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Can Public Participation Deepen Democracy?

Insights from Nakuru City in Kenya

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Public participation is an instrument used by governments to increase the effectiveness of decision-making processes and nurture accountability relationships between citizens and government officials. When successfully implemented, public participation can contribute to deepening democracy. Particularly at the local level, the close proximity between citizens and officials is believed to enable the public to monitor state activities, thereby contributing to more effective and inclusive governance and service delivery. Kenya is one of the frontrunners in Africa in this regard: The constitutional reforms of 2010 introduced a newly devolved system of governance and institutionalized public participation at all levels. Looking at Nakuru City – a secondary city in Kenya – the policy brief examines to what extent public participation contributes to three values of democratic governance: legitimacy, effectiveness and social justice. It finds that although public participation has contributed to enhancing social justice, improvements in governance effectiveness and legitimacy are less evident. The lacking responsiveness of local elites in daily interactions, political and legal loopholes, and the public's narrow scope for participation hamper the creation of productive accountability relationships.

Despite the fact that democracy still enjoys overwhelming support in Sub-Saharan Africa and globally, its practices are widely criticized and the number of democratic systems world-wide is decreasing.[1] This global trend of democratic backsliding leads to declining levels of trust in public institutions and weakens the legitimacy of governments.[2] Scholars point to the existing political inequality between those who are influential and those who remain at the receiving end of public policies as one reason for a decline in democracy.[3] Hence, one of the ways used across the globe to counter democratic deficits is to make use of participatory mechanisms that allow citizens to take part in governmental decision-making. The number of countries institutionalizing such mechanisms is constantly growing.[4] As a mechanism for seeking accountability beyond elections, public participation is

[1] Oliver Escobar and Stephen Elstub, "Introduction to the Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance: The Field of Democratic Innovation", in *Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance*, ed. Oliver Escobar and Stephen Elstub (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), 1-9; V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report 2023. Defiance in the Face of Autocratization*, 2023.

[2] Thomas Carothers and Benjamin Press, *Understanding and Responding to Global Democratic Backsliding*, Working Paper (October 2022); UN-DESA, *Trust in Public Institutions: Trends and Implications for Economic Security*, Policy Brief 108 (2021).

[3] Russell J. Dalton, *The Participation Gap: Social Status and Political Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[4] Escobar and Elstub, "Introduction to the Handbook", 1-9.

> ## Public Participation
> Public participation refers to citizens' participation in political processes beyond elections. This can be achieved in many formats, for instance by means of participatory policy planning, participatory budgeting, citizen score cards, social audits, public grievance redress mechanisms and citizen councils. These initiatives can be driven from the supply-side (state-led) or the demand-side (citizen-led). In order to be effective in creating accountability, public participation needs to include answerability – that is, the duty of officials to explain their actions – and enforceability, that is, sanctions in case obligations are not met.[5]

particularly relevant for countries in which representative governments are unresponsive or weak.[6] At the same time, the success of such initiatives is not guaranteed. Problems such as inadequate funds, insufficient legal frameworks and elite capture can prevent the goals linked to public participation from being achieved.

This policy brief examines the state of implementation of public participation in Nakuru City and assesses to what extent public participation contributes to deepening democracy by enhancing three dimensions of democratic governance: legitimacy, effectiveness and social justice. Studying public participation in Nakuru City is particularly interesting due to the political salience attached to the issue in Kenya. Kenya's new constitution of 2010 puts considerable emphasis on public participation. Nakuru City is a secondary city[7] and Kenya's youngest, having received its city status in 2019. It is a particularly interesting case, as its political decision-makers aim at becoming frontrunners in public participation. Building on Nakuru City's former reputation of being the cleanest city of East Africa, politicians aim at becoming a role model for other secondary cities in Kenya.[8] Hence, some of the political conditions for implementing public participation are especially favourable. If positive results are to be derived from public participation, we would expect them to materialize in this case. The analysis relies on 13 semi-structured interviews held in Nakuru City in March 2023 and further informal conversations held in Nairobi in September 2023. Interviews with civil society representatives were used to cross-check the views of ward administrators as well as city and county officials.

In the following section, the concepts of public participation and its underpinnings are examined in more detail. Subsequently, the case of public participation in Nakuru City is presented and analyzed. The policy brief argues that public participation has successfully contributed to creating accountability relationships between the citizens and the members of the county assembly and also contributes to mobilizing civil society. However, the limited scope of participation prevents improvements in terms of service delivery, and weaknesses in structural governance undermine the legitimacy of decision-makers and

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[5] Fox, "Social Accountability", 346-61; Sam Hickey and Sophie King, "Understanding Social Accountability: Politics, Power and Building New Social Contracts", *The Journal of Development Studies* 52, no. 8 (2016): 1225-40.

[6] Jonathan A. Fox, "Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?", *World Development* 72 (2015): 346-61.

[7] Secondary cities are generally defined in relation to the primary city (or cities) of a country, which is the leading economic, political or cultural centre. Secondary cities form "the urban middle ground" between metropolises and small towns, and thus they tend to be smaller and more specialized than primary cities. However, due to the different city structures in different countries, there is no universally agreed upon definition of secondary cities. In Africa, secondary cities are expected to absorb the bulk of urban growth. Brian H. Roberts, ed., Managing Systems of Secondary Cities – Policy Responses in International Development (Brussels: Cities Alliance, 2014); Carole Ammann, Aïdas Sanogo and Barbara Heer, "Secondary Cities in West Africa: Urbanity, Power, and Aspirations", Urban Forum 33, no. 4 (2022): 445-61.

[8] Eric Matara, "Nakuru Becomes Kenya's Fourth City", *The East African*, 1 December 2021, accessed 5 October 2023.

institutions. The policy brief concludes that public participation is most effective in tandem with electoral accountability, and it recommends broadening and scaling participation in order to contribute to improved service delivery and better harmonization of governance activities.

Why public participation?

Public participation in political processes is sought for different rationales and has different theoretical underpinnings. The instrumental perspective views public participation as a means to render decision-making processes so that they are more targeted and effective. Proponents argue that citizens' input can reduce costs by leading to more efficient resource allocation and more efficient public service provision.[9] The normative view emphasizes that public participation can deepen democracy by creating opportunities for building account-ability relationships between citizens and the state. This view relies on a conceptualization of citizens as right-bearers who can collectively hold duty-bearers to account (instead of viewing citizens as clients). Public participation as a form of establishing social accountabil-ity (beyond elections) relies on political and reputational costs to generate demands for accountability.[10] In Kenya, this mechanism functions mainly through participatory budget-ing: citizens can prioritize small-scale infrastructure in their ward. If infrastructure decisions are not in line with citizen preferences or projects are not completed in a satisfactory manner, this can damage the reputation of the respective ward's member of the county assembly and lower their chances of being re-elected.

  Bridging both instrumental and normative views, the policy brief examines to what extent public participation can be a tool to achieve three values of democratic governance: legiti-macy, effectiveness and social justice.[11] Participation can enhance the **legitimacy** of deci-sions, laws and policies as well as of institutions by representing citizens in decision-making processes. Decisions are believed to be more closely aligned to the will of the general public and include more perspectives. However, if citizens' decisions are not binding but treated as mere recommendations, this can also damage the legitimacy of government actors. Participation can contribute to more **effective governance** in four ways: Citizens can help to accurately identify problems, resolve ethical or material trade-offs, provide relevant information for the implementation of decisions and be directly involved through copro-duction by bringing in additional resources. Finally, participation can contribute to **social justice** by including less powerful social groups. Those who are politically, socially or eco-nomically advantaged often dominate policy processes. Designing participatory mecha-nisms that address these imbalances can enhance social justice. Improved responsiveness and more effective service delivery can also contribute indirectly to more social justice.

[9] Donald P. Moynihan, "Normative and Instrumental Perspectives on Public Participation: Citizen Summits in Washington, DC", *The American Review of Public Administration* 33, no. 2 (2003): 164-88.
[10] Anuradha Joshi and Peter P. Houtzager, "Widgets or Watchdogs?", *Public Management Review* 14, no. 2 (2012): 145-62, 149.
[11] Archon Fung, "Putting the Public Back into Governance: The Challenges of Citizen Participation and Its Future", *Public Administration Review* 75, no. 4 (2015): 513-22.

Public participation and devolution in Kenya

State-led efforts to include the public in decision-making date back to Kenya's early days of independence, but they have had mixed results.[12] The predecessor to the participatory budgeting held today is participation under the Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP). Under the LASDAP, citizens were asked to participate annually in identifying and monitoring capital projects.[13] Although the LASDAP was successful in institutionalizing public participation to a certain degree, the programme was also used to further political and patronage agendas, and a lack of oversight resulted in low project completion rates. Citizens could not adequately make use of recourse and redress mechanisms. Due to the LASDAP's independent structure and lack of coordination with other government programmes and agencies, projects also faced budget shortfalls for recurrent expenditures if projects were completed.

   With the adoption of Kenya's new constitution in 2010, accountability, transparency and the participation of people were included among the national values and principles of governance; public participation has since received heightened political and public attention.[14] The new constitution also kick-started ambitious devolution reforms: The former eight provinces have been replaced by 47 counties that are headed by elected county governors, rely on elected county assemblies and are represented at the national level through a senate. The devolution process was aimed at decentralizing political power and public service delivery, ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources among regions.[15] To this end, the Kenyan constitution envisions "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 in making decisions affecting them".[16] The increased discretion of the newly formed counties was supposed to be balanced by increased accountability, both upwards and downwards. Hence, devolution and public participation go hand in hand, as citizens are envisaged to holding counties to account, in particular regarding local service delivery. The close proximity between local duty-bearers and citizens is believed to enable the public to monitor state activities and effectively voice their priorities, thereby contributing to a sense of ownership and a more effective and inclusive delivery of services and allocation of resources.[17] County governments are required to create structures, mechanisms and guidelines to institutionalize public participation.[18]

   With the advent of devolution, city governance also changed drastically. The former elected local councils that had been in charge of governing cities were dissolved and scheduled to be replaced by city boards. According to the Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011), city or municipal boards are to "oversee the affairs of the city or municipality".[19] The members of the boards are not elected but appointed by the County Executive Committee. In reality,

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[12] Kibui E. Rwigi, Erick Manga and George Michuki, "New Wine in an Old Wineskin? Socio-Political Context and Participatory Budgeting in Kenya", *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (2020): 492-511.

[13] Kenya School of Government, *Participation in Kenya's Local Development Funds: Reviewing the Past to Inform the Future*, Working Paper 3 (2015).

[14] The Constitution of Kenya, Art. 10, 2.

[15] Nic Cheeseman, Gabrielle Lynch and Justin Willis, "Decentralisation in Kenya: The Governance of Governors", *Journal of Modern African Studies* 54, no. 1 (2016): 1-35.

[16] The Constitution of Kenya, Art. 174, c. Public participation is not only anchored in the constitution, but also operationalized in various legal texts such as the County Governments Act 2012, the Public Finance Management Act 2012 and the Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011). Public participation is required throughout all stages of the planning and budget cycle, including in budget and policy formulation, planning and monitoring.

[17] Chrispine Oduor, *Institutionalising Social Accountability in Devolved Governance* (Nairobi: Institute of Economic Affairs, 2015).

[18] Oduor, *Institutionalising Social Accountability in Devolved Governance*.

[19] The Urban Areas and Cities Act 2011, Art. 20, para. 1(a)

city governance has been mostly taken over by county governments, as the creation of city boards was significantly delayed.

The devolution reforms did lead to an actual transfer of powers and budgets, and governors have successfully warded off attempts by the national government to recentralize. There is evidence that governors and members of county assemblies have become more important political players in the eyes of Kenyans than members of parliament.[20] However, to date, the transfer of powers has not continued up to the level of cities and municipalities. In addition, the newly created governance layer also provided ample opportunity for devolving patronage and corruption.[21] Thus, public participation has an important role to play in providing a platform for citizens to hold those in power to account. Although at the beginning of the devolution reforms the county politicians enjoyed a high degree of trust, this has steadily eroded since the first county elections. In Afrobarometer's latest Round 9 (2021/2023), almost a third of all respondents indicated that they do not trust their local councillors at all.[22] Concurrently, re-election quotas in county elections have been low: Only 26 per cent of all 1,450 incumbent members of the county assembly were re-elected in 2017. In the last county elections in 2022, out of Nakuru County's 55 members of the county assembly, only 10 were re-elected, two of them in Nakuru City.[23]

Public participation in Nakuru

In Nakuru County, public participation is generally at the level of the electoral ward. In line with Sections 6 and 7 of the Nakuru County Revenue Allocation Act (2018), the public participates annually in the budgeting for public works at the ward level. Participatory budgeting is the main type of participation that has been implemented. Other, less frequently held formats include public participation in the county-integrated development plan (every four years) and sectoral hearings on the county fiscal strategy paper (every four years). Ward administrators can also call for more spontaneous issue-based meetings if citizens or the county administration request it. Hence, public participation is primarily organized through the county in Nakuru City.

In addition, the Urban Areas and Cities Act foresees the establishment of city-wide citizen fora that are organized by the city board. These fora have not been held yet in Nakuru due to the lack of funds. In Nakuru – as in many other Kenyan cities and municipalities – the city board was founded at a time when the transition process that started with the devolution reforms was already well advanced. The board was instituted in 2019 and received its first delegated functions from the county in 2023. The Nakuru City board has since been active in implementing several projects for which the public has been consulted. However, they have not yet been able to organize city-wide citizen fora due to a lack of funds.

[20] Nic Cheeseman et al., "Kenya's 2017 Elections: Winner-Takes-All Politics as Usual?", *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 13, no. 2 (2019): 215-34.
[21] Michelle D'Arcy and Agnes Cornell, "Devolution and Corruption in Kenya: Everyone's Turn to Eat?", *African Affairs* 115, no. 459 (2016): 246-73; Michelle D'Arcy, "Devolution and County Government", in *The Oxford Handbook of Kenyan Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 251.
[22] Afrobarometer Data, all countries, Round 9, 2021/2023, available at http://www.afrobarometer.org.
[23] Jackline Macharia, "2022 Polls: Brutal Voters Sent Home 76pc of MCAs", *Nation*, 27 September 2022, accessed 5 October 2023.

Legitimacy

The interviews show that public participation clearly contributes to creating accountability relationships between members of the county assembly and the citizens. Citizens attribute developments in their ward – and particularly infrastructure development – to the performance of their member of the county assembly. They also make use of public participation and other channels, such as petitions and memoranda, to appeal to their member of the county assembly. However, a lack of answerability in these relationships weakens legitimacy. Citizens' budget priorities are sometimes altered when they pass through the county assembly. There is no feedback mechanism at the ward level to inform citizens about the changes. As one community leader explains: "They might decide to change a certain percentage and that's what the community held dearly. So next year the community will say, what is the use of these meetings?" In fact, the final budget is only presented at the sub-county level, which makes attendance difficult for representatives of those wards located far from the venue. This lack of answerability causes frustration, and citizens begin to disengage and start questioning the legitimacy of budget decisions and county institutions altogether. Even though the county is the only legitimate authority when it comes to public participation, its legitimacy is not uncontested. The fact that the respective member of the county assembly has an interest in using the ward's budget, which is allocated for participatory budgeting, to fulfil election promises instead can lead to tensions, if citizens' interests are not reflected. Citizens report cases in which the ward's budget is used to build roads, even though they do not serve the majority of people and clearly benefit wealthier individuals. Civil society representatives further lament that members of the county assemblies use the public works in their wards to refer tenders to their own or befriended companies. The level of citizens' dissatisfaction with these decisions is mirrored in the low re-election quotas of members of the county assembly.

   At the same time, the Nakuru City board still plays a marginal role in governing the city, which can be attributed to the limits of its delegated functions and financial means. Being appointed by and fully accountable to the county, the city board is in a difficult position to build accountability relationships with its citizens. Accordingly, the city board has not yet been able to hold city-wide citizen fora, as foreseen by the Urban Areas and Cities Act. Whether the city board will gain more legitimacy and credibility among the citizens in the long run remains to be seen.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness of public participation is limited – not only because of implementation challenges, but also due to its narrow scope, which excludes service delivery. The limited focus of deliberations on small-scale infrastructure such as drainage, street lights and social venues reduces participation to questions about distribution and eclipses the ambitious goal of contributing to the more effective and inclusive delivery of services. Participatory budgeting only concerns each ward, and there is no regular format for public participation at the city level. In addition, there are no mechanisms in place that allow citizens to provide feedback on the quality of services or participate in decisions concerning service delivery performance. On paper, there are project-monitoring committees for infrastructure projects. However, in practice, the selection of committee members is politicized and citizens have very little power to intervene due to a lack of access to relevant information: "Project implementation committees are supposed to have access to information, but this is not

implemented. You find a classroom is built, but you cannot access the bill of quantity to as-certain what is supposed to be done." The example of the U_CODE project (Box 2) shows that there is a lot of potential to involve citizens as co-producers in city affairs. Involving citizens not only in project identification, but also in data collection, validation, and the monitoring of construction and service delivery contributes to the enhanced legitimacy of government projects. Furthermore, the U_CODE project developed a holistic vision for the entire settlement, capturing the voices of the entire community. By facilitating deliberations to balance out different groups' preferences, the project came up with a more socially just vision for the community.

Even though participatory budgeting is effective in helping to allocate small-scale infra-structure where it is needed most in each ward, the implementation process comes with several challenges. Participation opportunities are often advertised too late, which gives the public little or no time to prepare. Citizens also find it hard to make meaningful pro-posals, as they do not have the technical knowledge to realistically estimate the costs for the different types of infrastructure. Especially at the beginning of the devolution reforms, citizens did not know about the devolved functions and had erroneous expectations about public participation.

Social justice

Public participation has had some positive impacts on the pursuit of social justice. While the research findings partly corroborate other studies[24] stating that devolution in Kenya has provided ample opportunity for devolving patronage and corruption, the participatory agenda simultaneously has also created opportunities for increased civic engagement that challenges rent-seeking and patronage. Residents' associations are important actors in representing neighbourhoods' interests. These grassroots organizations are led by elected community leaders and meet on a regular basis to solve pressing community issues. Residents' associations in Nakuru City have successfully mobilised around public participa-tion, also with the support of NGOs. They have adapted their strategies, for instance by submitting written memoranda during public participation sessions that are less likely to be changed. By pressing for the county to adhere to formal processes – and as a last resort going to court – citizens put pressure on the county government. As one civil society repre-sentative explained: "Before the 2010 constitution, people could get away with corruption. But now a community can rise up and take somebody to court using the residents' associa-tion. So that's the reason why we register it so that it's going to be recognised." This social organizing focussed on public participation and has led to spillover effects in certain neigh-bourhoods – the security situation and overall living conditions have improved as a result. In several instances, vandalism was reduced as a result of including residents in the planning.

The attendance levels of individuals from informal settlements are high, showing that this format can indeed bring those with less power to the table. However, decisions taken in budget meetings only revolve around small-scale infrastructure; the allocation for partici-patory budgeting per ward is typically between 20 and 30 million Kenyan shillings (126,000–189,000 euros). Even though poorer neighbourhoods tend to receive the majority of pro-jects – as the people from these neighbourhoods dominate participatory budgeting in terms of attendance – the small amounts available can hardly make up for the inequalities

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[24] D'Arcy and Cornell, "Devolution and Corruption in Kenya", 246-73.

> ## U_CODE Co-Design Project
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> U_CODE is a digital platform for neighbourhood co-design that the Nakuru City board has used in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Technical University in Dresden as part of the "Just City" project. U_CODE was used for the first time in Africa for social planning in the Kenya Meat Commission settlement in Nakuru City. The settlement used to be a site for livestock breeding. However, when the Kenya Meat Commission was relocated, the settlement went through a transformation process. The U_CODE project facilitated the collection of updated settlement data, captured residents' priorities, and derived urban design and planning ideas. As part of the process, consultations were undertaken with the community. Community members and city planners jointly used the application to voice their priorities, which resulted in the capturing of 85 per cent of community members' opinions. The final vision for the settlement was translated into a 3-D design that was validated at a community session. The design will be used to lobby government stakeholders and donors to implement the residents' vision.

between poor and rich neighbourhoods. As participation does not revolve around service delivery, poorer residents are not benefitting from improved services.

If public participation is looked at from an instrumental point of view, there is much room for improvement when it comes to the effectiveness and legitimacy of public participation in Nakuru City. Although participatory budgeting allows for the efficient allocation of small-scale infrastructure, this format of participation does not contribute to improved service delivery. In addition, the lack of responsiveness of the county leads to frustration and a decline in the legitimacy of members of the county assembly – and in public participation overall. Effectiveness and legitimacy are in practice mutually constitutive and would ideally create a virtuous cycle. However, if citizens have the repeated experience that public participation leads to unresponsiveness, there is a real danger that they will start perceiving the process as being entirely captured by elites and might disengage from participation. The fact that elites do not participate in consultations – as their neighbourhoods are generally better serviced – further contributes to the feeling that public participation is used to appease the masses. Hence, a lack of accountability in public participation creates visible fissures between elites and the rest of the population. If legitimacy erodes further, this could lead to polarization instead of fostering inclusivity, and it could also diminish the level of trust in democratic governance altogether.

At the same time, devolution and the implementation of public participation at the ward level were successful in creating accountability relationships between citizens and members of the county assembly. Despite the allegations that public works are used for patronage purposes, there is evidence that the pressure created through public participation – in conjunction with low re-election quotas – impels members of the county assembly to be more responsive to the needs of their constituents.[25] Hence, public participation is most effective in tandem with electoral accountability. The downside of the focus on serving ward constituents is that it diverts attention away from the oversight role that members of the county assembly should play; that is, holding the county executive to account. Citizens evaluate the performance of members of the county assembly more according to infrastructure improvements and less on their effectiveness in monitoring the service delivery

[25] Abdu Muwonge, Timothy Stephen Williamson, Christine Owuor and Muratha Kinuthia, *Making Devolution Work for Service Delivery in Kenya* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2022), 124.

performance of the county executive. In addition, members of the county assembly depend on the executive for their budgets, which disincentivizes oversight.

At the same time, public participation has had some success with regard to fostering civic engagement and including marginalized populations. The capacities of individuals and civil society organizations have been strengthened while citizens have applied pressure from below for legitimacy and effectiveness. Civil society organizations have integrated public participation into their broader strategies of presenting demands. Hence, public participation is one puzzle piece that can contribute to building accountability relationships over time – it has the potential to contribute to social justice and deepen democracy. Although social justice can result from legitimate and effective public participation, it is not clear whether pressure from below will contribute to more effective and legitimate public participation. In addition to technical and capacity problems, the process is undermined by existing power and patronage networks. Whether public participation will in the long run be able to alter the power dynamics that allow elites to capture these processes will depend less on organizing civil society, and more on the responsiveness of elites and the tackling of weaknesses in structural governance.[26] The constitutionally stipulated transparency and participation requirements are not enforced. For instance, as of fiscal year 2019/2020, only 30 out of the 47 counties published an annual development plan.[27]

The policy brief also shows that the impact of public participation crucially depends on the devolved system of governance as well as the quality of democratic institutions. Although in Kenya the strong judiciary is key in preventing recentralization efforts and safeguarding compliance with rules and regulations, parliamentary oversight does not always work adequately. Among other outcomes, this materializes in the sluggish implementation of the Urban Areas and Cities Act. The nascent city boards have not yet received funds to support public participation and have a very limited mandate. Due to the weak position and lack of legitimacy of city boards, the interests of urbanites are not adequately represented at the county level, and it is questionable as to whether Kenyan county governments have the capacities to steer the rapid urbanization processes faced by its cities. Despite the revision of the Urban Areas and Cities Act, there is still no regulation in place for how to implement the act, which leaves its delegation at the whim of the county government. This also concerns transfers: Even though cities (and this is particularly true for Nakuru City) contribute substantially to national revenues, this is not mirrored in their allocations.

Policy recommendations

The county: To increase the effectiveness and output for social justice, the county should **broaden and scale participation**. It should invest in establishing additional formats for monitoring service delivery, such as citizen scorecards or social audits, and make sure that the selection process for participation in project-monitoring committees is transparent. Participation should also be used for more holistic neighbourhood planning (see Box 2). Recurring formats such as citizen fora can be complemented by project-based participation. At the same time, counties should **strengthen the role of city boards** to increase their legitimacy. City boards need delegated functions and the funds to fulfil mandates. Funding should also be provided for city boards to conduct city-wide citizen fora. In addition, counties need to **increase their responsiveness regarding public participation processes.**

[26] Ryan Sheely, "Mobilization, Participatory Planning Institutions, and Elite Capture: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Rural Kenya", *World Development* 67 (2015): 251-66.
[27] Abdu Muwonge et al., *Making Devolution Work*, 124.

They should regulate the implementation of public participation, making sure that the process for changing citizens' priorities and reporting them is transparent. Counties also need to make sure that meetings are advertised on time and technical experts are involved. In addition to NGOs, county governments should **invest in civic education initiatives,** in line with the County Governments Act (2012), and also increase access to information.

International donors and NGOs: Domestic NGOs play a crucial role in educating and mobilizing citizens as well as in supporting community-based organizations in their efforts to seek accountability and participate in governmental decision-making processes. Counties should play a prominent role in civic education, and NGOs should continue to complement these efforts. Donors can support domestic NGOs that work with community-based organizations, and particularly support efforts to **facilitate social organizing**. Not all neighbourhoods have benefited from such programmes. Germany's current contributions in Kenya to fund so-called good governance projects have been marginal. In light of the promises made in the recent "Africa strategy"[28] of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany should invest more in funding civil society organizations, both bilaterally and as part of multilateral initiatives. In order to assist the establishment of city-wide citizen fora, donors can **support umbrella organizations** that represent citizens' voices at the level of the county government or vis-à-vis the city board. NGOs often have substantial experience with methods that foster social accountability and can be used to **monitor service delivery**. Donors can fund NGOs that pilot such interventions and support their efforts to **pilot them in collaboration with the local government.**

The experiences of several neighbourhoods also showed that the participation of residents is vital to securing buy-in and ownership when it comes to neighbourhood development. This is also important for donor projects targeting infrastructure projects, which are often run outside of official channels for participation and city planning. Donors should include residents when implementing projects and **make use of institutionalized participation structures** (e.g. by going through ward administrators) instead of creating new ones. Donors can also fund projects that bring together researchers and communities to jointly **collect data** in order to lobby the government and **pilot co-production processes**, such as the U_Code project presented in Box 2.

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[28] Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Shaping the Future with Africa – the Strategy of the BMZ (Berlin: BMZ, 2023).

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