue 11, the Kenyan middle class has not disappeared, but it increasingly operates through multiple incomes, debt, side hustles and careful trade-offs.

The next phase of development must therefore be judged not simply by whether national income rises, but by whether households become more financially resilient.

The purpose of a 2060 vision cannot be to produce an impressive document that government officials unveil every few years while citizens continue to improvise around the failures of the present.

Its purpose should be to create a country in which a child born today has a substantially greater probability of finding productive work, living in secure housing, accessing quality healthcare, receiving a good education and accumulating enough wealth to withstand economic shocks.

That is an ambitious goal and in all measure an expensive one, and Kenya should not be afraid of either fact.

The country should dream about the Kenya it wants to become, but it should also be honest enough to publish the price tag.

Because the real test of the national conversation will not be whether Kenyans agree that they want a richer, fairer and more prosperous country.

The real test will be whether we can agree on what must be done first, what must be sacrificed, who must pay, and how we will know that the money was actually worth spending.

That is the conversation Kenya now needs.

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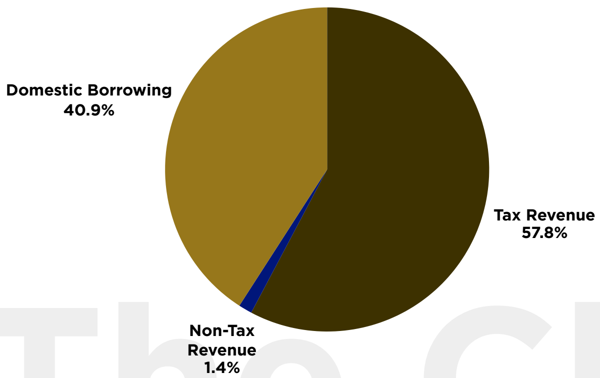
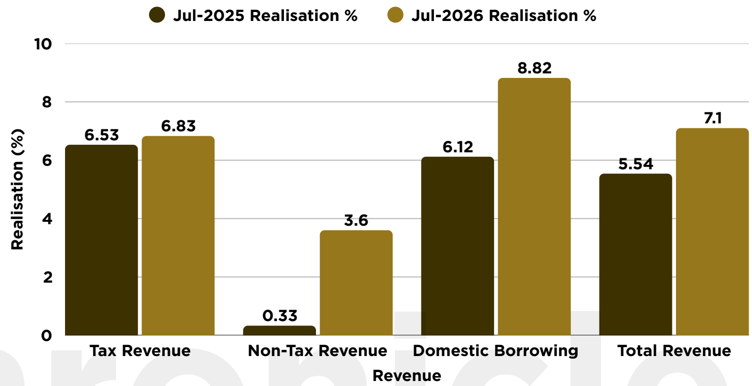
BUDGET WATCH

FY2026/27 EXCHEQUER TRACKER

Published monthly in the Kenya Gazette, this Treasury statement is the government's own record of cash actually collected and actually released. It is widely regarded as the most reliable single source on the real-time state of public finances.

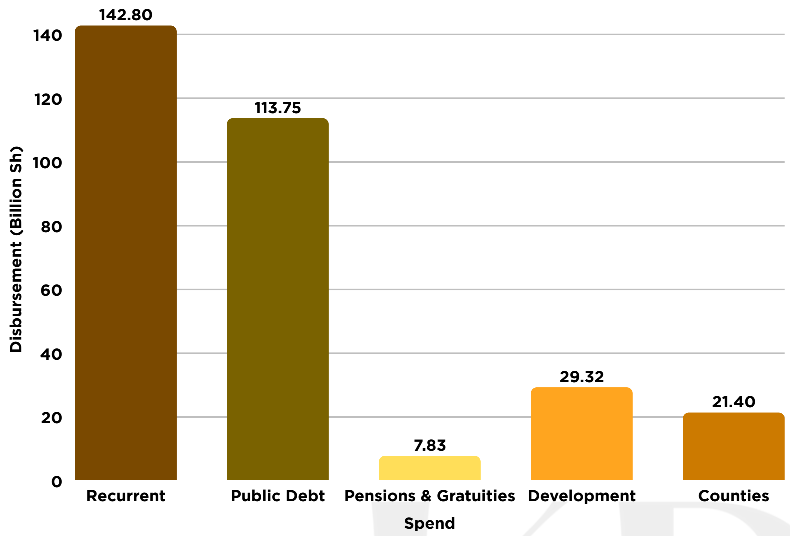
REVENUE (JULY 2026)

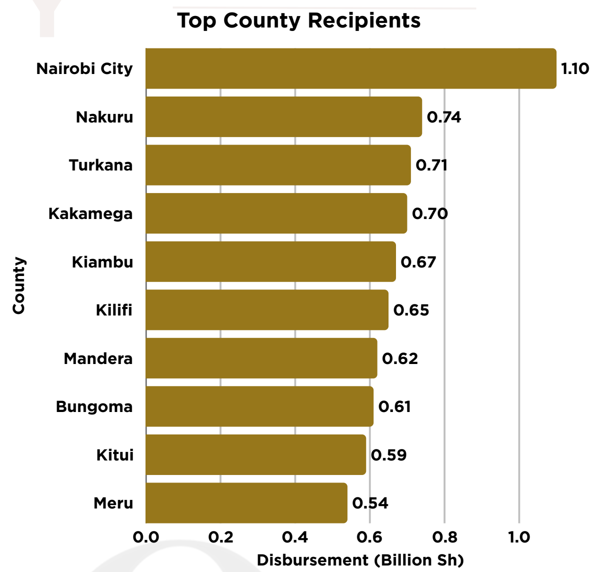




Total revenue realisation in July 2026 (7.10%) ran ahead of July 2025 (5.54%), driven mainly by a jump in non-tax revenue collection. This complicates any narrative of blanket government slowdown.

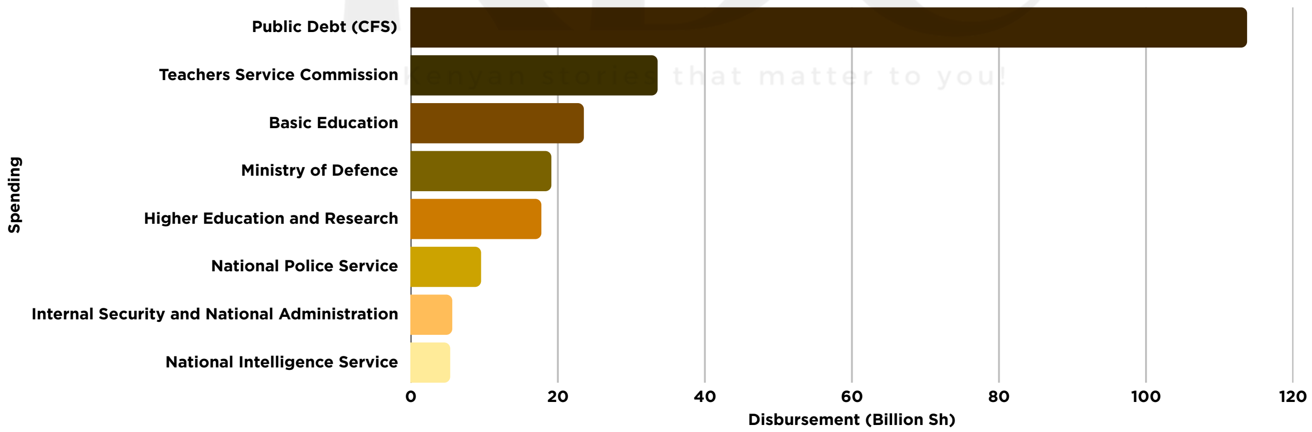
SPENDING (JULY 2026)





Every one of Kenya's 47 counties received exactly 5.00% of its annual equitable share in July; a flat national disbursement rate rather than one weighted by need or absorption capacity.

TOP SPENDING (JULY 2026)



Public debt servicing alone (Sh113.75B) accounted for 36% of all money issued in July; more than the combined recurrent releases to the Teachers Service Commission, Ministry of Defence, National Police Service, and both education state departments.

Source: The National Treasury

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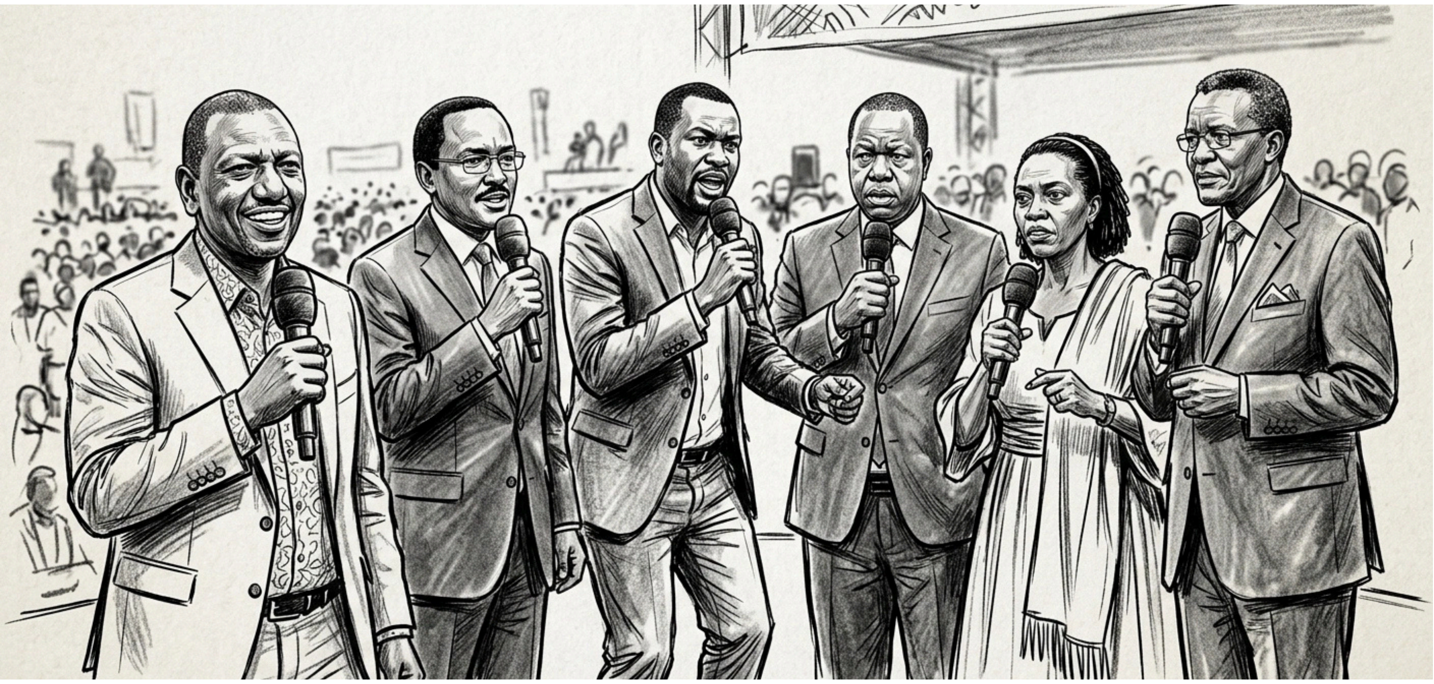
The next president will inherit a country that has run out of easy options



The 2027 election may decide who occupies State House, but it will not erase the fiscal, employment and institutional constraints that will confront the next administration.

The political competition of 2027 is gradually taking shape around personalities, alliances and competing visions of who should govern Kenya, but beneath the coalition arithmetic lies a less dramatic and more consequential reality: whoever wins the presidency will inherit a country in which many of the easiest policy choices have already been exhausted.

The next president will inherit an economy that is growing, but not fast enough to make households feel the benefits of that growth; a government that continues to invest in infrastructure and social programmes, but whose fiscal room is constrained by debt; and a young population whose aspirations are rising faster than the state can meet them.

Kenya's real GDP grew by 4.6 per cent in 2025, according to KNBS, following 4.7 per cent growth in 2024. That is hardly an economic crisis, and several sectors recorded strong expansions, but it also does not represent the kind of sustained acceleration that can rapidly transform living standards across a population that continues to grow.

The next government will therefore face a deceptively difficult task: it will need to accelerate growth while simultaneously exercising fiscal restraint. Those objectives can coexist, but they require a level of policy discipline that election campaigns rarely reward.

2026/27 Fiscal Framework

Kenya is working with a projected deficit of 5.5 per cent of GDP, while its medium-term objective is to bring the deficit down towards 3 per cent by 2028/29. The Finance Ministry has also indicated a projected deficit of 3.6 per cent for 2027/28, suggesting that fiscal consolidation will be central to the next administration's economic inheritance.

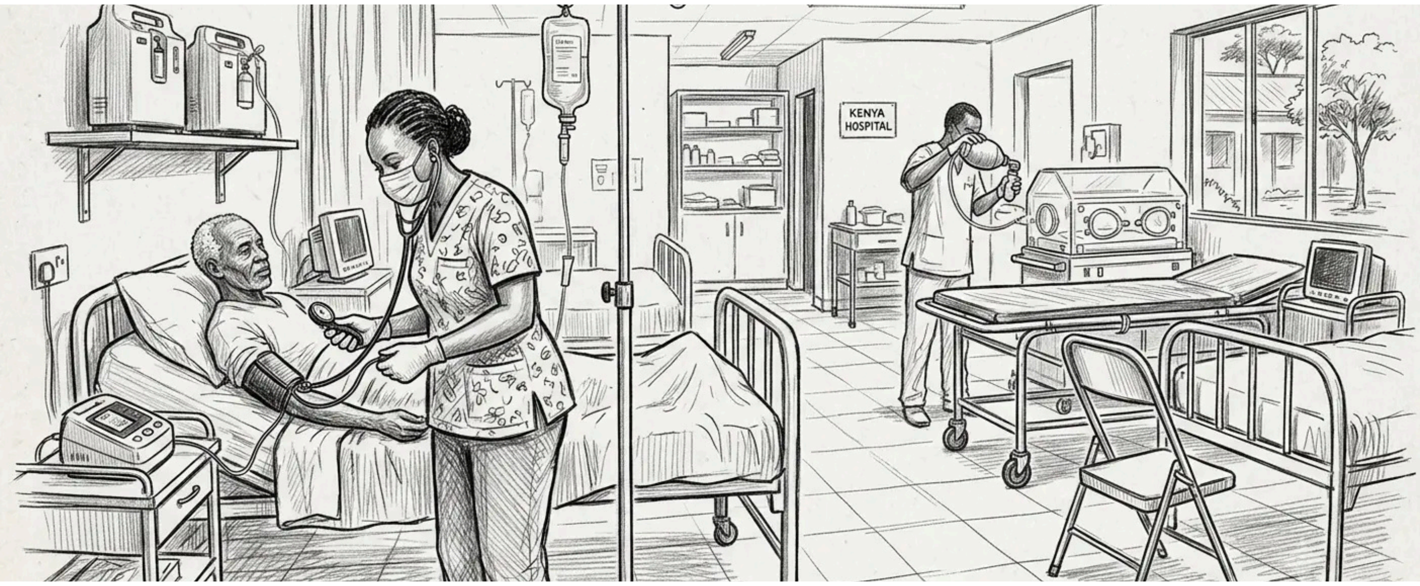
That means the president elected in 2027 will not enter State House with an empty notebook, as major spending commitments will already exist. Debt repayments will already be scheduled. Infrastructure projects will already be under construction.

Social programmes will already have beneficiaries who expect them to continue. Counties will continue demanding resources. The health system will continue requiring money. Education will continue consuming a substantial share of public expenditure.

The political temptation will be to promise that a new administration can simply rearrange everything, but the economic reality is that it cannot. The next president may change priorities, renegotiate contracts, eliminate waste and reform institutions, but the underlying obligations of will remain.

Debt: The Clearest Example

The 2026/27 budget allocates about Sh1.54 trillion to public debt-related costs, according to the Budget Policy Statement, up from Sh1.44 trillion in the previous financial year.



Within the financial statement, interest payments alone account for hundreds of billions of shillings, including nearly Sh987 billion for domestic debt and about Sh268 billion for external debt.

That debt or demand for services does not vanish simply because a new president is elected. The next administration will confront the same fundamental equation that has challenged the current one: citizens want better services and lower costs, and the government needs more revenue and less debt.

There is no political slogan capable of eliminating that contradiction, and this should change how the 2027 political debate is framed. The question should not simply be how many jobs a candidate promises but what kind their policies will produce.

A country cannot build a prosperous middle class on employment that leaves workers vulnerable to income shocks, limited social protection and weak access to credit or long-term savings.

Nor can it finance an ambitious welfare state if a large proportion of the working population remains outside the formal tax and social-security systems.

The next president will therefore need to pursue something more difficult than job creation, and the task will be to make the economy more productive.

That means creating the conditions where informal enterprises can grow into formal businesses rather than simply taxing them when they become visible.

It means making manufacturing competitive, agriculture more productive, energy more reliable and logistics more efficient.

It means ensuring that digital transformation creates higher-value economic activity rather than merely shifting existing consumption online.

It also means accepting that the government cannot create all the jobs, and the private sector must do much of the heavy lifting, which in turn means the next administration will have to decide whether it wants to treat business primarily as a source of tax revenue or as an engine of national development.

Kenya's private sector cannot be expected to create millions of jobs while simultaneously absorbing every increase in taxation, energy costs, regulation and compliance.

At the same time, businesses cannot expect the government to provide infrastructure, skilled workers, security and public services indefinitely without contributing to the revenue base.

Managing The Bargain

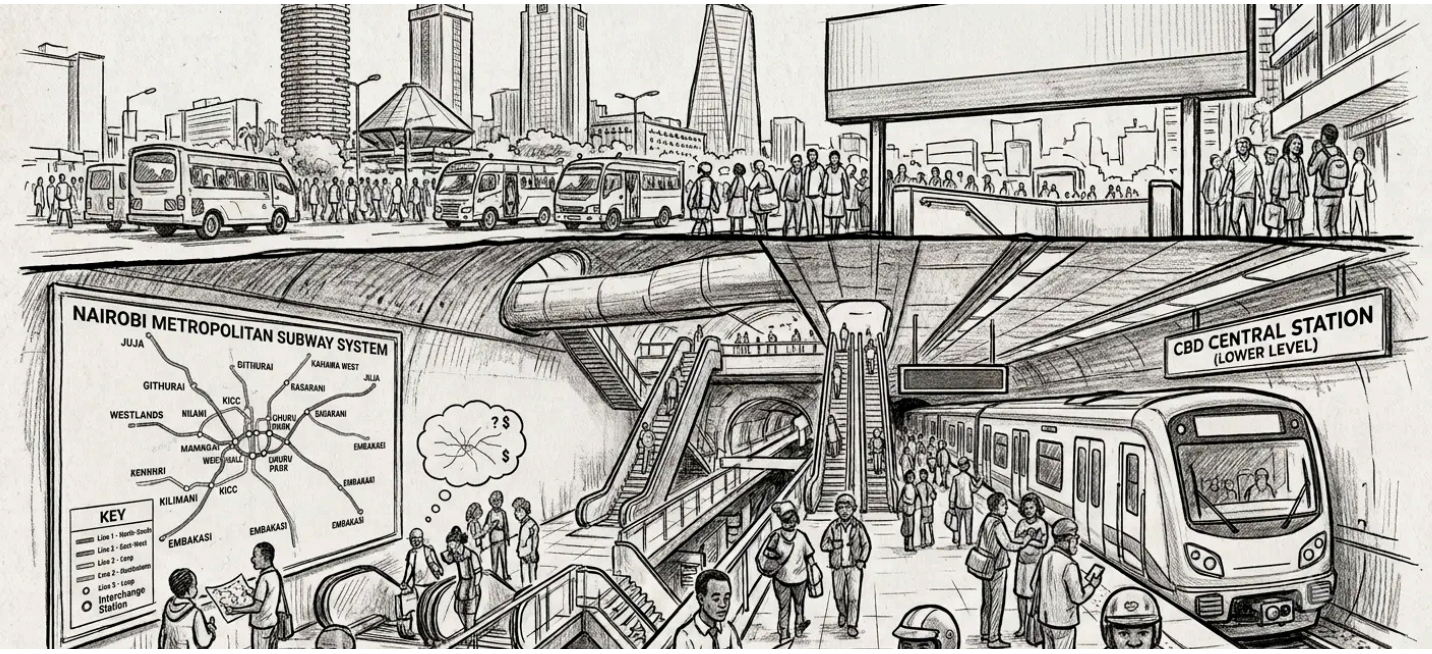
Kenyans want a healthcare system in which illness does not destroy household finances, while the government wants to move towards universal coverage through the Social Health Authority.

However, a sustainable health system requires more than enrollment figures and contribution mechanisms.

It requires reliable financing, hospitals capable of delivering services, health workers who are paid on time and a system capable of preventing fraud and waste.

Kenya needs millions of additional homes, particularly in growing urban centres, but affordable housing cannot be created simply by announcing large construction targets.

It requires land, infrastructure, financing, purchasing power and employment that allows households to actually afford the resulting homes.



Kenya can continue building roads, railways, stadiums, energy projects and other infrastructure, but the question increasingly has to become whether each project generates sufficient economic value to justify its cost and future maintenance burden.

That is the standard the next government should apply to every major project; not whether it photographs well or it can be opened before an election.

But whether it improves productivity, creates economic opportunity and continues to provide value long after the political leaders who commissioned it have left office.

Beyond Vision 2030 Conversation

The government has explicitly argued that Kenya's next development vision should transcend electoral cycles and create continuity across administrations, with the State Department for Economic Planning emphasising policy continuity, institutional stability and innovative financing during the August 12 national conversation.

That is a worthwhile principle, but continuity cannot mean simply carrying every existing programme forward.

It must mean preserving what works, correcting what does not and abandoning projects that no longer make economic or social sense, and the next president will need precisely that kind of discipline.

The political opposition will naturally campaign on what is wrong with the current administration, just as the incumbent side will point to infrastructure, digital services, investment and other achievements.

Both approaches will be incomplete if they avoid the deeper question of what happens after the election.

The next government will still have to pay the debt, raise revenue, create jobs, fund healthcare, educate millions of children, maintain roads and energy systems, manage the demands of counties, and to respond to climate shocks, global economic volatility and a rapidly changing labour market.

It will have to do all this while citizens are demanding lower taxes and better services at the same time.

That is why 2027 should not be judged solely as a referendum on the current administration but a contest between competing explanations of how Kenya works.

The serious question for every candidate should be: Given the Kenya you will inherit, what exactly will you do differently, how much will it cost, what will you stop doing, and what will you ask Kenyans to sacrifice in return?

Those questions may not make for the most exciting campaign rallies but may be the ones that determine whether the next five years are merely another political transition or the beginning of a different economic trajectory.

Kenya has reached a point where changing the people in charge will not, by itself, change the country's fundamental constraints and the next president will have to do more than win.

They will have to govern a country that has become too expensive to promise everything to, and too ambitious to settle for less.

In Numbers

180
CARDS
Number of National Identification Cards bearing different names recovered from two suspects arrested in Teso, Busia County.

9th
OCTOBER
Date when Opposition leaders will convene a People's Forum on Electoral Preparedness.

94
PER CENT
The completion status of the Talanta Sports Complex including the Raila Odinga International Stadium in Nairobi.

82
DEATHS
The number of humanitarian workers have been killed so far this year while on duty, according to the United Nations.

Quote of the Week

> We must pull down all non tariff barriers, accelerate progression of the East African Community (EAC) to a common market, monetary union with a single currency and ultimately a political federation.

- Ababu Nambwamba, Kenya High Commissioner to Uganda

KDC Explainer: Why 7–10pm Rules Kenyan TV Advertising

There is one number in the Communications Authority's latest audience measurement report that media buyers should circle: the window between 7pm and 10pm is where Kenyan TV audiences and advertising activity peak simultaneously.

The report identifies these three hours as the "Optimal Advertising Impact Window"; the point where audience size and the volume of ad spots being aired rise and fall together, rather than working against each other. It sounds obvious in hindsight: people are home, dinner is done, the TV is on. The data matters because it confirms that the market's own instincts, piling spend into prime time, are actually an efficient, not just conventional, move.

Where the money is being wasted

The more useful finding sits in the recommendation, not just its observation: advertisers can improve efficiency by pulling spend out of late-night and midday slots, where engagement is measurably lower, and reinvesting it in the morning and early evening. These periods offer a better balance of reach against cost than the overcrowded prime-time peak or the flat, low-engagement stretches either side of it.

In practice, that means the real optimisation opportunity isn't in the 7-10pm window at all; it's already crowded, already expensive, and already where budgets concentrate. The opportunity is in the underused shoulders around it, where audiences are still present but competition for airtime, and therefore cost, is lower.

Why this matters now

This finding lands against a backdrop of overall TV ad spend that remains the largest single category in Kenya's advertising economy: Sh7.94 billion in Q4 2025/26 alone, well ahead of radio (Sh5.07 billion) and print (Sh1.32 billion).

With free-to-air television commanding the overwhelming majority of that spend over Pay TV, and sectors like Telecommunications, Media & Publishing, and Banking & Finance dominating category spend, even small efficiency gains in scheduling translate into meaningful budget reallocation at the market level.

For media planners, the takeaway is less "chase the peak" and more "the peak is already priced in." The margin sits in the hours advertisers have been treating as filler.

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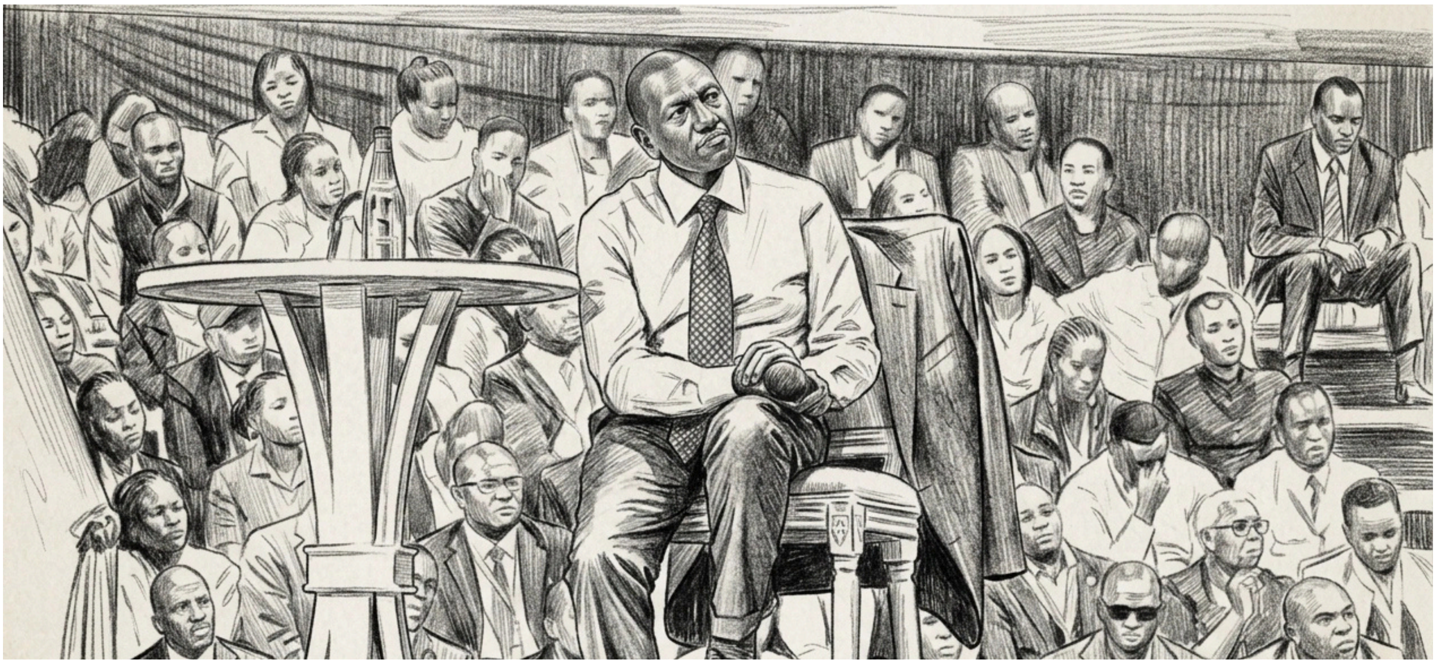
The Town Hall Test: What the SHA Q&A at KICC actually proved



On Tuesday, President William Ruto took the stage at the KICC to moderate a town hall on Kenya's health reforms; the closing act of day 1 of the National Health Summit held under the theme "Reform Delivered, Health as a Right."

Kenyans in the room were invited to share their experiences with the Social Health Authority, primary healthcare access and health financing, and to raise their concerns directly with the President.

It was billed, accurately, as a platform for citizen voice, but whether it functioned as one is a separate question that matters more. Kenya has a stronger constitutional claim to the town hall than almost any government attempting the format today.

Article 10 names public participation a binding national value, not an optional courtesy, applying whenever state organs enact policy or interpret law. The County Governments Act goes further, listing town hall meetings by name as a required modality county governments must establish.

Few constitutions anywhere spell out the tool this explicitly, so the gap is not in the law but in what happens when the law meets a stage, a summit programme and a single moderator who is also the subject of the accountability exercise.

Kenyan civil society has already named that gap with ICJ Kenya arguing that Article 10 sets no precise threshold for what counts as sufficient engagement, leaving room for officials to hold token forums that do not genuinely represent public input.

The ICJ has specifically pointed to the NHIF-to-SHIF transition as a case where participation was more theoretical than practised.

That history should sharpen scrutiny of Tuesday's session, not soften it: SHA is the direct successor to the reform ICJ Kenya flagged as a participation failure, and the town hall built to discuss it arrived only after the system was designed, legislated and rolled out to Kenyans.

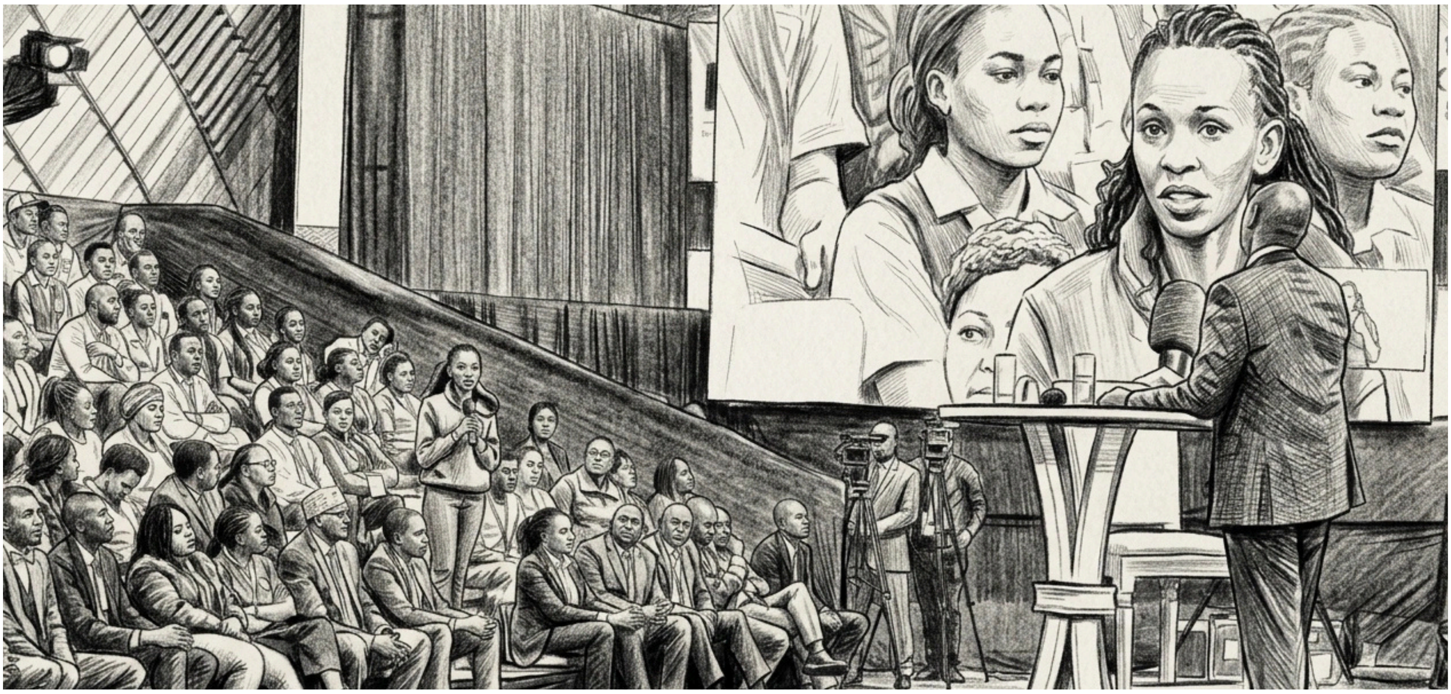
Sequencing is the tell: the town hall did not open day one of the summit; it closed it, after the SHA chief executive, senators, MPs and Cabinet secretaries had already framed the reform's achievements from the stage.

A citizen invited to speak into that structure is not shaping the policy; they are reacting to a finished narrative, on a schedule and platform the government controls end to end.

That is a legitimate governance function. It is closer to a report-back than to the deliberation Article 10 envisions, and Kenyan newsrooms should be precise about which one they are covering.

Set beside comparable formats elsewhere, the design choice becomes clearer.

South Africa's Presidential Imbizo is the closest structural cousin; a platform explicitly built for face-to-face engagement between citizens and senior leaders, intended to hold the administration accountable on service delivery.



It draws the same criticism Kenya's format invites: opposition parties have accused Ramaphosa of timing Imbizo tours to elections and using them as public-relations exercises rather than accountability ones. This critique applies easily to any head-of-state-moderated town hall regardless of country.

"Deliberative town halls," developed by Ohio State University's Institute for Democratic Engagement and now exported to Northern Ireland, Australia and the United Kingdom, use randomly sampled participant groups and professional, non-partisan moderation rather than the official being questioned.

Independent surveys have found that 95 per cent of participants rate the sessions valuable, and in at least one case a legislator changed a bill after hearing directly from constituents in that structure. The difference from Tuesday's format is not turnout or enthusiasm but who sets the terms of conversation.

New England's town meeting tradition draws the sharpest line of all. Unlike town halls held by state and politicians to answer questions, sessions that carry no decision-making power, a town meeting lets the participants legislate policy and budgets directly.

Kenya's SHA town hall sits firmly in the listening category, not the deciding one, and that placement is not itself the problem. The problem is a listening exercise dressed, in coverage and framing, as if it were closer to a decision-making one.

The Council of Europe's 2023 recommendation on deliberative democracy offers a checklist against which any of this could be scored: a clear legal framework, an unambiguous mandate for the exercise, fair representation of who gets to speak, and accountability for what happens to what is said.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PASSED THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION BILL A WEEK AGO

Kenya's SHA town hall passes the first test by a wide margin. It has not yet demonstrated it passes the fourth, as there is no visible mechanism turning Tuesday's testimony into a document anyone can hold the government to next year.

Representation is the final test, and it is the one every version of this format struggles with, not just Kenya's. Research on comparable local-government meetings elsewhere has found that the people who actually show up to speak skew markedly older and more male than the general voting population.

This is an elite-capture pattern that a curated, single-city, single-day summit at KICC does nothing to correct, and that rural or lower-income Kenyans without the means to travel to Nairobi are structurally excluded from by design, not accident.

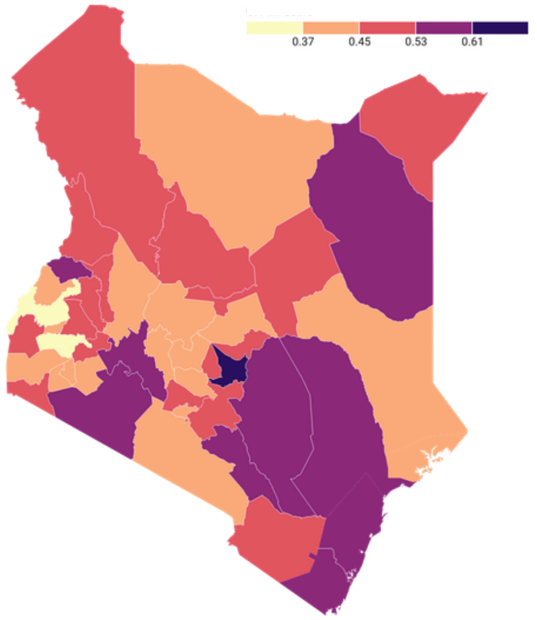
None of this argues against the town hall as a tool; Kenya's constitutional commitment to it is a genuine asset, and one most governments in the region cannot claim. It argues against mistaking the tool's presence for its function.

The Public Participation Bill, passed by the National Assembly a week ago, will test whether Kenya legislated the design standards: independent moderation, published commitments, a feedback loop with teeth, that separate a deliberative process from a well-attended briefing.

Support the ambition behind Tuesday's session. The delivery record, on participation as much as on SHA itself, is still to be built.

The index that contradicts opinion polls on county performance

CFPMI SCORE



On August 6, the Senate did something Kenya's devolution debate has never quite managed: it attached a number, not a sentiment, to how well each of the 47 counties actually manages money.

The County Fiscal Performance Measurement Index, Parliament's first attempt at ranking counties on hard fiscal indicators rather than public mood, landed within days of a separate Infotrak survey crowning the country's most popular governors.

Placed side by side, the two rankings tell almost contradictory stories, and the size of that gap, not either ranking alone, is the real finding.

The CFPMI was built by the Parliamentary Budget Office, Parliament's in-house fiscal think tank, which scored all 47 counties across seven indicators: budget implementation, development expenditure, own-source revenue collection, wage bill management, settlement of pending bills, county assembly expenditure ceilings, and audit outcomes.

The office drew its raw data from the Office of the Auditor-General and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, covering the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years, and computed a composite score for each county using min-max normalisation, sorting results into five grade tiers from A to E.

Senate Speaker Amason Kingi framed the exercise as filling a long-standing gap: devolution, he said, had lacked "a scientific and objective framework for measuring how counties perform."

A Different Honour Roll

Embu, under Governor Cecily Mbarire, topped the 2024/25 ranking with an overall score of 0.689, followed by Narok, Wajir, Kitui and Kilifi.

Only five counties - Wajir, Narok, Tana River, Kilifi and Kitui - held top-10 positions in both financial years, making them the closest thing the index offers to a genuine fiscal-discipline honour roll.

None of them are the counties that typically anchor national governance conversation.

At the other end, Kisumu finished dead last nationally in 2024/25, a position it also occupied the year before. Nairobi, Kisii and Kajiado were the only other counties to land in the bottom 10 in both financial years, a persistence that suggests these are not one-off dips but entrenched management problems.

Where Polls An Ledgers Disagree

This is where the CFPMI becomes genuinely interesting as a piece of political data rather than a dry fiscal audit.

In the Infotrak approval survey released the same week, Murang'a Governor Irungu Kang'ata topped the country with an 80 per cent approval rating, the highest of any governor. On the CFPMI, Murang'a ranks 33rd.

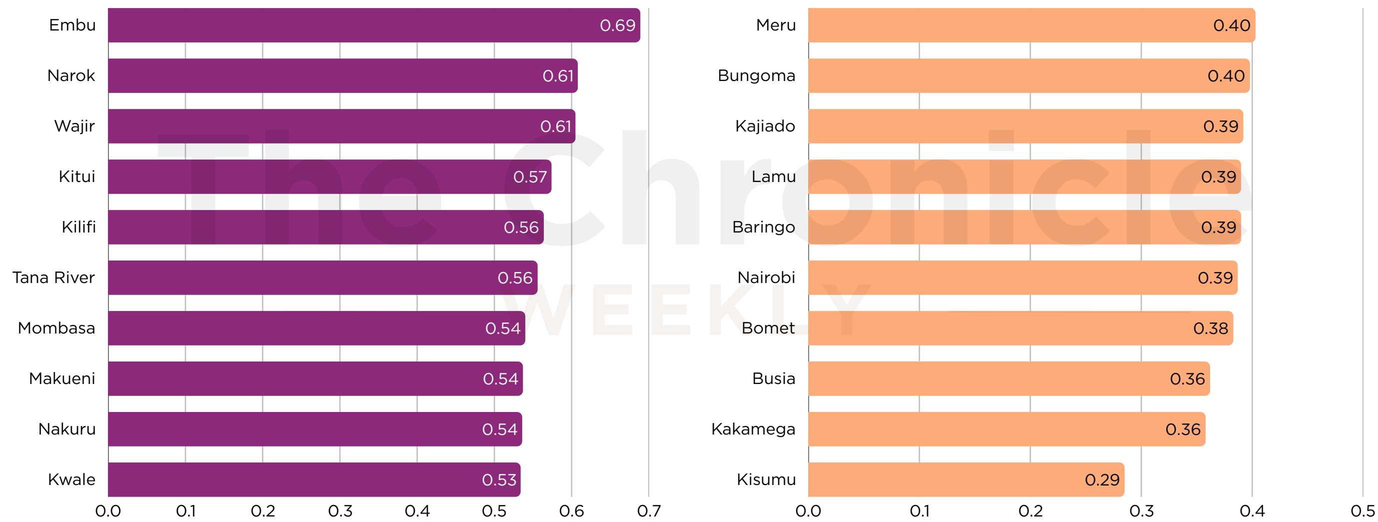
Homa Bay's Gladys Wanga, popular enough to place fourth nationally in the same poll at 66 per cent, saw her county's fiscal ranking slide from 17th to 28th between the two financial years measured.

The relationship is not a clean inversion, which is what makes it worth taking seriously rather than dismissing as noise.

Trans Nzoia's George Natembeya, the second most popular governor nationally at 76 percent approval, held a stable 11th-place fiscal ranking in both years; popularity and performance moving together.

Makueni's Mutula Kilonzo Jnr, popular at 66 percent, oversaw one of the sharpest fiscal improvements in the country, climbing from 29th to eighth.

TOP 10 COUNTIES | **BOTTOM 10 COUNTIES**



SOURCE: County Fiscal Performance Measurement Index (CFPMI), FY 2024/25, Parliamentary Budget Office

So the CFPMI is not simply debunking popularity; it is revealing that popularity, on its own, tells a voter nothing reliable about which case they are looking at.

Nairobi is the sharpest illustration of the gap. As the seat of national government and the country's most media-saturated county, Governor Johnson Sakaja's administration is arguably the most nationally visible in devolved government.

On the fiscal ledger, it is among the weakest: an overall score of 0.387 and a Grade D rating, a bottom-10 finish in both financial years, the second-weakest wage bill management nationally, one of the poorest development-expenditure records, and the single worst performer in the country on clearing pending bills.

Visibility and delivery, in Nairobi's case, appear to be moving in opposite directions.

Structural Problem Beneath Rankings

Individual rankings aside, the report points to a systemic weakness across devolution as a whole. Counties had accumulated Sh226.61 billion in pending bills as of June 2024; a year later, that figure had fallen only marginally, to Sh217.68 billion, leaving a liability that threatens service delivery regardless of where a county sits in the overall ranking.

On development spending, the report finds that counties are required to allocate at least 30 percent of their budgets to development expenditure under Section 107(2)(b) of the Public Finance Management Act, yet only a handful of counties clear the legal threshold.

On audit outcomes, the picture is starker still: 37 of the 47 counties share the lowest audit performance rating, meaning weak financial accountability is closer to the default setting of devolution than an exception confined to a few underperforming counties.

What It Means For 2027

The Senate has signalled it intends to use the index as a recurring oversight tool rather than a one-off exercise. Majority Leader Aaron Cheruiyot said the report would shift the terms of debate on county performance "from politics to facts."

If that holds, the CFPMI could become the accountability instrument devolution has lacked for over a decade — a concrete record governors will have to answer for beyond the reach of a favourable poll or a well-managed media cycle.

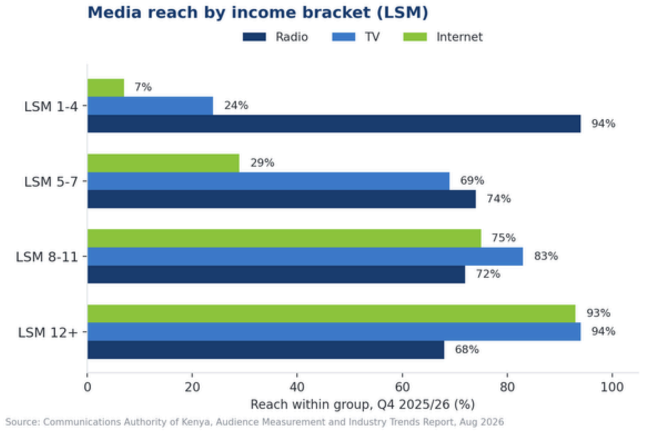
Whether it does depends on the same test The Chronicle Weekly applies to every claimed achievement: does public attention actually shift toward the delivery record, or does it stay with the more comfortable currency of approval ratings and popular perception?

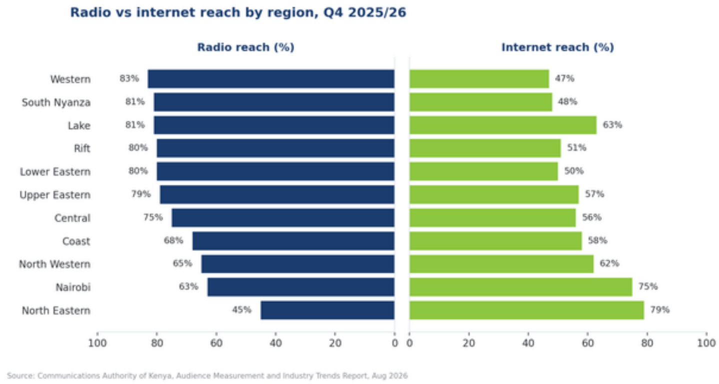
Devolution's promise was always that resources closer to the people would be managed more accountably. The CFPMI is the first real instrument for checking whether that promise is being kept.

What Kenyans do with it, whether they let a scientific scorecard compete with a popularity contest, or let the popularity contest win by default, is the more consequential story than any single county's grade.

The Chronicle
WEEKLY

Class, geography splitting Kenya's media audience in two





Picture two Kenyans on a Tuesday evening. One is scrolling Instagram in Kilimani, a television humming in the background, tuned to nothing in particular. The other is in a market town out west, radio dial fixed to the local vernacular station; the only screen in the house is off, because there isn't one.

Both count as "media consumers" in the Communications Authority's books. On the numbers, they might as well live in different countries.

That's the story hiding inside the CA's latest Audience Measurement and Industry Trends Report, covering Q4 of the 2025/26 financial year. The national totals look calm enough: radio at 75 per cent, TV at 74 per cent, internet at 57 cent.

Split by income, the calm disappears. Among the poorest bracket (LSM 1 to 4) radio reaches 94 per cent of people. Television reaches 24 per cent and the Internet, 7 per cent. For Kenya, radio isn't one option among several; it is the medium, full stop.

Flip to the top bracket, LSM 12+, and the picture inverts almost exactly: TV at 94 per cent, internet at 93 per cent, radio down to 68 per cent and still falling - from a high of 92 per cent among the poorest group down to fourth place among the richest.

Newspapers tell the same story in miniature: 35 per cent of LSM 12+ read one last week, against roughly 1 per cent of LSM 1-4.

Nairobi Doesn't Fit Model

Nairobi posts the lowest radio listenership in Kenya (63 per cent in Q4), trailing Western and Rift at 83 per cent apiece, and Lake at 81 per cent. But Nairobi's TV reach (84 per cent) and internet access (75 per cent) sit near the top nationally.

North Eastern is stranger still, with the lowest TV viewership in the country, at 58 per cent, yet leads on internet access, at 79 per cent, ahead of even Nairobi. A young, mobile-first population that never had legacy broadcast infrastructure to begin with, reaching straight for the phone instead. Digital-first, in other words, does not mean well served.

The split runs down to the language coming out of the speaker. Nationally, Swahili carries 61 per cent of radio listenership, vernacular 39 per cent, and English 11 per cent. But English listenership among LSM 12+ has been climbing all year, hitting 17 per cent in Q4, roughly double the mid-income rate, while vernacular stays the default for lower-LSM and rural Kenya.

In plain terms, a lower-income, rural Kenyan is reached almost exclusively through vernacular or Swahili radio.

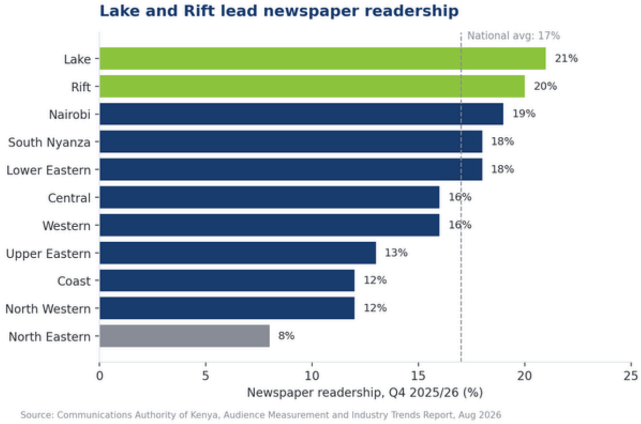
Why It Matters

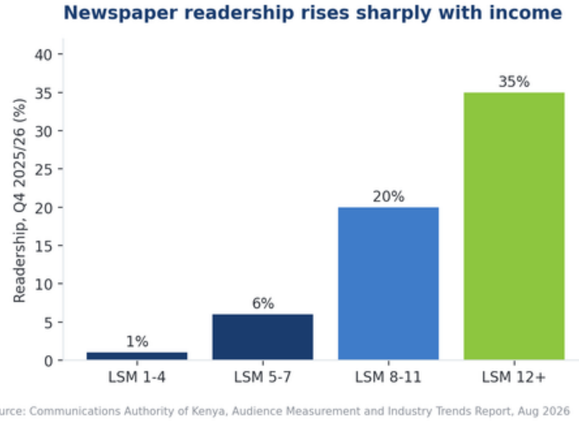
The CA's own report calls this the industry's defining tension: broadcasters must "serve different audiences across multiple platforms without weakening their core radio and television products," even as unequal digital access keeps rural, lower-income Kenya "reliant on radio and television".

For advertisers, the message is blunt. A Nairobi-weighted digital campaign will systematically miss rural, lower-income, non-Nairobi Kenya, where Swahili and vernacular radio remain the only thing that actually arrives.

For everyone else -media houses, regulators, anyone running a national message - the real question isn't whether Kenya is "going digital." It's how long a country can run on two disconnected media publics before something built for one stops reaching the other at all.

Newspaper readership is fading almost everywhere in Kenya





Two regions refuse to let go of newspapers, for reasons the income and geography numbers can't fully explain. Everywhere else, the story is the same: fewer buyers, thinner stacks at the kiosk, a slow bleed that shows up in every quarter.

Nationally, newspaper readership opened the 2025/26 financial year at 19 per cent, sank to 15 per cent by Q3, and limped back to 17 per cent by Q4.

Then there's Lake and Rift, which are pulling in the opposite direction from the rest of the country, and the Q4 numbers make the divergence hard to miss.

Who's Still Buying

Start with the obvious divide: money. Among LSM 12+, the top income bracket, 35 per cent read a newspaper in Q4. Among LSM 8-11, that's 20 per cent. Among LSM 1-4, it's close to nothing (roughly 1 per cent). Urban readership (20 per cent) still comfortably beats rural (15 per cent), which is exactly what you would expect from a medium that has always skewed middle-class and city-based.

Age adds a second layer: readers aged 25-34 are the most engaged of any group, while teenagers and the over-45s read least. Newspapers, in other words, have settled into a specific professional, mid-career audience — not a generational habit, and not a mass one.

The Holdouts

In Q4 2025/26, Lake posted the highest newspaper readership in the country at 21 per cent, and Rift came second at 20 per cent. Both are comfortably above the national average of 17 per cent, and both held their ground through Q3, the exact quarter when national readership cratered.

At the other end, North Eastern recorded just 8 per cent, the lowest in Kenya, even after a modest recovery from earlier in the year.

What makes Lake and Rift genuinely odd is that neither region tops the country on income or urbanisation; the two factors that predict newspaper readership almost everywhere else in this dataset.

Something more local is holding the line: distribution networks that never broke down, titles with real loyalty, reading habits that haven't been swallowed by radio and mobile the way they have on the Coast or in North Western.

What Publishers Should Do With This

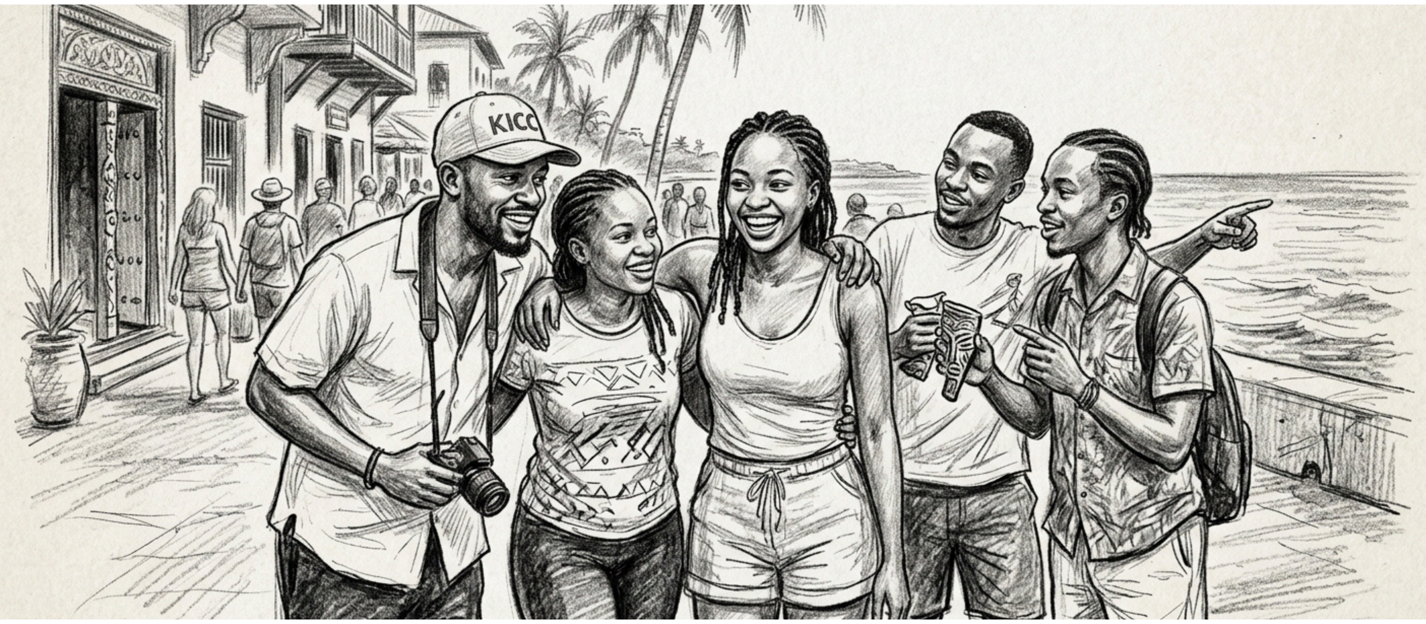
The data doesn't say “print is dying.” It says something useful: print is retreating into specific, identifiable territory, and the smart move is to treat that territory differently from everywhere else.

Lake and Rift proved more durable in the one quarter that hurt the rest of the country. Distribution spend and regionally relevant content here likely returns more than a Nairobi-first strategy ever will.

With LSM 1-4 readership near zero and youth readership the weakest cohort nationally, print's remaining growth story belongs to the urban, LSM 8+, 25-44 professional reader. That's a niche, not a market, and pricing, coverage, and distribution decisions should say so.

The CA's own industry analysis backs the read: it flags “pressure on credible journalism” as a sector-wide risk, but also notes that “vernacular and regional broadcasters can strengthen their competitive position by focusing on local news, culture... and community issues.”

The soft life has become a budget



For a generation raised to see travel, dining out, fitness, fashion and curated experiences as markers of a good life, the challenge today is not abandoning the soft life. It is learning how to afford it without wrecking their finances.

"Soft life" once sounded deliberately frivolous, social media shorthand for brunches, weekend getaways, new clothes, gym memberships and airport photos, the general performance of a life under control. It was easy to dismiss as an internet trend, since the online version rarely showed rent, school fees, family obligations, and debt repayments sitting off-camera.

Something more interesting is happening in Kenya now; the soft life is becoming a budget. Kenyans who want to travel are chasing cheaper dates, and those who want to eat out are hunting for weekday offers instead of the Saturday dinner.

The aspiration has survived; the spending pattern has changed. The consumer economy is not watching discretionary spending vanish, but a more deliberate consumer who still wants experience and leisure without destabilising the rest of the month.

The Arithmetic Of Necessity

The pressure driving this shift shows up directly in the price data. Annual inflation rose to 6.5 per cent in July 2026, driven by increases in food and non-alcoholic beverages (9.0 per cent), transport (15.6 per cent), and housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels (3.2 per cent) over the one year.

These three divisions together account for over 57 per cent of the total weight across the 13 major expenditure categories.

Food carries the single biggest weight in the inflation basket, which means households doing the tightest budgeting have the least room to substitute their way out of the pressure. A new phone can wait; food, transport, rent and electricity cannot.

Discretionary spending is left fighting for whatever survives that arithmetic, and this is producing a new definition of the soft life. The original version implied abundance; enough money that nothing required calculation.

The 2026 Kenyan version is about controlled enjoyment: still living well, but choosing deliberately which pleasures are worth paying for and which can be postponed, substituted, or downsized.

Growth Without Security

This is playing out against an economy that is growing, if unevenly. Real GDP expanded 4.6 per cent in 2025, per the 2026 Economic Survey, led by accommodation and food services (up 15.6 per cent), financial and insurance activities (6.5 per cent), construction (6.8 per cent) and information and communication (4.8 per cent).

Growth is real, but it doesn't automatically translate into disposable income for every household, which is why employment quality matters more than employment numbers.

The 2026 Economic Survey credits Kenya with 822,100 new jobs in 2025, but the overwhelming majority landed in the informal economy, where incomes are unpredictable and social protection is thin.

Kenyans are therefore living an odd contradiction: more connected to global lifestyles than ever, with aspirations rising faster than income security, and now faster than prices too.

"Convince Me It's Worth It"

But, Kenyans aren't retreating from consumption; they are getting more strategic about it. The question has shifted from "can I afford this" to "is this worth what it costs."

A Sh3,000 meal has to earn its premium over a cheaper alternative; a hotel has to justify itself through location or service; entertainment has to prove value before anyone commits. That appetite for experience hasn't disappeared.

Kenya recorded 2.7 million international arrivals and 5.2 million domestic travellers in 2025, with tourism earnings around Sh500 billion and international arrivals up 9 per cent.

The domestic number is the telling one; it suggests the desire to travel hasn't been extinguished, just redirected toward shorter trips, cheaper stays and group travel that deliver a memorable experience without an international price tag, at a moment when transport costs alone are running 15.6 per cent higher than a year ago.

For businesses, the distinction matters: the consumer isn't saying "I won't buy." They are saying "convince me it's worth it"; an opening for smaller packages, loyalty programmes, off-peak pricing and flexible memberships over blunt discounting.

When Budgeting Becomes Borrowing

Kenya's digital financial ecosystem has made this new discipline easier to practise, but it carries its own risk. The 2024 FinAccess Household Survey found 82 percent of adults using mobile money and 28.9 percent having accessed the Hustler Fund; deep digital embedding that comes with rising concern about household indebtedness.

A holiday funded by a savings plan is discipline; one funded by stacked digital loans is postponed financial pain. The photograph shows the restaurant, not the credit bill; the departure lounge, not the months of saving behind it.

Younger Kenyans are discovering that the appearance of prosperity and the economics of prosperity are not the same thing, and that is reshaping what success even means, shifting from asset ownership toward mobility and experience, tempered by the reality that lifestyle inflation eats income increases just as fast as they arrive.

The answer is making soft life sustainable: 3 days instead of a week, one memorable dinner instead of several ordinary ones, six months of saving so the holiday doesn't cost a year of recovery.

Kenya is growing more aspirational exactly as its consumers are being forced to grow more disciplined, and, as of July's numbers, more disciplined than before. The soft life isn't disappearing; it's being renegotiated, squeezed into the space between responsibility, saving and resilience.

The Chronicle
WEEKLY

Ninth in the world, one field in Nairobi: Kenya's Baseball5 paradox

Kenya is going to the Youth Olympic Games in Dakar carrying something unusual for a country accustomed to celebrating success in sports only after decades of investment: a young national team competing in a sport that has barely had time to establish itself at home, yet has already placed Kenya among the world's leading nations.

Baseball5, the fast, mixed-gender urban version of baseball and softball, will make its Olympic debut at Dakar 2026, with Kenya representing Africa alongside hosts Senegal.

Kenya's youth team finished fifth at the 2025 Youth Baseball5 World Cup in Mexico, while country was ranked ninth in the world in May 2026, ahead of countries with considerably deeper baseball and sporting infrastructure.

That achievement deserves recognition, but it also raises a more uncomfortable question: what happens to Kenyan Baseball5 when the international programmes helping to build it move on?

Built for Low-Infrastructure Countries

Baseball5 was designed precisely for countries that cannot afford traditional baseball infrastructure. There are no bats, no gloves and no pitchers; five players take the field, games run for five innings, and the sport can be played on almost any suitable surface with a rubber ball.

In other words, Kenya does not need to build a baseball stadium to build a Baseball5 system.

It does, however, need something much harder to provide: a sustainable institutional pipeline of teachers, coaches, competitions, equipment, talent identification, national-team preparation and predictable financing.

Weight of External Support

The Baseball Federation of Kenya was founded in 1997 and registered in 2002 as a non-governmental organisation, with a stated ambition of taking baseball to schools and higher institutions.

Its own development goals include training coaches and officials, providing equipment and developing playing facilities across the country. That model has produced results, but much of the story of Kenyan baseball has historically involved outside assistance.

Meru University of Science and Technology, for example, describes its baseball diamond as the country's only standard baseball field and records equipment support from American Friends of Kenya.

Elsewhere, organisations such as American Friends of Kenya and international baseball bodies have supported equipment, coaching and grassroots development. For Baseball5, the dependence on external development partners is even more visible.

In August 2024, the WBSC launched a programme in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement with the African Higher Education in Emergencies Network, supported by Olympic Solidarity.

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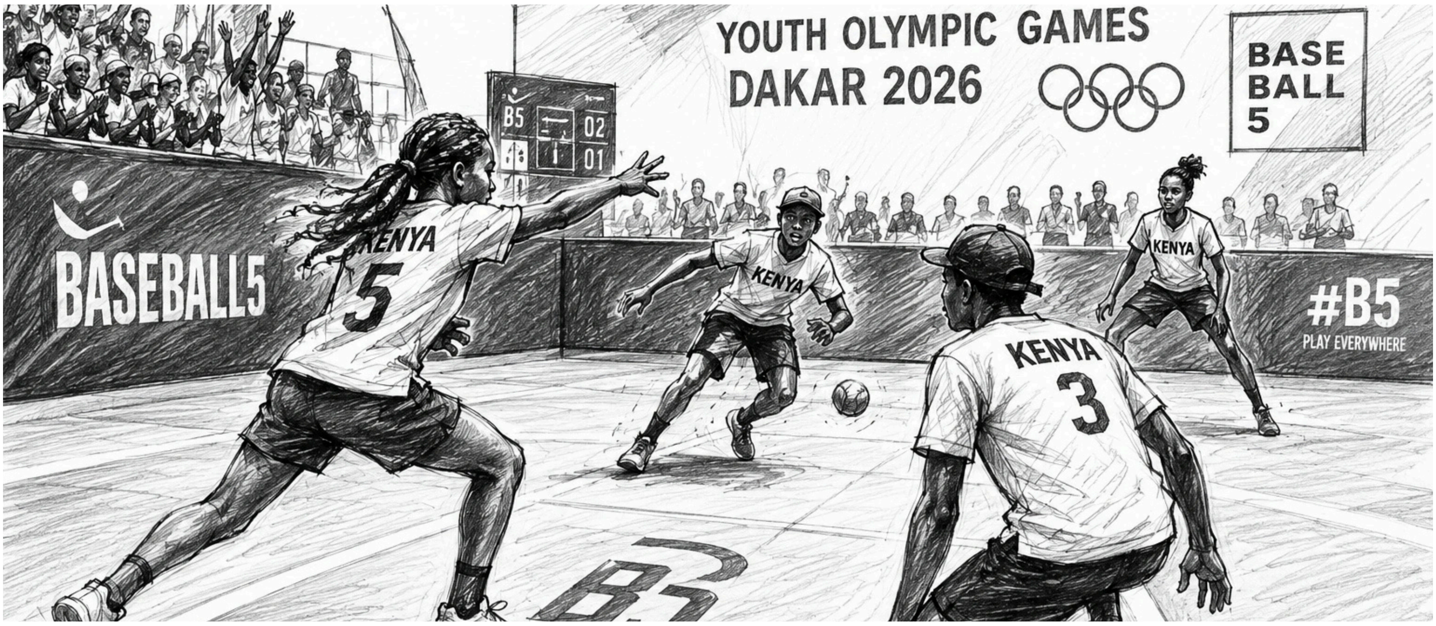


The initiative recruited 60 young people, divided between the two settlements, and combined sport with education, nutrition, coaching and life-skills development.

The first year produced more than 240 training sessions, seven friendly tournaments and a national event, while 23 participants emerged as high-performance players.

The programme was successful enough to be renewed, but the renewal itself tells the story of the underlying challenge: the agreement runs through December 2026.

Under the renewed arrangement, the WBSC finances the initiative with support from Olympic Solidarity, working with the National Olympic Committee of Kenya, the country's baseball and softball federations and AHEEN.

There is nothing wrong with international development support. Indeed, without it, many young Kenyan athletes would probably never have encountered Baseball5 in the first place.

The accountability question is what comes next. A programme that reaches 60 young people, trains coaches and produces elite players is a development success. A programme whose future depends on the next grant cycle is not yet a domestic sports system.

Building a School-Based Pipeline

In February, the Baseball Federation of Kenya, working with the Kenya Secondary Schools Sports Association, began training physical-education teachers ahead of the introduction of Baseball5 into the secondary-school games calendar.

This is arguably the most important development in Kenya's sporting history because schools are where Baseball5 can become more than an Olympic project.

The economics make sense. Unlike traditional baseball, the game can be introduced without constructing expensive diamonds, while its mixed-gender format creates an opportunity to bring boys and girls into the same sporting pathway.

The WBSC explicitly promotes Baseball5 as a way of taking baseball and softball into communities where conventional facilities and equipment are barriers to participation.

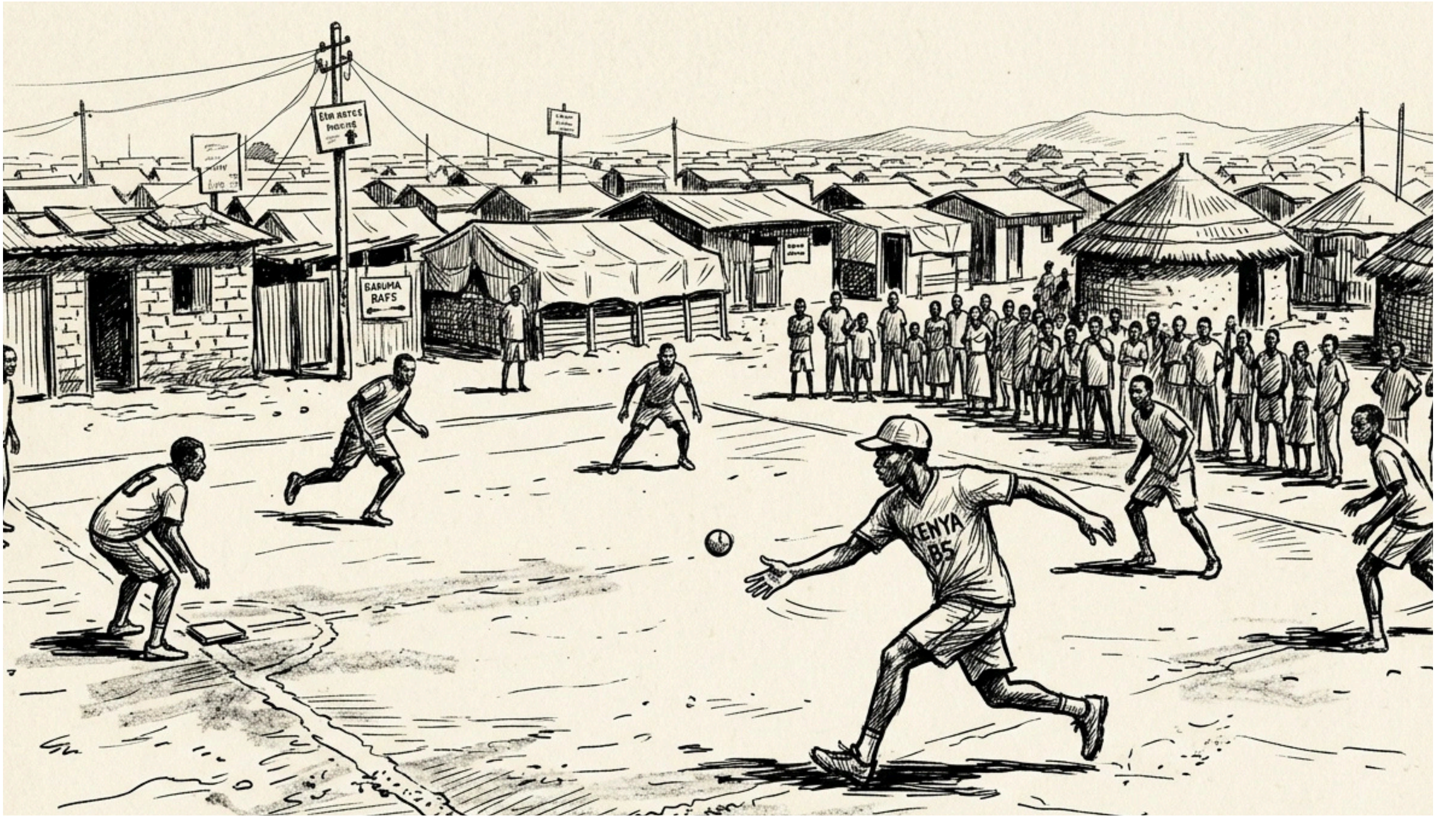
But the Kenyan school rollout still needs to answer the questions that accompany every ambitious sports programme.

Who trains the teachers after the initial clinics, who supplies equipment, who organises competitions, who pays for officials and travel, and who makes sure that a promising player from Kisii, Kakuma or Meru can progress from school competition into county, national and international sport?

Those questions matter because the country's public sports budget is not small. The State Department for Sports has a total 2026 allocation of about Sh32.25 billion, including Sh28.76 billion in development expenditure.

Within the broader sports architecture, the Sports, Arts and Social Development Fund is expected to finance sports programmes, talent development and facilities.

Yet a broad sports budget is not the same thing as a Baseball5 development budget.



In the 2026/27 budget material reviewed, there is no clearly identifiable dedicated allocation for Baseball5 or a specific national school Baseball5 rollout.

That does not prove that the sport receives no public support, but it does highlight the difference between being included in Kenya's sporting ambitions and having a clearly financed development pathway.

The Pressure of Success

The ninth-place world ranking is not a publicity gimmick. It reflects genuine competitive progress, and Kenya's fifth-place finish at the 2025 Youth World Cup demonstrated that the country can compete with established Baseball5 programmes.

The WBSC's January 2026 review also identified Kenya as one of the biggest improvers in its five global rankings, with Baseball5 contributing 1,508 points during 2025. The danger is therefore not that Kenya will fail in Dakar but that it will succeed.

A medal, a strong finish or another breakthrough performance could create another familiar Kenyan sports moment in which athletes demonstrate that the talent exists while institutions scramble to catch up with the achievement.

Baseball5 offers Kenya a rare opportunity to get ahead of that cycle because the sport is cheap to start, easy to take into schools and naturally suited to urban and underserved communities.

The country does not need a massive stadium programme to exploit the opportunity. It needs a modest but reliable system that connects schools, clubs, counties, federations and national teams.

By November, Kenyan teenagers will walk onto an Olympic field in Dakar as one of Africa's leading Baseball5 nations. The more important question for Kenyan sport will be what happens when they come home.

If the answer is another grant application, another foreign-funded clinic and another scramble for national-team travel money, then Dakar will have been a brilliant sporting moment but a weak governance story.

If, instead, the country uses the momentum to put Baseball5 permanently into the school sports system, finance the coaching pipeline, support competitions and give the federations a predictable development framework, then the ninth-ranked team will have done something much bigger than win games.

It will have exposed what Kenya can achieve when a sport is built around accessibility rather than expensive infrastructure.

And that may be Baseball5's real Olympic opportunity for Kenya: not simply to prove that Kenyan athletes can compete with the world, but to prove that Kenyan sporting institutions can build something that survives after the applause ends.

Inside the Raila Odinga International Stadium at the Talanta Sports Complex which is now at 94 per cent completion.

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