

# WHAT IS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?



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## WHAT IS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO THE GOVERNANCE OF A COUNTRY?

**Public participation** is an action or a series of actions a person takes to involve themselves in affairs of government or community. These activities include voting, attending meetings, participating in public or private political discussion or debate on issues, signing a petition on a desired government action or policy, volunteering in community activities and contributing money to a political party or candidate of one's choice among other similar activities.

## WHERE DO THE CITIZENS GET THIS POWER TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS?

The citizen gets the powers to participate in public affairs directly from the Constitution. This is because sovereign power is vested on the people and has been enshrined in the Constitution. The Constitution of Kenya 2010 upholds peoples' power and outlines how it can be exercised.

Sovereignty of people is articulated in Article 1 of Constitution. **Specifically, the Constitution provides for sovereign power in the following manner:**

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 under Article 1(1-4) states that, all sovereign power belongs to the people of Kenya and shall be exercised only in accordance with the Constitution. It also states that the people may exercise their sovereign power either directly or through their democratically elected representatives. In Kenya Sovereign power of the people is exercised both at national and county level. Further, sovereign power is delegated to the following state organs:



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- Parliament at the National level and the Legislative assemblies in the counties.
  - National Executive and executive structures in county governments.
  - Judiciary and independent tribunals.

## **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF DUTY BEARERS (LEADERS) IN FACILITATING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?**

The following are the roles of duty bearers in facilitating public participation:

- i. Ensuring that as duty bearers (leaders) they are accessible to and represent citizens.
- ii. Ensuring existence of forums and opportunities for citizens to participate and engage in matters affecting their lives.
- iii. Providing civic education.
- iv. Developing effective communication channels with citizens.
- v. Providing timely information to citizens on critical and emerging issues.
- vi. Providing resources to facilitate public participation.

## **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO THE CITIZENS AND THE COUNTRY WHEN THERE IS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?**

The following are benefits of public participation:

- a) Improved service delivery by public officers.
- b) Increased credibility between public officers and community on important issues and services.
- c) Creates citizens who feel they belong and have trust in their community and local government.
- d) Provides a platform for greater diversity of citizens to contribute to public debate and decision making.
- e) Provides an opportunity for focused and prioritised community concerns to be addressed by public officials.
- f) Creates citizens who are more aware of their community needs and how government responds to those needs.

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## **WHAT EXACTLY IS CITIZEN POWER? AND WHAT TYPES OF POWERS DO CITIZENS HAVE TO ENABLE THEM TO EFFECTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THE GOVERNANCE AFFAIRS OF THEIR COUNTRY, COUNTY OR VILLAGE?**

Citizen power is simply the ability of a citizen to engage meaningfully with duty bearers/leaders/policy makers in determining and making their voices heard in as far as the running and management of the affairs of the country is concerned.

**The types of citizen power include:**

- 1. Passive power**
- 2. Physical power**
- 3. Fiscal power**

### **a) Passive Citizen Power**

This refers to a participation model that does not require direct physical actions such as signing a petition, voting in representatives/leaders; recalling underperforming representatives or leaders; and writing letters of complaint or demand for information or services to people in authority.

### **b) Physical Citizen Power**

This requires direct physical participation; it includes using ones' effort to engage; examples include working for or with the government to develop the country; protesting against bad governance, or boycotting services, products or bad policies and laws.

*NB: When exercising physical citizen power, it is important do so in a responsible manner as provided for under Bill of Rights in Article 37 of Constitution. The COK2010 states that that every person has right to peaceably (e.g. not destroy property, not cause chaos, not block roads and or passages etc.), unarmed assemble, demonstrate, picket and present petitions to public authorities.*

### **c) Fiscal Citizen Power**

This refers to actions that will involve financial resources; it includes activities such as paying or not paying taxes, giving donations and approving spending of money by government etc.

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The citizen can use this power in various ways. e.g. by paying taxes the citizen is participating in building the country by ensuring the much needed revenue is available and that services can be brought to the citizens. The citizen can equally demand to see how his/her taxes are used and demand for accountability and sanctions in case of misappropriation of the same funds.

## **WHY DO WE NEED PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?**

**We need public participation for the following reasons:**

- a) To promote democratic and accountable exercise of power.
- b) To foster national unity by recognizing diversity.
- c) To give powers of self-governance to the people and enhance the participation of the people in the exercise of the powers of the State and making decisions affecting them.
- d) To recognize the rights of communities to manage their own affairs and for self-development.

## **FOR ONE TO SAY THAT PUBIC PARTICIPATION IS SUCCESSFUL AND IS TAKING PLACE WHAT PRINCIPLES SHOULD BE OBSERVED?**

- i. Timely access to relevant information, data, documents or related to policy formulation and implementation.
- ii. Reasonable access to the process of formulating and implementing policies, laws and regulations, including approval of development proposals, projects, budgets and granting of permits and establishments of specific performance standards and indicators.
- iii. Protection and promotion of the interests and rights of minorities, marginalized groups and communities and their access to relevant information.
- iv. Reasonable balance in roles and obligations of county government and non-state actors in decision making processes to promote shared responsibility and partnership and to provide complementary authority and oversight.
- v. Promotion of public-private partnership such as joint committees, technical teams and citizen commissions so as to encourage direct dialogue and concerted action on sustainable development.
- vi. Recognition and promotion of reciprocal roles of non-state actors' participation and governmental facilitation and oversight.

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## HOW CAN A CITIZEN PREPARE SO THAT S/HE CAN ENGAGE IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EFFECTIVELY?

- a) Identify what issues are up for discussion (what policy, legislation or development plan).
- b) Identify specific problems affecting them individually or in community, in relation to the issue being discussed.
- c) Think in advance with friends family colleagues or even individually and come up with possible scenarios and solutions/or proposals to the problem.
- d) Identify who needs be involved in public consultation.
- e) Assemble a citizen groups or likeminded people to have a united front and a larger voice; (BUT YOU CAN ALSO TAKE THIS INITIATIVE AS AN INDIVIDUAL IT IS NOT A MUST IT BE UNDERTAKEN IN A GROUP).
- f) Form partnerships and networks with local organizations and county government.
- g) Keep community informed on the outcomes and the progress of the process and discussions.
- h) Seek feedback from leaders/policy makers/duty bearers after the public participation event is over.

## WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS FORMS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION THAT A CITIZEN CAN ENGAGE IN?

**They include the following:**

- i. Attending public meetings/rallies.
- ii. Learn and discuss or support an issue of concern to the community.
- iii. Participating in sector working and interest groups or advisory committees to influence policies and plans.
- iv. Attending and participating in planning and budgeting forums.
- v. Demonstrating on a position or an issue, a cause or a government policy through marches, boycotts, sit-ins or various forms of peaceful protests.
- vi. Participating in civic discussions such as locals "baraza", radio programmes, TV programmes, community forums, online and social media platforms such (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter).
- vii. Persuading (lobbying) a lawmaker/(MP/MCA/Senator etc.) to vote in a certain way or to support a particular law, policy or position.
- viii. Petitioning government and signing petitions on issues affecting the

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community, the county, the country or even the continent.

ix. Vying as a candidate for an elective office.

x. Volunteering in a community initiative or holding state office.

xi. Campaigning for a political candidate or on issue(s) that will be voted for by public.

xii. Communicating and engaging with elected representatives on issues affecting the community and the society at large.

## ARE THERE LEVELS OR STAGES IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION OR IS PARTICIPATION STANDARD ACROSS THE BOARD?

Yes, there are stages. Specifically, there are 8 stages of Public participation. These are then classified into three categories. These have been outlined so that the citizen can know if their participation is adding value to the governance process or not. Out of the 8 stages we have 3 categories ranging from the “**least effective**” mode of participation to what is considered to be the “**most effective**” mode. The “most effective mode” is the mode that all the citizens are expected to be engaging in whenever they are involved in public participation.

### The three categories are as follows:

- 1) **Category 1** - Referred to as the lowest form of participation: No impact just done by the people in authority to make the citizen feel ‘happy’ inputs are not recognized.
- 2) **Category 2** - Tokenism: Some of the inputs and contributions from the citizens are considered and taken into account.
- 3) **Category 3** - Citizen Power: Here the citizen is fully engaged and his/her input and contribution is valued and accepted and has impact.

### Detailed explanation of the categories

#### Category 1 - Lowest form of participation

This category consists of two stages:

Stage 1 – **Manipulation**

Stage 2 – **Therapy**

Stage 1 and 2 are called lowest form of participation. These are lowest stages in public participation ladder. In manipulation stage, citizens participate in what has been planned by the authorities. They do not take part in decision making.



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Under the therapy stage anxiety of community members is diffused to pacify them and make them feel important. The primary objective of these two stages is to educate citizens on their concerns.

### **Category 2 - Tokenism**

Tokenism category consists of following three stages:

- Stage 3 - Informing
- Stage 4 - Consultation
- Stage 5 - Placation/appeasing or pacifying people.

The primary objective of tokenism is to allow citizens to hear and be heard.

Tokenism stage is considered a higher level stage because citizens have ability not just hear and be heard, but also advice power holders.

### **Category 3 - Citizen Power**

The citizen power category consists of three stages:

- Stage 6 - Partnership: Citizens can engage in negotiations with power holders or get involved in decision making responsibilities.





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- Stage 7 - Delegated Power: Power holders transfer part of their authority to individuals or community groups.
  - Stage 8 - Citizen Control: This is the upper-most stage and it reflects an increasing degrees of "citizen power". It relates to citizens having greater power over decision making process e.g. having more seats in a committee. Main objective of this stage is to fully involve the citizens in decision making process.

As a citizen you always need to ask and gauge yourself at what level of participation your leaders are involving you in and always aim to participate at the level of "citizen power".

## **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?**

The benefits of public participation include the following:

- i. Increased trust between public officials and the community.
- ii. Citizens have a sense of belonging and trust in their community leaders.
- iii. There is diverse views from a greater citizenry, contributing to robust and inclusive public debate on issues affecting the society as well as on decision-making.
- iv. Citizens are better informed on various developmental projects as well as the government initiatives.
- v. Community concerns are more focused and prioritized for public officials to address comprehensively.
- vi. Citizens' diverse and unique skills are revealed to government officials and to the community.
- vii. It contributes in setting the priorities of the community and better decision making.
- viii. The citizens is more aware of community concerns and can effectively judge government responses on issues affecting the community.
- ix. Public officials get a better understanding of community needs and are able respond effectively.

## **WHAT ARE THE CORE VALUES OF CITIZEN/PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?**

- a) Public participation is based on belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right be involved in the decision-making process.
- b) Public participation includes the promise that public's contribution will

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influence decision making by the authorities

**c)** Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.

**d)** Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.

**e)** Public participation seeks input/ideas from participants in designing how they participate.

**f)** Public participation provides participants with the information that they need to participate in a meaningful way.

**g)** Public participation communicates to the participants/citizens how their input affected the decision(s).





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