

READY OR NOT?



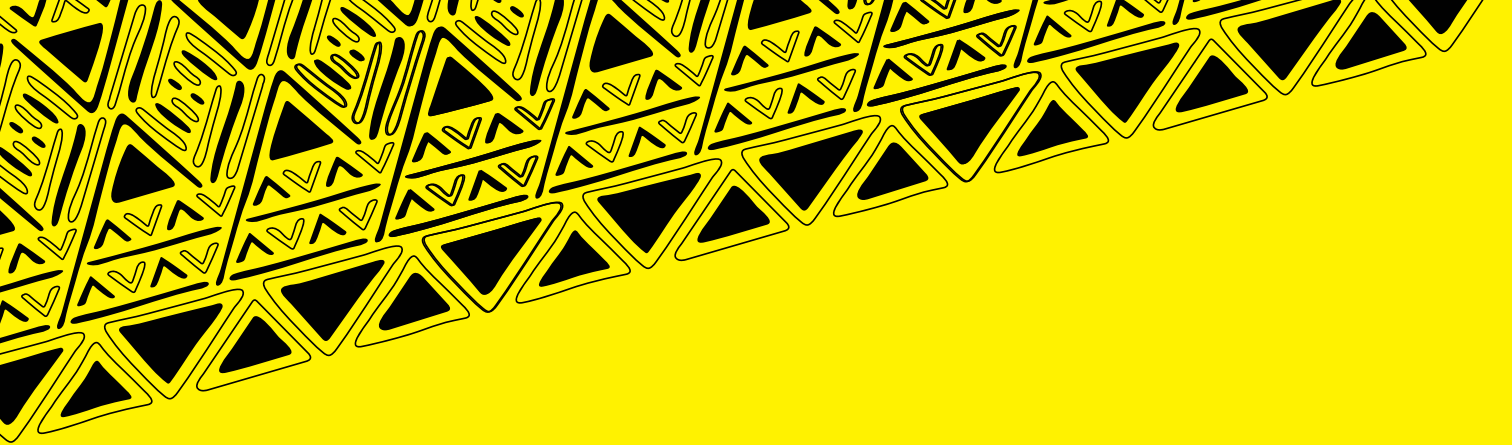
CITIZENS' PERSPECTIVES ON MAISHA NAMBA.

September 2024

KENYA

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL





Executive Summary	4
Background	5
County Fact Sheet	7
Methodology	7
Analysis of Findings	14
Citizen's Perceptions on the Level of Public Awareness on Maisha Namba.	16
Citizens' Perceptions on the Country's Readiness for the Maisha Namba Transition.	17
Citizens' Lived Experiences, Perceptions and Anticipated Implementation Challenges in Obtaining Maisha Namba	21
Conclusion	26
Recommendations	27

Acknowledgements

Amnesty International Kenya is a section of Amnesty International's global movement of over 10 million members and supporters committed to creating a future where human rights are enjoyed. United by our shared humanity, we know that the power to create positive change is within all of us.

Amnesty International Kenya extends gratitude to all those who contributed to the successful completion of this perception study report. This research could not have been achieved without the invaluable support and insights provided by a range of dedicated individuals. We acknowledge the exceptional efforts of our staff researchers, Victor Ndede, Chepkoech Rotich, Joel Njuguna, Aurelia Miheso and Sharlene Muthuri for intellectual rigor in shaping the study's methodology, analyzing data, and compiling these findings.

Amnesty International Kenya also extends gratitude to the participants of the focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informants from across Kenya for their candid feedback, thoughtful contributions, and willingness to share their experiences and perspectives that have significantly enhanced the quality of our report.

Except where otherwise noted, all original content in this document is licensed under a Creative Commons license. All users must attribute the contents of this document in the manner specified and do not suggest that we endorse your use of the work. You are free to share this work as long as it is on a non-commercial basis. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>

Where material is attributed to a copyright owner other than Amnesty International Kenya this material is not subject to the Creative Commons licence.

First Published September 2024

197 Place, Lenana Road

P.O. Box 1527-00606 Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: +254 020 – 4283000

Email: amnestykenya@amnesty.org

www.amnestykenya.org



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ready or not? Citizen's Perspectives on Maisha Namba is a perception study conducted by Amnesty International Kenya to assess Kenyan citizens' perceptions, attitudes, and concerns regarding the Digital ID and Maisha Namba. Amnesty International Kenya spoke to representatives of citizen groups, journalists, religious leaders, human rights defenders and administrative leaders in nine counties across Kenya—Kwale, Mombasa, Tana River, Nairobi, Nakuru, Turkana, Garissa, Kilifi and Kisumu. This report is a sequel to "Digital ID in Kenya: An Advisory Paper on Implementation of a Rights Respecting Digital ID Regime in Kenya" released in January 2024. The Advisory Paper provided academic views on the next steps, the need, justification, principles, benefits and challenges of the UPI and digital ID in Kenya.

The government of Kenya has been advancing its digital transformation agenda with the introduction of the Digital ID system and Maisha Namba to streamline identity verification, improve service delivery, and enhance governance. Understanding citizen perceptions of these systems is vital for addressing concerns, improving implementation, and ensuring the systems' effectiveness and acceptance.

This report offers a comprehensive analysis of several critical aspects surrounding the Maisha Namba initiative, focusing on public awareness, engagement, and readiness. The primary objective is to evaluate how well-informed the citizens of Kenya are about Maisha Namba and their level of engagement with the program. Additionally, the report examines citizens' preparedness to adopt Maisha Namba and explores various concerns related to its implementation from the public's viewpoint. Through a detailed exploration of these areas, the report delves into the extent to which Kenyans are aware of the Maisha Namba project, including their understanding of its objectives, benefits, and implications. It assesses how

effectively the information about Maisha Namba has been disseminated and received by different segments of the population.

Moreover, the report evaluates citizens' readiness to embrace Maisha Namba, considering factors such as technological access, preparedness to transition from existing systems, and overall receptiveness to the changes introduced by the initiative. This includes an analysis of potential barriers to adoption and areas where additional support or resources may be needed.

In addressing implementation concerns, the report highlights the specific issues and challenges faced by the public as they interact with Maisha Namba. This includes concerns related to data security, system reliability, and accessibility, among other factors. The insights gathered aim to provide a nuanced understanding of how the implementation of Maisha Namba is perceived and experienced by citizens. The report culminates in a set of key findings and recommendations derived from the three broad areas of inquiry. These insights are intended to offer the Government of Kenya a thorough perspective on citizen experiences, expectations, and demands regarding the Maisha Namba project.

By incorporating these perspectives, the government can better address public concerns, enhance the effectiveness of the Maisha Namba initiative, and ensure that the system meets the needs and expectations of all Kenyans.

BACKGROUND

Legal identification is the universal human right which enables the people in a country to fully access and enjoy the civic freedoms that allow people to participate in society. The right to legal identification refers to the right to acquire documents such as ID cards, birth certificates and other such documents which tell a government who you are. The right to legal recognition is enshrined under Article 12 of the Kenyan Constitution and in international law under Article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that “everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.”

Additionally, the importance of legal identification is further emphasized by the United Nations in Sustainable Development Goal No. 16,9 which aims to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration” by 2030.¹ In the global majority there is currently a trend of digital transformation where governments are increasingly pushing to shift towards using digital technology to improve public service delivery. With this trend of digital transformation comes the need to strengthen data governance and digital rights. In the spirit of digital transformation, several countries in Africa are in the process of adopting and implementing digital identity systems. The countries currently implementing digital ID include Kenya (Maisha Namba), Uganda (Ndaga Muntu), Rwanda (SDID), Ghana (Ghana Card), Nigeria (NIN) and South Africa (Smart ID).

Like the rest of Africa, Kenya’s history of identification can be traced back to the colonial kipande system.¹ The kipande or identity card was introduced through the Native Registration Ordinance to keep track of African men and boys entering the labor sector, serving as a tool for controlling and monitoring their movements and employment. The Kipande system was a colonial tool used primarily for administrative and labor management purposes, focusing on men as they

were the primary labor force in plantations and mines. The kipande system initially excluded women who at the time, were not seen as part of the formal labor market. At its introduction, the For African men and boys above 16 years, the kipande was mandatory³ and it contained personal information regarding the holder’s clan and tribe.⁴ The kipande identity card was a piece of paper attached to a piece of metal and worn around the neck.⁵ It was not until 1947, through the Registration of Persons Ordinance, that the kipande was replaced with a passbook which included fingerprint biometrics as an additional feature. In 1978, the law was further amended to introduce mandatory registration for all Kenyans above 18 years. Today the Registration of Persons Act has seen minimal reforms since its colonial origins and remains largely in operation today with only minor amendments.”

Further amendments were initiated in 1980 which saw the introduction of Kenya’s first-generation ID bearing the holder’s photo and fingerprints. In 1995 this was replaced with the second-generation ID commonly known as kitambulisho which was a smaller and laminated identity card. The kitambulisho, like the kipande similarly included personal information detailing the holder’s name, sex, place of birth, signature, photo and fingerprint image. In 2011, the second-generation ID was improved into a plastic card with a unique eight-digit number as the holder’s national ID number.

In 2005, there were unsuccessful attempts to introduce a third generation digital ID which was designed as an electronic ID. In 2010, Kenya promulgated the current constitution which sought to address numerous historical injustices including issues related to access to citizenship for certain communities⁷.

In 2018, the Kenyan government made another unsuccessful attempt at introducing a third generation digital ID through the Huduma Namba project. The Huduma Namba was



intended as a centralized identifier which would be used to access government services on a digital platform. Though the Huduma Namba itself did not come into operation, the project established the National Identity Integrated Management System (NIIMS); a centralised database purposed to consolidate all government records about an individual into a single ID system.¹¹ In 2019, the Huduma Namba system was halted by the Kenyan High Court following several constitutional petitions filed against it. Initially, in the Nubian Rights Forum v. Attorney General & 2 Others 2019 case, the courts ordered the government to proceed with the implementation of NIIMS only after enacting a comprehensive data protection framework. In the same judgement, the courts placed emphasis on the issue of data protection, stating that the collection of data was unlawful due to the absence of a prior Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA). Following this, in the case of R v Joe Mucheru and 2 others ex parte Katiba Institute and another 2020 the court declared the roll out of the Huduma Namba project unconstitutional, faulting the government for proceeding with implementation without adequate data protection measures and insufficient public participation.

In 2022 the government made a third attempt at introducing a third generation digital ID known as Maisha Namba. The Directorate of Civil Registration Services (CRS), established under the Births and Deaths Registration Act, is the state agency responsible for managing Kenya's birth and death records. With the introduction of Maisha Namba, significant reforms are underway. The current hybrid system of electronic and manual processes will become fully digitized. This new digital system will assign a Unique Personal Identifier (UPI) at birth which will become one's lifelong identification number; Maisha Namba.

The **term Maisha Namba refers to an identity ecosystem comprising of four interrelated aspects: Maisha Namba, Maisha Card, Digital ID and the National Population Master Register.**

Maisha Namba refers to the Unique Personal Identifier assigned at birth registration and will be used until death registration.

Maisha Card replaces the physical ID and includes enhanced security features such as the microprocessor electronic chip.

Digital ID refers to the virtual representation of the physical ID. This means that a person's digital ID will be linked to their Maisha Namba and will be used to authenticate identity in accessing various services.

The **National Population Master Register** is the final component designed to consolidate all existing government databases into a single integrated register that will be the central reference for all data about Kenyan citizens and foreign residents.

The implementation of Maisha Namba in Kenya has so far faced several legal challenges with several petitioners raising concerns about the government's efforts to ensure that Maisha Namba is implemented in a manner that respects, protects and fulfil human rights. The main concerns here include legal anchorage, data protection compliance, data security, public participation as well as the inclusion of rural and marginalized communities.

2019

Huduma Namba system was halted by the Kenyan High Court

2020

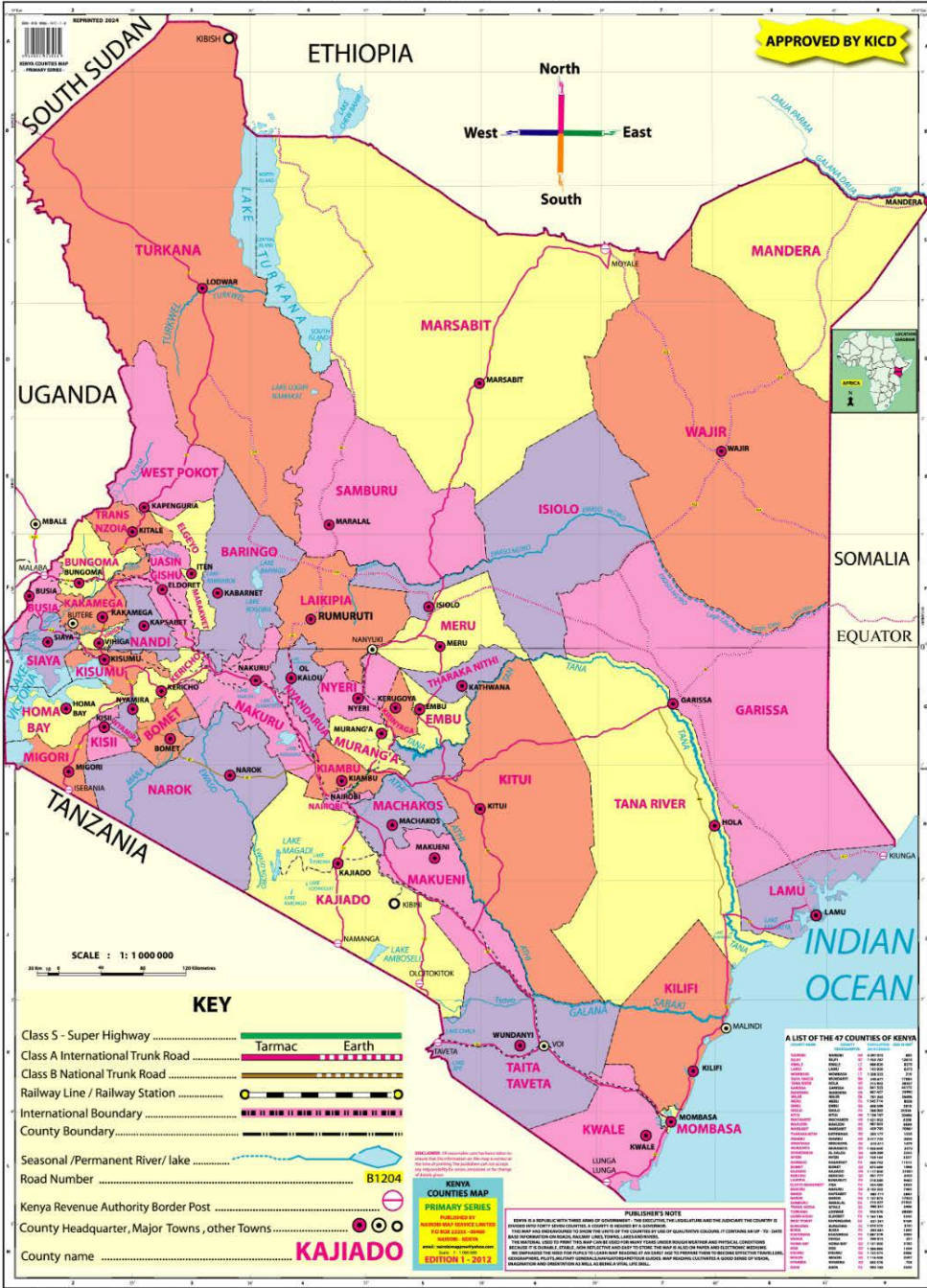
the court declared the roll out of the Huduma Namba project unconstitutional

2022

the government made a third attempt at introducing a third generation digital ID known as Maisha Namba.

County Fact Sheet

KENYA COUNTIES MAP



The county fact sheet examines two social services ancillaries to the roll out of a successful digital ID system in Kenya. The fact sheet looks at only the counties visited during the study. Energy and ICT infrastructure are critical social services factors for the successful adoption of a rights respecting and inclusive digital ID. Assessing the country's readiness therefore requires one to measure population against the availability and accessibility of energy and ICT infrastructure. Across the country, inadequate access to energy and ICT infrastructure already hinders access to manual systems, transitioning to a digital system without bridging the gaps will only exacerbate existing inequalities. With Maisha Namba, if disparities in access to energy and ICT infrastructure are not addressed, the shift to digital ID will progressively exclude

many Kenyan citizens from accessing crucial government services.

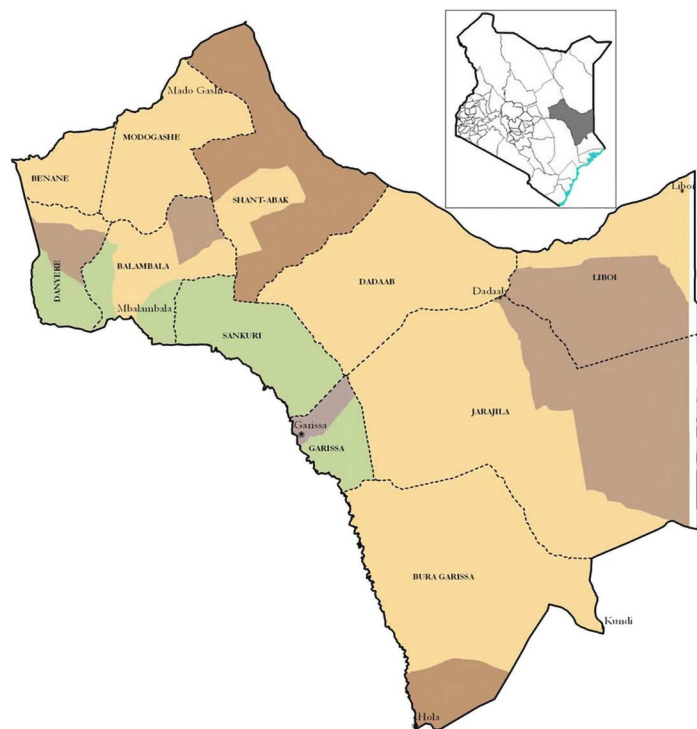
Maisha Namba will serve as the foundation for Kenya's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). This means that Maisha Namba will be the main tool used to access essential public services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare. Therefore, understanding how energy and ICT infrastructure aligns with population needs is critical to ensuring the successful adoption of an inclusive and rights-respecting digital identity. This county fact sheet highlights rural population per county in comparison to energy and ICT access and infrastructure to provide factual context for an analysis of the capacity of counties to inclusively take up Maisha Namba.



Garissa

Garissa County is in the northeastern part of Kenya. It covers an area of 44,174.1Km² and borders the Republic of Somalia to the East, Lamu County to the South, Tana River County to the West, Isiolo County to the Northwest and Wajir County to the North. The county features arid and semi-arid lands with a generally flat topography and is characterized by a hot and dry climate, with occasional rainfall during the short and long rains.

The **county has a population of 841,343** with a population of 630,463 (70%) classified as rural population in the county. 24% of households have access to electricity in this county with only 30.3% of the population owning mobile phones. As of 2019, only 7.2% of the population had access to the internet. Lagdera and Fafi constituencies have internet access recorded at 2.7% and 3.5% of the population respectively.

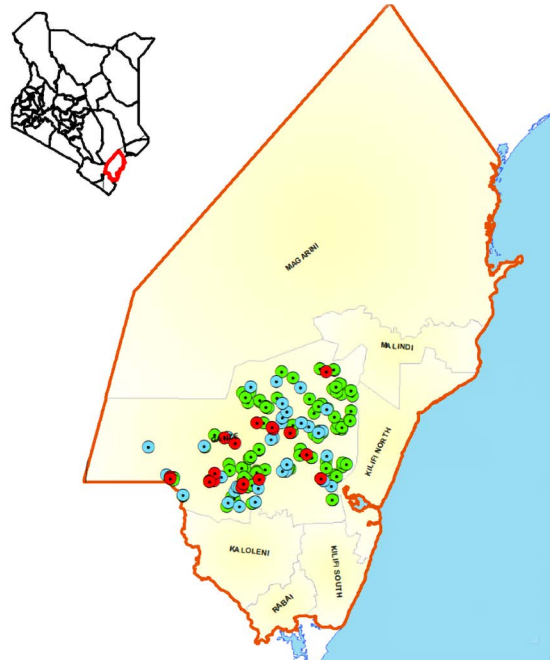




Kilifi

Kilifi County in the coastal part of Kenya and covers an area of 12,609.7 Km². It borders Kwale County to the Southwest, Taita Taveta County to the West, Tana River County to the North, the Indian Ocean to the East and Mombasa County to the South.

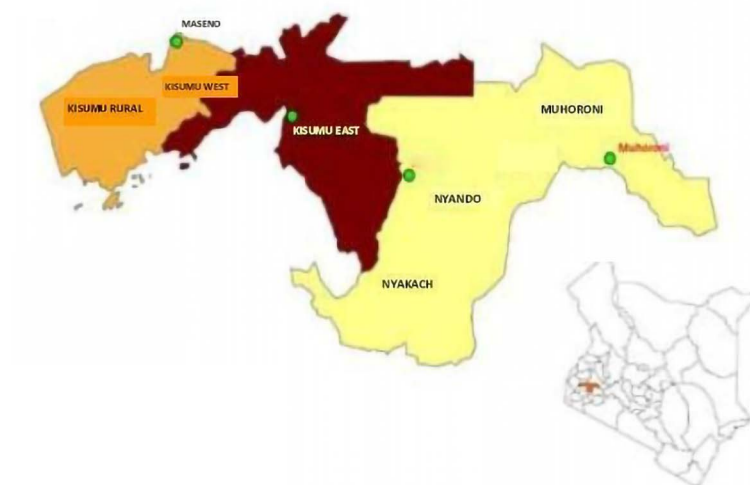
The **county has a population of 1,453,787** with a population of 1,059,899 (73.04%) classified as rural population in the county. 38.6% of households in the county have access to electricity. The county has a population of 39.4 owning mobile phones with 12.1% of the population having access to the internet. Constituencies like Ganze and Magarini have internet access recorded as 4.2% and 5.3% of the population respectively.



Kisumu

Kisumu County is in western Kenya, on the shores of Lake Victoria. Kisumu County covers approximately 567 km² on water and 2086km² land area, representing 0.36% of Kenya's total land area. It hosts the third largest city in Kenya which serves as the County's headquarters. The County is bordered by Homa Bay County to the South, Nandi County to the Northeast, Kericho County to the East, Vihiga County to the Northwest, Siaya County to the West and surrounded by the second largest freshwater lake in the World; Lake Victoria.

The **county has a population of about 1,155,574** people with a population of 714,668 (61.94%) classified as rural population in Kisumu County. 52.8%



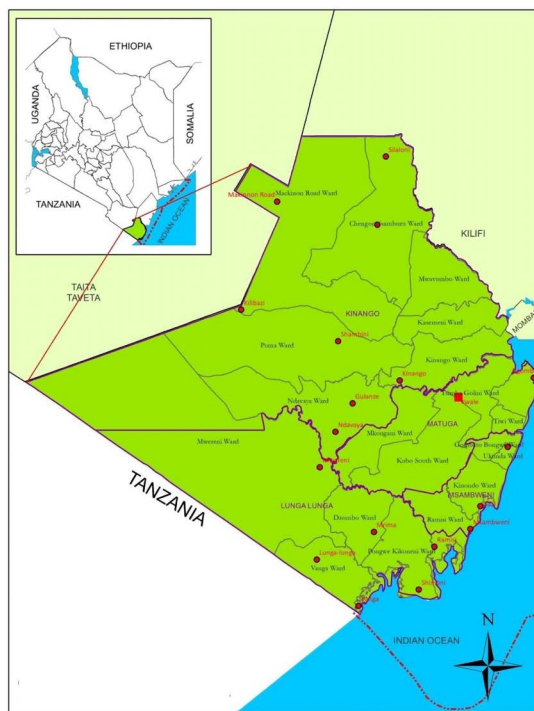
of households in Kisumu County have access to electricity. 49.4% of the population owns mobile phones with 20% of the population accessing the internet. Seme and Muhoroni Constituencies have internet access recorded at 7.1% and 9.9% of the population respectively.



Kwale

Located in the Southern tip of Kenya, Kwale County covers an area of about 8,270.2 Km², borders Taita Taveta County to the Northwest, Kilifi County to the North and Northeast, Mombasa County and Indian Ocean to the East and Southeast and the United Republic of Tanzania to the South West.

The **county has a population of 866,820** people with 740,389 (85.46%) people in Kwale County classified as rural populations. 31.1% of the households in Kwale County have access to electricity. 36.7 of the population own mobile phones with only 9.9% of the population accessing the internet. In Lunga Lunga and Kinango constituencies, only 3.5% and 5.8% of the population access the internet.



Mombasa

Mombasa County covering an area of 229.9 Km² is the home of second largest city in Kenya and borders Kilifi County to the North, Kwale County to the Southwest and the Indian Ocean to the East. The city serves as the headquarters of Mombasa County.

The **county has a population of 1,208,333** people with the entire population considered an urban population given the size of the county and the population density. 86.3% of the population in Mombasa County has access to electricity. 61.8 of the population own mobile phones with 29.2% accessing the internet in Mombasa County. Likoni and Jomvu constituencies have the least population accessing the internet at 19.4% and 23.1% respectively.





Nairobi

Nairobi is the capital and largest city of Kenya. The city and its surrounding area constitute the Nairobi City County, earmarked as the 47th County in Kenya. The County has a total area of 696.1 Km² and borders Kiambu County to the North and West, Kajiado to the South and Machakos to the East.

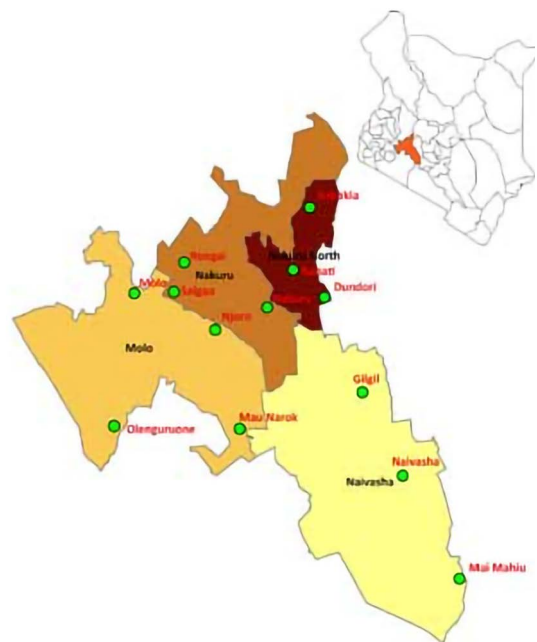
The County has a population of 4,397,073 people with the entire population considered an urban population given the size of the county and the population density. 96.7% of Nairobi households have access to electricity. 69.1% of the population in Nairobi own mobile phones with 43% of the population accessing the internet. Mathare constituency and Embakasi record the least populations accessing the internet at 24.8% and 27.7% respectively.



Nakuru

Nakuru County lies within the central parts of Kenya's Great Rift Valley and covers an area of approximately 7,504.9 Km². Nakuru County Borders eight Counties, namely, Laikipia to the North-East, Kericho to the West, Narok to the South-West, Kajiado and Kiambu to the South-East, Baringo to the North, Nyandarua to the East and Bomet to the West.

Nakuru County has a population of 2,162, 202 people with 51.5% of the population classified as rural. 64.3% of Nakuru households have access to electricity. Additionally, 52.7% of the population in Nakuru own mobile phones with 21.4% of the population accessing the internet in the county. Kuresoi North and Kuresoi South have the least populations accessing the internet at 5.6% and 6.5% of the population respectively.

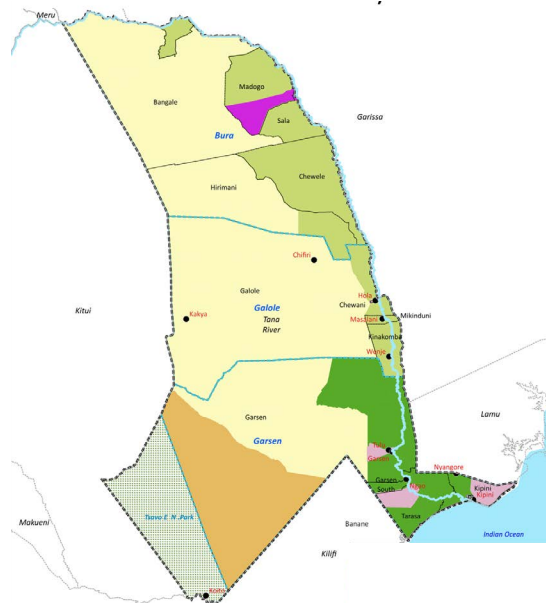




Tana River

Tana River County with a total area of 39,190.6 Km² is one of the six Counties in the Coast region of Kenya. It borders Kitui County to the West, Garissa County to the North East, Isiolo County to the North, Lamu County to the South East and Kilifi County to the South.

The county has a population of 315,943 people with 76.4% (240,221) of the population classified as rural populations. Only 26.1% of the population in Tana River have access to electricity. Mobile phone ownership is low in Tana River with only 31.6% of the population owning mobile phones. Population accessing the internet is also significantly low at 6% of the entire population with Bura and Garsen constituencies reporting 4.1% and 6.0% respectively.



Turkana

Turkana is the largest county (71,597.6 Km²) in Kenya located in the Northwest of Kenya with its headquarters situated at Lodwar Town. It borders Uganda to the west, South Sudan and Ethiopia to the North and Northeast respectively. Internally, it borders West Pokot and Baringo Counties to the South, Samburu County to the Southeast, and Marsabit County to the East.

The county has a population of 926,976 people with 84.8% (786,185) of the population classified as rural populations. Only 8.8% of the households has access to electricity, with at least 3 constituencies (Loima, Turkana East and Turkana North) having less than 2% of their households accessing electricity. Only 16% of the population owns mobile phones, with only 4.8% of the population accessing the internet. Again, 3 constituencies Loima, Turkana East and Turkana North) have less than 2% of their populations accessing the internet.



Methodology

Amnesty International Kenya combined a mixed methodology approach with an in-depth analysis of the contextual issues around digital ID in Kenya.

This perception study uses qualitative methods to understand how citizens feel about the country's readiness to shift to a digital ID system. The focus of this study is to look at the perceptions of citizens informed by their experiences. The objective of which is to highlight implementation concerns from the citizen's perspective, and from this, to provide recommendations for the adoption of an inclusive and rights-respecting digital ID system. This research framework is adaptable and can be consistently applied across a range of settings and variables.

This method identified and contextualized both positive and disruptive developments, to explain public apprehension, as well as the narratives which frame citizen's understanding of digital ID in Kenya.

Conducting a perception study on citizens' perspectives on Maisha Namba allowed us to compare, draw lessons, and consolidate learning about the trends, systems and local context which influence the narratives which frame citizen's understanding of digital ID in Kenya.

This study conducted field missions in nine counties across Kenya—Kwale, Mombasa, Tana River, Nairobi, Nakuru, Turkana, Garissa, and Kisumu. The selection of these nine counties was strategic, reflecting their geographical and socio-economic significance within the Maisha Namba ecosystem. Mombasa and Nairobi, being major cities, provide a snapshot of urban readiness for digital ID, while Nakuru and Kisumu represent rapidly urbanizing areas with cosmopolitan populations. Coastal regions such as Kwale, and Tana River offer insights into the unique challenges and opportunities in areas with significant rural-urban divides. Garissa and Turkana, as border counties, were included to assess the readiness of marginalized and underserved populations, whose access to digital infrastructure or access to citizenship registration

may be historically limited. Collectively, these regions offer a broad cross-section of Kenya's socio-economic landscape, which is crucial for understanding the national implications of the Maisha Namba.

Participants were selected to represent diverse demographics, including urban and rural populations, to capture a wide range of perspectives on the Maisha Namba initiative.

The participant sample included men and women between 18-65 years, working in varying occupations such as students, public and private sector representatives, civil society representatives, community leaders, local authorities, religious leaders and key informants. The perceptions of participants in each county were collected through conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) where prepared and structured open-ended questionnaires were administered to participants, with questions read aloud to ensure accessibility. Responses were recorded directly by the research team to ensure clarity and completeness. The research analysis here included evaluating recorded responses of the participants, analysis of context and subtext, against research indicators. The research findings, conclusion and recommendations were further validated.



Analysis of Findings

Level of Public Awareness on Maisha Namba.

The first research objective focused on assessing the level of public awareness among citizens about the Maisha Namba eco-system. This assessment sought to understand how well-informed citizens are about the purpose, benefits, and implications of transitioning to a digital ID system.

Public awareness refers to the obligation of the State to ensure that people are informed about laws, and government projects, thereby enabling them to make informed decisions and take appropriate actions. This information should be widespread as it directly affects people's capacity and willingness to engage with a government project or service. Article 10 (2) (a) of the Kenyan Constitution requires the state to foster public awareness by conducting meaningful public participation.

Public participation as a constitutional principle encompasses citizens' right to be involved in the public decision-making process. The legal reasoning here is that Kenyans as adult citizens are fully capable of making decisions about matters which affect their current and future livelihoods. The 2024 case of *Aura v Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Health & 11 others* where the Kenyan High Courts deemed three pieces of legislation as unconstitutional, reiterated that

“Public participation is not an abstract notion; it must be purposive and meaningful.”

This requires that government bodies at both the national and county levels actively engage the public in the formulation and implementation of laws, policies and public programs. The

above judgement provided for the components of ‘meaningful’ public participation which place an obligation on governments to establish accessible platforms for dialogue, seek feedback on proposed laws, and show a commitment to adjusting policies in response to citizen contributions. Through meaningful public participation, the government not only fulfils its responsibility to involve citizens in decision making processes, thereby building trust and transparency.

This research objective is closely linked to both citizens' readiness to uptake Maisha Namba and the overall implementation of a rights-respecting and inclusive digital ID system in Kenya. The study sought to ascertain the level of public awareness assessing by the number of respondents who have about Maisha Namba, as well as the depth of their understanding of digital ID as a concept of legal identity and the extent of their understanding of the Maisha Namba ecosystem. A high level of public awareness under this research objective was indicated by the number of participants who had heard of Maisha Namba, as well as how well they could describe its various aspects.

Throughout the counties, most of the responses revealed low level of public awareness regarding the Maisha Namba ecosystem. Most participants did not have prior knowledge of Maisha Namba. Some participants were familiar with Maisha Namba having ‘heard about it’ through the grapevine, or social media. Several participants across various counties reported that in the ordinary course of acquiring citizen registration documents between 2023 and 2024, they had expected the current ID card but obtained a Maisha Card. For many of these participants this formed their first encounter Maisha Namba and often participants had not previously heard of Maisha Namba.

Where participants were familiar with or had heard of Maisha Namba, their responses indicated a lack of understanding of the various components of Maisha Namba or on how this digital ID system would alter the way that they currently access digital government services. In all the focus group discussions (FGDs), most of the participants who had heard of Maisha Namba heard about the project perceived it to be a duplication of the Huduma Namba and did not understand the differences. Furthermore, only a few participants mentioned hearing about Maisha Namba during its launch through mainstream media. Most of the participants who had heard of Maisha Namba reported having never attended a public participation meeting. Highlighting a significant gap in public communication and outreach efforts by the government on Maisha Namba. Due to this low level of public awareness on Maisha Namba many responses indicated misconceptions about Maisha Namba. An overwhelming majority of participants across all counties reported a significant level of skepticism towards Maisha Namba. This included skepticism over the capacity of the government to secure personal information, and suspicions around the 'true' motivations for digital ID as a trend of digital transformation. These findings highlight the need for clear communication and public education on the purpose and function of Maisha Namba. This indicates a low level of public trust which was found to be linked to the perception of citizens towards public participation done on Maisha Namba.

Some participants across the various counties reported attending public participation meetings which were locally organized. However, every participant who attended such a meeting also reported that there was no real opportunity to provide feedback, and many perceived these efforts as a 'box ticking exercise' worrying that their feedback would not be taken into consideration ultimately.

“I was invited for a meeting by our chief, but he did not explain what the meeting was all about.

The Principal Secretary came to explain about Maisha Namba, but it was not meaningful because it was done in haste, and we did not clearly understand what he was talking about. The forum only included the elderly with no youths present.” - Participant, Nakuru County

In general, a lack of public awareness on Maisha Namba was noted even though the system has been rolled out and several participants were current Maisha Card holders. Where participants in focus group discussions who already held Maisha Cards report limited knowledge of the system, this highlights a failure in the communication strategy, with citizens feeling out of touch with the government's efforts. A similar disparity was observed with the Huduma Namba. With many citizens reportedly unsure of its purpose, and with widespread concerns about data privacy, the project faced confusion and skepticism.

As with Maisha Namba, this breakdown in communication is attributable to inadequate public awareness. Despite national campaigns, the Huduma Namba rollout faced public resistance, and the initiative ultimately stalled. In conclusion, the lack of meaningful, consistent and widespread public participation efforts by the Kenyan government has negatively impact citizens' willingness and readiness to take up Maisha Namba. For Maisha Namba to succeed, these lessons from Huduma Namba need to be addressed, particularly in fostering trust through transparency and active public participation.

Citizens' Perceptions on the Country's Readiness for the Maisha Namba Transition.

The second research objective aimed to gauge citizen's perception as to the readiness of themselves and their communities in terms of transitioning to a digital identity ecosystem. These perceptions were informed by their own experiences and those within their communities. Citizen readiness in terms of the Maisha Namba initiative refers to the level of awareness, engagement, and capability of individuals to adapt to and utilize the digital identification system effectively. This objective is inextricably linked to the first objective as readiness ultimately includes understanding the purpose and function of the Maisha Namba. Further, it involves being equipped with the necessary digital literacy to navigate the registration process and manage their information responsibly.

A citizen or community that is 'ready' to uptake Maisha Namba should be free from barriers to access citizenship and should have the requisite means—, being availability and access to energy and ICT infrastructure: that is access to technology and internet connectivity; as well as adequate knowledge on digital rights,

data hygiene and digital literacy enabling them to derive the best benefit from a digital ID system. Successful readiness under this research objective was marked by the level of public confidence in the system, awareness of their digital rights, and reported access to the resources and infrastructure needed facilitate smooth adoption, particularly among vulnerable or populations experiencing the digital divide .

This research objective was analyzed in three parts.

- Citizens' perspectives on the usability of current public digital platforms such as E-citizen.
- The number of participants who were current Maisha Card holders.
- Citizens' perceptions on barriers to access for Persons Living with Disabilities.

Citizens' Perspectives on the usability of current public digital platforms such as E-citizen

The design of a public digital platform is crucial as this determines the usability of the platform. Public digital platforms should be designed in a way which ensures that users can easily and effectively navigate the system, thereby enhancing accessibility, reducing errors, and fostering trust and adoption

E-Citizen, is one such digital platform, a comprehensive online portal through which Kenyans access more than what the government puts at 16,000 services. This usually requires users to navigate through multiple sections, screens and pages. Launched as a part of Kenya's digital ID, Gava Mkononi App, is the more recent addition to Kenya's digital public service landscape which, aims to streamline access to government services through a mobile app. This platform not only consolidates several E-Citizen services but also incorporates a digital ID system for user authentication. Gava Mkononi represents a significant advancement in Kenya's efforts to implement digital ID and establish a robust Digital Public Infrastructure. The usability

of these digital platforms is central to their accessibility. It is important that these platforms are designed to be usable by various populations to promote the implementation of an inclusive and rights-respecting digital ID system in Kenya. Further, the effective usability of these digital platforms is essential for a successful adoption of Maisha Namba.

It was noted that most participants had E-citizen accounts, with the border populations reporting lower presence on the digital platform. Participants here reported accessing e-citizen from a personal phone or other such device but mostly from cyber cafes. It was further noted that many participants who reported using cyber cafes were above the age of 35. All these participants reiterated that they opted for cyber cafes due to the difficulties faced when navigating the E-citizen platform. Participants repeatedly noted that they particularly struggled with functionalities such as scanning and uploading documents onto the platform. This was also attributed to their decreased ability to navigate their mobile devices. Highlighting a unique challenge which did not affect the youth participants – under 35 years of age.

In addition to personal devices and cyber cafes, Huduma centers and local government offices emerged as the second most utilized means of accessing government services online. This reliance on physical locations indicates that a significant portion of the population continues to depend on in-person assistance for public services. This dependence corresponds with the reported difficulties in navigating digital platforms and may indicate lower levels of digital literacy or limited access to personal technology, potentially hindering the successful adoption of Kenya's digital ID.

Furthermore, an analysis of the cost implications revealed that using a cybercafé was the most

expensive option. This is due to the combined costs of government fees, assistance charges, and cybercafé usage fees.

The prevalence of cybercafes use in accessing digital government services further raises readiness concerns especially in consideration of the privacy risks associated with public cyber cafes. The safety and sustainability of this method should be considered in conjunction with digital literacy levels to assess the extent of digital hygiene practices, such as password protection, among individuals who frequently use cyber cafés to access platforms like E-Citizen. This is because citizen readiness for digital public services involves both the proficiency of the users and the quality of the digital platforms they interact with. Improving user design can help enhance readiness across different age groups and ensure a more inclusive digital environment. Citizens' readiness to

effectively uptake and utilize digital public services is influenced not only by their individual technological skills but also by the design and usability of the platforms. There is a clear need for improved design that accommodates diverse user needs and abilities.

In summary, although the younger citizens may feel prepared or confident in their ability to navigate the Maisha Namba digital systems via personal devices, the notable reliance on cyber cafés and Huduma Centers suggests that a considerable segment of the population may lack the know how to navigate the digital landscape independently. This suggests a need for any upcoming digital ID platforms to be designed in a manner which allows for the varied levels of digital literacy among various Kenyan populations.

The Number of Participants Who Were Current Maisha Card Holders.

A high number of individuals taking steps towards obtaining a Maisha Namba indicates a significant level of awareness and interest in participating in digital ID initiatives. This suggests that citizens are capable of engaging with the system and are motivated to be part of the digital transformation. Moreover, an increased number of individuals actively taking up Maisha Namba could suggest a positive indication on the accessibility of requisite energy and ICT infrastructure, and on the level of public awareness. This would therefore indicate positively on the perceived capacity of citizens to take up digital ID in Kenya. Conversely, if the numbers are low, this may indicate barriers in access to technology and infrastructure,

low digital literacy levels, or a lack of public awareness. This would indicate negatively on the perceived capacity of citizens to take up digital ID in Kenya.

A cross-cutting finding from the FGDs is that only a few participants reported actually having the Maisha Namba card. Of all the participants across counties, three were Maisha Card holders, reporting from Turkana, Malindi and Garissa. All these participants reported obtaining their Maisha Card unintentionally; through the ordinary course of seeking citizen's registration processes. This mainly included the process of replacing their ID.

Citizen's Perceived Barriers to Adoption

In examining the adoption of digital ID systems during FGDs, several perceived barriers emerged which could impede the widespread acceptance and adoption of Maisha Namba in Kenya. Participants highlighted issues such as internet connectivity, inadequate ICT infrastructure, digital literacy, and limited public trust in government systems as significant challenges. Understanding and addressing these barriers

is essential for ensuring that Maisha Namba is implemented in rights-respecting and inclusive manner.

From the FGDs with Kenyans across the country, the following issues were identified as cutting across the various counties. These issues were reportedly perceived by participants as barriers to the adoption of Maisha Namba within their communities. These include.

Internet Connectivity is the foundation for accessing, managing and utilising any digital service. The success of the Maisha Namba digital ID system relies on users' ability to interact seamlessly with online platforms. In Kenya, disparities in internet connectivity between urban and rural areas pose a significant barrier, potentially excluding entire populations from fully benefiting from the Maisha Namba system.

Government registration offices are crucial for obtaining identification documents, including those related to the Maisha Namba system. In Kenya, many individuals, particularly in rural and remote areas, face challenges in accessing civil documentation services due to the limited number of government offices and registration centers. This limited availability poses a barrier to the successful implementation and widespread adoption of Maisha Namba, as it hinders the ability of residents in these areas to engage with the Maisha Namba system effectively. From the study, it was noted that in each county outside of Nairobi, and Mombasa, there was only one Huduma Center serving very large populations in geographically vast counties. In locations such as Turkana County, considering its sheer size and the distance between a citizen in need of registration services and a Huduma Center or registration suffices were several hundred kilometres.

Public trust and confidence are essential for the successful implementation of any government project, including Maisha Namba, and are closely tied to effective public participation. Conducting public participation as a mere formality rather than conducting a meaningful public participation may impede the successful implementation and adoption of Maisha Namba. Additionally, the failure to incorporate citizens' feedback and opinions into the implementation and design process may further undermine the project's success and acceptance.

Digital literacy directly impacts a person's ability to interact with and utilise digital ID systems. A population that lacks digital skills may find it difficult to complete online registration processes, access digital ID services, or understand and protect their digital information. Moreover, inadequate digital literacy can exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly for marginalized groups such as the elderly,

low-income individuals, and those in rural areas. Without adequate digital literacy, these vulnerable groups risk being further excluded from accessing essential services via the Maisha Namba ecosystem.

Increased Costs relating to civil registration which include fees for application, renewal, verification, and documentation, present a significant barrier for low-income individuals and marginalized communities. The implementation of the Maisha Namba ecosystem feature will see an increase in most civil registration fees including birth registration, replacement and registration of identity cards. This financial burden may discourage or prevent many from participating in the digital ID system, undermining the promise of efficient public service delivery. Further, although citizens may be willing to engage with digital services, the high costs associated with certain access methods, particularly cyber cafés, may exacerbate existing disparities in digital readiness. This underscores the need for more inclusive and cost-effective solutions to facilitate the widespread adoption of the Maisha Namba system. Thus, indicating the need for more inclusive and cost-effective solutions to ensure widespread adoption of Maisha Namba and address existing disparities in digital readiness.

“For us, Chiefs demand a fee that ranges from KES 400-600 to have the ID application for my child. I asked them to provide an official receipt for this, which they refused to do. They could also not explain why I needed to give out this fee.” – Participant, Tana River

County.

Persons with Disabilities risk exclusion from

digital ID as a minority group. They face considerable barriers to adopting digital ID systems, including pervasive societal stigma that can deter engagement with these platforms. The importance of civil registration for PWDs is underscored by its role in accessing critical medical and specialized care. Additionally, concerns about the adaptability of digital ID platforms for individuals with visual and mobility impairments highlight the need for inclusive design to ensure equitable access. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring that digital ID systems serve all segments of the population effectively.

“I got a disability card, then I got another one –I was required to register for another one under E-Citizen which is already hectic for Persons with Disabilities since there is need of assistance in navigating the system.”

- Participant, Nakuru County

Across the counties where we conducted this research, several consistent challenges emerged that were perceived by participants as barriers to the adoption of Maisha Namba. Participants perceived these issues as significant obstacles, reflecting the complex interplay of technological, economic, and social factors that influence the

successful implementation of digital identity systems.

The lack of reliable internet connectivity in many areas creates a significant obstacle, particularly in remote or underserved communities where access to basic digital infrastructure is limited. The scarcity of government offices, such as Huduma Centres, further compounds this challenge, making it difficult for individuals to access essential services and information related to Maisha Namba registration and usage. In addition, a prevailing low level of digital literacy and lack of awareness on Maisha Namba adds another layer of complexity. This lack of trust can foster scepticism and hesitation among individuals, making them less likely to embrace a new digital identification system.

Citizens' Lived Experiences, Perceptions and Anticipated Implementation Challenges in Obtaining Maisha Namba

“... The inability of our parents to pay for ID led to poor police-community relations and some had to live in the forest...I was rained on for 8 hours in fear of police arrest due to lack of identification card... The catholic church assisted us in championing for our legal recognition through the bishop in 2005. We were later invited for a meeting in Nairobi where some officers requested us to make a statue expressing the challenges the Makonde Community was facing, especially on lack of IDs. On presenting

these statues, they were forcefully taken away.... We united with a local organization and later with the Kenya Human Rights Commission. The commission collected data on the number of people who wanted to go back to their country and those who wanted to be issued with IDs. The majority chose to have access to IDs. We wrote letters to the President requesting for a meeting to express our concerns. We were denied entrance to the statehouse. The Human Rights Commission and the then Cabinet



Secretary for interior assisted us in getting there. We were given 20 minutes to express our issues to the president. After listening to us, the president confirmed that we would be recognized as Kenyans. Registration process started in 2016 and in February 2017, we received our IDs. However, those who did not register for the IDs have never recognized... si tumeteseke, tumeteseke .”

- Participant, Makonde Community

This was the third and final research objective which was aimed at evaluating public perception of the process of acquiring identification documents in a digital ID system, as these documents are crucial for various essential services, understanding individual experiences in navigating these processes was key. This included citizen insights on the efficiency, convenience, and accessibility of government services related to identification. The responses here were instrumental to developing the recommendations of this report. This feedback helped us to contribute to the development of practical recommendations on the interventions needed to ensure that Maisha Namba is rolled out in an inclusive and rights-respecting manner. Most of the respondents from border communities like the Pemba, Makonde and minorities like the Nubians indicated that they experienced myriads of challenges in acquiring

identification documents. Moreover, we recorded experiences of two participants who had one parent from a mainstream Kenyan tribe (Luhya and Kikuyu) who despite this underwent vetting. All participants who underwent vetting reported that there was no standard procedure for vetting thus the length of the process depended on the officer of the day. Further, the process was reportedly bureaucratic being characterized by inordinate and inexplicable delays.

“My husband is from a different tribe and for my children to get ID I have to present my ID and swear an affidavit because they acquired their IDs in a different county” Nairobi FGD participant

“....it was easier for students to get their IDs.... but as a Muslim student my documents which I submitted while applying for my ID were misplaced, vetting was hectic, and the chief could not show up when scheduled for vetting. After my ID was processed, it had an error, and this took me a total of 5 years to get my ID” - Kisumu FGD Participant

The acquisition of IDs for first time registration requires pre-existing documents such as birth certificates or death certificates. Most respondents highlighted that this posed a challenge and frustrations in cases where grandparents' and parents' identification documents could not be traced, consequently, ending up without the identification documents.

“My birth certificate was destroyed during the Post Election Violence in Uasin Gishu. I lost my father to these clashes. When I tried to do a replacement of the document, they requested for dad's Death Certificate who had died out of the clashes. Given the circumstances during the period had buried my father without a death notification hence no death certificate had been issued. I tried reaching out to the chief to write a letter to facilitate the process of acquiring the death certificate, the chief said they did not witness the burial and so couldn't do the letter. I was forced to go back to Nakuru to apply for a new birth certificate and looked for a woman to testify that my mom was

a single parent, and my certificate indicates i am from a single parent” - Nakuru FGD Participant

Additionally, the bureaucracy is further exacerbated by the need for multiple visits to government offices, which is both costly and burdensome, especially for residents of remote and underserved areas. Additionally, respondents reported frequent demands for unofficial fees from local administrators to expedite the process, adding another layer of complexity and inequity to the system.

“There is no electricity in the government offices to get Birth certificate and National ID in Mukoe, Lamu. The advantage of the current system is the fact that the application forms are printed. What happens when we switch to a digital system that's heavily reliant on electronic devices? In Kiunga, there's no public means, and the water transport is dependent on a Miraa boat, which is KES 3000, private boat is KES 50,000. The only government office

nearby is in Mukoe. Our organization has been assisting in acquisition of IDs in Kiunga because the government office is not resourced to do it. They spend KES 60,200 on average daily..... The community is quite poverty-stricken, out of a 200k investment, they're only able to get 39 people to register. 300 is too high for them.” - Participant Kwale FGD

“it took me 6 years to get ID due to political reasons, chief requested for a bribe yet at that time I was a student. There is corruption....” - Participant Nakuru

FGD

“There's a delay noted in acquiring an ID, and vetting is mandatory is every location. Currently

it is being done by chiefs. Chiefs demand a fee that ranges from 400-600 to have the ID application. One participant mentioned that they refuse to provide a receipt for this and could not explain why they needed to pay out this fee. 100-200 is demanded for 'lunch' for the registration officers. Ids take at least 3-6 months to process.”

- FGD participant in Tana River

Based on these responses, it was clear that there are still many migrant, border and minority communities who are excluded from the current identity system. Consequently, many participants expressed skepticism about their inclusion and utilization of a digital ID system.

“I tried applying for my ID after high school, I could not apply without the school leaving certificate, I was requested for a letter from chief as a confirmation that I hailed from his area. “Mzee wa Nyumba Kumi” booked

me for vetting but after 3 months there was no invitation for vetting. I went after another 3 months without success. One and a half years later, I was invited for vetting. However, due to an error in my pronoun on the chief's letter, I was referred to chief for another letter. I waited another one and a half years for another vetting. The vetting panel posed irrelevant questions, for example

which schools I went to and who were my teachers, which I considered to be frustrating. It took me 3 years. 8 months to finally get the document. I was requested for 100 to cater for vetting minutes which was essentially a bribe.”

- participant from Nakuru FGD



Conclusion

A Summary of Citizens' Perspectives on the Country's Readiness for Digital ID.

This report sheds light on key insights into Kenya's readiness to adopt the Maisha Namba digital ID system, based on citizen perspectives. The most striking realization, or "Aha" moment, is the critical need for a citizen-centered approach to digital identity.

- Citizenship Shouldn't Come at a Hefty Price Tag** – Identification is a fundamental right, not a privilege contingent on financial means. Charging for processes like acquisition and renewal of Maisha Namba could deepen existing inequalities, particularly in marginalized counties such as Turkana and Tana River, where multidimensional poverty is prevalent. Making digital ID accessible to all, without financial barriers, is essential for inclusivity.
- Data Privacy Isn't Optional – It's Essential** – In an age where data is power, protecting citizens' personal information is non-negotiable. The government must ensure stringent data privacy safeguards during the Maisha Namba transition to foster public trust. Transparency, accountability, and ethical use of citizens' data should be at the core of this initiative.
- Digital Inclusivity: Leave No One Behind** – For Maisha Namba to be truly transformative, it must be inclusive of all, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, physical abilities, or geographical location. Bridging the digital divide requires significant investment in infrastructure, inclusive design, and policies that ensure everyone can participate in

Kenya's digital future.

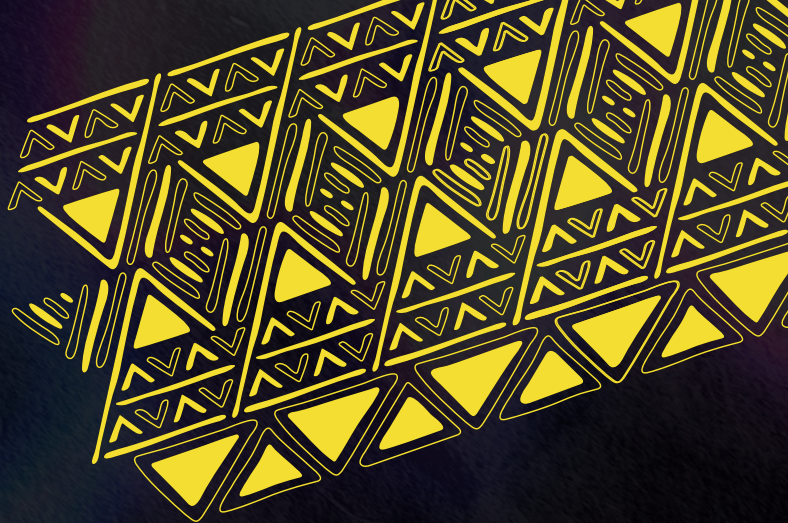
- Digital Literacy:** The Key to Unlocking Benefits– Equipping citizens with the skills needed to navigate the digital world is critical. Without digital literacy, the benefits of Maisha Namba will remain out of reach for many, further entrenching the digital divide. A robust digital literacy program is necessary for empowering individuals to make the most of the digital ID system.
- Public Awareness:** A Critical Shortfall – One of the most alarming findings from this report is the gap in public understanding of the Maisha Namba system. Misinformation and misconceptions about Maisha Namba are exacerbated by the lack of communication, particularly in Kiswahili, leaves many citizens uninformed about the system's purpose and implications. Public participation and awareness campaigns must be comprehensive, inclusive, and tailored to Kenya's diverse population to build trust and foster acceptance.

In conclusion, the path to a successful digital ID system lies in inclusivity, transparency, and education. The government must prioritize the rights and needs of its citizens, ensuring that Maisha Namba serves as a tool for empowerment, not exclusion. By addressing these critical challenges, Kenya can pave the way for a truly equitable digital transformation.

Recommendations

From an analysis of the perspectives of citizens collected from this research, the following recommendations emerge. If adopted, these recommendations aim to address the findings of the study and provide actionable steps for the successful implementation of the Maisha Namba digital ID ecosystem:

- Ensure Meaningful and Robust Public Participation** – The Ministry of Interior should prioritize meaningful and effective public participation to raise awareness about Maisha Namba and ensure that citizens are well-informed about its purpose and benefits. Additionally, the Ministry of Interior should ensure that Maisha Namba ecosystem is legally grounded and engaging in robust public participation on the legal provisions for Maisha Namba.
- Rethink Costs for Identification Documents** – In full realization of the poverty levels across Kenya, the costs associated with obtaining and renewing identification documents should be eliminated, ensuring that all citizens have equal access to their right to identification without financial barriers. The proposed costs were found to be prohibitive and will disproportionately affect vulnerable populations and exacerbate inequality.
- Decentralize & Expand Reach of Government Services** – To improve access, government registration services should be decentralized further, particularly to remote and underserved areas, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of location, can access services. More government and registration offices should be established, particularly in remote and underserved areas, to ensure that all citizens can access services efficiently.
- Improve Digital Infrastructure** – Investments in digital infrastructure are necessary to guarantee seamless access to integrated services across all regions, supporting the Maisha Namba system's functionality.
- Rollout Maisha Namba in Phases** – The implementation of Maisha Namba should be carried out in phases, with careful monitoring and reporting of progress and challenges, to ensure redress before full-scale adoption.
- Enhance Digital Literacy** – Comprehensive civic education on the use of digital devices and digital government platforms should be conducted to address the widespread challenge of digital illiteracy, ensuring that all citizens can navigate the digital ID system (Gava Mkononi) effectively.
- Ensure Inclusivity for Persons with Disabilities (PWD)** – Efforts should be made to sensitize PWDs about Maisha Namba, offering reasonable accommodations to ensure they are not excluded from accessing identification services, as they have been under the current system.
- Abolish the Vetting Process** – While the government has abolished vetting processes for identification documents and acknowledged its discriminatory nature, the new verification guidelines may rollback to vetting. Affirmative action should be implemented to ensure the issuance of identification documents particularly to those historically excluded from accessing IDs.
- Strengthening Data Protection and Digital Security** – Digital identification systems come significant responsibilities regarding data protection. The government must remain vigilant about the risks posed by digital technologies. Safeguarding personal information and ensuring robust security measures are crucial for maintaining public confidence.
- Promote Transparency and Accountability** – Transparency and accountability should be prioritized in all processes related to the acquisition of government services, ensuring trust in the system.



Contact the team

**Victor Ndede, Technology &
Human Rights Manager**
(victor.ndede@amnesty.or.ke)

**Chepkoech Rotich, Technology &
Human Rights Program Officer**
(Chepkoech.rotich@amnesty.or.ke)



AmnestyKenya



amnesty_kenya



Amnesty International Kenya

www.amnestykenya.org

KENYA

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

