

# Press Release

## Dokeza – Makes Law-Making Accessible to Kenyans, A Bill at a time

**Nairobi, 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017** – Mzalendo launches ‘Dokeza’- a Bill Annotation platform addressing the challenges faced in accessing, contributing, and conversing with others about bills and legislative proposals put forward by Parliamentarians or government institutions. ‘Dokeza’ is Swahili for ‘Share an idea.’ Although article 118 of the Constitution expects government including Parliament to facilitate public participation in governance, spaces provided are not sufficient and often the particular documents are not easily accessible or understandable. Through the Dokeza portal – <http://dokeza.mzalendo.com> - launched today, Mzalendo endeavours to make gazetted bills and legislative proposals readily accessible for commentary and collating of public opinion – both technical expertise and general sentiments.

Speaking at the launch Mzalendo’s Executive Director Jessica Musila said “Even though law-making is traditionally opaque and rather laborious, Mzalendo through the Dokeza platform – seeks to open up the public participation in law making through a four step process: First - digitization of either legislative proposals or bills then making them accessible in an open manner. Secondly, collaborating with others to make the legal language used understandable in layman man language. Thirdly, facilitating the public to easily post their on the sections of bills, interact with others on the same document and share their contributions with others on social media. Lastly, Mzalendo and its partners will be able collate the generated commentary, edit it and submit it as memoranda. We hope the four-step process will add and bring together more significant voices in the process of legislation.”

The development of this tool is Mzalendo’s response to requests frequently sent to us whenever we share calls for memoranda by Parliament or a critical bill is inaccessible. Critical to note is that calls for Memoranda often generate lots of excitement and are widely shared on social media. However, the public enthusiasm often wanes first because they finds it challenging to access the bills from Parliament and government printers. The legal language becomes a second barrier to their participation. Thirdly, even when the public self-organises to engage online and offline: the information is locked in google documents often shared by a few early birds hence the need for a publicly accessible space for the same.

It is critical to note, calls for Memoranda often generate lots of excitement and are widely shared on social media handles. However, the public often finds it challenging to access the bills from Parliament and government printers. The legal language becomes a second barrier to their participation. Thirdly, even when the public self-organises to engage: the information is locked in google documents often shared by a few early birds hence the need for a publicly accessible space for the same.

Notwithstanding, the fact that the window Parliament usually gives for submission of memoranda is usually very short – on average 5-6 days. Even then, despite the law stipulating that the public must be involved in governance as a whole, their participation in the law-making process remains weak and rather ad-hoc at best. On most bills, Parliament gets few memoranda and the respondents are mainly lawyers and issue focused civil society groups. Given our current developmental challenges as a country, there is need to bring in more voices of especially youth and women to law-making to inform the matters affecting their everyday lives.

We hope the ‘Dokeza’ platform, will be embraced and used by everyone – the public, Parliamentary Staff, Parliamentarians, government representatives, civil society representatives and private sector actors – to collate opinion and generate a public record of their sentiments.

Since Mzalendo.com’s birth more than 10 years ago, the website and organisation has remained focused on encouraging citizen accountability. This launch marks an important phase in its development as more and more Kenyans are using technology to track issues of importance to them. Mzalendo is a non-partisan organisation that keeps an eye on Kenyan Parliament with a mission *to facilitate public participation in Parliamentary processes through Information Sharing, Research and Networking.*

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