

# Enhancing citizen participation in local development planning in Nairobi and Makueni Counties in Kenya

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**Abstract.** *Public participation in development planning is critical for achieving sustainable development outcomes. Even though participation is still evolving, the existing theoretical models indicate that implementing*

*public participation enhances responsiveness to community needs, leverages diverse skills, and instills a sense of ownership for sustainable development projects. Although Kenya has made strides in ensuring citizens' participation in local government development processes, local authorities and other stakeholders still find the existing public participation inadequate, marginalizing the needs of the local citizens in development planning. This paper aims to explore the current status and determine the factors that affect the active participation of citizens in development planning by examining the preparation process of the 2023- 2027 County Integrated Development Plans for Nairobi and Makueni Counties in Kenya. The intention was to enhance participation by devising strategies for sustainable participation practices. Based on the case study approach, involving literature review and textual analysis of key documents and county-specific County Integrated Development plans retrieved from official online sources, the results revealed that Nairobi and Makueni counties have distinct approaches and challenges in public participation. Despite budget constraints and perceived citizen apathy, Nairobi addresses historical service delivery issues through diverse mechanisms like social media and town hall meetings. Makueni excels in inclusivity using comprehensive matrices, but low budget allocation hinders participation. Both counties aim to enhance participation, with Makueni emphasizing innovative civic empowerment through citizen schools and promoting inclusive decision-making. Unfortunately, the impacts of participation could not be evaluated in both cases because the plans lack a dedicated section on the approach to public participation used to develop the plans. These results imply the need for more studies on the impacts of participation and the effects of integrating technology, such as AI, in participation to promote efficiency in the use of scarce county resources.*

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## **1. Introduction**

With the growing human needs, government institutions across the developed and developing world are increasingly embracing public participation as crucial for development planning. Rooted in humanitarian movements advocating people-centric development (Jennings, 2000), public participation ensures

citizens affected by development decisions actively shape their course (Sinclair & Diduck, 2017; Maurice et al., 2021). However, with ongoing societal change, implementing public participation is becoming increasingly context-specific, and hence, the need for urgent localized studies in order to develop strategies for enhancing it, especially at sub-national levels.

Kenya has also embraced citizen participation in development planning. The country has initiated policy and legislative reforms to improve public participation in development. The 2010 Constitution of Kenya recognizes and institutionalizes public participation in the country. Moreover, the three arms of government established by the 2010 constitution have established standards for public involvement, emphasizing that it must be meaningful and not merely symbolic or procedural. As of 2016, more than fifty cases were filed in Kenyan courts challenging the lack of public participation in appointments, legislation, budgets, development projects, and impeachments.

Consequently, public participation has emerged as an evolving concept whose interpretation, application, and practice vary depending on the context and the issue under discussion. In order to improve public participation at sub-national levels (counties), this paper used the case study research design with a literature review and document content analysis in the case of Nairobi and Makueni Counties to explore the current status of citizen participation in developing the County Integrated Development Plans for the period 2023-2027 and extract valuable lessons for future improvements. To respond to these study aims, this study reviewed the theoretical background of democratic principles grounded in participatory democracy and aspects of constitutional law from the perspective of sustainable development. The findings were then synthesized together with results from empirical reviews in order to determine the policy implications of this study. The study focuses on Makueni County for its established public participation and Nairobi for its urbanization. A comparative analysis aims to draw insights for enhancing public involvement in development planning.

### *1.1. Participatory governance for local development planning: Theoretical Analysis*

In this paper, public participation refers to the active involvement, engagement, and inclusion of public members in decision-making processes, policy development, and implementing projects or initiatives by governments, organizations, or institutions. Public participation in development planning fosters responsiveness to community needs, collaboration, and utilization of diverse skills. It enriches decision-making with local knowledge and enhances project ownership, sustainability, and success through a collective commitment

to initiatives (Wiarda et al., 2023). Participatory governance originated from Ancient Athens revived during the enlightenment period and gained traction in the twentieth century as a response to top-down approaches, bolstered by civil rights movements. It later evolved into an inclusive decision-making model championed by international development organizations and is now a recognized principle for democratic and responsive governance globally (Ergenc, 2023).

Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, featuring eight steps that signify varying levels of involvement, is the most used theoretical model for describing citizen participation in development. The ladder serves as a valuable tool for interpreting the meaning of 'participation' in programs and policies. Arnstein's conceptualization of the eight rungs provides a comprehensive understanding of the varying levels of public participation. Rungs one and two, termed as "non-participation," involve manipulation and therapy strategies by those in leadership. This approach circumvents genuine participation by patronizing participants, either through education or curing processes. Progressing to Rungs three and four signifies a shift toward "tokenism," where citizens are informed and consulted, though their input is non-binding. Rung five, known as "Placation," represents a higher form of tokenism, allowing advice without decision-making power. Rung six, "Partnership," enables citizens to negotiate and influence decision-making. The pinnacle, Rungs seven and eight, embodies "Delegate power" and "Citizen control," granting have-not citizens the authority to manage their own affairs. Another significant contribution comes from Sarah White, who outlines four forms of participation: nominal, instrumental, representative, and transformative, each with distinct functions. Actors at different power levels, both at the top and grassroots, perceive and have different interests in each form. These conceptual frameworks contribute to a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of public participation (Gaber, 2020). Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation was used as the lens for examining Kenya's case studies in order generate study implications.

Empirical reviews on participatory governance reveal worldwide efforts to entrench public participation in development planning, yet challenges hinder its success in many local governments. Studies conducted in Zimbabwe (Nyama & Mukwada, 2023) and China (Qiu et al., 2023) underscore the intricate dynamics influencing public participation, emphasizing the need for context-specific strategies to achieve meaningful engagement in development planning. Moreover, despite legislative guidelines for citizen participation in defining local development agendas in South Africa, studies suggest citizen involvement varies across municipalities. Some municipalities exhibit genuine participatory

processes, while others treat citizens as mere ratifiers of pre-planned development interests (Molale, 2023; Molale, 2021). The study advocates exploring citizen participation through the lens of participatory communication to understand the facilitative nature of participation in local government. The above reviews show persistent difficulties in achieving meaningful public involvement in development planning worldwide. Despite democratic principles advocating inclusivity and transparency, implementation hurdles persist, requiring further research to bridge the gap and enhance community engagement globally.

Various factors affect citizen participation in development planning. In Zimbabwe, top-down approaches that neglect citizens' needs affect citizen participation in development planning (Nyama & Mukwada, 2023). In Tanzania, Income level, cattle ownership, age, awareness, experience, and gender were noted as factors influencing citizen participation in development planning. To address this challenge, the government was urged to enhance community involvement in project development (Fredrick & Ahmad, 2023). In Thailand, where tokenism is rampant in light rain projects that demand citizen participation, socio-demographic factors such as residential location, age, occupation, and income affect participation levels (Panyavaranant et al., 2023). In Indonesia, the complexity of participative development planning requires ongoing assessment of institutionalization through laws and regulations in the context of democratized and decentralized governance (Widianingsih & Morrell, 2007). From these reviews, the complexity of public participation dynamics stresses the importance of targeted strategies for meaningful engagement in development planning.

In the Kenyan context, public participation is defined as an open and accountable process, aligning with constitutional provisions emphasizing its fundamental value. The 2010 Constitution mandates the state to facilitate public involvement in policymaking and governance. Several policy and legislative measures prioritize public engagement, such as public finance management, planning, performance management, and the Bill of Rights. The County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) are pivotal in shaping individual county development. CIDPs are comprehensive, medium-term strategic plans developed through an inclusive process involving stakeholders, reflecting a holistic approach to development (County Governance Tool Kit Website, 2023). The CIDP development process involves meticulous stages, starting with consultations and data collection, followed by stakeholder engagement, formulation of strategies, and public participation forums. These forums allow

citizens to contribute to the development priorities and goals. The CIDP development culminates in approval by the County Assembly, ensuring transparent and citizen-driven governance at the county level (IGTRC n.d). Various mechanisms facilitate consultations between state organs and the public in Kenya, including community forums, town hall meetings, and media engagement. Challenges to meaningful public participation include limited resources, time constraints, accessibility issues, distrust in leadership, elite capture, absence of enforceable norms, political competition, compensation expectations, inadequate civic education, and insufficient funding. Despite these challenges, public participation remains integral to inclusive governance and sustainable development in Kenya (IGTRC n.d). Exploring cases in different devolved units, such as Makueni and Nairobi, could shed light on unique practices and understanding of diverse contexts, which inform strategies to enhance inclusivity and effectiveness in governance processes across different counties in Kenya.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### *2.1. Case study research design*

This study uses a case study research design to evaluate the implications of using public participation in developing county-integrated development plans. The choice of this design was informed by the fact that public participation involves complex and context-specific challenges that often require an in-depth understanding of the unique factors at play. A case study design allows for an in-depth examination of a specific case and provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and contextual factors, including those involved in county-integrated development plans. The design focuses on understanding the specific contexts, processes, and outcomes in participatory development planning.

### *2.2. Case studies*

#### **2.2.1. Nairobi City County**

Nairobi County is one of the forty-seven Counties in the Republic of Kenya. It borders Kiambu County to the North and West, Kajiado to the South, and Machakos to the East. Among the three neighboring counties, Kiambu County shares the longest boundary with Nairobi County. The county has a total area of 696.1 km<sup>2</sup> and is located between longitudes thirty-six to forty-five degrees east and latitudes one to eighteen degrees south. It lies at an altitude of 1,798 meters

above sea level. According to Article 220 (2) of the Constitution, the third County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) for 2023-2027 has been crafted to establish a framework for county planning, budgeting, funding, monitoring, and evaluating programs and projects in the medium term. It is in response to the development issues identified by the county citizens. The plan focuses on economic growth, poverty reduction, income generation, employment creation, improved service delivery, and business development as key drivers of its development agenda (Nairobi County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027).

In the implementation of CIDP III, the county is effectively integrating the global Agenda 2030, Africa's Agenda 2063, the fourth Medium Term Plan of Kenya Vision 2030, and the "Big Four" Agenda. Building on the successes and lessons from the first two CIDPs, this plan aims to accelerate socio-economic transformation, achieving a resilient economy through measures such as enhancing city competitiveness, increased infrastructure investment, improved education and skills access, functional health systems, broader water and sanitation supply, expanded market linkages, promotion of entrepreneurship, job creation, and provision of decent and affordable housing (Nairobi County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027).

The outcomes will be achieved by strategically focusing on economic, social, environmental, spatial, legal, and institutional aspects of development, with collaboration from stakeholders like the National Government, development partners, private sector investors, and other counties. The ultimate goal is to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors of Nairobi City County, including improved incomes, life expectancies, and knowledge and skills acquisition, all realized through a resilient economy by 2027 (Nairobi County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027).

The plan is organized into six chapters, starting with County General Information, which provides background details about the county's position, size, physiographic and natural conditions, administrative and political units, demographic features, and the human development index of its citizens. Chapter six of the plan details the County monitoring and evaluation structure, Outcome indicators, Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting, Dissemination, Feedback Mechanism, Citizen Engagement, and the Evaluation Plan. Information and learning from the monitoring and evaluation system will provide critical input to the appropriate design of future programs and projects (Nairobi County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027).

Unfortunately, the plan lacks a dedicated section on public participation in the plan formulation process. Therefore, the extent of public participation in preparing the CIDP could not be thoroughly evaluated. Nonetheless, for the current CIDP, a public participation notice was placed on the county website inviting the general public, development partners, non-state actors, and all stakeholders to Ward-based consultative forums scheduled in seventeen sub-counties that constitute Nairobi County. The two-day process between seventeenth and eighteenth November 2022 was conducted at various centralized locations, and the consultations were planned to start at 9 am. The participation was also to inform the finalization of the 2023/2024 Annual Development Plan. Those willing to participate could submit written memoranda to ward and sub-county administrators' offices, county economic planning office, or send an email or physically deliver the memoranda to the County Secretary's office. Customer care and social media links were also provided to promote citizen interaction (Nairobi County Website, 2023).

In the previous CIDP 2018-2022, the devolution and sub-county administration sector enhanced citizen participation in county Government programs through public participation and civic education. At the end of the plan period, the sector carried out 272 public participation forums against a target of 340 and seventeen Civic Education forums against a target of 204. During the years 2020 and 2021, the sector did not carry out any public participation forums due to the Ministry of Health protocols on public gatherings due to COVID-19. In prioritizing issues for 2023-2027, the low level of public inclusivity in county government issues is noted as a development issue caused by inadequate public participation forums. This is attributed to potential low budgetary allocation for public participation even though there are opportunities where donors can finance such forums. The other cause of low inclusivity is the lack of public participation guidelines constrained by public apathy due to a culture of tokenism. Lack of public participation in land administration and management is noted to be caused by dilapidated city hall infrastructure. Public participation is also affected by the administration's disjointed and ad hoc nature or impromptu nature. The plan proposes the following strategies for enhancing public participation: to enhance civic engagement and foster a more inclusive decision-making process, the establishment of a dedicated Public Participation Directorate is imperative. The Directorate will play a pivotal role in recruiting skilled and passionate individuals, such as County Rapporteurs, who will serve as liaisons between communities and government entities. Additionally, the identification and empowerment of Community Public Participation Champions will be a key focus, ensuring that diverse voices are heard and amplified. The Directorate will work collaboratively



to develop a comprehensive Public Participation Policy, laying the foundation for transparent and participatory governance. In conjunction with this policy, guidelines, and regulations will be crafted to provide a framework for effective public engagement. To further align with best practices and legal frameworks, a thorough review of the National Council for Civic and Governance (NCCG) Public Participation Act will be conducted, ensuring that the Directorate's initiatives align seamlessly with existing legislation and contribute to the overall advancement of democratic values (Nairobi County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027).

### 2.2.2. Makueni County

Makueni County is one of the forty-seven counties in Kenya. It is situated in the southeastern part of the country and borders the following counties: Machakos to the North, Kitui to the East, Taita Taveta to the South, and Kajiado to the West. The county lies between Latitude 1° 35' and 3° 00' South and Longitude 37°10' and 38°30' East with an area of 8,176.7 KM<sup>2</sup>. The county is divided into nine National government administrative sub-counties (Kathonzweni, Kibwezi, Kilungu, Makindu, Makueni, Mbooni East, Mbooni West, Mukaa, and Nzaui) and six county government administrative sub-counties which are also the parliamentary constituencies namely Makueni, Mbooni, Kibwezi East, Kibwezi West, Kaiti and Kilome. The six sub-counties are further subdivided into 30 electoral wards. Makueni County is a South Eastern Kenya Block (SEKEB) member alongside Kitui and Machakos Counties (Makueni County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027).

At its core of development planning, public participation is a meticulously structured process of consulting with individuals, groups, and entities before making decisions. It is a mechanism designed to amplify the voices of those who may otherwise go unheard, crystallizing the concept of agency within the County Government. Public participation is intended to generate and confirm decisions rather than being a conduit for decisions already made. Importantly, it transcends political affiliations, representing a non-partisan process where the government becomes the agent seeking instruction and direction from the people. The Government of Makueni County is steadfast in its commitment to employing various participation models, including consultation, placation, partnership, and citizen control. This commitment aligns with the constitutional vision of fostering people-centered and people-driven development. From its inception, the county government has actively strived to create an environment conducive to citizen involvement in policy development. To operationalize this commitment, the government adopts multiple forms of public participation,

from informing and consulting to involving, collaborating, and empowering the public.

A distinctive feature is that participation in all forums, and development committees is entirely voluntary, with no benefits to members based on their engagement. The implementation of public participation unfolds through a comprehensive matrix of forums established at different administrative levels. The Village Peoples Forum, Village Clusters Peoples Forum, Sub-Ward Peoples Forum, Ward Peoples Forum, Sub-County Peoples Forum, and County Peoples Forum form a hierarchical structure, each serving as a conduit for citizen engagement. These forums convene regularly, ensuring broad representation and active citizen involvement in decision-making processes. The Public Participation Matrix delineates the number of forums, participants, development committee representatives, and the working composition of each forum. These forums, from the grassroots to the county level, create a tiered system that reflects the diverse composition and needs of the community. With a total target of 3,488 participants, this matrix outlines a comprehensive and inclusive approach to public participation.

Organized groups, including teachers' unions, head teachers associations, women's organizations, youth councils, faith-based organizations, farmers groups, and others, are crucial contributors to the participatory process. These groups ensure that diverse perspectives and interests are considered in decision-making forums. The overarching goal of this public participation framework is not only to facilitate citizen engagement but also to have a tangible impact on social and economic dimensions. Socially, public participation is seen as a potent tool in mitigating conflicts by bringing together diverse stakeholders and interest groups. By actively involving the public, the framework seeks to reduce the number and magnitude of social conflicts arising while implementing policies, laws, and development plans. Economically, an enlightened citizenry is viewed as a catalyst for effective participation in the development process. Empowered citizens are expected to influence the decision-making process, positively impacting their livelihoods. This dual focus on social and economic impacts underscores the comprehensive and sustainable nature of the public participation framework in Makueni County (Makueni County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027).

The 2023-27 County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) marks the third long-term strategy since the initiation of Devolution in Kenya, a consequence of the 2010 Constitution. Timed alongside the new government regime post the August 2022 elections, the plan, themed 'A resilient economy for sustainable

development,' aims to foster a community capable of withstanding shocks and fostering economic growth. Acknowledging national and international commitments, the CIDP aligns with Africa's Agenda 2063, Paris Agreement, East Africa Community Vision 2050, International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 25 Kenya Commitments, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, Kenya Vision 2030, and The Makueni Vision 2025. Structured around eight sectors—Water, Sanitation, Environment, and Natural Resources; Agriculture and Rural Development; Transport, Infrastructure, Energy and ICT; Health Services; Social Protection, Education and Recreation; General Economic and Commercial Affairs; Lands and Urban Development; and Devolution—the CIDP consists of six chapters and an annex. These chapters cover county overview, performance review, spatial development framework, development priorities, implementation framework, and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework (MEALF).

Additionally, the CIDP, estimated at Kshs 92.3 billion, will be executed through Annual Development Plans, drawing funding from the national government's equitable share, grants, Own Source Revenue (OSR), and Development Partners (DP) support. A series of Sector Working Reports underpinned the work on the plan prepared by Sector Members at the Sub County and County Level, and the Ward Public Participation reports from the ward and locational public participation (Makueni County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027). Unfortunately, the plan lacks a dedicated section on the plan formulation process. Therefore, the extent of public participation in preparing the CIDP could not be thoroughly evaluated. However, from the 2023-2027 CIDP, a public notice was issued on the county website inviting residents and other stakeholders to a sub-ward public participation forum on the 2024/2025 county annual development plan and community feedback on CIDP 2023-2027 in various sub-ward venues between twenty-first and twenty-second August 2023. A PDF report on the participation is also available online (Makueni county, website 2023)

### *2.3. Data sources and collection process*

The study employed a systematic textual analysis procedure to extract and analyze relevant documents, including county-integrated development plans, policy reports, and project reports. The document selection criteria and data extraction steps focused on implementation cases, methodologies, strategies, and key actors. The coding scheme categorized textual data into themes such as "citizen participation," "Policy Framework," and "inclusivity." Contextual analysis

considered broader social, economic, and environmental factors influencing outcomes. The interpretation and synthesis phase drew meaningful conclusions, showcasing implications for future development planning. Validity and reliability checks ensured accuracy through independent coding and cross-verification, leading to a comprehensive report emphasizing the role of public participation in understanding development planning in the Kenyan context. The process involved reading and breaking down the text, coding relevant units, grouping codes into categories, analyzing patterns, and interpreting themes to conclude community participation in development planning. The key documents consulted are shown in Table 1.

Document	Type	Source	Key Findings
<b>Makueni County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027</b>	County planning tool	Internet	The plan marks the third generation of long-term planning. The public is consulted in all the development planning sectors.
<b>Nairobi County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027</b>	County planning tool	Internet	The plan incorporates the aspirations and needs of the city's residents, businesses, and stakeholders through a participatory and consultative process.
<b>Nthiga and Moi, (2021)</b>	Research article	Internet	There was active public involvement and overall satisfaction with CDF project execution. However, there was need for exploring further avenues to expand public participation in policy formulation.
<b>Mutisya, (2018)</b>	Research article	Internet	Public participation was insufficient and overshadowed by higher-level technocrats. There was a need for civic education on project monitoring and evaluation.
<b>Waitere, (2022)</b>	Research article	Internet	Challenges to public participation included political obstacles, role conflicts, limited facilitation, and inadequate incentives. The study called for timely civic education.
<b>Mbevi, (2016)</b>	Research article	Internet	Findings showed limited community involvement attributed to economic constraints and lack of understanding. There was the need for more civic education, and involving communities in project planning for better resource identification and contribution.
<b>Kioko, (2018)</b>	Research article	Internet	There was a significant relationship between community participation and the regulatory framework, socio-economic factors, social attitude, and trust. Participation could be strengthened by civic education.
<b>Kisumbi et al., (2017)</b>	Research article	Internet	From the background of the theory of Citizen Participation Ladder, the study found that Citizen Power did not significantly impact

Document	Type	Source	Key Findings
			water project sustainability. The study called for enhanced community participation in all water projects.
Malusha & Njoroge, (2023)	Research article	Internet	The findings revealed that citizen participation practices significantly influence CIDP implementation. The study called for the publishing of public deliberation outcomes.
Kaseya & Kihonge, (2016)	Webpage	Internet	The study found that civic education significantly impacts participation. Further research on the education level's impact on public participation was suggested.
Atieno et al., (2019)	Research Article	Internet	Findings indicated that education level, language use, employment status, trust, and political influence impact public participation. The study called for a change in public attitude towards government project participation.
Mutwiri, (2016)	Research Article	Internet	Findings revealed that community awareness, behavioral factors, and economic considerations significantly impact public participation. It called for enhancing public awareness, tailoring development projects to local economic benefits, and improving public relations and policy communication.
Namano, (2015)	Research Article	Internet	It found a very weak relationship between public awareness and participation, no relationship with accessibility, and a weak positive correlation with the financial situation.
Mbithi et al., (2019)	Research Article	Internet	The study revealed a positive level of citizen participation. Conversely, challenges in influencing decision-making, unresponsive County Assembly Members, difficulty accessing information, and corruption.
Munyao, (2019)	Research Article	Internet	The research identified systemic gaps affecting the effectiveness of public participation, such as issues with civic education, lack of a public participation Act, and communication gaps in public forums. It called for aligning legal reforms for public participation.

**Table 1.** Documents reviewed.

#### 2.4. Data analysis

The reviewed literature from document content analysis revealed that several pivotal factors that shape the engagement level and overall process efficacy influence effective public participation in development planning. Effective public

participation in development planning requires clear and accessible communication of plans, considering diverse demographics and cultural nuances. Building trust in overseeing institutions is crucial, alongside well-timed and flexible engagement activities. Capacity building through education and training fosters community participation. Supportive legal and policy frameworks and adequate resource allocation enhance inclusive strategies. Establishing accessible feedback mechanisms is vital to assure communities, and learning from past experiences and addressing historical perspectives is crucial for future engagement success. These findings constituted the conceptual lenses of this study and were used to observe the current status of citizen participation in developing CIDP for Nairobi and Makueni Counties and to draw study lessons. In order to explore the current status, five broad thematic areas, namely, participation activities, process, achievements, challenges, and strategies for participation, were analyzed for each county. Document content analysis was used for its cost-effectiveness compared to other research methods, such as surveys or experiments. It avoids direct participant contact, which is beneficial for sensitive topics. Objective and relying on document content sidesteps researcher bias. Though lacking quantitative data, acknowledged limitations in document availability hinder statistical depth, impacting the overall study.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. *Current status on the role of citizens in development planning*

Results show that public participation is beneficial for both Nairobi and Makueni counties. Table 2 shows the current status of citizen participation in CIDP development. Nairobi aspires to use public participation to regain its image after many years of sub-optimal service delivery. Makueni seeks to use public participation for the purpose of improving the quality-of-service delivery.

Thematic Area	Nairobi	Makueni
<b>Participation activities</b>	Long-term development planning (CIDP) and short-term development plan (Annual Development plan)	Long-term development planning (CIDP) and short-term development plan (Annual Development plan)
<b>Mechanism of participation and category of participation</b>	Various mechanisms, including Social media (Facebook, X), town hall meetings at ward level, and written and oral submissions (Nairobi County Website, 2023; Nairobi County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027).	Various mechanisms are used for public participation (Makueni County website, 2023). Participation is structured (Makueni County Integrated Development Plan, 2023-2027),

<b>Achievements or benefits</b>	Improved quality of service and county image as the "The Green City in the Sun."	Improved quality of service.
<b>Challenges and causes</b>	Limited budgetary allocation and citizen apathy	Inadequate capacity among the citizens, Inadequate funding.

**Table 2.** Status of participation in development planning

### 3.2. Factors affecting citizen role in participation in development planning

Results show that several key factors affect public participation in both Nairobi and Makueni (Table 3).

<b>Key Factor</b>	<b>Nairobi</b>	<b>Makueni</b>
<b>Accessible information</b>	A public participation notice was placed on the county website and social media handles	A public participation notice is displayed on the county website
<b>Inclusivity of outreach strategies</b>	There is a need for inclusive public participation guidelines.	The outreach strategy is highly comprehensive and inclusive.
<b>Cultural sensitivity</b>	Public apathy due to a perceived culture of tokenism may hinder effective public participation.	Citizens are enthusiastic to participate in CIDP and other development matters.
<b>Trust in institutions</b>	Low levels of trust due to bad negative experiences	There is a high level of trust in institutions
<b>Timing and flexibility of engagement</b>	Public participation is conducted in 2 days but has flexible approaches, including emails.	Public participation is conducted in 2 days but has flexible approaches, including petition and complaint forms.
<b>Capacity-building opportunities for the citizens</b>	There are forums for capacity building through civic education	There are forums for capacity building through civic education
<b>Resource allocation</b>	There are limited budgetary resources to facilitate participation	There are limited budgetary resources to facilitate participation
<b>Past experiences and perceptions of participation</b>	Unfavorable perception due to bad negative experiences with participation	Favorable perception due to the presence of feedback mechanisms

**Table 3:** Factors affecting participation

### 3.3. Strategies for enhancing the role of citizen participation in development planning

Results show that Nairobi County wishes to ensure citizens are adequately informed, included, heard, served with dignity and order, actively participate in decisions that impact their needs, hold public officers accountable, and have

creative self-expression opportunities. Makueni seeks to transform citizen participation through a raft of proposals, as shown in Table 4.

<b>Nairobi</b>	<b>Makueni</b>
Establishing a public participation directorate	To enact implementable laws and policies, undertake objective oversight, and represent the interests of the public
Recruiting Public Participation personnel, including the County Rapporteur	To empower the citizenry to achieve meaningful participation in development activities.
Identifying Community Public Participation Champions	Improving community knowledge in development matters
Developing a public participation policy;	Improving community participatory and representative decision-making targeting special interest groups involved in participatory development
Developing public participation guidelines and regulations	Establishing participatory development committees
Reviewing the Nairobi City County Government Public Participation Act	Writing social safeguard reports and implement them
Collecting data, classifying data geographically and along other applicable matrices, and building appropriate databases for participation and engagement	Improving civic education resource materials and sharing them with the citizens
Conducting mapping of stakeholders per sector	Developing a civic education curriculum and disseminating it
Undertaking a baseline survey of public participation	Establishing a center for devolution and participatory development (community-led development school)

**Table 4.** Strategies for improving participation

In summary, Nairobi and Makueni counties demonstrate unique approaches and challenges in citizen participation in development planning. Nairobi tackles historical service delivery problems through social media and town hall meetings, overcoming obstacles amid budget constraints and citizen apathy. In contrast, Makueni excels in inclusivity, using comprehensive matrices and engaging numerous participants. Shared factors influencing participation in both counties



include low budgetary allocation, cultural sensitivity, trust levels, timing, and past experiences. Improvement strategies encompass creating participation directorates, recruiting personnel, implementing laws and policies, emphasizing civic empowerment, and fostering inclusive decision-making.

#### 4. Discussion

Participatory governance as a key strategy for achieving sustainable development outcomes. Public participation enhances responsiveness to community needs, leverages diverse skills, and instills a sense of ownership for sustainable development projects (Jennings, 2000; Sinclair & Diduck, 2017; Maurice et al., 2021; Ergenc, 2023). It is behind this backdrop that in a bid to promote inclusive development, Kenya has deliberately entrenched public participation in key national development policies and legislation. In the context of development planning at the local level, the County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) are important in shaping the development trajectory of individual counties. Their development involves a meticulous and participatory process with multiple stages as guided by key policies and legislation outlined in Table 1, especially the County Governments Act of 2012. However, public participation is not uniform across counties. Moreover, the participation outcomes have been largely contextual with the changing socio-economic matrices.

This paper aimed to use document content analysis in the case of Nairobi and Makueni counties to explore and compare the current status of citizen participation in developing the county's integrated development plans for 2023-2027. When the analytical approach developed from the literature review was applied to the two counties, results showed that both Nairobi and Makueni counties showcase distinct approaches and challenges. Citizen participation is sought in both long-term and short-term development planning. Moreover, both counties employ similar strategies, incorporating mechanisms such as social media, town hall meetings, and written/oral submissions. However, Nairobi's approach, though not explicitly stated, is perceived as potentially tokenistic, possibly due to perceived citizen apathy.

In contrast, Makueni adopts a structured matrix for participation at the sub-ward level, documented in a comprehensive PDF report, targeting a diverse group of 3,488 participants. In addition, even though participation in both counties is aimed at improved service quality, Nairobi faces challenges of limited budgetary allocation and negative public perception, while Makueni grapples with citizen capacity and funding inadequacies (Table 2). In relation to Arnstein's

participation ladder, and based on study findings, the current status of the two cases falls in between and including Rungs three and five, signifying a shift between "tokenism," where citizens are informed and consulted. However, their input is non-binding and "Placation," representing a higher form of tokenism, allowing advice without decision-making power (Gaber, 2020). This finding is consistent with the findings from local studies conducted in Makueni county and has called for enhancing public participation in development planning such as Nthiga & Moi (2021), Mutisya (2018), Waitere (2022), Mbevi (2016) and Kioko (2018) and studies such as Atieno et al. (2019), Namano (2015), and Munyao (2019).

Results also reveal that similar factors affect the effectiveness of public participation, for instance, access to information, flexibility, and time in both counties. However, in the considered opinion of this paper, the limited budgetary allocation for facilitating citizen participation has a much greater negative impact on citizen participation. Limited financial resources restrict the implementation of effective outreach, educational initiatives, and feedback mechanisms, creating a more pronounced negative impact on the overall quality and inclusivity of citizen participation processes. Nevertheless, both counties have performed well by incorporating robust and flexible participation mechanisms that promote modern technology. Nairobi employs diverse methods such as social media (Facebook, X), ward-level town hall meetings, and written/oral submissions, detailed in the Nairobi County Website 2023. Makueni adopts diverse approaches to public participation, facilitating the submission of petitions and complaints through dedicated forms. The engagement extends to the sub-ward level, meticulously documented in a PDF report on the Makueni County website 2023 (Table 3). These findings give credence to the facilitative role that local and national government officials provide to encourage public participation in development planning (Nyama & Mukwada, 2023; Wiarda et al., 2023; Mbithi et al., 2019; Munyao, 2019).

While lauding the county officials for the gains registered in promoting participation, this study calls upon the county officials to redouble their efforts and further integrate the use of more modern multi-tasking technology by promoting AI technology in public participation. AI revolutionizes public participation in development planning through data analysis and insights, processing diverse data sources like social media and surveys. It extracts valuable insights from unstructured data, aiding planners in understanding public opinions. Predictive analytics, driven by AI algorithms, anticipates issues and opportunities based on historical data, enabling proactive addressing of public

concerns. Chatbots on websites or social media platforms engage the public instantly, answering queries and gathering feedback efficiently. Natural Language Processing analyzes language, helping planners grasp public sentiment. AI's role extends to Virtual and Augmented Reality, creating immersive simulations for public feedback. Personalized recommendations, automated surveys, collaborative platforms, and inclusive design ensure a dynamic and responsive development planning process accessible to all.

Moreover, even though diverse strategies are adopted to enhance citizen participation, Makueni's strategy of establishing a Centre for Devolution and Participatory Development (community-led development school) should be lauded as a strategy for enhancing the sustainable participation of citizens. Firstly, it serves as a dedicated hub for empowering communities with knowledge and skills essential for effective participation in local development processes. This strategy fosters a culture of informed engagement, enhancing the overall quality of citizen involvement. Moreover, centralizing resources and expertise in a specific institution creates a sustainable platform for continuous learning and capacity building. This approach ensures that communities are well-equipped to actively contribute to decision-making and development initiatives, making them more strategic and impactful. Nairobi County should be encouraged to develop a policy guideline for promoting citizen participation in CIDP development. This policy will provide a structured framework outlining the mechanisms and avenues through which citizens can actively engage in decision-making processes related to their communities. It ensures that the diverse voices and perspectives of the population are considered, contributing to more informed and equitable development plans. Additionally, a well-defined policy promotes transparency, accountability, and trust between the government and its constituents. Ultimately, it strengthens the social fabric by empowering citizens, making them active stakeholders in shaping the trajectory of their own development, and fostering a sense of ownership and pride in community outcomes.

Results in Table 4, comparing the public participation strategies of Nairobi and Makueni, show that both regions exhibit robust approaches, albeit with nuanced differences. Nairobi focuses on institutionalizing participation by establishing a Public Participation Directorate, while Makueni emphasizes enacting laws and policies for objective oversight. Both recruit specialized personnel, such as County Rapporteurs in Nairobi and Community Participation Champions in Makueni, to facilitate engagement. Nairobi prioritizes policy development and regulatory review, ensuring a legal framework for participation, whereas Makueni centers on improving community knowledge in development matters and

establishing participatory development committees. Nairobi's emphasis on data collection, classification, and database creation aligns with a structured approach for participation and engagement. At the same time, Makueni's focus on civic education resource materials and a community-led development school highlights a commitment to enhancing citizen understanding. Both regions share commonalities in conducting stakeholder mapping and baseline surveys, which are essential for informed decision-making. The adequacy of these strategies depends on the specific needs and dynamics of each county. Nairobi's legal and institutional foundation ensures a structured approach, while Makueni's emphasis on community empowerment and education reflects a grassroots-oriented strategy.

However, a major setback in both counties is that CIDPs lack a dedicated section highlighting how public consultations were conducted in their development. Lack of information on the form of public participation used, the impacts of participation, and the challenges incurred have significant implications. First, it hampers the thorough evaluation of public participation in preparing the plan. Public participation is crucial in democratic governance and decision-making processes. Without a clear understanding of how the plan was formulated, assessing the level of involvement and input from the community becomes challenging. This lack of transparency may lead to skepticism and mistrust among the public, as they may question the legitimacy of the plan and whether their voices were truly considered.

Furthermore, a dedicated section on the plan formulation process serves as a valuable resource for stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers. It provides insights into the methodologies, data sources, and criteria used in shaping the plan. This information is vital for accountability and for learning from the successes and challenges of the planning process. In the absence of such a section, there is a risk of overlooking potential flaws or biases in the formulation process. This, in turn, could impact the effectiveness and relevance of the CIDP. Additionally, making informed decisions for future planning initiatives becomes more difficult without clear documentation of the formulation process. To address these implications, it would be advisable to revisit the CIDP and incorporate a dedicated section outlining the steps to formulate the plan. This not only enhances transparency but also strengthens the foundation for future community engagement and participatory planning processes.

Public participation is important in development planning because it enhances more inclusive sustainable development. In the context of county-integrated development plans, different counties are at different levels of implementing

public participation in development planning. Despite robust strategies being applied in Nairobi and Makueni, addressing specific challenges is crucial for enhancing inclusive and effective public participation in development planning.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study has highlighted the critical role of public participation in attaining Sustainable Development outcomes in Kenya, specifically within the context of County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) for 2023-2027. Examining Nairobi and Makueni Counties has revealed distinct strategies and challenges in citizen involvement. Despite robust approaches, financial constraints present a notable obstacle, underscoring the urgency for increased budgetary allocation and other innovative funding models. Makueni's innovative establishment of a Center for Devolution and Participatory Development emerges as an exemplary model for fostering sustained citizen engagement. Recommendations to enhance citizen participation include hastening Nairobi's adoption of a citizen participation policy and a collective effort from both counties to address documentation gaps, ensuring transparency and informed decision-making in future planning endeavors. Future studies should focus on assessing the effectiveness of innovative models such as Makueni's Center for Devolution in sustaining citizen engagement. Moreover, exploring the impact of increased budgetary allocation on public participation quality and inclusivity is crucial. The limitation of this study is that there could be some risk related to the subjective nature of interpretation, as different analysts may interpret texts differently, leading to misinterpretations.

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