

# Governor's Day with Farmers

An emerging governance innovation in Kakamega County, Kenya



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## Overview

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In August 2010, Kenyans celebrated the adoption of [one of the most progressive constitutions in Africa](#). It was the culmination of a long political process aimed at giving citizens a greater say in decisions affecting their lives, and potentially bringing an end to "...bad governance, poor economic policies, imprudent use of natural resources and perennial famines," as [one commentator](#) put it.

Perhaps the most far-reaching provision in the new constitution was the devolution of decision making and implementation power from the country's capital to 47 county governments. This was designed to go hand in hand with the country's blueprint to achieve middle income country status by 2030, the [Vision 2030 Agenda](#), with food and nutrition security as one of its "Big Four" pillars. Similarly, the current government's "Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Plan," has identified pathways for [achieving agricultural transformation and inclusive growth](#) that include "transforming two million poor farmers into surplus producers" and reducing dependence on basic food imports by 30 percent.

Despite economic progress over the past two decades, income disparities, poverty and food insecurity persist. A 2021 [assessment](#) found that one-third of Kenyans were experiencing "food poverty." The number of people in urgent need of food assistance increased sixfold, from 739,000 in August 2020 to 4.4 million in February 2023, according to the [World Food Programme](#).

The extent to which citizens have access to adequate, safe and nutritious food is an important indicator of good governance. In a country where [more than 70 percent of the rural population](#) is involved in agriculture the disconnect between what happens on farms, agrifood markets, and agricultural policy making is one of the key drivers of food insecurity, dwindling livelihoods and weak resilience to shocks.

[A consultation](#) with smallholder farmers and other stakeholders in western Kenya revealed a general perception that farmers' interests were under-represented in agricultural policy-making processes due to a lack of effective engagement mechanisms. This was the genesis of a joint proposal by Shibuye Community Health Workers (CHW), a community-based organization, the Kakamega County Farmers Association (KACOFA), and TMG Research, to establish a "[Governor's Day with Farmers](#)" (GDF) platform. Conceived as a [social innovation](#) to connect the highest decision makers at county level with farmers, the GDF aimed to counter conventional top-down governance structures by empowering smallholder farmers to articulate their interests and priorities to policy makers. With its further institutionalization and possible expansion to more counties, it is expected that the GDF will offer a concrete pathway towards sustainable food systems transformation.

Two editions of the GDF have taken place in Kakamega County, western Kenya, since its inauguration on 22 February 2022. The events, and accompanying consultative processes, saw active participation from diverse stakeholders, including farmers, government officials, and support organizations. The purpose of this Policy Brief is to distill some of the lessons learned so far to reflect on the potential of the GDF to foster more inclusive policy making and accelerate food systems transformation in Kakamega, and beyond. The Brief draws on a TMG analysis of key documents, participant observations, and interviews with 11 key informants involved in planning and execution of the GDF.

# Food System Transformation from the ground up

## The Governor's Day with Farmers explained

The Governor's Day with Farmers was conceived as a way to empower smallholder farmers, including youth, and other marginalized groups. It seeks to provide a county-wide platform through which farmers can interact directly with political leaders and agricultural policy makers to articulate the challenges they face so that these issues can be incorporated in agricultural policy and programme design. A highlight of the Day is the formal endorsement of a "[Farmers' Declaration](#)" – a consolidated set of issues identified through a broad-based consultative process ahead of the event. Following the inaugural event in 2022, the County government confirmed 22 February as a fixed date for the GDF. One of the key considerations in choosing this date was to align the GDF with the fiscal planning and budgeting cycle and hence to incorporate the farmers' demands into the annual planning cycle.

Around 2,000 farmers attended the second GDF in 2023, more than double the attendance at the inaugural event. In preparation for both events, TMG partners KACOFA and Shibuye CHW organized in-depth discussions with more than 400 farmer representatives across all 12 sub-counties. The objective was to gain a comprehensive understanding of challenges as well as opportunities for strengthening agricultural production and farm-based livelihoods. Among key issues raised, and subsequently highlighted in the accompanying GDF Declarations, were gaps in access to extension services, agricultural inputs and markets, secure land access (with a focus on women and youth), soil management and climate adaptation. The consultations further noted the importance of improved coordination of the multiple donor initiatives underway to truly benefit farmers and local communities.



Habbakuk Khaamala, Chair of KACOFA, signing the Farmers' Declaration together with H.E. Governor Fernandes Barasa, Violet Shivutse, Director Shibuye CHW, and Dr. Daniel Mwendah M'Mailutha, CEO of Kenya National Farmers' Federation (KENAFF) at the 2nd GDF in 2023. Photo: Kakamega County Government.

Formally acknowledging these concerns, each GDF concluded with the signing of the Declaration by the Governor, County Minister for Agriculture and representatives of farmers and other key stakeholders. This created opportunities for organizing follow up meetings and other monitoring activities to ensure that the issues raised are incorporated into county planning and budgetary cycles.

The GDF is therefore much more than an annual “meet and greet” moment. Through its design as a continuous consultative process, the aim is to link farmers’ associations to county decision making structures, enabling them to demand greater accountability from their leaders.



Each GDF features a vibrant marketplace where exhibitors can demonstrate their innovations and success stories. Photo: Elijah Mwangi/ Anchor Bay Productions.

## Multi-stakeholder partnerships

A steering committee, consisting of about 10 agri-food actors, was established to coordinate preparations for the second GDF in 2023. The steering committee consisted of delegates from KACOFA, Shibuye CHW, the County Government of Kakamega, Kakamega County Youth Agripreneurs Association, Transparency International, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Transparency International, and Anglican Development Services Western. The members of the steering committee supported the realization of the GDF both financially and in-kind.

**“** [...the steering committee members] were bringing on board also their views because they are working with farmers, they are working with the farmer groups on production and whatever information (...) they were collecting in the field they were also bringing to us, so that we can put it as one package to the Governor.

H. Khaamala, KACOFA Chairperson

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## Kakamega County

Kakamega County is located in western Kenya. Covering an area of approximately 3,000 square kilometres and a population of nearly 1.9 million people in 2019, Kakamega is the fourth most populous county after the urbanized centres of Nairobi, Kiambu, and Nakuru. Agriculture is the main economic activity, contributing to [more than half](#) of Kakamega's Gross Domestic Product. The main crops cultivated include maize, beans, cassava, finger millet and sorghum, sweet potatoes, bananas and tomatoes. Tea and sugarcane are the main cash crops. The average farm size is 1.5 acres for small-scale holders, who constitute around 90 percent of all farmers, and around 10 acres for large-scale farmers according to the [Kakamega County Integrated Development Plan](#). Despite favourable agro-climatic conditions, over 30 percent of residents are food insecure. Female-headed households are particularly vulnerable as they are less likely to have secure access to land.

## Assessing the outcomes

### Strengthening farmers' voices

**“ There is currently nothing in Kakamega county that brings the governor directly to the voters (...) the Governor's Day brings the real people who have power and resources including the Governor himself to listen to a big number of farmers who are speaking with a collective voice. ”**

Violet Shivutse, Director, Shibuye CHW

One of the most significant contributions of the GDF, according to most interviewees, is its success in raising awareness among policy makers about farmers' views and concerns. While this may not automatically translate into greater integration of farmers in decision making processes, it is a critical first step in mapping who the key voices are and building pressure on public processes to involve farmers more systematically. Several interviewees linked this growing visibility with increased efforts by government officials to approach organizations involved in the GDF and invite them to contribute to agricultural planning processes.

The successful engagement of 10 additional partners in the second GDF was also credited with helping to strengthen horizontal linkages among support organizations that work directly with farmers and other grassroots groups, which is critical in jointly analyzing shared challenges and potential solutions, and ensuring a more coherent approach to advocacy. This is particularly important in minimizing competition and fragmentation of farmers' representation in county-level decision making structures. For young people, especially, participation at the GDF is perceived as rare opportunity to build broader partnerships and practically demonstrate their contribution to the agricultural sector, including as technical service providers who can bring innovative solutions directly to farmers.

However, given the concern expressed by some interviewees that resource constraints led to the sidelining of youth and people living with disabilities during the second GDF preparatory process, there is a clear need for continued engagement of civil society networks and other organizations representing these groups to ensure their views are included in a more systemic way.

## Towards more inclusive policy making

**“ The first time we saw CASSCOM [County Agricultural Sector Steering Committee] call us for meetings was last year. So, it was after the Governor's Day. At the farmers level, I don't think we have had the opportunity to sit in the county planning team before. ”**

G. Litunya, Chair, Kakamega County Youth Agripreneurs Association

A frequently highlighted success of the GDF so far is the aggregation of farmers' issues through the GDF Farmers' Declarations. Many interviewees highlighted the potential of these “communiqués” to raise the profile of farmers' issues, facilitating their inclusion in the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) process. It is noteworthy that during the first GDF, the then Governor explicitly invited the network of farmers, youth and women's organizations involved in organizing the event to continue to participate in county planning processes.

After the second GDF, KACOFA was invited to chair a county steering committee established to oversee the purchase and effective distribution of subsidized fertilizer, an important recognition that might not have happened without KACOFA's strong role in organizing the Governor's Day with Farmers. Habbakuk Khaamala, KACOFA Chairperson reported that this involvement had enabled him to provide direct feedback from farmers, leading to much faster disbursements of fertilizer in time for the planting season. Likewise, the Kakamega County Youth Agripreneurs Association was invited to CASSCOM meetings as a result of the first GDF.

While small steps, these invitations are widely viewed as offering a “foot in the door” for farmers and other community organizations. One official pointed to the allocation of resources for the GDF in the annual budget as a concrete outcome of farmers' advocacy efforts. However, there is also broad acknowledgement that it will take proactiveness and capacities for underrepresented groups to seize this momentum and entrench their position in county decision making structures.

Another concrete outcome from the first GDF highlighted by several interviewees was increased attention to extension services. According to Habbakuk Khaamala, around 116 officers were hired by the County government, roughly 44 percent of whom were women. While this number still falls far short of the technical services needed, it is nevertheless a welcome step for strengthening technical skills and resilience of smallholder farmers to climate change and other threats.

Despite these positive signals, interviewees also noted that many priorities highlighted in the first declaration had to be repeated the following year due to lack of concrete follow up actions. This was partly due to national and county elections in 2022, including a change in the County government.

## Strengthening Accountability

**“ The Governor and other government officers are actually recognizing the voice of the farmer and (...) that there are issues that need to be addressed that have probably been ignored in the past. ”**

G. Demba, Western Area Manager, Welthungerhilfe

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Interviewees broadly concurred that the two GDFs held so far show promise for enhancing accountability and transparency in agricultural public policy. Many pointed out that the GDF offers an opportunity for the Governor to provide a detailed update on the current state of agriculture in the county. By articulating their policy demands through the GDF Declaration, which is subsequently endorsed by the County leadership, farmers can seize this chance to continue to monitor implementation of their issues of concern, including through tracking of budgetary allocations for agriculture. Other interviewees pointed out that as participation at the GDF continues to grow, it will become an important political space creating pressure on leaders to demonstrate what they are doing for farmers, as potential voters.

However, many also recognize that without a dedicated team and sustained interest from the highest level, it will be difficult to ensure that GDF “promises” are actually implemented.

## Walking the talk

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### Outlook for integrating smallholder farmers in county decision making processes

“ *Follow up, do an audit. (...) because if we just leave the GDF as an event, then it dies.* ”

Hon. B. Andama, County Executive Committee Member for Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives, Kakamega County

In line with the overarching principle of devolution of power, county institutions are expected to ensure that policies are developed in a participatory way by taking into account diverse viewpoints, including from civil society, the private sector, research, and other stakeholders. For the agricultural constituency, important decision making organs include the annual and five-year integrated development plans, and the County Agricultural Sector Steering Committee (CASSCOM), a multi-stakeholder body that brings together nominated representatives from the County and key agricultural value chain actors. Several interviewees underscored the importance of a clear follow up and monitoring plan to track implementation of the GDF Declarations, highlighting the role of more systematic farmers’ representation within these processes.

Another key gap is the long-term financial sustainability of the GDF, especially to ensure that Farmers’ Declarations are derived from broad-based consultations with key stakeholder groups well in advance of the annual GDF events. This will require continuing to build a multi-stakeholder alliance to not only pool resources, but also ensure that messaging, as well as the underlying analysis of key challenges and solutions, incorporates multiple contexts and viewpoints.

With regard to the potential replication of the GDF model, several counties, including neighbouring Siaya, have expressed interest in organizing a similar process. This highlights the importance of continuing to demonstrate the rationale and value-added of the GDF process. Further efforts are also needed to engage nationwide farmers’ platforms, as well as representative structures such as the Council of Governors, to raise awareness of the GDF model as a tool for strengthening inclusive governance in the agricultural sector.

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## Takeaways

In conclusion, here are some **key takeaways** from the GDF process thus far:

**Declarations are only a first step:** continued engagement, platform building and creative advocacy approaches are all key to keeping farmers' issues in sight of decision makers.

**Marginalized groups "are not created equal":** Keep a focus on distinct communities – such as widows and female-headed households, youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities – and develop tailor made strategies to ensure they are given opportunities to meaningfully participate.

**Building broad "coalitions of the willing" is critical:** While the second GDF successfully built a broader constituency of organizers, continued efforts are needed to reach out to more networks involved in agriculture, fisheries, climate change, ecosystem restoration, and other relevant sectors to ensure the broadest possible analysis of challenges as well as pathways towards food systems transformation.

**Farmers' organizations must strengthen their planning and organizational capacities:** Just as the CIDP guides prioritization at the county level, organizations involved in the GDF need to develop a clear plan on how to influence decision making as well.

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We are grateful to the following interviewees for sharing their insights on the GDF:

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**Cover image:** H.E. Governor Fernandes Barasa visiting stands and the farmers marketplace.

**Photo:** Kakamega County Government