



THE MERU COUNTY **WE ENVISION**

MERU COUNTY CITIZEN'S POLICY PRIORITY AREAS

2022 – 2027

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PREAMBLE

We, the residents of Meru County, RECOGNIZING our sovereignty as a people; APPRECIATING the place of devolution as our system of governance; ACKNOWLEDGING our collective aspirations as a people; EXERCISING our rights and responsibilities to be involved in the governance process; COMMITTED to the development of our County and the improvement of our living standards, and having conducted consultative meetings with the public drawn from different sectors and sub- Counties, as a result of this ADOPT the following priority issues to be areas of focus for the County government for the next five years;



Education



Health



**Agriculture &
Livestock
Production**



**Transport &
Infrastructure**



**Water , Natural
Resources &
Tourism**



**Trade,
Investment, &
Industrialization**



**Special Groups:
Youth, Women &
PWDs**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The County Policy Issues are intended to serve as a resource for the county government, the elected leaders, and the private sector in Meru county. It is based on the premise that the people of Meru county hold the solutions and challenges the people face.

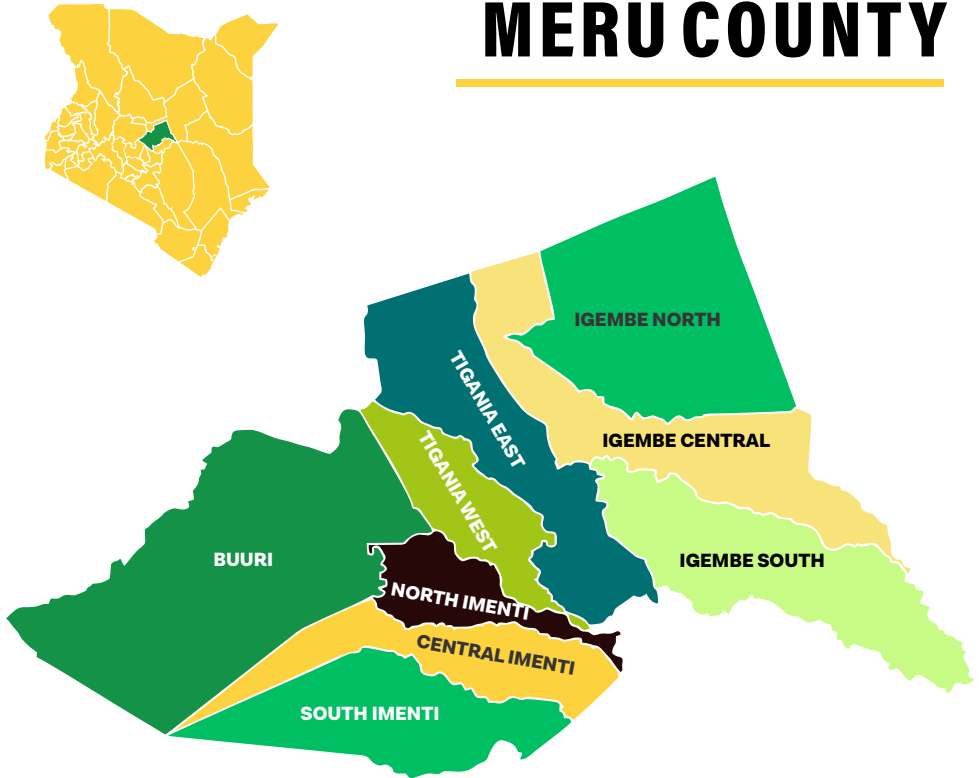
In partnership with the Oslo Center, the citizens of Meru County present a list of issues and proposals that the citizens have generated from a consultative process. The proposed issues reflect ideas and lessons learned by the citizens of Meru County from other counties within the country. We hope our County open's up new horizons and instills a new sense of purpose in our people, catching up on what we have missed while taking steps to enhance our growth.

As County dwellers, we truly appreciate the County developments thus far. As we focus on this new phase of our leadership, we aim to make strides to propel Meru County to the next level with progressive ideas that focus on social and economic interventions to improve our people's lives.

Special thanks go to the Royal Swedish Embassy in Nairobi through its Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) for providing funding and support for the development process of this Citizen policy priority issue.



MERU COUNTY



BACKGROUND

Meru County is east of Mt. Kenya, with a total area of 6936.2 km². Meru county is in eastern Kenya, approximately 225 kilometers northeast of Nairobi. It shares its borders with five other counties: Isiolo County to the north, Nyeri County to the southwest, Tharaka Nithi to the southwest, Laikipia to the west. The word 'Meru' is believed to come from the Maasai people, referring to Tigania and Imenti forests.

The rainfall distribution ranges from 300mm per annum in the midlands and 2500mm per annum in the southeast. The temperatures range from a low of 8°C to a high of 32°C during the cold and hot seasons. The County has been experiencing some climatic changes, leading to drought in parts of the county.

The County's population is 1,545,714, with 50.3% women and 49.7% male. The County has a population of approximately 466,406 youths. Meru County is at the beginning of a transition from a child-rich population structure where those aged between 0-14, 40% are at the onset of a decline, while those aged between 15-34 years old, constituting 35% of the total population, are beginning to increase. It is expected that in the year 2040, the population of Meru County will be 2,353,500 people. The County's population growth rate is estimated at 2.1 percent per annum. With a third of the population being youths, the population segment presents an opportunity for the County government to grow by utilizing its capacities. On the other hand, it's a challenge if the county government fails to meet their needs.

Meru County comprises nine sub-counties; Igembe south, Igembe central, Igembe north, Tigania west, Tigania east, North Imenti, Buuri, Central Imenti, and South Imenti. The County has 11 gazetted Sub Counties, namely Imenti South, Meru Central, Imenti North, Buuri East, Buuri West, Tigania East, Tigania Central, Tigania West, Igembe Central, Igembe South, and Igembe North; 28 Divisions, 133 Locations, and 351 Sub-Locations. There are 45 Wards and 392 Villages, also used as administrative units. Ethnically, the county has three subethnic groups, namely Imenti, Tigania, and Igembe, each occupying a distinct region. Additionally, the major towns in Meru County are cosmopolitan with other ethnic communities, including the Somali, Borana, Turkana, Kikuyu, Indians, and Luo, among others.

Agriculture is the county's biggest economic contributor. The Agriculture Sector comprises agriculture, livestock, and fisheries. Eighty-nine (89%) percent of the households in the county practice agriculture, and Sixty three (63%) percent of all enterprises are in the agriculture sector. (Meru County Socio-Economic Indicators baseline survey, 2016). Tourism is another potential source of revenue in the county. Meru County has the Meru national park and Lewa Conservancy, which holds the big five – the lion, elephant, rhino, leopard, and buffalo. The two sites, the park, and conservancy, are characterized by favorable ecosystems rich in flora and fauna.





INTRODUCTION

The adoption of a devolved system of government through the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, fundamentally reorders the country's governance framework. It also recognizes public participation as a core principle of governance under article 1, 10(2)(a) and the Fourth schedule part 2(14) of the constitution. and sections 87 to 92 and 115 of the county government Act 2012. For devolution to be successful, citizens must be politically conscious, aware of their rights and responsibilities, and know the channels through which they can exercise those rights. Participation is necessary for all processes within the county assembly and executive. The County Government Act envisages citizens' participation in identifying their priority needs for the county to deliver effective service delivery.

It is paramount that county governments can develop mechanisms for regular consultations and the development of social contracts that act as guidelines on what the county government will deliver to its citizens.

According to a 2020 joint survey by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and the University of Nairobi on equality trends in Kenya, absolute poverty in Meru County stands at 19.4 percent, while the highest absolute poverty level in Kenya, in general, is at 79.4 percent.

However, even with the relatively low rate of poverty compared to other counties, the residents of Meru County still grapple with a myriad of challenges, ranging from the poor state of healthcare, and roads to education, among others. Cumulatively, these problems impact the general well-being of human beings and, in turn, the social and economic development of the county.

For effective service delivery to the people, inclusivity and meaningful participation are recognized as best governance practices. The Constitution of Kenya emphasizes public participation in public policy discharge. It further provides that County governments institute measures to enhance the participation of the people in the exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions affecting them.

On this basis, the Meru County People's Manifesto seeks to entrench public participation as the cornerstone of governance by identifying priority areas for development and designing follow-up mechanisms to ensure efficient and people-centered service delivery. Involving the people in making critical decisions that affect them enhances a sense of belonging and a spirit of ownership in the projects the county government implements. Ultimately, programs and policies that consider the social needs of the people of Meru County have a higher potential of achieving optimal impact in transforming their lives and improving their living standards.



PRIORITY 1

EDUCATION

“

31 per cent of children, adolescents and youth in sub-saharan Africa, are out of school.

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS

”



THE SITUATION

There are **1602** Early Childhood Development Centres (ECD), **647** primary schools, and **192** secondary schools. The lack of adequate learning facilities has remained on the highlights as the major challenge facing the education sector in Meru County. Most primary schools in the country lack infrastructure and facilities, while the early Childhood development level is overly deprived of relevant resources making the formative years in primary school unproductive. Over time there has been an increase in the number of ECD classrooms built to meet the demand for ECDE learning. In the consequent years, there were efforts to construct more classrooms. There is a need to increase the number of teachers hired to teach in the ECD as the majority of the teacher and volunteers.

There was an acknowledgment that the previous status of ECDE was challenged and, therefore, an urgent need to rethink the focus and come up with interventions especially looking at the retention level of the children in school. The county established a school feeding program to retain students in schools to ensure student retention.

The projected number of children under five years is 235822 persons as of 2018. The number of students can only increase; therefore, the demand for ECDs will also increase. The county must have a financial plan for these populations to ensure the infrastructure to support this growth is built.

Previous county governments abolished bursaries for University students, and there is a need to reintroduce bursaries to students to encourage needy students to access and enroll in universities.

Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) has gradually increased since 2013, and the county has 33 VTCs. Many Kenyans have acquired hands-on skills without formal training as masons, plumbers, electricians, mechanics, and other blue-collar jobs but lack formal certification. Recognition of these abilities and advancing their skills through training in TVETs will improve living standards and lead to economic growth.

CITIZEN-PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

01

Employing more ECDE teachers and competitively remunerating them to attract the best

02

Enhance the feeding program in ECDE learning centers and Nutrition program in ECDE centers to give children a head-start in life and to relieve the socio-economic burden of working parents

03

Proper equipping of the TVETs – modernizing the facilities to provide machinery used in the current job market to enhance training

04

Increase the allocation of bursary and revolving funds for needy students enrolling in TVETs, colleges

05

Establish a County bursary loan specific to University students

06

Establish a scholarship fund for students wanting to study abroad

07

Recognition of Prior Learning policy

08

Provide grants to youths joining TVETs to put up start-up companies

09

Provide free menstrual hygiene products to all primary and secondary school girls

10

Offering relevant and competitive courses

11

Establish a program for unskilled people to recognize prior learning experiences and boost their capacities by giving them a certificate

12

Seek partnerships with companies to establish apprentice programs for TVET students to gain experience



PRIORITY 2

HEALTH

“

An additional 18 million health workers are required in low and lower middle income countries to achieve universal health coverage by 2030

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS

”



THE SITUATION

Improved health and nutrition are a foundation for rapid economic growth, and according to Health Act 2017, part I section 3(a), (b), (c), (d); provides for the protection, respect, promotion, and fulfillment of the health rights of all persons in Kenya to the progressive realization of their right to the highest attainable standard of health, including reproductive health care and the right to emergency medical treatment; The county has 316 Public hospitals ranging from level five to level one. Additionally, the county has 69 hospitals that are Faith Based on organizations/NGOs and Private (56%), mostly private clinics. However, these facilities are not evenly distributed across the county, so access to health services remains challenging in some areas. While there are an adequate number of hospitals overall, there are some gaps in some sub-counties in hospitals. Therefore, priorities for investment need to be determined by the county.

Therefore, the health and well-being of the people will affect the county's productivity immensely. Despite the challenges that continue to cripple healthcare systems in the counties, investing in comprehensive wellness programs will lead to improved nutrition status, thus, a healthier population. Concentrating on curative health should be discouraged and instead ensure healthcare systems that respond to the nutritional gaps among the population to boost their immunity.



Health services in the county remain a great challenge, with access still top on the list as the greatest challenge. Facilities, especially those in rural areas, continue to lack essential services, and specialized treatment remains one of the major challenges that most counties face. The county urgently needs the software aspect of health, including quality medical equipment, highly trained healthcare personnel, and adequate drugs.

CITIZEN-PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

01

Improve and expand healthcare infrastructure through re-examining and improving healthcare professionals' working conditions and remuneration.

02

Enhance integration of health outreaches delivering essential nutrition services, with a particular focus on rural areas

03

Establish a universal healthcare system that provides healthcare for the people of Meru county. Every person from Meru county can access the basic care package at their nearest public health facility

04

Equip health facilities with modern equipment to respond to chronic diseases and minimize the cost of seeking medication far away

05

Improve the status of the health facilities in the rural areas

06

Modernize record keeping of the community health workers to ensure effective follow-up to county residents who need medical attention

07

With advanced technology and research in healthcare management, the county government can partner with KEMRI to advance research and technology to respond to emerging healthcare issues

08

Deploy two ambulances per ward for a speedy response to emergency cases

09

Health outreaches for essential nutrition services

10

Improve access to clean water across the county

11

Prenatal education for mothers and awareness and availability of nutrition information and personnel



PRIORITY 3

AGRICULTURE & LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

“Despite their enormous contribution to combating hunger, smallholders are most vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS



THE SITUATION



Agriculture remains a critical contributor to the country's economy and offers employment to a large population. Agriculture is the county's biggest economic contributor, with Eighty-nine (89%) percent of the households in the county practicing agriculture, and Sixty three (63%) percent of all

enterprises are in the agriculture sector. However, the sector is challenged marginally by limited resource allocation making production and large-scale farming very expensive. The expensive nature of large-scale farming has resulted in many farmers doing subsistence farming. Growing the agricultural sector needs to be done in appropriate agroecological ways and conserve our biodiversity to ensure increased productivity without degrading the soil. Most people in Meru County focus on agriculture, notably family business and agricultural holdings. If well invested, the sector can contribute to higher employment, increased manufacturing and value addition, and greater food security while leveraging our youthful population and innovative technologies.

CITIZEN-PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

01

County government to promote innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to production, especially mechanization, market linkages, and digitization

02

County government to ensure the existence of arable land that can be used for crop production and enhancement of food security

03

To create an enabling environment for farmers, especially smallholders, to better access high-quality extension services and veterinary services, support improvement in the ratio of extension providers to farmers

04

To support increased coverage of irrigation to reduce dependence on rain-fed agriculture to improve food security, fish farming, and the resilience of the livestock subsector

05

Increase value addition and agro-processing of agricultural product

06

Improved breeding to maximize the production



07

Establish a program that will focus on livestock surveillance and disease control

08

Develop adequate agricultural policies to carry out land amalgamation – one ward two product approach

09

Carry out market research and data management for validity/reliability

10

Promote farm planning, conduct soil mapping, and testing

11

Integrate gender, youth, and PWDs in agri- projects and adopt climate-smart agricultural practices

12

Carry out youth mentorship for a mindset change on agriculture and integration of youth in agricultural processing



PRIORITY 4

TRANSPORT & INFRASTRUCTURE

“

The absence of access to modern energy services is a grave obstacle to sustainable development

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS

”



THE SITUATION

There is a general acknowledgement that most of the roads in the county could be better. Therefore, during the rainy season, the roads, especially those covered by gravel and earth surface roads, are impassable. Roads are key enablers of economic growth and have productive interlinkages with other socio-economic activities such as industrial, services, agricultural, commercial, social institutions, and households. The county has 1,259.9 km of the road network, of which 225.7km is bitumen, 266.7 km is gravel, and 767.5 km of the earth's surface. However, some gravel and earth surface roads are impassable during the rainy seasons. The county is served by one airstrip; the Gaitu airstrip in Meru Central has been improved to serve more flights.

Transport infrastructure plays a critical role in the growth and sustainability of the economy. Where road connectivity is an excellent movement of goods and people becomes easy, thus opening the economy to trade and new opportunities. Therefore, the county government needs to invest in developing County Road infrastructure by introducing more efficient implementation modalities to maintain the road infrastructure.

CITIZEN-PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

01

Regular maintenance of the feeder roads by ensuring proper drainage and murrum

02

Creation of a roads network that achieves Inter-County Road Connectivity, Inter-Sub-County Road Connectivity, Inter-Ward Road Connectivity, and Intra-Ward Road Connectivity

03

Create Boda Boda SACCOs to help them access loans and training and mechanisms to regularize them

04

Proposer lighting of the road using solar lighting

05

Monitoring the construction of roads and banning contractors with a record of developing poor roads

06

Enactment of road maintenance policy that will ensure a certain percentage of the road in km is maintained in each ward each financial year

07

Construct public toilets and children's changing units in the bus terminal

08

Development of an urban county plan that would provide for the infrastructure development



PRIORITY 5

WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES

“

**Worldwide, one
in three people
(2.2 Billion) do
not have access
to safe drinking
water**

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS

”

THE SITUATION

As a mandate of the County Government, the protection, preservation, and safeguarding of the natural resource and the promotion of environmental protection are critical. The county government is responsible for providing clean and potable water to its citizenry.

In some parts of Meru county, women walk long distances to access potable water due to diminishing water levels. Diminished water levels have resulted in insufficient safe drinking water and agricultural water. Lack of education on water harvesting is also a huge challenge in the county and contributes to the lack of water. The previous government mapped all sub-county headquarters to have water distribution networks and all strategic water resources managed by the environmental cooperatives. Meru County has 59% of residents using improved water sources, such as springs, protected wells, boreholes, piped-into dwellings, and piped and rainwater collection. At the same time, the rest rely on ponds, dams, streams/rivers, well, and water vendors. Therefore, the county needs to invest in sustainable water harvesting and management solutions that will improve access and quality of the water being supplied to the residents.

CITIZEN-PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

01

Provide education on improved efficiency in water harvesting methods

02

Rehabilitating and protecting water catchment areas/water towers

03

Develop mechanisms for effective and efficient management of water resources in the county

04

Initiate conservation and protection initiatives by involving various communities

05

Deliver on the commitment to establish a solid waste management program, rehabilitate wetland areas such as Nkunga and restoration and improve Maua wetland

06

Explore the possibilities of the construction of dams within the county by the national government



PRIORITY 6

TRADE, INVESTMENT, & INDUSTRIALIZATION

“

**Worldwide, the
poverty rate in rural
areas is
17.2%—more than
three times higher
than in urban areas**

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS

”



THE SITUATION



Trade opens the region to tremendous economic growth and numerous opportunities through agriculture, manufacturing, and service industries. Creating avenues for growth in livelihoods and the economy. Promoting investment, especially direct investment, will boost sustainable economic growth. The county government must act quickly to initiate and encourage foreign direct investment to open the region to new opportunities and transfer technologies

CITIZEN-PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

01

Classification of licenses and permits to help start-ups

02

Ensure a conducive working environment by training county workers on ethical ways of cooperating with traders

03

Introduction of industrial parks zones where upcoming companies can access services. (recycling of metal)

04

Empowering SMEs to help them grow their business through training/access to affordable loans

05

To provide accessible and affordable credit facilities to youth-owned businesses through the Biashara Fund and other mechanisms in collaboration with private sector partners

06

Improve local tourism sites and market the Meru national park as a destination of choice

07

Establish a trader's fund that can be a source of affordable loans for traders within the county

08

Investing in value-addition and processed products for a positive balance of trade

09

Establish a ministry of Micro and Small Enterprises to develop programs and provide an enabling environment for micro and small enterprises

10

Support improved market access for agricultural products by supporting the development of quality standards and export markets





PRIORITY 7

SPECIAL GROUPS: YOUTH, WOMEN & PWDS

“

**there are 1.8
billion people
between the ages
of 10-24—they are
the largest
generation of
youth in history**

SOURCE: UNITED NATIONS

”

THE SITUATION

The youth are the drivers of strength, wealth, and community innovation. Employment creation, particularly among youth, is one of the top priorities of the Government of Kenya. The county government needs to implement mechanisms for addressing the pressing problem of youth unemployment. The county government must seek to promote growth and employment by identifying opportunities in sectors with great employment potential, such as agriculture and agri-business, sustainable housing; sustainable infrastructure; and the manufacturing sector. However, this reality is yet to be reflected in how we handle this critical demographic. The slow growth of the economy, low growth of the formal sector, and demand for previous work experience by potential employers have left an overwhelming majority of the youth unemployed. Women: Gender inclusion is a concept that transcends mere equality. Article 27(3) of the Constitution says that; "women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres." Women are about 57% of the population and must be included in the county's development. They say when you empower women, you empower a village as a county.

CITIZEN-PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

01

The county to establish a Youth Advisory Board that will oversee streamlining of youth challenges

02

Establish an affirmative action fund for youths women and PWDs in business

03

Strengthen the existing Free Maternity Programme by recruiting relevant healthcare personnel and ensuring timely reimbursement to all private facilities implementing the program

04

Provide training opportunities for women, PWDs, and youth on successful business models to enhance their participation in business

05

Have programs that will look to boost the talents of the youths

06

Ensure the AGPO policy for the youth is guaranteed

07

In partnership with the National council of disability, develop a database for people living with disability and assist homes that need assistance.

08

Establish drug and substance abuse rehabilitation and correctional facilities

09

Empower the youth in sports and culture. Build stadiums and art centers in each sub-county to nurture talent among the youth



10

Develop a policy that requires building to be disability friendly in the county

11

Implementation of the 30% AGPO procurement tenders for the youth, women, and PWDs and further support the groups to receive certification

12

Establish rescue and rehabilitation centers for street children and families

CONCLUSION

The legal framework on public participation, as provided in the County Government Act No 17 of 2012, offers a great opportunity to sustain public engagement in governance issues. The county government legislated and gazetted the Meru County Public Participation Act 2014 to operationalize a framework of participation and design methods to consult, involve, and inform the public so that they may have some form of input in the process of decision-making and governance. The County government has also established administrative structures for public engagement through the Committee on Lands, Economic and Physical Planning to facilitate an effective and efficient public participation process. The citizens of Meru, in the development of this document, have exhibited knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in offering checks and balances and taking part in the governance process of the county.

As citizens of Kenya and residents of Meru county, the county government has the best interest at heart for its citizens. We hope that the Meru County government will ensure it is reducing inequalities and putting deliberate measures in place that leave no one behind. It is imperative to strengthen the factors contributing to people's dignity, transforming lives, and safeguarding their right to live in peace and prosperity. Meru County government has the potential to grow its economy and thus improve productivity by adopting and supporting strong, vibrant, and healthy communities based on the principles of inclusion, transparency, and need-based policy development approaches that contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built, and historical environment.

We hope the county government will preserve the livelihoods of our young and old people. They will endeavor to provide opportunities that promote economic prosperity and opportunities for business growth. We hope, we the citizens and county government, can make Meru the next frontier of Investment, Peace, Prosperity, and harmony.

ANNEX: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

AGNES KALWILO	ERIC MUTUMA	JOSRAY MUTETHIA	MWENDA JASON
ALEX GIKUNDI	ESTHER MUNGAI	JOY KINOTI	NANCY KAWIRA MARETE
ALOISE KIRIMI	EVANS MUTWIRI	JOY KINOTI	NEWTON GATOBU
ANIS MURUGU	EVANS MWANDIKI	JOY NYAGUTHI	NEWTON MWITI
ANTONY MWENDA	FAITH NTHAMA	JULIA KARUTI	ONESMUS MUTWIRI
BENSON MWIRIGI	FRAKLIN MANYARA	KAILANYA MUTHARIMI	PASCO MWIRIGI
BRAM MUTWIRI	FRANKLINE KIRIMI	KAREN NYINYARI MWENDA	PETER MUREGA
BRAYAN MWENDA	FRED MUCHENA	KELVIN MUTEA KIGUNDA	PIUS MURITHI NJERU
CASTY MICHINI	FREDRICK MBURUGU	KELVIN MWENDA	RACHAEL KARIMI
CHARLES MUROKI	GAKII DORCAS	KIMENCU KENNETH	REGINA KARANJA
CHRISTINE KIRUMBA	GODWIN MURITHI	KIOGORA ELIPHAS	ROYFORD MWIRIGI
DANCAN MWENDA	HIDAH NIGEETA	KIRIMI BOSCO	SALOME KINANU
DAVID KINOTI	ISAIAH MITHIKA	KIRIMI BOSCO	SUSAN KARWITHA
DENNIS KITHINJI	JACKLINE NYANGARI	MARTIN MURIMI	WAMBUI IMMACULATE
DENNIS MUCHUI	JACOB LOBENYO	MIRIAM KAJUJU	WILBER MUTHEE
DOLLY KIENDE	JOHN WACHIRA	MURITHI IVY GAKII	WYCLIFF MUTHOMI MUCHENA
ELSIE KAWIRA	JOSPHAT MARITHI	MUTHAMIA JAMES MWINDA	YVONNE MURITHI



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