

# E-Participation in Africa - Literature Review

Research report for GIZ DataCipation Project



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# E-Participation in Africa - Literature Review

## 1 Introduction

E-participation is the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) or digital technologies to involve citizens in public decision-making with the goal of empowering citizens and for the benefit of society as a whole.<sup>1</sup> It is part of e-governance, a term that refers to the use of ICTs in governance functions. Broadly, e-governance comprises government service provision (e-government); government information platforms and e-participation platforms through which public decision-making takes place.<sup>2</sup> Developments in digital technologies have led to convergence of one or all of e-governance components. For example, with the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments publish health information online for their citizens. During particular campaigns, such as vaccination drives, government officers use their systems to contact people, collect data and provide the vaccination and follow-ups. The same system may be used to collect feedback on services received.

**On the African continent, public participation in governance is a value that is relevant to many societies which have always practised various aspects of it.** The African Union (AU) reports that as at 2019, 30 African countries, representing 55% of the continent, had mechanisms for public participation.<sup>3</sup> While very few countries have good examples of sustained e-participation, the advent of social media has created new opportu-

nities for people to obtain information, give input and deliberate with policy-makers. An analysis by Portland communications noted the growing transnationalism of online spaces:<sup>4</sup> Africans from different countries converge on topics through hashtags. The potential of social media to rally people has led to internet shutdowns, particularly around election periods. The report noted that in some elections, most of the tweets were from outside the country holding the election.

Specifically with respect to public decision-making, the functions vary from provision of information to opportunities for consultation, deliberation, community building, campaigning, electioneering, lobbying, petitioning, mediation, voting and polling.<sup>5</sup> The extent to which citizens are involved in these functions leads to different levels of participation. Table 1 gives an overview of functions and activities in participation.

1 UNDP (n.d.), <https://publicadministration.un.org/en/eparticipation>

2 Bwalya (2018), Decolonisation of e-Government Research and Practice: Exploring Contextual Issues and Opportunities in Africa, p. 11, <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/25306/978-1-928396-77-2%20Decolonization%20.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

3 APRM (2019), The Africa Governance Report: Promoting African Union Shared Values, p. 24, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36418-doc-eng-\\_the\\_africa\\_governance\\_report\\_2019\\_final-1.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36418-doc-eng-_the_africa_governance_report_2019_final-1.pdf)

4 Portland (2018), How Africa Tweets, <https://portland-communications.com/pdf/How-Africa-Tweets-2018.pdf>

5 Bagui (2012), Listening to the Ground: Key Indicators of e-Participation in Government

5 Bagui (2012), Listening to the Ground: Key Indicators of e-Participation in Government for Africa, <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/listening-ground-key-indicators-participation/64867>

Table 1: Functions of participation for public decision making

Function	Activities	Examples
Information provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Government communication</li> <li>■ Government open data</li> <li>■ CSO publications/rankings/ reports</li> <li>■ CSO open data or open data products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ AU information</li> <li>■ Government information e.g. Kenyalaw.org, ECOWAS, Ghana and South African government information sites</li> <li>■ iNGO, NGO, academic and non-state actor information sites e.g. law sites</li> </ul>
Consultation	Public hearings, demonstration, protests	Common in countries where laws require public consultation eg South Africa, Kenya
Deliberation	Barazas, Indabas, Imbizos, public meetings and forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Common in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Rwanda etc where government officials call meetings to explain government policies</li> <li>■ Country national and sub-national budget processes</li> <li>■ Expert conferences on themes likely to be part of norm-setting processes</li> </ul>
Community building / collaborative environment	Principally through CBOs and NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Coalitions of NGOs advocating for various issues, e.g. African Declaration on Internet Rights and Principles</li> <li>■ Industry associations<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>
Campaigning	Lobbying, petitioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Crowdsourced CSO petitions</li> <li>■ Crowdsourced CSO information gathering e.g. Ushahidi platform</li> </ul>
Electioneering	Campaigning both offline and online	Election period
Mediation	<p>Conflict resolution processes</p> <p>Consensus building in processes such as land rights, mining etc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Rwanda civil society public policy monitoring process <sup>7</sup></li> <li>■ Northern Uganda</li> <li>■ South Sudan</li> </ul>
Voting	Election voting	Voting for representatives in forums such as national ICT, women and youth bodies
Polling	Present in national/public companies shareholder meetings, C2C platforms, competitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Agricultural cooperatives</li> <li>■ Regional/continental gaming</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Library of Congress (n.d) Africa Business Guide- Business and Trade Associations <https://www.loc.gov/rr/business/african/associations.html>

<sup>7</sup> The Public Policy Information, Monitoring and Advocacy (PPIMA) project, Rwanda. See Tubibe Amahoro (2019) PPIMA <http://www.ta-rwanda.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/PUBLIC-POLICY-INFORMATION-MONITORING-AND-ADVOCACY-PPIMA.pdf>

The simplest level of engagement is providing information, where the policy-maker publishes or communicates decisions. This function is widely practised in varying media – from civic education in schools and places of worship to publication of laws and open data. At the AU level and in many states, some of the reported challenges faced in this function include bureaucracy and a culture of state secrets. For example, not all meetings are open to the public and outcome documents are published with delay. It is common to wait for weeks for AU declarations to be published. Reasons given for this include official approvals as well as translation of documents into various AU languages. Similarly, not all African countries publish their laws, policies, national budgets, national statistics and other important information online.<sup>8</sup> There are some non-governmental actors that fill this gap by publishing the information themselves. For laws this includes the African Legal Information Institute,<sup>9</sup> the Commonwealth Legal Information Institute,<sup>10</sup> L'Association des Cours Constitutionnelles ayant en Partage l'Usage du Français, the Resources Databases at the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria,<sup>11</sup> Droit-Afrique.com,<sup>12</sup> Juricaf<sup>13</sup> and Legis-Palop.<sup>14</sup> These resources are mostly crowd-sourced and may therefore not always be up to date. The publication gap creates incentives for subscription and market-based information sources,<sup>15</sup> a barrier to low-income earners.

Consultation involves getting citizens' input on a draft policy or law. It is common in countries with a legal mandate for public consultation. Some of the challenges for consultation include lack of resources for meaningful consultation, the influ-

ence of more powerful players such as telecommunication company lobbyists and lack of feedback to the public. Jadili (Swahili for debate or discourse) and Dokeza are pilot e-engagement platforms attempting to expand consultation processes in Kenya.<sup>16</sup> Another example is the use of listserves to generate debate on open policy processes.<sup>17</sup>

Deliberation involves longer discussions, sometimes on broad policy problems for which a concrete policy proposal is yet to be drafted. It is common to have experts involved in the deliberative processes. Such experts include the people who are directly affected by the problem or technical experts. Deliberative discussions are often held on issues such as budgets in local units, where citizens attempt to prioritise their various needs. At AU level, experts typically deliberate on norm-setting processes with a view to influencing final policies. Current deliberations in many expert spaces include implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. Due to travel restrictions owing to the COVID pandemic, the deliberations have taken place online.

### 1.1 E-Participation forms

E-participation platforms can broadly be classified according to actor relationships: government to citizen (G2C), citizen to government (C2G) and citizen to citizen (C2C). This classification presents the following challenges.

- a. There is a high risk of conceptual ambiguity, for example where government service delivery platforms are classified as e-participation, even where the participation of the citizen does not influence decision-making. For instance, governments may report their e-government service provision platforms as e-participation

8 [https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/African\\_Law1.html](https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/African_Law1.html)

9 <https://africanlii.org/>

10 <http://www.commonlii.org/resources/55904/>

11 <https://www.chr.up.ac.za/resources>

12 <http://www.droit-afrique.com/>

13 <https://juricaf.org/recherche>

14 <https://www.legis-palop.org/bd>

15 For example <https://llr.lawafrica.com/login.php>

16 <http://jadili.ictpolicy.org/> and <https://dokeza.mzalendo.com/>

17 Examples include KICTANet (hosted in Kenya) and AFRINIC policy development process, <https://lists.kictanet.or.ke/pipermail/kictanet/> and <https://lists.afrinic.net/pipermail/rpd/>

yet the platforms do not give citizens an opportunity to provide input on government services.

- b.** The classification conceives participation as one-way, while the ideal participation platform should enable multiple communications, where citizens can talk to other citizens, give input on government policies and also propose policies that government should consider.

Furthermore, studies indicate that each of the platform designs has its own merits and demerits, as shown in Table 2. The growth of social networking sites (SNS) has, however, created new dimensions for citizen participation, providing multiple dimensions for participation functions. The merits and demerits of SNS are also considered.

Another way of looking at forms of e-participation is by considering the function of participation enabled by the platform, for example the communication component (CC), deliberation component (DC) and voting component (VC).<sup>18</sup> This classification is important as it defines the functions of the model, giving any well-meaning public body a framework to achieve a low to high level of citizen participation. Another analysis considers the effect of government engaging citizens in decision-making and uses a three-dimensional framework of e-enabling, e-engaging and e-empowering.<sup>19</sup> This analysis shifts the gaze from the platforms used to the opportunities enabled in any citizen engagement initiative. It is a useful response to critiques of ICT4D and UN initiatives that have invested in e-participation initiatives

that are well documented in reports and indices but seem to have less impact on the ground.

18 Kumar and Vragov (2012), Active Citizen Participation Using ICT Tools, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220420302\\_Active\\_Citizen\\_Participation\\_Using\\_ICT\\_Tools](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220420302_Active_Citizen_Participation_Using_ICT_Tools)

19 Okeke-Uzodike and Dlamini (2019), Citizens' E-Participation at Local Municipal Government in South Africa, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335020468\\_Citizens%27\\_E\\_Participation\\_at\\_Local\\_Municipal\\_Government\\_in\\_South\\_Africa](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335020468_Citizens%27_E_Participation_at_Local_Municipal_Government_in_South_Africa)



Table 2: E-participation platform merits and demerits

Platforms	Merits	Demerits
<b>(C2C)</b> e.g. Ushahidi, Uchaguzi, Durban Data/Open cities lab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ More open discussions, especially if citizens have no fear of retaliation</li> <li>■ Since they are open, government can view and act on the discussions, particularly where governments use the platforms as barometers</li> </ul>	Citizen resolutions are often not acted upon
<b>C2G</b> e.g. various reporting systems by state-owned enterprises, Jadili, Bunge la Mwananchi, Mzalendo, Jamii Forums	Similar to C2C, very open and robust discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Similar to C2C, resolutions rarely acted upon unless government official selectively takes interest</li> <li>■ Some members of such platforms have been co-opted into government, diluting C2G movements</li> </ul>
<b>G2C</b> E-government services with inbuilt feedback, data collected from e-government services,  Government online feedback forms, e.g. South Africa Presidency  Government data published for citizen information e.g. opencounty.org, Makueni Open Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Higher chances of citizen input being acted upon, particularly if there is political goodwill</li> <li>■ Even where there is no feedback loop, senior government officials use citizen input as feedback on services</li> </ul>	If government is autocratic, there is fear of outspoken citizens facing reprisal
<b>Social Networking Sites</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Where government officials are responsive, it is a quick and effective means of highlighting urgent issues</li> <li>■ Citizens can engage with each other's ideas, giving government officials the opportunity to gain broad input on an idea</li> <li>■ Social media provide information and entertainment, even in autocratic societies. Dissident voices that are outside the country can also participate in functions such as deliberation, provision of information as well as commenting on information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Limited to bubbles within SNS sites</li> <li>■ Social media input tends to lean towards extreme and sensational cases</li> <li>■ With the social media companies determining which posts get prominence, input from inexperienced, new or infrequent users may be overlooked</li> <li>■ African governments tend to discredit anonymity, particularly in sensitive discussions</li> </ul>

## 2. Trajectory of participation in Africa

### 2.1 Post independence

Many African countries adopted existing traditional norms of collective decision-making at independence. These included sittings where government officials would regularly meet with people and explain ongoing government policies. For example, in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and South Africa, **public meetings (known as barazas, indabas and imbizos)** are common. Depending on the political environment as well as the issue, the engagement at the public meetings can range from merely informing people to consulting them or deliberating on broad issues.

It is also common for public officials to use social and cultural gatherings such as religious ceremonies, weddings and funerals to explain government policies. In tandem, people use the public forums to state their problems and in some cases deliberate on issues affecting them. Scholars observe that such structures have been leveraged by politicians to mobilise for political causes, particularly during electioneering periods. In the post-independence period, many presidents who sought to centralise power used gatherings of this type to communicate government action and mobilise nationalism, without necessarily seeking the input of citizens.<sup>20</sup> Historical analysis of government communications and service provision offers a number of lessons for future citizen participation projects, as outlined below.

- I There are existing structures that can be leveraged for citizen participation, as can be seen from post-independence government strategies on government communication and service delivery. Some literature refers to this as ‘social capital.’<sup>21</sup>

- I Government can shape public participation as one-way communication, where government informs the people of actions taken. Alternatively, it can enable a spectrum of activities that can extend from consultation, deliberation, community building, campaigning, electioneering, mediation to voting and polling. Various authors identify factors that foster such activities to include political goodwill, commitment (sometimes through laws), funding, good ICT management as well as monitoring and evaluation.

### 2.2 Development-driven participation

The international development sector is also credited with the uptake of citizen participation in Africa, especially from the late 1990s. Some of the drivers of participation in development projects include the criticism of parachute development, where non-local actors developed solutions to local problems. The solutions were often a misfit, leading to a shift towards consulting local communities.<sup>22</sup> Consultation came with the added benefit of communities taking ‘ownership’ of projects, thereby increasing the chances of sustainability. Sustainable projects affect the community in a more positive way and also reduce dependency. There are numerous examples of particularly small and local projects in health care, education, water and small business support that attest to the merits of citizen participation in this form. However, the jury is still out on larger-scale projects, as discussed using the example of South Africa below.<sup>23</sup>

Other rationales for participation from the development sector include the pursuit of transparency and accountability, and more recently, openness in government. **This has led to processes such as**

20 H. Kwasi Prempeh (2008), ‘Presidential power in comparative perspective: The puzzling persistence of imperial presidency in post-authoritarian Africa’, 35(4), *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly*, pp. 761–834

21 Bagui (2012), *Listening to the Ground: Key Indicators of e-Participation in Government for Africa*, <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/listening-ground-key-indicators-participation/64867>

22 Kang’ara, Sylvia Wairimu (2000), *When the Pendulum Swings too Far: Structural Adjustment Programs in Kenya*, <https://scholar.valpo.edu/twls/vol15/iss1/5>

23 McGee and Edwards (2016), *Introduction: Opening Governance – Change, Continuity and Conceptual Ambiguity*, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/32>

## peer review mechanisms and the Open Government Partnership (OGP).

### 2.3 Rights-driven participation

Closely related to development-driven participation is rights-driven development, which has emerged in the course of the new millennium. Among the reasons that advocates and activists increasingly linked development to human rights was the liberalisation of markets in the late 1990s. Many governments reduced spending on social services such as education and health care, leaving this to market dynamics. CSOs and activists used various participation techniques – from protests and petitions to responding to legal and policy proposals – to advocate for more government spending on specific rights. In the international arena, this resulted in soft and binding instruments such as the 2001 Abuja Declaration on public health care spending.<sup>24</sup> As the rights-based development model gains momentum, political and information rights, which are easily asserted through the internet, have come into focus in norm-setting arenas. Examples of participation-related debates include the issue of internet shutdowns during political moments, the right to anonymity as well as access to the internet for all. Newer constitutions conceive participation as a value and make it mandatory for policy-makers to consult citizens.

### 2.4 ICT4D movement

History dates the ICT4D movement to the 1980s, when ICT stakeholders began discussions on the potential of the technology to solve the most urgent development problems, such as poverty.<sup>25</sup>

24 The Declaration, made by African heads of state, committed to spending at least 15% of the national budget on health care, [https://www.who.int/healthsystems/publications/abuja\\_declaration/en/](https://www.who.int/healthsystems/publications/abuja_declaration/en/)

25 Souter (2016), Inside the Information Society: A short history of ICT4D, <https://www.apc.org/en/blog/inside-information-society-short-history-ict4d> and Dimagi (2018), A Brief History of ICT4D, <https://www.dimagi.com/blog/ict4d-brief-history/>

As the internet gained more usage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of the topics of discussion within the ICT4D movement became how to leverage technology to improve communications, including communication between policy-makers and citizens. Hence, some of the goals related to citizen participation from the ICT4D movement include increasing access to information for citizens, using ICTs for government service delivery (e-government) and more recently, using data<sup>26</sup> for evidence-based decision-making. Early studies on digital citizenship were enthusiastic about the role of technology in enhancing citizen voice and agency. Studies included the use of SMS in digital activism, humanitarian action, social media protest and citizen-led accountability. Over time, there have been more studies spotlighting the use of digital technologies in propagating harm. Themes include the digital divide and gaps, government and corporate surveillance, quieting of dissent, algorithmic discrimination and generally, the use of technology to close civic space.<sup>27</sup>

### 2.5 Data for development

**The data for development (D4D) movement is an offshoot of ICT4D. It focuses on leveraging the massive data generated by technologies such as mobile phones, government instruments such as censuses and citizen data to make better decisions.** D4D is linked to sustainable development goals (SDGs) in various ways. These include integration of new data with existing data such as government statistics to provide new insights for policy-makers (digitalisation of analogue data and datafication of people and processes);

26 CRS (n.d.), About ICT4D, <https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/program-areas/ict4d#:~:text=Information%20and%20communications%20technology%20for,marginalized%20people%20in%20developing%20communities> and World Bank (2017), Listening to Africa: A New Way to Gather Data Using Mobile Phones, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/video/2017/01/23/listening-to-africa-a-new-way-to-gather-data-using-mobile-phones>

27 McGee and Edwards (2016), Introduction: Opening Governance – Change, Continuity and Conceptual Ambiguity, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/32>

utilisation of data for delivery of government and private services (through automation of processes, machine learning, artificial intelligence, etc.) and empowerment of individuals through evidence-based decisions. The World Development Report 2021 published by the World Bank advocates for five key actions with regard to data and development: forging a new social contract for data; more equitable access to data; protection of people from harm that may arise from use of their data; use and reuse of data; and integrated national data systems. Since the World Bank is also supporting the digital economy in Africa, it is expected that this will spur activities in norm-setting and the use of data for development in the coming years.<sup>28</sup> Examples of actors working in data for development include IDRC, which is funding data for development policy work as well as projects.<sup>29</sup>

Besides governments and international development actors, private companies such as Facebook<sup>30</sup> and mobile network operators under GSMA<sup>31</sup> have also been exploring and sharing data collected in the course of their business. Currently, such data is being shared in disaster response and charity causes. Development scholars have cautioned on extending the relationship between profit-driven companies and government, arguing that companies use the relationship to gain market insights.<sup>32</sup>

28 World Bank (2021), Data for Better Lives – Annual Development Report, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2021>

29 [https://www.idrc.ca/en/initiative/open-data-development#:~:text=Open%20Data%20for%20Development%20\(OD4D\)%20is%20a%20global%20network%20committed,and%20impact%20of%20open%20data.&text=Currently%20in%20phase%20III%2C%20OD4D's,good%20governance%2C%20and%20economic%20growth.](https://www.idrc.ca/en/initiative/open-data-development#:~:text=Open%20Data%20for%20Development%20(OD4D)%20is%20a%20global%20network%20committed,and%20impact%20of%20open%20data.&text=Currently%20in%20phase%20III%2C%20OD4D's,good%20governance%2C%20and%20economic%20growth.)

30 Cheney (2017), Facebook introduces disaster maps, announces early partners, <https://www.devex.com/news/facebook-introduces-disaster-maps-announces-early-partners-90427>

31 GSMA (n.d.), Global Metrics, <https://www.gsma.com/mobilemon-eymetrics/#global?y=2017?v=overview?g=global>

32 Taylor and Broeders (2015), In the name of Development: Power, profit and the datafication of the global South, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0016718515001761>

### 3. Assumptions on participation and e-participation

#### 3.1 Participation and development

It is widely assumed that participation results in positive development, in other words that enabling people to give input on a development question will result in an improvement of their quality of life.<sup>33</sup> In the case of South Africa, many black people do not perceive their input in public decision-making processes as having any impact on the quality of their life. Others view their contribution to independence and anti-apartheid struggles as participation that should by now have translated into tangible benefits such as housing, water, social grants, etc. This means that participation projects must have a holistic approach, where people not only participate but eventually gain access to a higher quality of life. In addition, policy-makers must manage public expectations during the participation process by providing information on the long-term goals of the decision being made, as well as challenges such as lack of finances, capacity issues and competing priorities.

#### 3.2 Information as an enabler of participation, transparency and accountability

Participation is closely linked to the transparency and accountability movement. Transparency and accountability advocates have long fought for access to information to enable citizens to provide input to policy processes as well as to demand accountability from policy-makers. However, literature from Africa and elsewhere **challenges the assumption that government always has information, or where it does, that the information is accurate and up to date, or that the government**

**will release the information it possesses.**<sup>34</sup> This has led to citizen-driven information that is then given to government for decision-making. The focus is also shifting to collection and processing of data to close the information gap, as opposed to waiting for government action.<sup>35</sup>

#### 3.3 Citizens as participants

National and regional participation frameworks assume that citizens are able to present their input in written form. Countries with participation laws and practices such as Ghana, Kenya and South Africa have often defaulted to participation formats suitable for urban educated people, particularly when making laws. The irony is that this provides an opportunity for empowered participants such as telecom companies and international NGOs to give in-depth input, while locking out those who are equally or more directly affected by the proposed law.<sup>36</sup> During more urgent processes such as peace meetings, political campaigns and constitutional referenda, there appears to be more direct negotiation with citizens of all cadres. This shows that there are moments when policy-makers put more effort into understanding the citizen's point of view. There are also examples of bottom-up citizen-driven participation where citizens assume public participation functions. Some of them, for instance Bunge la Mwananchi (BLM) in Kenya and Agaciro in

33 Okeke-Uzodike (2019), Citizens' E-Participation at Local Municipal Government in South Africa, <https://www.lifescienceglobal.com/pms/index.php/jrge/article/view/6047/3355>

34 Peixoto and Fox (2016), When Does ICT-Enabled Citizen Voice Lead to Government Responsiveness? <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/23650>

35 World Bank (2017), Listening to Africa: A New Way to Gather Data Using Mobile Phones, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/video/2017/01/23/listening-to-africa-a-new-way-to-gather-data-using-mobile-phones>

36 See for example the response to calls for participation on the Data Protection Bill – Communications Authority of Kenya (2018), Published findings; the review of telecommunication laws (Ethiopia) curated at ECA (n.d.), Public consultations, and KICTANet (2013), A Report of the Online Debate on African Union Convention on Cybersecurity, (AUCC), <https://www.kictanet.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/REPORT-ON-OF-THE-ONLINE-DEBATE-ON-AFRICA-UNION-CONVENTION-ON-CYBERSECURITY.pdf>

Rwanda,<sup>37</sup> involve **non-digital participation and 'non-elite' audiences.**<sup>38</sup> Both hold **deliberative assemblies in public spaces.** They also make use of radio. BLM has social media pages where some of the communications are shared.

### 3.4 Governments as participants

Many citizen participation frameworks assume that government officers and institutions have the capacity and willingness to enable citizen participation. However, litigation from South Africa and Kenya, for example, reveals that government officers often undertake the minimum in this respect in order to certify that the proposed document was subject to citizen participation.<sup>39</sup> This includes publishing a call for participation in a newspaper or website and receiving submissions from the public.<sup>40</sup> In the worst case scenario, government assumes that it does not need citizen input during the conceptual stages of a policy and only presents a draft for validation.<sup>41</sup> The problem is compounded even more where there is migration from an existing analogue method to a digital platform. If government officers are not trained on the theory of change, or given resources to support users, there is likelihood of the analogue methods being retained and the digital system only being used where required for certain procedures, e.g. for reporting. In such cases, the officers end up doing double work (analogue and digital), which creates logistical challenges.<sup>42</sup>

37 Agaciro is Rwanda's national sovereign fund. It began from a resolution of the National Dialogue Conference, where citizens can contribute financially to national development projects, <https://www.devex.com/news/what-is-the-agaciro-development-fund-78982>

38 <https://matharesocialjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CASE-STUDY-OF-BUNGE-LA-MWANANCHI-PEOPLE%E2%80%99S-PARLIAMENT.pdf>

39 Muhia and Nganyi (2020), A Critique of the Public Participation Bill – A Case Study of the Al Gurhair Case, <https://wamaeallen.com/a-critique-of-the-public-participation-bill-a-case-study-of-the-al-gurhair-case/>

40 Oyimbi (2018), Public Participation Using 3D Web-Based City Models: Opportunities for E-Participation in Kisumu, Kenya, <https://www.mdpi.com/2220-9964/7/12/454/htm>

41 For example development of an education policy in Tanzania, Loureiro et al (2016), When Does the State Listen?, <https://www.makingallvoicescount.org/publication/when-does-the-state-listen-ids/>

42 For example the water reporting system studied in Welle et al (2016), ICTs Help Citizens Voice Concerns over Water – Or Do They?, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/35>

### 3.5 Cultural determinants

Cultural assumptions manifest themselves in systems that are imported as opposed to being built locally. This can occur when international donors fund a system that is developed elsewhere or with little input from the users concerned. It can also happen where e-participation systems are built without the input of users or when systems ignore existing cultures. Examples here include building internet-based systems where people have little access to the internet or are more comfortable with SMS or USSD.<sup>43</sup> Systems in which participation costs money also get low uptake, for example in rural or low-income areas, as do systems that are complicated, where users have other competing needs. In such cases, it would be more beneficial to fall back on existing means through which the community is organised, for example using community leaders or training young people in reporting methods and providing them with resources to report on behalf of the community.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.6 Actors

Participation systems, especially those developed from a Western standpoint, may assume that citizens are individuals giving their personal views on a problem. However, there are many instances of shared community resources, such as water points, libraries, schools, school buses, places of worship, etc., where deliberations take place. Consequently, **some decisions are taken collectively, and this creates pressure to ensure the decision is heard and acted upon.** However, laws and e-participation platforms often provide for the individual and not a group.

43 Welle et al (2016), ICTs Help Citizens Voice Concerns over Water – Or Do They?, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/35>

44 Piexoto and Fox (2016), When Does ICT-Enabled Citizen Voice Lead to Government Responsiveness?, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/23650>

Table 3: Political, institutional and cultural determinants of e-participation

Political	Institutional	Cultural
Political goodwill	Institutional policies	Citizen empowerment
Legal commitments	Capacity	Channels to exert pressure
Human rights and rule of law environment	Resources	Influence Freedom of the participation environment
Social justice	Champions	Competing needs- political, social and economic
Moments	Access to technology	Dynamics of citizenship- class, literacy, gender, rural-urban divide
Shared theory of change	Sustainability of technology platform	Political realities – distance between policy makers and citizens
Learning and improving through M&E		Beyond participation to service delivery

### 3.7 ICT impacts e-participation

Movements such as ICT4D assumed that ICTs would have a positive impact on participation. However, literature shows that ICTs have both positive and negative impacts, as set out below.

- a. They result in an increase in transparency where important information is published. This is the case for example in Kenya, Ghana and South Africa, where one can easily access information such as bills, laws, executive decisions and court judgments.<sup>45</sup>
- b. They lead to enhanced accountability where citizens have information with which to engage in decision-making processes. For example – using data – residents of Durban and some localities in Cape Town have been able to advocate for better planning and services.<sup>46</sup>

- c. Conversely, an increase in transparency and accountability can end up empowering elites at the behest of the masses, such as those who work in citizen participation spaces like CSOs, think tanks and experts. In South Africa for example, there have been many protests against poor services by various public and private authorities, despite well-developed e-participation methods. This leads to the conclusion that structural challenges can and do limit the objectives of e-participation.<sup>47</sup>
- d. E-participation, just like citizen participation, suffers from the feedback loop problem. This is where citizens participate by giving input, but the public authorities who receive it never get back to them. However, new studies show that **e-participation has better chances of closing the feedback loop, particularly where the system is designed to let citizens view what other citizens are saying, or where there is collective action or pressure as opposed to individual action.**<sup>48</sup>

45 UNDP and PIWA (2009), E-governance and Citizen Participation in West Africa: Challenges and Opportunities, [https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Ipaticipation/e-Governance%20and%20Citizen%20Participation%20in%20West%20Africa%20\(UNDP-IPAO%20Report%20English\).pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Ipaticipation/e-Governance%20and%20Citizen%20Participation%20in%20West%20Africa%20(UNDP-IPAO%20Report%20English).pdf)

46 EPA (n.d.), Public Participation Guide: Container Handling in the Port of Durban, South Africa, <https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-container-handling-port-durban-south-africa>

47 Obianiju et al (2019)

48 IDS Bulletin, p. 9

- e. Technology does not necessarily resolve participation problems. Experiences with electronic voting<sup>49</sup> and application of technology in aspects of elections from various countries in Africa show that if citizens do not trust the structures, provision of electronic platforms do not contribute to credible elections and therefore more peaceful societies.<sup>50</sup>

It is therefore important to define the policy problem that technology is intended to resolve.

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49 Giles (2018), DR Congo elections: Why do voters mistrust electronic voting?, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-4655444>

50 Chan (2017), Africa leads the way in election technology, but there's a long way to go, <https://theconversation.com/africa-leads-the-way-in-election-technology-but-theres-a-long-way-to-go-84925>



## 4. Determinants of citizen participation

There are many factors that determine the success of citizen participation initiatives. Table 3 uses a political, institutional and cultural classification to highlight some of the factors discussed in literature.

### 4.1 Political determinants

#### 4.1.1 Political goodwill

While there is consensus that ICTs can be leveraged to improve aspects of citizen participation, literature also cautions against problematising citizen participation as a technology issue. With the benefit of hindsight into the post-independence era, it is now clear that **creating room for citizen participation is a political act.**<sup>51</sup> **Successful citizen participation involves government ceding power and letting citizens define their problems and the resolution of the problems.** A golden thread among examples of successful participation from Africa was the willingness of government to genuinely seek citizens' input and reconcile various and sometimes conflicting views of citizens. By contrast, less successful examples reveal moments when governments are not open, or are open to participation but do not act on citizens' input. For example, this can be extrapolated to projects such as an OGP-supported project with a local government in Kigoma, Tanzania. In that project, the local government had been progressively taking steps from mere provision of information to consultation in health, land and budget transparency issues. However, OGP funding was significantly cut back after Tanzania withdrew from the OGP<sup>52</sup>. Another example is Elgeyo Marakwet County in Kenya, where a

commitment has been made to increase health budgeting transparency. Citizens have identified the lack of medicines as the most pressing issue and are therefore calling for an increase in the corresponding allocation. However, patient needs are made to compete with institutional priorities, which include branding, staff time and consultancy. The department has undertaken to purchase ICT equipment that will be used to display the available drugs. While this fulfils the goal of transparency, it does not ultimately resolve the issue of inaccessibility of drugs: patients get information but not the medicines they need.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Political environment

Closely linked to political goodwill is the issue of the human rights and rule of law environment. There is more likelihood of citizens participating in public decision-making where they do not fear reprisal from state agents. An open environment also gives room for innovation by citizens for projects such as data for evidence-based decision-making and crowdsourcing. Hence, countries that provide many examples of citizen participation are more likely to be rated as open and democratic.

Wakabi explores e-participation in autocratic states such as Uganda. He notes that even in autocratic states, government can perform some of the functions of participation, for example by providing information that supports its interests, or deliberating on selected issues.<sup>54</sup> Political studies broadly classify informal controls by such states to include co-optation (where only elites or appointees have access to information); informal controls (discretionary application of laws) and camouflage, where rules exist but are manipulat-

51 Never Again Rwanda (2017), *Governing with and for Citizens*, <https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Citizen-participation-research-Final.pdf>

52 Rweyemamu (2017), *Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) Final Report 2017: Kigoma Ujiji*, [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Kigoma\\_Final-Report\\_2017.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Kigoma_Final-Report_2017.pdf)

53 OGP (2018), *Public Healthcare Service Delivery – Elgeyo Marakwet, Kenya*, <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/elgeyo-marakwet-kenya/commitments/ELG0007/>

54 Wairagala Wakabi (2016), *Motivating eParticipation in Authoritarian Countries*, <https://diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:902111/FULLTEXT04.pdf>

ed.<sup>55</sup> However, despite these controls and limits on freedom, citizens can still participate, though indirectly, by expressing their support or dissatisfaction with public decisions. They use various means including social media campaigns, protests and petitions to bring attention to issues they are passionate about and can ultimately influence public decision-making, sometimes to their advantage and other times to their detriment.

#### 4.1.3 Interest

Issues that attract political participation include those of particular interest to citizens or civil society organisations. For example, political issues are among the most highly discussed topics in most African countries.<sup>56</sup> These issues are also canvassed at African Union mechanisms by civil society actors through strategic litigation, petitions and shadow reports.<sup>57</sup> Digital rights advocates highlight the lack of activity on digital rights on the continent, due to the low number of civil society organisations working in this field. However, they foresee growing interest as more Africans go online and as digital and other functions converge. Noting that the World Bank, European Union and several European countries are providing support for digital development, digital rights advocates expect the interest in digital rights to peak in the coming decade. Other current issues of interest include health, intra-African trade and movement.

#### 4.1.4 Social justice

Closely related to political goodwill are social justice issues such as inclusion and equity for marginalised and vulnerable groups. Among the factors that determine inclusion are the legal environment and the makeup of political institutions. Studies from South Africa demonstrate that under the historical apartheid regime, strategic decisions in cities such as Cape Town were made by white people, who formed the majority in city leadership. This resulted in unfavourable decisions for black and coloured neighbourhoods and overall dissatisfaction with government among these groups. Although South Africa has laws on citizen participation and high-level commitments such as OGP, the realities of segregation are still apparent, with for example, black HIV patients being relegated to informal settlements such as Khayelitsha.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, studies from autocratic regimes show that technology can be harnessed to centralise power and for the continued oppression of dissenters.<sup>59</sup> The studies buttress the view that citizen participation is closely linked to political realities on the ground and that unless there is deliberate action by policy-makers to address structural injustices, then even application of the latest technology only results in exacerbation of existing inequalities.<sup>60</sup> One such inequality on the continent and among many countries at national and sub-national level is the lower partic-

55 Camargo and Gatwa (2018), Informal Governance and Corruption – Transcending the Principal Agent and Collective Action Paradigms Rwanda Country Report, p. 6, [https://baselgovernance.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/rwanda.informalgovernance.country\\_report.pdf](https://baselgovernance.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/rwanda.informalgovernance.country_report.pdf)

56 Portland (2018), How Africa Tweets, <https://portland-communications.com/pdf/How-Africa-Tweets-2018.pdf>

57 APRM (2019), The Africa Governance Report: Promoting African Union Shared Values, p. 24, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36418-doc-eng\\_the\\_africa\\_governance\\_report\\_2019\\_fi-nal-1.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36418-doc-eng_the_africa_governance_report_2019_fi-nal-1.pdf)

58 Mills (2016), 'You Have to Raise a Fist!': Seeing and Speaking to the State in South Africa, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/37/html>

59 Treré (2016), The Dark Side of Digital Politics: Understanding the Algorithmic Manufacturing of Consent and the Hindering of Online Dissidence, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/41>

60 Bagui (2012), Listening to the Ground: Key Indicators of e-Participation in Government for Africa, <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/listening-ground-key-indicators-participation/64867>; Bagui and Bytheway (2013), Exploring E-Participation in the City of Cape Town, <https://openjournals.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/JoCI/article/view/3140/4095>; Mills (2016), 'You Have to Raise a Fist!': Seeing and Speaking to the State in South Africa, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/37/html>

ipation of women in decision-making processes.<sup>61</sup> Feminists recommend that technology design should prioritise inclusion, protection from harm, respect for human rights, a feminist lens as well as attention to issues of climate change and connecting people and movements. These approaches increase opportunities not only for women, but for all the powerless in society.<sup>62</sup>

#### 4.1.5 Legal commitments

Beyond transparency and accountability, sovereignty – the ultimate power of people to govern themselves – is another logic driving e-participation models. In some countries, such as Kenya and South Africa, citizen participation has been enacted into laws, making it a requirement to consult those who will be affected by a policy prior to its enactment. There is general agreement that legal commitments alone do not translate into openness on the part of government or participation by citizens. However, there is also evidence that legal tools such as access to information frameworks or commitments under compacts such as OGP can be used to pressure government to open up. For example, commitments by Kenya and South Africa to publish financial information have contributed to lively online deliberations on public finance.<sup>63</sup> Activists have also been pushing for national plans on SDGs so as to monitor governments and other players.<sup>64</sup> Commitments on Agenda 2063 could also be used

to promote citizen participation.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4.1.6 Moments

Participation has been linked to national moments such as constitutional changes or change of government. A study of social justice campaigns that took place around key moments such as constitutional change involving democratic elections, multipartyism or universal suffrage, shows how civil society activists already working on an issue induce government to listen and act.<sup>66</sup> Examples from Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa provide lessons on how such moments create a favourable environment for the state to listen, as set out below.

- a. Democratisation processes and moments are a catalyst for social justice movements that are already pursuing an issue. The cases in the study include national health insurance reforms in Ghana, government digitalisation in Kenya, social protection in Kenya and free primary education in Tanzania.
- b. Although moments provide visibility for social justice efforts, it is not always given that government will listen or act. Sometimes the state listens without acting (hearing moments), other times it engages with citizen voices but takes up one one-sided action (consultation moments). In more ideal cases, social justice advocates and policy-makers engage in two-way dialogue and action for accountable governance (concertation moments).
- c. Factors that lead to concertation moments or better results in citizen-state engagements during democratisation processes include a shared sense of urgency among citizens and

61 Neuman (2016), The Right of Access to Information: Exploring Gender Inequities, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/38>

62 APC (2020), Closer than ever: Keeping our movements connected and inclusive – The Association for Progressive Communications' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/closer-ever-keeping-our-movements-connected-and-inclusive-association-progressive>

63 Portland (2018), How Africa Tweets, <https://portland-communications.com/pdf/How-Africa-Tweets-2018.pdf>

64 UN Women Eastern and Southern Africa (2017), The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Africa's Agenda 2063 – Convening Report, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2441UNWomenSDGReport.pdf>

65 For example, Kenya underwent a voluntary national review on SDGs, creating an opportunity for CSOs to put pressure on certain commitments: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/member-states/kenya>

66 Loureiro et al (2016), When Does the State Listen?, <https://www.makingallovoicescount.org/publication/when-does-the-state-listen-ids/>

policy-makers, public and political pressure for drastic change, the sense of a common goal as well as an accountable and responsive state.

d. However, concertation moments are often temporary as they are expensive to maintain, not funded for the long haul, and frequently, champions from social justice movements get co-opted into government or the donor side. Concertation moments therefore reverse to consultation or hearing moments once the democratisation momentum slows down. This calls for incorporation of means of learning from citizen participation processes, such as civic learning as well as monitoring and evaluation.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4.1.7 Theory of change

A theory of change may be described as the fundamental logic that guides a project and its outcomes. Many of the e-participation projects from the last decade or so are premised on improving transparency and accountability. Initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) therefore aim to improve transparency through opening government.<sup>68</sup> Using the same theory of change, CSOs have tested crowdsourcing, where an ICT platform is open for members of the public to populate with information that may be used for policy-making.

Analysis of participation platforms cautions against poorly articulated theories of change, concluding that where time is not spent on developing a shared theory of change, there is rarely a realistic pathway on how to achieve results.

It is therefore important to plan citizen participation processes that are to be shared among all stakeholders along a clear theory of change. This increases chances of sustained action on the part of citizens and responsiveness on the part of government. An interesting example is Bunge la Mwananchi, a grassroots movement in Kenya: its theory of change involves providing a space for local people to deliberate on a wide range of issues – from politics to entertainment. The movement has been sustained by always keeping the space open for any person to join in and contribute. This has enabled the movement to carry on, even when some of their active members are co-opted into government or formal civil society.<sup>69</sup> Similar examples can be found in South Africa, where many protests and petitions take place on the subject of distribution of resources.<sup>70</sup>

#### 4.1.8 Learning and improving

Donor-funded citizen participation platforms sometimes suffer from the problem of reporting outputs – such as uptake by citizens – as outcomes. For example, the U-report project in Uganda was lauded for improving citizen participation as it reported an increase in the number of users year-on-year. The UNICEF-funded project involved SMS-based reporting of issues by ordinary citizens in underserved and rural areas.<sup>71</sup> However, analysis indicated that the extent to which the system had influenced changes, for example in legislation or policies, was much lower. Similar reports are available from other donor-funded projects, for instance in West Africa. This calls for a shift in the evaluation of results, to separate outputs from outcomes but also to measure other indirect benefits, such as the number of people

67 Fisher (2020), Digital games, developing democracies, and civic engagement: a study of games in Kenya and Nigeria, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0163443720914030?ai=1g-voi&mi=3ricys&af=R>

68 Dimba and Grudz (2017), OGP in Africa: Another sharp tool in the governance toolbox, <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/ogp-in-africa-another-sharp-tool-in-the-governance-toolbox/#:~:text=Currently%2C%20eleven%20African%20countries%20are,same%20government%20department%20steers%20both>

69 Otieno et al (2016), Men and Women of Words: How Words Divide and Connect the Bunge La Mwananchi Movement in Kenya, <https://www.makingallvoicescount.org/publication/men-women-words-words-divide-connect-bunge-la-mwananchi-movement-kenya/>

70 For example #RhodesMustFall followed by #DataMust Fall

71 UNICEF (n.d.), What is U-report?, <https://www.unicef.org/uganda/what-we-do/u-report>

who gain skills and better life opportunities from the e-participation project.<sup>72</sup>

## 4.2 Institutional determinants

### 4.2.1 Institutional policies

Political determinants, including high-level commitments and laws, need to be translated into institutional policies that can be acted upon by government officers. South Africa has several examples of institutional policies on stakeholder engagement and governance of participation processes.<sup>73</sup> The country also has promising examples of citizen groups using data for data-driven decision-making, for example in Cape Town. The availability of institutional policies ensures that even where a group of citizens develops a data-driven proposal, other citizens can participate in the decision-making.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, **even where it appears as if institutional policies lengthen decision-making processes, they also aid in expanding space for inclusion of citizens who may not have the same digital or other capacities to participate.**

With respect to political factors, institutional policies such as establishing mechanisms for reporting an issue, timelines for consultation, proactive publication, participation officers, etc. also aid in 'pushing the envelope', as citizens can use the policies to demand information and action.

### 4.2.2 Capacity and resources

Institutional policies must be resourced so that they can be implemented successfully. The resources should partly be used in building the

capacity of government officers to listen sufficiently to citizen voices. An observation regarding participation policies that were made at national level for implementation at local level was the lack of capacity building and resourcing of local officers. The latter are important actors as they directly interact with citizens and communities at the grassroots. For example, in a study of disaster response systems in Mozambique, donors at the headquarters sought data from local officers in order to determine the resources needed for emergency and recovery efforts. The local officers however were undertaking the more urgent work of evacuating families to safer areas and would therefore feed estimates on systems provided by donors. Some gave inaccurate data (lower or higher estimates, wrong demographics), as they were not aware of the objective of the system and were only doing it in response to instructions from higher up.

### 4.2.3 Champions

Literature reviewing early e-participation systems in Africa notes that a success factor in the participation process is the presence of government, making government-owned systems more responsive to citizens even when the systems were not open for citizens to view what other citizens had said. CSO-owned systems were only successful where the CSO had access to the government. Even then, CSOs faced challenges in monitoring follow-up from the participation process to service delivery. This points to the role that individuals, groups and departments within governments play in realisation of citizen participation.<sup>75</sup> It also shows the risk of failure if citizen participation processes overly rely on champions, hence the need to partly institutionalise the roles played by champions. For example, where a champion

72 Making All Voices Count Project, <https://www.makingallvoicescount.org>

73 <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-05/documents/southafrica.pdf>

74 Okeke-Uzodike and Dlamini (2019), Citizens' E-Participation at Local Municipal Government in South Africa, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335020468\\_Citizens%27\\_E\\_Participation\\_at\\_Local\\_Municipal\\_Government\\_in\\_South\\_Africa](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335020468_Citizens%27_E_Participation_at_Local_Municipal_Government_in_South_Africa)

75 Otieno et al (2016), Men and Women of Words: How Words Divide and Connect the Bunge La Mwananchi Movement in Kenya, <https://www.makingallvoicescount.org/publication/men-women-words-words-divide-connect-bunge-la-mwananchi-movement-kenya/>

garners citizen input through social media engagement, the institution should not only participate in the engagement, but also keep institutional memory of deliberations and decisions from such citizen engagement for implementation.

#### 4.2.4. Access to technology

With more uptake of digital technology in government,<sup>76</sup> access to technology determines the level and depth of citizen participation. Countries with higher access to technology such as South Africa therefore have robust online discourse on governance that results in government action. This is partly because technology improves the access to information required for active citizenship. A risk with reliance on technology for citizen participation is elitism, where only citizens with access to technology as well as the digital skills and time actively participate. As citizen participation moves to more technology-dependent methods such as data-driven participation, there is also a need to improve access to technology for all so that the whole society can participate in decision-making.

#### 4.2.5 Sustainability

There have been instances of good citizen participation platforms, particularly around moments such as elections and natural disasters, where government and non-governmental actors built platforms that gave opportunity for participation. A UNDP Report on e-participation in Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal identifies the lack of long-term resourcing for citizen participation as among the challenges for good e-participation initiatives. The initiatives are funded for specific moments such as

elections, using models such as crowdsourcing. However, there could be other utilities for the platforms following the moment if this had been factored into the project. The report recommends the integration of e-participation into governance processes so as to guard against disengagement of engaged citizens.<sup>77</sup> Although the report is dated, the issues discussed continue to appear in more recent studies, suggesting that sustainable models for e-participation have been elusive. An emerging and interesting model for self-sustainability entails community networks, where rural and underserved communities build their own internet service provider (ISP). The ISPs serve not only as infrastructure for service provision but as community centres where people can start small businesses, as capacity building centres where youth and women can learn how to maintain their network, and as social centres for cultural and entertainment activities.<sup>78</sup> In Kenya, civil society organisations have petitioned the communications regulator for a special licensing framework for community networks.<sup>79</sup>

### 4.3. Cultural determinants

#### 4.3.1 Citizen empowerment

For citizens to participate meaningfully in public decision-making, they require special knowledge skills and attitudes. Studies are quick to point out that the burden of citizen empowerment lies more with government due to its immense power. They also caution against paternalistic atti-

76 UNDP (n.d.), E-Government Development Index, <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/-E-Government-Development-Index#:~:text=The%20E%2DGovernment%20Development%20Index,the%20United%20Nations%20Member%20States.&text=The%20EGDI%20is%20a%20composite,telecommunication%20connectivity%20and%20human%20capacity>.

77 UNDP and PIWA (2009), E-governance and Citizen Participation in West Africa: Challenges and Opportunities, [https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Ipaticipation/e-Governance%20and%20Citizen%20Participation%20in%20West%20Africa%20\(UNDP-IPAO%20Report%20English\).pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Ipaticipation/e-Governance%20and%20Citizen%20Participation%20in%20West%20Africa%20(UNDP-IPAO%20Report%20English).pdf)

78 Internet Society (2017), Community Networking Report, [https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CommunityNetworkingAfrica\\_report\\_May2017\\_1.pdf](https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CommunityNetworkingAfrica_report_May2017_1.pdf)

79 KICTANet (2021), Invitation to Webinar: Towards a Licensing and Shared Spectrum Framework for Community Networks, <https://www.kictanet.or.ke/invitation-to-webinar-towards-a-licensing-and-shared-spectrum-framework-for-community-networks/>

tudes on the part of government and elite citizens where rural and other citizens are assumed not to be aware of their needs. Instead, citizen engagement should be broadened to encompass functions such as deliberation, community building, direct voting and polling on issues where the lived realities and local knowledge of citizens may be deeper than that of policy-makers, donors and larger CSOs.

The role of CSOs in citizen empowerment is also emphasised. CSOs can bridge the gap between high-level policies and lived experiences of citizens. They can also translate deliberations of citizens into policy proposals and coordinate actions for pressure on government to act on citizens' priorities.<sup>80</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Competing needs

Citizen participation among poor citizens or in low and middle-income countries such as in Africa always encounters the challenge of competing needs. Citizens who have to grapple with feeding their families may not have time to participate in decision-making processes.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, governments with limited budgets allocate only a minimum to citizen participation. Innovative ways of overcoming budget challenges include provision of information in government facilities where citizens seek services. For example, the Huduma Centers in Kenya, which are one-stop shops for e-government services, have been used to disseminate government communications to the high number of citizens who visit the centres every day.<sup>82</sup> The model could be used for other cit-

izen participation functions such as deliberation, where citizens seeking services could be engaged in various issues while waiting for the services. This could also be extended to other spaces where citizens gather, for example social halls, places of worship, schools and health centres.

#### 4.3.3 Vulnerabilities

However, care needs to be taken in engaging with vulnerable citizens such as the poor, health-challenged, ethnic and gender minorities. The Khayelitsha study, as well as accounts by Bunge la Mwananchi and several of the UNDP West African projects, explore how vulnerabilities can lead to commercialisation of participation, such that vulnerable people participate for pay. This can skew input in favour of the paying entity.

Although the community networks movement is not about citizen participation, it provides some lessons on dealing with vulnerable citizens. Community networks are community-owned internet service providers (ISPs) that start as a response to the need for internet for either remote areas or urban poor who are not well-served by commercial ISPs. However, they not only build ISPs but also communities, where people come together for various reasons. These include learning about the network so as to maintain it, starting small businesses around the community, using the internet and for entertainment purposes. Community networks have better chances of sustaining the ISP in the long run, leading to the view that being the owner or producer of technology has more benefits than being a consumer of technology, as is the case with commercially supplied internet services.<sup>83</sup>

80 UNESCO(2017), What if we could all govern the internet?, [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/what\\_if\\_we\\_all\\_governed\\_internet\\_en.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/what_if_we_all_governed_internet_en.pdf)

81 Welle et al (2016), ICTs Help Citizens Voice Concerns over Water – Or Do They?, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/35>

82 Kariithi (2018), Strategy Implementation Practices on Performance of Huduma Centres in Nairobi City County, Kenya, <https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/19928/Strategy%20Implementation%20Practices....pdf?sequence=1>

83 Internet Society (2017), Community Networking Report, [https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CommunityNetworkingAfrica\\_report\\_May2017\\_1.pdf](https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CommunityNetworkingAfrica_report_May2017_1.pdf)

Table 4: Translating participation determinants into e-participation determinants

Participation determinant	Determinant in e-participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Political goodwill</li> <li>■ Capacity building</li> <li>■ Resources for e-participation platforms</li> <li>■ Access to technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Responsive technology that is sensitive to cultural factors</li> <li>■ Possibility for people to participate using non-digital means</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Legal commitments</li> <li>■ Institutional policies</li> </ul>	Technology that supports commitments such as openness and transparency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Human rights and rule of law environment</li> <li>■ Champions</li> <li>■ Political realities – distance between policy-makers and citizens</li> <li>■ Vulnerabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Open technology</li> <li>■ Protection from technology harms (privacy, surveillance)</li> <li>■ Rights promoting technology, e.g. support for various cultures, support for anonymity</li> <li>■ Technology neutrality</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Moments</li> <li>■ Influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ownership/production of technology</li> <li>■ Technology-related skills development</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Shared theory of change</li> <li>■ Citizen empowerment</li> <li>■ Pressure</li> </ul>	Making different means of participation available, digital and non-digital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Learning and improving through M&amp;E</li> <li>■ Access to technology</li> <li>■ Sustainability of e-participation platforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Independence of technology from profit-making</li> <li>■ Community technology</li> <li>■ Social enterprise technology</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Competing needs</li> <li>■ Beyond participation to service delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ownership/production of technology</li> <li>■ Technology-related skills development</li> </ul>

#### 4.3.4 Influence and pressure

Influence is related to the issue of power. In every society, there are those who are able to influence processes such as citizen participation due to their social power. This can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. For example, influencers can amplify the voice of citizens and also rally others to exert pressure on government. Influencers have been key in social justice movements and online campaigns, with some literature referring to this as civic power (as opposed to individual power).<sup>84</sup> However, influencers can also cloud out minority and vulnerable voices, resulting in public discourse that favours the powerful. Examples from South Africa show how data-driven decisions led to allo-

cation of more resources to already well-served neighbourhoods and neglect of poor neighbourhoods. Some of the ways in which influence can be used for social good include: Some of the ways in which influence can be used for social good include:

- Conducting a stakeholder analysis to ensure that the policy-maker is aware of the whole spectrum of stakeholders;
- Improving transparency on citizen input and public decisions taken, e.g. by publishing citizen input;
- Establishing an open environment where citizens can participate in decision-making processes either as individuals or in groups. Openness also includes creating opportunities for citizens to participate during the whole life cycle of a decision-making process.

<sup>84</sup> Piexoto and Fox (2016), When Does ICT-Enabled Citizen Voice Lead to Government Responsiveness?, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/23650>



#### 4.3.5 Freedom

Freedom includes an environment that respects human rights, where participation by the citizen does not result in retaliation from the state or put the citizen at risk of harm, e.g. by exposure of their personal data, ridicule from other citizens, etc. This requires political goodwill and institutional policies that protect the citizens who participate.

Freedom from a cultural perspective also involves expanding the space for groups who would otherwise not be included.<sup>85</sup> Studies show that in some rural communities, women will hardly give any input in an open meeting organised by government officials, yet they are more open in CSO forums. A government that is genuinely interested in citizen participation should therefore factor in the various meanings of freedom for the different citizens it is engaging with.<sup>86</sup> This can be achieved through technology that supports anonymity, submitting on behalf of others as well as a variety of formats for those who may not be proficient in reading and writing.

#### 4.3.6 From participation to service delivery

Citizen participation is about power. It calls upon government to share its decision-making power but also requires citizens to share their influence so as to give legitimacy to decisions.

With regard to government power, issues that the government must tackle and eventually eliminate include administrative vices such as authoritarianism, elitism, corruption, trafficking of influence, nepotism, treason, fiscal evasion and misman-

agement.<sup>87</sup> Elimination of these vices may help citizens to trust the government and therefore cooperate in governance by giving their input to decision-making processes. However, beyond the decision-making process, experiences from South Africa show that **even where citizens have the opportunity to be involved in decision-making, lack of service delivery greatly dilutes trust in government, leading to suspicion of government processes and expression of dissatisfaction with government through protests.**

85 Otieno (2016), Men and Women of Words: How Words Divide and Connect the Bunge La Mwananchi Movement in Kenya, <https://www.makingallvoicescount.org/publication/men-women-words-words-divide-connect-bunge-la-mwananchi-movement-kenya/>

86 Neuman (2016), The Right of Access to Information: Exploring Gender Inequities, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/38>

87 Macintosh & Whyte (2008)

## 5. E-participation determinants

A concept that is core to e-participation is digital citizenship – the capacity and action of engaging in civic life using digital tools or online spaces. Digital citizenship is influenced by political, institutional, cultural as well as technological factors. As regards political and cultural factors, the determinants are similar to analogue participation; the technology used must be tweaked to facilitate participation. For example, political goodwill will translate into responsive technology that is sensitive to cultural factors. If the cultural environment does not support digital participation, the institutional policies will make room for non-digital participation. Table 4 summarises how participation determinants translate into e-participation.

Technological determinants include access and affordability of technology as well as the freedom to use it. Internet access is very unequal across Africa, with countries like Kenya and Nigeria recording 85% and 95% internet penetration respectively, while over 20 countries have less than 20%. Even within countries with high penetration rates, access is concentrated in larger cities and among people with higher incomes.<sup>88</sup> Women are generally least connected across African societies.<sup>89</sup>

In addition, studies of technology platforms used for government services reveal the following points.<sup>90</sup>

- Entry points for use of technology in public decision-making include information gaps

– where public bodies lack data on an issue; feedback gaps – where the public has limited means of providing feedback on services of public agencies.

- The effectiveness of technology depends more on the design than its deployment. This is more so for technologies purchased or developed specifically for participation such as web-based or SMS platforms.
- There is more strength in communities voicing an issue compared to individuals (amplification) both in non-digital and digital participation. Hence, technologies that help communities discuss an issue, for example social media platforms, have become quite popular for participation.
- **Technology not only helps communities to communicate with policy-makers, it can also be useful in community building.** For example, people with common interests can come together in social media groups, WhatsApp, etc. to learn, strategise and advocate on an issue. Consequently, even in participation projects that are considered unsuccessful, the community building function may still be achieved through technology tools.
- The success of technology largely depends on the political environment. Even where a country has internet penetration, liberties such as the freedom of expression and association as well as access to information facilitate public participation. The government must also be open to hearing public views and desist from shaping public opinion in accordance with its interests by ‘manufacturing consent’<sup>91</sup> using technologies such as bots,<sup>92</sup> misinformation, and internet shutdowns.<sup>93</sup>

88 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1124283/internet-penetration-in-africa-by-country/>

89 <https://www.gsma.com/r/gender-gap/>

90 McGee et al (2018), Appropriating technology for accountability: messages from Making All Voices Count, [https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/13452/RR\\_Synth\\_Online\\_final.pdf](https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/13452/RR_Synth_Online_final.pdf) and Wilson (2016), Test It and They Might Come: Improving the Uptake of Digital Tools in Transparency and Accountability Initiatives, <https://www.makingallvoicescount.org/publication/test-might-come-improving-uptake-digital-tools-transparency-accountability-initiatives/>

91 Trere (2016), The Dark Side of Digital Politics: Understanding the Algorithmic Manufacturing of Consent and the Hindering of Online Dissidence, <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/41>

92 CIPESA (2016), Analysis of Twitter Activity on Election Eve and Election Day in Uganda, [https://cipesa.org/?wpfb\\_dl=216](https://cipesa.org/?wpfb_dl=216)

93 Giles and Mwai (2021), Africa internet: Where and how are governments blocking it?, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47734843>

- It is not possible for all voices to use technology, much less so in African countries where internet penetration remains low. Therefore e-participation strategies must also consider non-digital means of communication, such as radio, paper surveys and face-to-face meetings.

Beyond access, various factors determine how technology is used. Some studies use the 5A's analysis – availability, affordability, awareness, abilities and agency to analyse technology from a user perspective. This analysis is useful in getting policy-makers not only to increase access to the internet but also to provide an environment that facilitates its use. However, it assumes that users are individuals accessing the internet through market-driven approaches. As noted from the determinants, public policy-making also takes a collective approach. There is also a need to expand access to technology, particularly for those not covered under market-driven approaches, since the industry does not invest in areas considered economically unviable. Community networks, where local communities in rural and underserved areas are building their own internet service provider (ISPs) outfits, are worth further study and support. The community networks movement has picked up in the global South and in countries like Kenya and Zambia, where communities have approached policy-makers for policy and monetary assistance. In Kenya, community networks are being considered for special non-commercial licences while in Zambia, they are funded under the Universal Service Fund.

Literature identifies other factors of e-participation, as given below.

- The World Bank Principles for Digital ID for Sustainable Development identify five pointers for robust, secure, and sustainable digital identity projects. These are security, interoperability of platforms, use of open standards with technology and vendor neutrality, protection

of user privacy and operational sustainability with accessibility.<sup>94</sup> Although these principles are tailored for digital ID technology, they are applicable to many aspects of public decision-making technology. For example, security and protection of privacy both protect users of e-participation platforms from harm.

- Design:** Technology should be designed to suit the cultural environment where participation is to take place. For example, the rise in use of social media for citizen campaigns is due to its use for communication and entertainment, particularly among urban youth. Therefore, designers could leverage aspects of social media to empower citizens to participate in public decision-making. Other important design aspects include multiple formats for participation, e.g. voice notes and videos.
- Cost:** Related to design is the issue of cost. Many studies found that cost was a barrier to participation, for example where citizens were expected to send an SMS that was charged. Moreover, the cost of accessing the internet is high for most people on the African continent, and many are on pre-paid data models. Hence, an e-participation platform that is data-intensive would be prohibitive.
- Ownership:** Beyond the technology and vendor neutrality principle, African governments could explore producing their own e-participation technology.

94 World Bank (2021), Principles on Identification for Sustainable Development: Toward the Digital Age, <https://id4d.worldbank.org/principles>

## 6. Scalable aspects

One way to consider scalable aspects of e-participation is from a policy objectives perspective. The DataCipation project (Citizen Engagement and Innovative Data Use for Africa's Development) aims to strengthen the engagement between AU organs, Member States and citizens leveraging data, digital and non-digital approaches for good governance and development. Policy objectives include the use of digital technology to promote political participation and legitimate, transparent and accountable state structures, improved state governance and the practice of democratic processes.

On its part, the African Union (AU) has facilitated stakeholder engagement through the Diaspora & Civil Society Engagement Directorate. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have over the years attempted to influence various AU mechanisms, with mixed results. The CSOs respond to AU documents and processes, and have at times through initiatives such as the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Principles been proactive in norm-setting. CSOs have also had difficulty in accessing the AU mechanisms due to bureaucratic and cultural barriers. For example, the Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL) followed the specified procedure to obtain observer status at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in 2015.<sup>95</sup> However, pressure by the African Union Executive Council for ACHPR to consider 'African values' when reviewing applications for observer status led to revocation of this status in August 2018.<sup>96</sup> The case illustrates the power dynamics of citizen participation at continental level as a threat to equitable participation of all.

95 CAL (2015), Statement on Decision of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to Grant Observer Status to the Coalition of African Lesbians, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151208064900/http://www.cal.org.za/new/?p=1908>

96 Ijrc (2018), African Commission Bows to Political Pressure, Withdraws NGO's Observer Status, <https://ijrcenter.org/2018/08/28/achpr-strips-the-coalition-of-african-lesbians-of-its-observer-status/>

AU's latest strategy, Agenda 2063, envisages greater involvement of African people in socio-economic transformation. For the first time, the union is seeking an AU-wide citizen engagement strategy that will tap into citizens' collective power to 'promote leadership, ownership, partnership, resilience and co-creation of activities that are central to citizens' livelihoods.'<sup>97</sup> The strategy will create 'spaces (physical and virtual) through the adoption and deployment of state-of-the-art technology with standardised tools, instruments, and indicators for engagement on Agenda 2063 implementation'.

**With the existing landscape of policies and actors in the transparency and accountability space, some of the areas that could be scaled include policy-making, existing projects and capacity building.**

### 6.1 Policy-making

One of the lessons that can be drawn from previous projects such as Making All Voices Count (MAVIC) is that the existence of policies such as the Open Government Partnership does contribute towards pushing governments to play their part in transparency and accountability. The development of the African Union strategy for public participation is therefore one of the ways through which governments can increase their commitment to participation. The policy itself creates an opportunity to test various aspects of citizen participation, for example consultation on the strategy. There could also be deliberation on the forms participation could assume on the African continent. This would involve leveraging existing networks of norm-setting communities which may have already interacted with the African Union mechanisms on various issues. Existing

97 AUC (2020), Call for Proposal – Consultancy Services for Development of an AU-wide Citizen Engagement Strategy for Agenda 2063, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/bids/39491-tor\\_-\\_et-auc-175220-cs-indv.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/bids/39491-tor_-_et-auc-175220-cs-indv.pdf)

networks on information-related rights, for example the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms could be brought on board. They could be encouraged to contribute new voices and increase capacity in the norm-setting work.

On the use of data for decision-making, the AU is also in the process of developing a data governance policy.<sup>98</sup> According to notes taken on webinars with AU officers in attendance, the policy will cover issues such as access to data for research as well as data interoperability. Civil society organisations have been calling for a discussion on the Malabo Convention (African Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection) as a way of ensuring that people are protected from harm arising from the use of data. The Convention would also assist in creating a data market in Africa if data protection frameworks on the continent were harmonised, making it easy for data actors across different countries to share, use and reuse data. This discourse points to the need for a harmonised policy on data access across the continent. It is even more urgent with the coming into force of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. Groups that are working on policy advocacy in this respect include the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms (AfDec)<sup>99</sup> on data privacy as well as the open data movement, which advocates for data for policy-making.<sup>100</sup>

## 6.2 Existing projects

There are several transnational projects on different aspects of citizen participation, from transparency and accountability to citizen voice. These projects, particularly those which are highly adapted to local conditions, for example Bunge la

Mwananchi in Kenya or Civil Societies in Rwanda, are an interesting study in bottom-up participation. Their models could be tested in other places.

One interesting model that does not directly focus on citizen participation but could accelerate the use of digital tools is community networks.<sup>101</sup> These are bottom-up approaches to internet access where rural and underserved communities build their own internet networks. Community networks have the potential not only to connect the unconnected but also to increase digital literacy and create spaces for online and offline discourse.

There are several actors implementing projects that are either collecting or using data for decision-making. Some are under the data for development<sup>102</sup> movement. They include the Open Data Barometer,<sup>103</sup> which measures open data readiness for African countries, and Geo-Portal,<sup>104</sup> a network of geo-spatial organisations. Projects such as Durban Data/Open Cities Lab<sup>105</sup> demonstrate the use of data for civic engagement. The Open Cities Lab has been successful in South Africa, attracting funding from donors to build more tools. However, as pointed out in the discussion on determinants, building of civic tech requires knowledge of social issues<sup>106</sup> so as to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities.

Emerging projects such as WanaData have taken a more feminist approach by focusing on building the capacity of young women to work on data on issues that affect them. For example, they have collaborated with local newspapers to create sim-

98 AUC (2020), African Union leading on Data Economy in Africa ... for Africa, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20201006/african-union-leading-data-economy-africa-africa>

99 <https://africaninternetrights.org/en/updates/impact-covid-19-digital-rights-africa>

100 For example <https://africaopendata.org/> and Africa Open Data Network (AODN), <http://africaopendatanetwork.org/>

101 <https://www.internetsociety.org/events/summit-community-networks-africa/>

102 <http://africaopendatanetwork.org/who-we-are/>

103 <https://opendatabarometer.org/3rdedition/regional-report/africa/>

104 <https://www.africageoportal.com/>

105 <https://opencitieslab.org/odd/home>

106 [https://www.timeshighereducation.com/sites/default/files/institution\\_downloads/wits-curiosity-issue-08\\_0.pdf](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/sites/default/files/institution_downloads/wits-curiosity-issue-08_0.pdf)

ple tools on health care<sup>107</sup> provision, using open data.<sup>108</sup>

### 6.3 Capacity building

There are also capacity building initiatives that merit further support. An outstanding one on data and machine learning is Deep Learning Indaba,<sup>109</sup> a pan-African network of researchers and academics who have created a conference-cum-organisation for data and machine learning students and professionals in Africa. The group has created some datasets<sup>110</sup> and shared information on COVID-19 modelling that is useful to governments and other actors responding to the pandemic. WanaData and its parent organisation Code for Africa are also examples of spaces where journalists and others are upskilling themselves through training on data for civic engagement.

Although they were not founded as capacity building projects, not-for-profit fact-checking outfits such as AfricaCheck<sup>111</sup> and PesaCheck<sup>112</sup> have been training journalists and other internet users on how to recognise credible content. This is an important aspect of digital literacy that also protects discursive spaces.

Examples of previous and existing citizen participation and related initiatives are appended at the end of the report.

107 <https://health.the-star.co.ke/>

108 <https://africaopendata.org/dataset?q=kenya+health>

109 <https://deeplearningindaba.com/2021/>

110 <https://github.com/dsfsi/covid19africa>

111 [https://africacheck.org/promise-tracker?gclid=EAlalQobCh-MIm7aSrLrb8AIVkqiyCh0jqAGNEAAYASAAEgIJG\\_D\\_BwE](https://africacheck.org/promise-tracker?gclid=EAlalQobCh-MIm7aSrLrb8AIVkqiyCh0jqAGNEAAYASAAEgIJG_D_BwE)

112 <https://pesacheck.org/>

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, a number of suggestions regarding support for e-participation are set out below, which address various actors, including AU institutions, Member States and international partners.

- Actor support should be geared towards promoting existing and new projects as well as policy-making. From the OGP project, it appears that government action is influenced by civil society pressure on OGP commitments. Hence, even when public participation projects are being supported, the role of civil society organisations in achieving transparent societies should not be overlooked.
- GIZ should also encourage other actors to support e-participation. It is evident that public discourse and topics that attract interest in the African Union and other spaces are partly influenced by actors' funding.
- Experience from two e-participation projects in Kenya – Jadili and Dokeza – as well as from previous analogue participation initiatives shows that participation measures gain more traction where citizens perceive the presence of government. This can take the form of supporting legislation or political goodwill to respond to citizen input; recording citizen input using non-digital means where more appropriate, and supporting civic space and a thriving civil society.
- On policy-making, actors should advocate for the AU e-participation strategy to be a livelier, more spirited document than previous APRMs. This could include commitments by governments with mechanisms for follow-up by civil society organisations and citizens in general.
- Actors should support community-building efforts and cross-fertilisation of citizen participation initiatives. This could include initiatives where policy communities have started to build data tools or data communities that are connected to policy/norm-setting entities.
- In addition, actors – together with civil society organisations and think tanks – should develop tools to assist governments in realising e-participation. These could range from model laws for e-participation, policies for institutions undertaking e-participation to civic education programmes for the public.
- On data for development, there are promising initiatives such as Open Cities (Durban data), Deep Learning Indaba (data science and machine learning community), fact-checking communities and Afrobarometer (citizen surveys). These and similar initiatives are worth supporting since they not only promote data for development but also set out to build capacity for digital citizenship and build technology in Africa.
- Like any other development, there is a risk of citizen participation and data for decision-making leaving out marginalised groups such as women, the poor and rural folk. Actors should promote initiatives that are bridging existing gaps, for example the feminist data work of WanaData. They should also support work that is grounded in affected communities or in networks that can make use of data for policy advocacy.
- A lesson learned in South Africa is that for citizens, participation is not just about having a voice, but the voice translating into a better quality of life. Hence, it is essential to support citizen participation projects that are linked to improved livelihoods. This applies to direct employment of many people, or training for income-earning skills, as is the case with data and machine learning communities. Consideration should be given to broader investment, where models such as community networks that resolve the problems of access are assisted.

- Actors should also support research and learning components to ensure that e-participation projects benefit from reflection on their value, successes and failures. As demonstrated from the Making All Voices Count project, academic analysis of processes such as open government partnership curated knowledge and contributed to global South perspectives on transparent societies.









