



YOUTH FOR
TAX JUSTICE
NETWORK

Pioneering Youth Agency in Policy Making in Kenya

A Detailed Case Study of the Taita
Taveta Youth Service Act (2026)



The Taita Taveta Youth Service Act, assented in 2026, represents a landmark case of youth-led legislative reform in Kenya's devolved governance framework. It is the result of a multi-year process that transformed a youth-driven vision into binding law.

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True youth empowerment begins when young people influence not only ideas, but institutions, budgets, and binding law.

- Jon Kafuko - Programmes Manager (YTJN)

Executive Summary

The Taita Taveta Youth Service Act, assented in 2026, represents a milestone in youth-led policymaking in Kenya's devolved governance framework. Originating from a youth manifesto in 2022, the Bill became law through sustained advocacy, strategic engagement with Members of the County Assembly (MCAs), and technical support by the Youth for Tax Justice Network (YTJN).

YTJN's intervention, implemented under the phase 1 of the project, 'Promoting Domestic Resource Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa,' and phase 2 of the project titled **"Promoting Accountable, Sustainable and Gender Just Domestic Resource Mobilization in Africa"** and funded by Diakonia and Sweden (Sverige), was instrumental in linking youth empowerment to fiscal literacy, domestic resource mobilization, gender justice, and accountable governance.

Highlights of the Report

A youth manifesto, endorsed by Hon. Martha Karua under the Orange Democratic movement (ODM) in 2022, provided the blueprint for county-level legislative reform.

YTJN guided youth groups and MCAs through policy literacy, advocacy, and technical review, ensuring provisions in the Bill were sustainable and gender-responsive.

The Act establishes a structured County Youth Service, linking empowerment initiatives to fiscal planning, civic engagement, and oversight mechanisms.

Lessons from this case provide a replicable model for youth-driven legislation in Kenya and Africa.

Introduction and Background

“For the Youth for Tax Justice Network, youth agency in policymaking means shifting young people from the margins of consultation to the center of decision-making – equipping them with fiscal literacy, legislative knowledge, and organizing power to shape laws, budgets, and accountability systems that determine their futures. It is about transforming participation from symbolic engagement into structured, informed, and institutionalized influence.”

Youth constitute Kenya's largest demographic, yet unemployment, underemployment, and exclusion from governance remain persistent national challenges. Devolved governance, established under the 2010 Constitution, offers counties the power to legislate and implement policies addressing local needs—making it the ideal arena for transformative action.

Our journey began with the Kenya Youth Manifesto-making process ahead of the 2022 general elections. This national consultative exercise united youth networks, civil society organizations, and young leaders to articulate a unified agenda. It was through this process that we built trust, forged alliances, and identified shared priorities—most critically, the need for county-level legislation that could translate youth aspirations into binding law.

The manifesto process led directly to our engagement in Taita Taveta. Recognizing an opportunity to move from advocacy to action, we partnered with the Kenya Young Members of County Assembly (KYMCA) to pilot a legislative initiative that could serve as a replicable model. Taita Taveta County, with its rising youth unemployment and receptive political leadership, became the laboratory for this experiment.

Our deeper motivation extended beyond one county. Our participation in the manifesto process and partnership with Young MCAs was ultimately aimed at building sustained political will across Sub-Saharan Africa to develop policies and laws that promote domestic resource mobilization. We recognized that sustainable development must be financed from within—by expanding the tax base, formalizing economies, and ensuring fair and transparent public resourcing. This requires legislators who understand that investing in youth is not charity, but fiscal strategy.

About the Report

The Youth Service Bill originated as a youth-led initiative, demonstrating that organized, well-informed youth engagement can move policy from advocacy to law. The purpose of this report is to:

- Document the full legislative journey of the Youth Service Bill.
- Highlight the role of youth actors and young MCAs.
- Examine the catalytic contribution of YTJN and its development partners.
- Provide lessons and recommendations for replicating youth-led policy initiatives.

Context and Rationale

Taita Taveta County affirms that youth must not stand at the margins of governance, but at the forefront of shaping its policies, priorities, and progress.
- **Rogers Ngoo, Taita Taveta County Assembly**



Youth unemployment in Taita Taveta County has persistently remained above the national average, reflecting a deeper structural crisis extending beyond mere job scarcity. For years, young people across the county's six sub-counties have faced limited structured training opportunities, minimal civic engagement platforms, and systemic exclusion from economic participation. The consequences have been tangible: idleness, frustration, outward migration, and growing alienation from the institutions designed to serve them. These challenges have necessitated innovative, sustainable and participatory solutions.

Devolved governance, established under the 2010 Constitution, offers counties the power to legislate and implement policies addressing local needs—making it the ideal arena for transformative action. Across the county, young people demanded skills development, civic participation, and economic inclusion. There was also a growing recognition that youth programs should be embedded within county fiscal and governance frameworks to ensure sustainability.

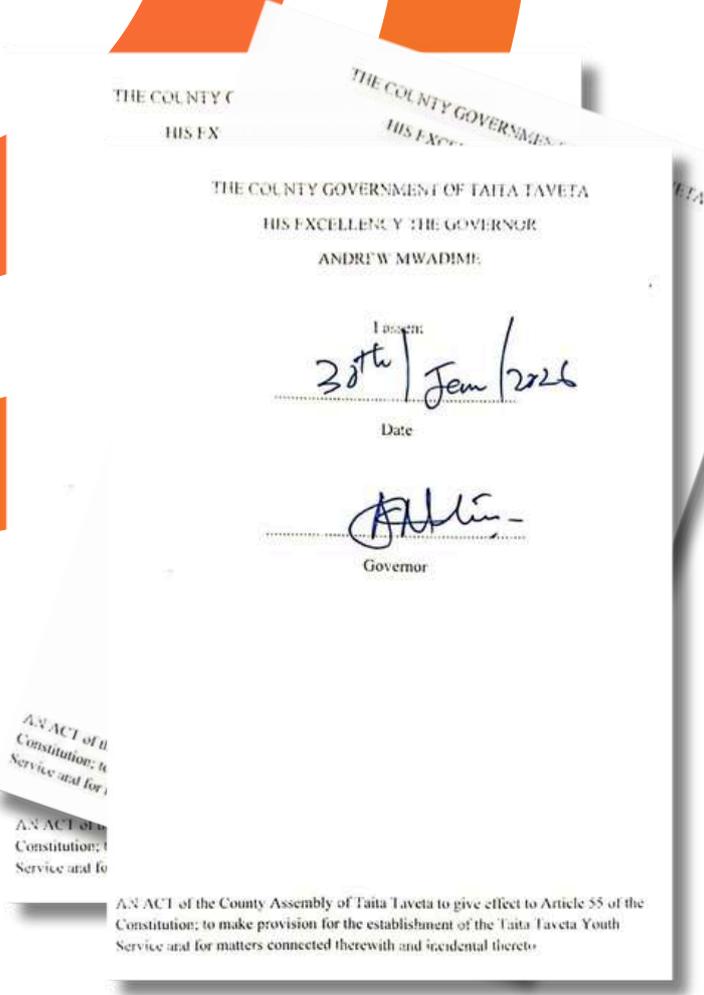
Backed by growing political will within the County Assembly and among key leaders, we positioned youth not merely as beneficiaries, but as co-creators of policy. Through sustained advocacy, technical support, structured dialogue, and civic education, we helped translate youth aspirations into legislative language. At the same time, our engagement contributed to strengthening political commitment by demonstrating that youth-led solutions could be practical, fiscally grounded, and development-oriented.

Key Provisions of the County Youth Service Act, 2026

Establishment of the Taita Taveta County Youth Service

*There is hereby established and maintained in County, **the Taita Taveta County Youth Service**. The functions of the Service shall be –*

- (a) the training of youth to serve the County and to be self-reliant;*
- (b) assist in employment and placement of the trained youth in formal, informal or any other form of employment;*
- (c) instilling a culture of patriotism, responsibility and self-discipline to self and the service of Taita Taveta County.*



Structured vocational and skills development programs. Designed to equip youth with market-relevant technical and entrepreneurial skills that respond to local economic opportunities.

Civic engagement and community service initiatives. Provides platforms for youth to actively contribute to county development while building leadership, responsibility, and public service values.

Transparent recruitment and selection procedures. Establishes clear, merit-based processes to ensure fairness, equal opportunity, and protection from political patronage.

Robust oversight, accountability, and governance mechanisms. Creates structured supervision and monitoring systems to guarantee responsible implementation and prudent use of public resources.

Integration into county planning and budgeting processes. Embeds the Youth Service within official county development plans to secure sustainable funding and long-term institutional support.

Gender-responsive participation frameworks to ensure equitable access. Ensures inclusive participation by addressing structural barriers and promoting equal opportunities for young women and marginalized groups.

From Youth Manifesto to Legislative Agenda (2022–2023)

2022 : Youth Manifesto (Youth Priorities & Asks to Political Leadership)



The journey began with the [Kenya Youth Manifesto 2022](#), a powerful document born from a collaborative effort led by the Youth for Tax Justice Network (YTJN) and over a dozen youth-serving organizations. The manifesto laid out clear, actionable “asks”: county youth policies with dedicated budgets, concrete pathways to employment, and meaningful inclusion in governance.

Our process was premised on Ask #3 on Youth Economic Inclusion, and specifically on Job creation and youth employment. Specifically, youth demanded for the following from political leadership;

1. Provide access to a favorable business environment for economic inclusion with the following indicators: 10% of government leased and for agriculture set aside for young farmers, provide cost based and not profit based tax incentives to address strategic market failures and provide access to affordable capital at the county level by setting up a revolving fund kitty to provide loans to youth in business.
2. Provide an inclusive flexible and equitable vocational education and training responsive to other requirements of the county and national economy and globally competitive,
3. Create an education pathway to allow learners to transition into Technical Vocational Education and Training directly from junior high school. This should be equivalent to a certificate course and the learners can then join other tertiary institutions of their choice. Equally, this certificate can allow them transition into employment.

Hon, Martha Karua of Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) Party, at the time endorsed the manifesto, signaling political support at the national level and increasing legitimacy for county-level follow-up. The manifesto highlighted linkages between youth empowerment and fiscal responsibility, laying the conceptual foundation for future legislation.



2023: Engagement with MCAs and Conceptualizing the Bill



YTJN met the youth leaders and Kenya Young Members of County Assemblies (KYMCA) in Kenya to explore practical avenues for realizing manifesto demands/asks. The MCAs noted that Taita Taveta is a mineral rich region but with high levels of youth unemployment. They further noted that there is a challenge of skilling among the youth.

At the national level, they agreed that there is need to expand the tax base to increase domestic revenue collection. They agreed that as a means of decentralizing the National Youth Service Act, a Taita Taveta County Youth Service Bill be developed to counter issues of youth unemployment and skilling in the region as a means of widening the tax base and increasing revenue collection.

This phase established shared understanding among youth, MCAs, and civil society actors, aligning political and technical objectives.

Legislative Journey and Engagements (2024–2026)

2024 – Drafting, Technical Review, and Committee Sensitization

The Bill underwent multiple draft revisions, reflecting input from youth groups, MCAs, and legal advisors. The Sectoral Committee led detailed clause-by-clause reviews, ensuring alignment with county laws, fiscal policy, and governance frameworks.



YTJN facilitated technical sessions for youth representatives, including:

- Budget literacy: understanding county revenue allocation and expenditure processes
- Fiscal sustainability analysis: linking program design to county revenue streams
- Gender mainstreaming: ensuring inclusivity in recruitment and participation
- Oversight and accountability: mechanisms to monitor fund use and program outcomes

Outcome: a technically sound, fiscally grounded, and gender-responsive draft ready for public engagement.

2025 – Public Participation and MCA Sensitization



Formal public participation involved forums in all county wards. Youth groups, mobilized and supported by YTJN, submitted memoranda outlining priorities and proposals. Key advocacy points included: Transparent recruitment and fair selection criteria, Equitable representation across wards, Integration with county budgeting and resource allocation and Clear mechanisms for accountability and oversight.

MCAs underwent final sensitization sessions to ensure political consensus and cross-party support. The 2025 stage solidified youth influence over final content while strengthening institutional and community buy-in.

2026: Committee of the Whole House Final Sensitization and Gubernatorial Assent



- The Bill underwent clause-by-clause consideration in the Committee of the Whole House, and this resulted into MCAs passing the Bill. Afterwards, the Final version was adopted and forwarded to the Governor of Taita Taveta - Hon. Andrew Mwadime, who assented it on 30th January 2026, making it law.
- **The outcome:** institutionalization of the Taita Taveta County Youth Service, ensuring continuity, transparency, and alignment with county policy frameworks.

Follow through the Journey with Us



Taita Taveta County Assembly - Call for Submission of Memoeranda for the County Youth Service Bill

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[Call for Memoranda](#)



COUNTY ASSEMBLY APPROVES REPORT ON TAITA TAVETA COUNTY YOUTH SERVICE BILL, 2025



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Vijana kunufaika na mswada wa kuwashughulikia masilahi yao Taita Taveta



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[Video Submission](#)



January 2026: Taita Taveta County Youth Service Bill signed into Law



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2025 - Stakeholder Views On The Taita Taveta County Youth Service Bill, 2025



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2024: Kamati ya Vijana na Michezo Bunge la Kaunti Ya Taita Taveta laanda Mswada wa Kuwawezesha Vijana



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YOUTH BILL || Hon.Danson Mwashako, MP Wundanyi Contributing To The Taita Taveta Youth Proposed Bill.



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The Economic Engine: How Youth Employment Mobilizes Revenue?

The genius of the Taita Taveta Youth Service Act lies in its dual impact. It is simultaneously a profound social intervention and a strategic fiscal policy designed to strengthen Kenya's economic foundation from the ground up.

Addressing Kenya's Fiscal Reality

Kenya's public finances face significant strain. According to the World Bank, the country's public debt stands at nearly 68% of GDP, with interest payments consuming over a third of government revenues. This limits crucial investments in healthcare, education, and infrastructure. A primary driver of this fragility is a narrow tax base. Kenya relies heavily on a small cohort of formally employed citizens. Only about 3 million individuals bear the Pay-As-You-Earn (PAYE) burden for a nation of over 50 million.

The Act as a Tax Base Expansion Tool

The Youth Service Act directly attacks this problem by systematically moving young people from the informal, untaxed economy into formal, taxable employment and entrepreneurship. Here's how it creates a virtuous revenue cycle:

From Trainee to Taxpayer: Each graduate placed in formal employment begins contributing through PAYE income tax. Data from the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) is telling: taxpayers aged 21-30 already constitute a significant 42% of the total taxpayer base, proving the immense latent potential of this demographic.

The Consumption Multiplier: Formal employment increases disposable income. This spending, subject to Value Added Tax (VAT), generates additional, sustained revenue for both national and county governments.

Creating Formal Enterprises: The Act's focus on entrepreneurship support helps youth-led micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) formalize. These businesses then start contributing corporate tax, further broadening the revenue stream.

Strengthening the Social Contract: When citizens, especially youth, see their taxes translating directly into quality services and opportunities—like the Youth Service itself, it builds trust. This enhanced tax morale is critical for voluntary compliance and a healthier fiscal ecosystem.

A Replicable Blueprint for Kenya and Beyond

The success in Taita Taveta County in Kenya is a proof of concept. The Youth for Tax Justice Network (YTJN) envisions this not as a singular victory, but as a scalable, adaptable model for other counties and nations grappling with similar demographic and fiscal challenges.

The Toolkit for Replication

The process has created a tangible roadmap:

Local Advocacy and Political Partnership. The journey begins with building coalitions between youth organizations and legislators through the various associations that they are organized in, such as the Kenya Members of County Assembly (KYMCA), in this case.

Adaptive Drafting. Use the Taita Taveta County Youth Service Act 2026 as a core template for policy drafting, while adapting it to local economic strengths (for example, agriculture in Nakuru County, Technology in Nairobi County and so on and so forth).

Embedded Public Participation. Make youth consultation a non-negotiable part of the legislative process in order to ensure buy-in and relevance to their lived realities. Also, give youth the opportunity to share perspectives on what exactly the bill means to them, so that there is a shared understanding on its purpose, process and overall alignment to development objectives.

Fiscal Integration. Advocate for the law alongside complementary measures to improve local revenue administration.

The Vision for a National Transformation

Imagine the impact if multiple countries enacted similar, context-specific versions of this law. The cumulative effect would be a nationwide expansion of the formal sector, a significant boost in domestic revenue and a dramatic reduction in youth idleness and vulnerability. It presents a powerful alternative to unsustainable debt: investing in youth to generate the revenue needed for national development.

Role of the Youth for Tax Justice Network (YTJN)

Capacity Building: YTJN organized targeted capacity-building sessions for both youth leaders and Members of the County Assembly (MCAs). These sessions focused on; Understanding constitutional provisions on devolution, public participation, and county legislative mandates, Breaking down the stages of a County Bill—from drafting, First Reading, Committee review, public participation, Committee of the Whole House, to assent, and Equipping youth with knowledge of county budgeting cycles, revenue streams, expenditure ceilings, and the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF).

Policy Dialogue Facilitation: YTJN acted as a neutral convener, creating structured spaces for dialogue between: Youth leaders and grassroots groups, Young MCAs and sectoral committee members, as well as Technical advisors and legal drafters. These engagements allowed for Clarification of policy objectives, Negotiation of contentious clauses, Strengthening of legislative language and Building cross-party consensus.

Domestic Resource Mobilization (DRM) Advocacy: A defining feature of YTJN's intervention was linking youth empowerment to domestic resource mobilization (DRM) and public finance sustainability. YTJN supported stakeholders to:

- Analyze how the proposed Youth Service would be financed within the county budget, Advocate for integration of the Youth Service into existing revenue streams rather than relying on short-term political allocations and Align program design with fiscal realities to prevent unfunded mandates.

Website : www.ytjn.org | **Email address :** info@ytjn.org

Address : Block 193, Plot 844 Mbogo Road, Najjera P.O Box 1558 Kampala, Uganda

For more information:



Youth for Tax Justice Network