

How children in Kenya are influencing local government through local children's charters

16 August – by Grace Nyoro and Maria Lapa

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Kenya is steadily moving towards the full realisation of child rights but there continues to be substantial disparities across the country. While there has been progress in school enrolment, child survival and a reduction in female genital mutilation there are still challenges in gender equality, public participation and access to essential services. The 2010 constitution and related policies make provisions for entitlement to services and participation however, there have been weaknesses in the implementation of these legal and policy frameworks.

During the lead up to the Kenyan national elections in 2017 children across Kenya took part in a children's charter calling for their voices to be heard in the governance agenda. Over 40,000 children from all social backgrounds expressed their concerns on the Government's development plans following coordinated and sustained mobilisation over a seven-month period. The result has been an increase in agency with more children embracing their role in making change happen; an activated youth network campaigning on a range of similar issues and commitments from local government leaders.

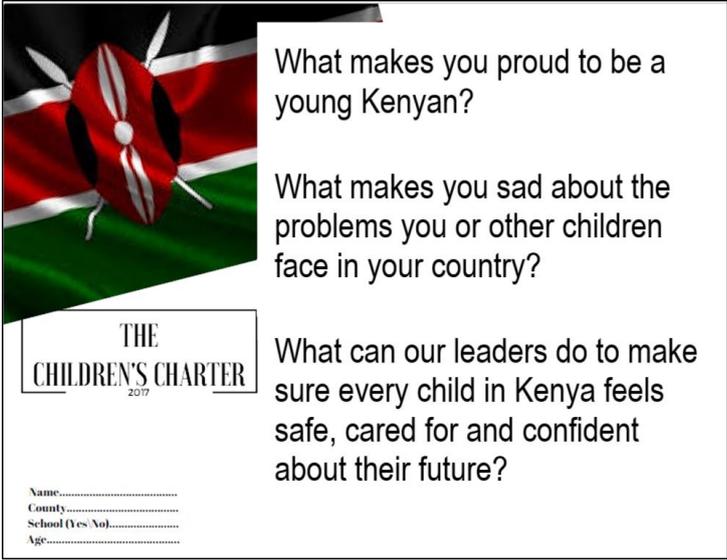
What is the Children's Charter?

The children's charter represents the socio-political concerns and aspirations of young Kenyan children across the country. It started with a postcard campaign across schools, communities and county assemblies, where face-to-face meetings were held with children to discuss the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) framework and its importance to local and national development plans. Children were then asked to reflect on their own circumstances, the issues that concerned them and what action they would like to see from Kenyan leaders.

The postcard data was collected, analysed and further discussed with children. Many believed that the Government's provision of free primary education was a significant achievement, they also felt proud to be citizens and wanted a peaceful environment to grow up in. The concerns emerging from children were violence and the continued barriers to education, peace and food security.

Based on these results representative groups of children¹ drafted local charters with

recommendations for county development plans. With the support of partners, children were able to hand over and discuss the recommendations with local politicians, this was a significant achievement at the time given the political attention on the re-election process unfolding in the country.



What makes you proud to be a young Kenyan?

What makes you sad about the problems you or other children face in your country?

What can our leaders do to make sure every child in Kenya feels safe, cared for and confident about their future?

THE CHILDREN'S CHARTER 2017

Name.....
 County.....
 School (Yes/No).....
 Age.....

¹ Children are elected in each county to represent their peers and they meet quarterly to discuss concerns and issues raised by their constituencies.

The local charters were then consolidated into a national Kenyan Children's Charter which was launched on Universal Children's Day in 2017 by child representatives from each county.

How has the charter influenced the political agenda?

At the time the charter was presented, decision makers showed interest in the recommendations with some making explicit commitments to address concerns raised. There is evidence that some draft development plans are capturing issues raised and in Bungoma County a rescue centre has been constructed as a result of the consultation.

Furthermore, some of the children have now become involved in child-consultations on amendments to the Children's Act calling for provisions to involve children in public participation processes.

The **Kenyan Constitution and legal framework** place a strong emphasis on public participation in decision-making. When presenting the children's charter, children explained that if they represent more than 50% of the Kenyan population and are not being consulted, then the law is not being properly implemented. They asked for the creation of spaces for child participation so they can systematically be part of the decision-making process.

How did the charter represent diverse voices?

During the seven-month mobilisation period there was a deliberate effort to ensure the most excluded children in all countries were represented in this process. Approaches included working with sports associations, utilising popular moments (such as the Day of the African Child), and an emphasis on the leadership of children's networks and local agencies. With greater representation across counties strong partnerships allowed us to reach a higher and more diverse number of children². Partners included [Child Fund](#), [Mtoto News](#), [World Vision](#), [Mathare Youth Sports Association](#), [Moving the Goal Post football](#) and [Save the Children](#).

What have we learnt?

The initiative is one of largest public actions in the global south within the Save the Children alliance, with significant learning for future ambitions to ensure children are supported to have a voice within civil society. The opinions gathered by children have helped Save the Children to further clarify its focus in Kenya within its next strategic plan.

For many participating children the charter hand over represents the first opportunity for them to engage with decision makers. We have observed an increase in self-confidence among young people along with more interest from decision makers and the [media](#).

Partnership, transparency and pooled resources have been important principles underlying the project, creating joint ownership and trust.

Lastly, the simplicity of the postcard tool for surveying the views of children encouraged high numbers of participants. It allowed children from eight to eighteen to express their concerns and recommendations in a simple way that was easy to disseminate across the country.

² Children's networks lead on the framing of priorities and presentation to decision makers; child focused agencies facilitated the participation of children; media agencies ensured there was visibility and wider public engagement; a wider network of supporting agencies (schools, youth clubs, business etc) supported the logistics and coordination of the process.

What next?

As time passes we will start to see the full impact of this approach, but for this to happen children and partners will need to be involved in monitoring and accountability of political promises. The partners in the project will be supporting children to monitor commitments and implementation and continue to utilise the charter and popular platforms.

For internal learning only

Lessons learned

- The **simplicity of the tool** for surveying children was key in reaching such a high number of participants. It allowed children from 8 to 18 years old to express their concerns and recommendations in a simple manner, that was easy to disseminate across the country through the postcards.
- The fact that this campaign was **led by children** and intrinsically aligned with the **SDG agenda** makes it an example of how to successfully progress Save the Children's ambition for campaigning and advocacy.
- **Limited financial resources** prevented the coalition from reaching all 47 counties.
- **Delays in submitting the county integrated development plans**, which were due in January 2018, means that the coalition has not yet been able to assess the extent to which children's recommendations were actually captured.
- **Involving partners from the beginning of the project** was key to ensuring a true sense of joint ownership. Being transparent in every stage of the process guaranteed a good working relationship between partners. A formal partnership could have helped in ensuring delivery of tasks by the agreed timelines by all parties.
- The fact that **children presented their own priorities and recommendations** made it much more impactful and interesting for the decision makers and the media than if it presented by NGOs.
- For many of the participating children, the handover events represented their first opportunity to engage with

Children's views informed Save the Children Kenya's programmatic focus

The Children's Charter exercise and the 40,067 opinions gathered was very relevant and informed the Country Strategic Planning (CSP) process developed by Save the Children Kenya. The issues that children identified as their biggest concerns were part of the CSP discussion and helped us better understand what our programmatic focus should be for the next strategic period. For example, the issue child labour had not been initially identified as significant by the team, but after seeing that most children who responded saw it as one of the country's biggest problems, we decided to include it in our focus.

decision makers. Throughout the process, we observed that their **self-confidence increased** and that with each public event they were more articulate in presenting their recommendations and confident in discussing them with the audience.

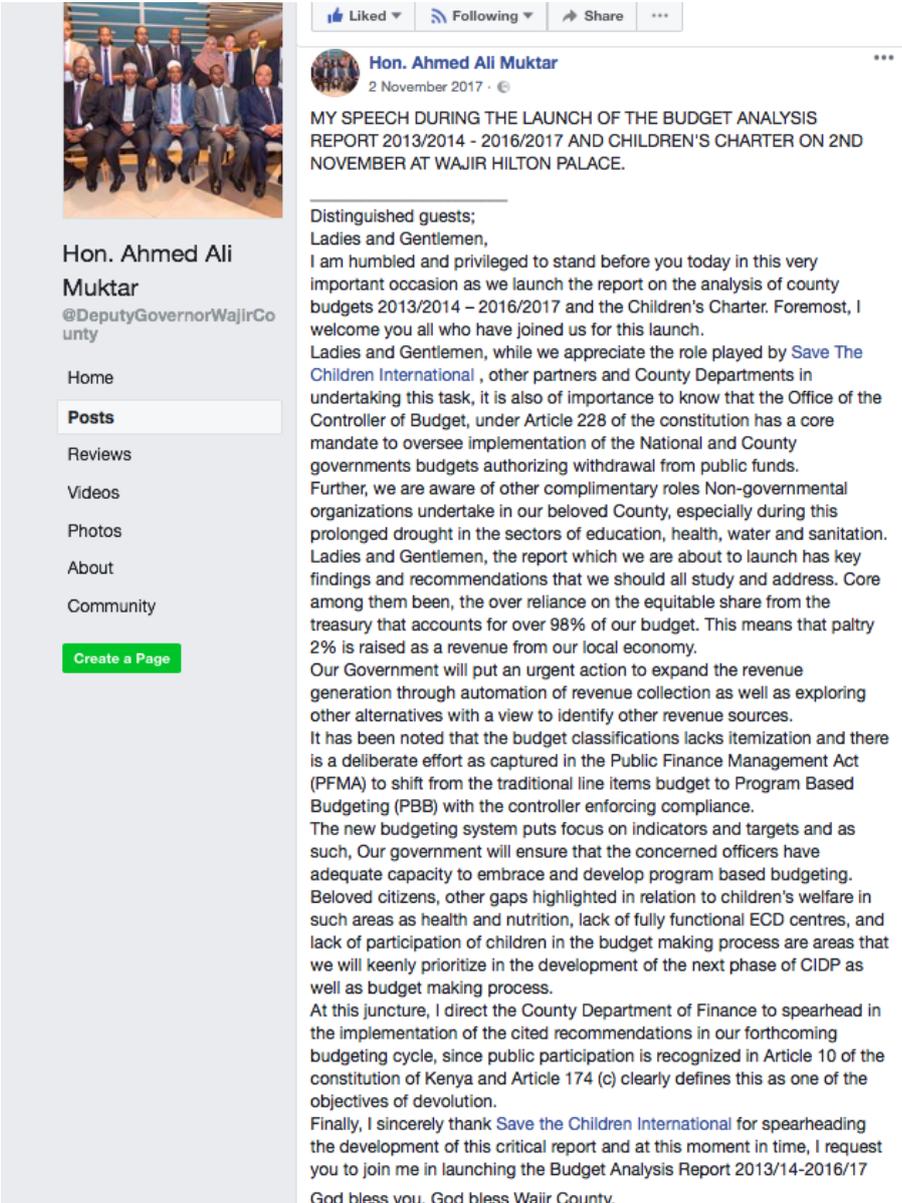
Next steps

- A review of the integration of children's priorities in the development plans will be conducted once these are submitted. This will be followed by a child-led monitoring on the implementation of the relevant priorities throughout the 5-year lifespan of the development plans.
- Partners will use a tool developed by World Vision to evaluate how child-friendly county integrated development plans are.

- The coalition will publish and present a final report to summarise achievements and recommendations, once the development plans are submitted and analysed.
- Save the Children and partners will continue to work to ensure county governments make budgeted allocations for child participation spaces, which would guarantee the sustainability of the initiative and make it autonomous from the coalition.

Annex

Wajir Deputy Governor’s speech during the Children's Charter and Budget Analysis Report



Hon. Ahmed Ali Muktar
@DeputyGovernorWajirCounty

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Hon. Ahmed Ali Muktar
2 November 2017 · 🌐

MY SPEECH DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE BUDGET ANALYSIS REPORT 2013/2014 - 2016/2017 AND CHILDREN'S CHARTER ON 2ND NOVEMBER AT WAJIR HILTON PALACE.

Distinguished guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen,
I am humbled and privileged to stand before you today in this very important occasion as we launch the report on the analysis of county budgets 2013/2014 – 2016/2017 and the Children's Charter. Foremost, I welcome you all who have joined us for this launch.
Ladies and Gentlemen, while we appreciate the role played by [Save The Children International](#), other partners and County Departments in undertaking this task, it is also of importance to know that the Office of the Controller of Budget, under Article 228 of the constitution has a core mandate to oversee implementation of the National and County governments budgets authorizing withdrawal from public funds. Further, we are aware of other complimentary roles Non-governmental organizations undertake in our beloved County, especially during this prolonged drought in the sectors of education, health, water and sanitation. Ladies and Gentlemen, the report which we are about to launch has key findings and recommendations that we should all study and address. Core among them been, the over reliance on the equitable share from the treasury that accounts for over 98% of our budget. This means that paltry 2% is raised as a revenue from our local economy. Our Government will put an urgent action to expand the revenue generation through automation of revenue collection as well as exploring other alternatives with a view to identify other revenue sources. It has been noted that the budget classifications lacks itemization and there is a deliberate effort as captured in the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) to shift from the traditional line items budget to Program Based Budgeting (PBB) with the controller enforcing compliance. The new budgeting system puts focus on indicators and targets and as such, Our government will ensure that the concerned officers have adequate capacity to embrace and develop program based budgeting. Beloved citizens, other gaps highlighted in relation to children's welfare in such areas as health and nutrition, lack of fully functional ECD centres, and lack of participation of children in the budget making process are areas that we will keenly prioritize in the development of the next phase of CIDP as well as budget making process. At this juncture, I direct the County Department of Finance to spearhead in the implementation of the cited recommendations in our forthcoming budgeting cycle, since public participation is recognized in Article 10 of the constitution of Kenya and Article 174 (c) clearly defines this as one of the objectives of devolution. Finally, I sincerely thank [Save the Children International](#) for spearheading the development of this critical report and at this moment in time, I request you to join me in launching the Budget Analysis Report 2013/14-2016/17 God bless you, God bless Wajir County.