

Not for Sale!

How to Talk about Privatisation in Kenya

A Messaging Guide by Uchumi Watch

What is happening?

The Government of Kenya is moving quickly to sell or lease what belongs us Kenyans for profit. New laws are making it easier to hand over what we built with our taxes to a few political actors and elites. Chief among them is the Privatisation Act, 2025, and the National Infrastructure Fund Act of 2026, which establishes a fund that will absorb the proceeds from the big sale of what belongs to the public.

This is not the first such wave. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Structural Adjustment Programs forced on us by World Bank and IMF pushed the then government to cut spending and sell off what belonged to the public.

What's different now under President William Ruto's government is the speed and scale—and how often these deals are done quietly, with the public only told after the fact.

The government and other supporters of privatisation say Kenya is broke and drowning in debt. Public systems have failed anyway. Sasa mnataka tu-do? They say that if we want to reach Singapore or "first-world" status, the only choice is to sell.

Many Kenyans understand what's at stake and are pushing back through protests and in conversations on digital platforms and offline. Yet too often these conversations stop at whether these moves will invite more corruption, whether they followed the law, or whether there is an accountable way to implement them. Without meaning to, these conversations concede that selling what belongs to the public or *mali ya uma* is reasonable, and that all that is left is to do it properly.

This guide, developed by Uchumi Watch—Kenya Comms Hub's economy programme—exists to widen that conversation. It offers a shared way of talking about *mali ya uma*, one that returns us to what these public systems are for and how they hold up everyday life of working Kenyans. It moves us beyond reacting to each new deal towards imagining a Kenya where the *mali ya uma* we build together serves us, the *wananchi*.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anyone having these conversations who wants a different vision for Kenya. It is for communicators, storytellers, allies in the media and their guests, campaigners, educators and anyone who wants a *mwananchi*-centred way of talking about what is happening around us.

It is for Kenyans living with the consequences of this big sale: the patient turned away at Kenyatta National Hospital because SHA didn't work; the worker worn down by the chaos of private *matatu* transportation; the one who fears their parastatal is next on the sale list and their job with it. It's for that WhatsApp group of friends who always find themselves drifting into the same conversations: Wueh! Aki what is wrong with this government? Why are they selling everything?

This is not a script. It is a working tool whose ideas you can adapt to your own context and language. You can use it to shape speeches, community conversations, social media posts, op-eds or even campaign materials.

It draws from the [Race Narrative Approach](#), a communication method that has shown that messaging works best when it moves beyond grievance and instead begins with shared values and aspirations, names what stands in the way of these shared values and describes the clear vision of the future we can build.

So how do we talk about the big sale of Kenya?

1. Start with the values and realities we share as wananchi

Begin with the things that unite us across ethnicity, region, political affiliation or generation. Most wananchi—wherever they come from or whoever they are—want the same thing. Most of us if not all, want the ability to provide for ourselves and our families and live with dignity. Start there. This will create a sense of shared interest and remind people that we have more in common than the divisions politicians often use to keep us apart.

Sample message: Whether you are a mama mboga, a teacher or a tech worker, whether you support this government or the next, wantam or tutam, whether you live in Nairobi or Lamu, we all want food on the table, clean water in our houses and a fair price for unga. We all want the dignity of a decent life.

2. Name what mali ya uma is for

Bring the conversation back to why public systems or mali ya uma exists. It is how the economy serves the mwananchi. When those pushing for the big sale say the move will “save the economy,” they have turned the relationship between the economy and mwananchi on its head. Public systems exist to serve everyday life of a working Kenyan—not to generate profit for the political elite who sign these deals.

Sample messages:

- a) Mali ya uma ni ya nani? Ni yangu na wewe. Na ni ya nini? Ni ya kutuhudumia.
- b) There is a reason we call it mali ya uma. Because ni mali ya uma. It belongs to the public to serve the public.
- c) Public schools, hospitals, roads, and water systems do not exist to make profit. They exist to serve the public.
- d) Public systems exist so that Kamene, Abdalla, Kipngetich, Wanjohi—all of us—can reach the basics of a decent life: healthcare, water, education, and transport.

3. Name them! Name the people making these decisions

Make power visible. Public systems are not failing on their own. Someone is making the decisions to underfund and neglect them. When discussing the big sale of Kenya, name the small circle of wealthy elites and politicians who are driving it. Explain what they are doing and the alternatives they have chosen not to pursue. This is important because it reminds us that all this is not inevitable. Damage done through political decisions can be undone through different political decisions that favour mwananchi, not profit.

Sample messages:

- a) Kenyatta National Hospital is not struggling for no reason and Kenya Power's problems did not fall from the sky. Politicians and powerful elites have made decisions that have shaped the fate of these institutions. Now the same people who underfunded or mismanaged them are moving to hand the institutions to private companies—some of which they own or hold stakes in. If they wanted to, they could make different choices that put mwananchi before profit.
- b) There are other choices besides selling. Government officials could audit major projects to find waste, inflated costs and projects that no longer serve anyone. Instead of letting them rot, government officials could repair leaking water systems and expand rural water schemes.

4. Describe the big sale by its effects

Most (or some) people don't wake up thinking about ownership structures or private-public partnerships. They will think about whether they can afford matatu fare or school fees or bundles to scroll TikTok. They think about the frustration of fundraising to fly a loved one to India for treatment because our hospitals don't work. Show people what the big sale means in practice—how they will experience it. Be clear why costs climb. Once a service is run for profit, the mwananchi is no longer the priority—profit is. A private owner puts in money to make more money. Use examples people already know such as the Nairobi Expressway to show how this works. The road may be convenient, but access depends on one's ability to pay. When people can see the consequences in their own lives, the issue becomes clear and urgent—and something to act on.

Sample message:

- c) Mali ya uma ikiuzwa, bei ya vitu itapanda. Look at the Nairobi Expressway. The private investor who financed that road must recover their money through the tolls Kenyans—those who can afford it—will pay for years to come.

5. Be honest about the current reality, such as the frustrations people feel

Don't pretend that public systems are working well. Kenyans have stood in the overcrowded halls of public hospitals or walked long distances looking for water. People are right to be frustrated by public services, and those pushing the big sale are counting on it. If you ignore that reality, you lose credibility. Acknowledge that frustration but point the frustration back at the decision-makers and the decisions that weakened these services in the first place.

Sample message: Kenyans are frustrated, and rightly so. No one should queue for hours waiting for treatment. No one should be denied treatment because SHA didn't work. But you do not fix our public hospitals by selling them. You fix them by staffing them, funding them, ensuring they have enough medication and running them for people they are meant to serve, not profit.

6. End on hope. Describe the vision of what's possible

Do not end with despair. If the messaging ends with "everything is broken," people will feel defeated and fall into the trap of sasa tutado? Strong messaging will leave Kenyans sure that another direction is possible—that we can build systems that work for us. Many Kenyans remember glimpses of what public systems can make possible. These memories matter in visioning what is possible, so use them. But don't stop at nostalgia. That past was not perfect, and it did not serve everyone. There is much we should not romanticise. Use those memories as a starting point and connect them to a bigger and better vision for Kenya and paint it clearly.

Sample messages:

- a) These things are possible. Kenya can work if those in power want it to. Our children can have public spaces to play. Remember when Buru had places for children to play? Now imagine better: A Kenya where the best of what Nairobi once offered is also available in Garisa, Busia, Turkana and Kwale. A Kenya where a child in Lodwar has the same access to good schools such as the one in Kilimani and every home, wherever it is, has clean water.
- b) The government should be able to build decent housing through public rental housing, social housing, cooperative housing and genuinely affordable ownership. Housing must be planned with transport, water, sanitation, schools, clinics, parks, libraries, markets and work. A decent home is not just walls and a roof; it is a place from which a person can live, work, move and participate in society.

The Core Message

As Kenyans, no matter where we come from, where we live, who we know, who we support politically, we want the same things: clean water, a clinic that treats us when we are sick, education for our children, food on the table and generally the dignity of a decent life. Public services that make that life possible.

Our parents, our grandparents and we ourselves build these services with our taxes. Hii ni mali ya uma, sisi. It exists to serve us and make our lives easier—not to enrich a select few.

Today, a small circle of wealthy elites and politicians are deciding to sell what we have built together. They tell us public services have failed and that selling them is the only solution, yet decisions politicians have made have weakened public services.

It does not have to be this way. The government can choose to invest in public systems instead of selling them. A Kenya where public systems belong to all wananchi and work for all wananchi is within reach and it's ours to demand.

Words that work

Say...	Instead of...	Because...
Mali ya uma, what belongs to Kenyans, what belongs to us...	Assets, enterprises, infrastructure	These terms remind people of that shared ownership, and these resources belong to the people and not the government of the day.
The big sale, selling what belongs to mwananchi, running our services for profit	Privatisation, public-private partnerships	These phrases make an abstract process visible and human by describing what is being sold and who is being affected.
Choices our leaders made, decisions by politicians	Economic necessity, market forces	This emphasizes that these are decisions made by our politicians and not inevitable forces beyond anyone's control.
The Kenya we want, a future Kenyans can live in	Fiscal adjustment, reform	This keeps the future human and imaginable

Common attacks and how to respond

a) Selling will improve efficiency and quality of services

Respond: Selling a public service doesn't fix it. It changes who it is for. Run for profit, it charges more and narrows access. We already know what happens when public systems fail and people are pushed to private alternatives such as hospitals and schools. Families pay more, and there is no guarantee of better quality.

b) There is no alternative

Respond: This ongoing big sale is not by accident. Politicians made decisions that weakened them, then used that damage as the reason to hand them over—often to the same wealthy people—while wananchi pay through costlier services. Those decisions can be reversed. The same government that starved these systems can choose to fund and fix them. Even the 'Singapore' politicians invoke did not build its rise by sinking public systems.

c) At least private owners will not be as corrupt.

Respond: Looting and selling are often the same hands: starve a service and sell it to yourself or your friends. The big sale will not cure corruption.

d) We need to reduce debt

Respond: Individual politicians made decisions that left us deep in debt. Those who ran up the debt and privately profited from it need to carry its weight. We cannot sell what belongs to wananchi to cover a bill wananchi never chose.

e) Honestly, I am not very hopeful

Respond: That's fair—Kenyans have been let down for a long time. But hii Kenya ni yetu, and it can work for us. We have seen public systems deliver before. The way forward is to demand that the government makes decisions that protect them and make them work for us. They are counting on us to lose hope and to forget what's possible.

Stats that tell a story

Where possible, use a number to anchor the story. Numbers help people grasp scale, but they should never replace the human story.

- a) In February 2026, the High Court [dismissed petitions](#) challenging the constitutionality of the Privatisation Act, 2025, clearing the way for the government sell stakes in 11 state-owned firms, the including the Kenya Pipeline Company.
- b) Kenya loses [nearly half](#) of the water it produces each year before it reaches consumers through leaks, theft, faulty meters and aging infrastructure.
- i) Kenya's public debt rose to KES 12.84 trillion by early 2026. Debt servicing consumes a significant share of government revenue. In 2024/25 nearly 69% of all ordinary revenue went just to servicing it.
- j) [An investigation by Africa Uncensored, Lighthouse Reports and The Guardian](#) found that SHA's AI means-testing algorithm systematically overcharges the poor and undercharges the rich. The investigation claims that the government was warned the system was inequitable before launching it.

Resources

- [The Race Class Narrative](#) Framework
- [Privatisation Act, 2025](#)
- [Infrastructure Fund Bill, 2026](#)