



Meaningful Public Participation by Tharaka Nithi CSO Network in Collaboration with the County Government Contributes to Citizen Centric Development Plans

Tharaka Nithi County Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) Network

Background of the Intervention

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 created two levels of government: the national government and county governments. The fourth schedule of the Constitution outlines the functions of the two levels of government. County Governments are required by law to develop long-term and short-term plans to facilitate development for effective service delivery. The Constitution states that public participation is mandatory in county development planning.

Among the key development plans that county governments are required by law to have in place is the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP). The CIDP is the county's 5-years blueprint, it reflects a broader picture of county development priorities. Development of the CIDP is a multi-stakeholder process involving all the county's sectors, led by the County Department for Finance and Economic Planning. The development of previous CIDPs in Tharaka Nithi County demonstrated some key gaps in public participation, which included:



Lack of public engagement during the development of the 2nd Gen. CIDP, whose priorities were determined mainly by the county government technical officers



Participation was through selective invitation of participants in restricted venues, mainly hotels



Lack of awareness of the CIDP among most members of the public and their role in developing the plans



Lack of involvement of the non-state actors, including the CSOs, in developing the CIDP



Minimal engagement of the marginalised groups resulted in a lack of inclusion of their priorities for the last ten years

Steps Towards Meaningful Public Participation for the Third Generation CIDP



Act! undertook the interventions supporting the government on public participation

The project sought to enhance the citizens' understanding of the CIDP and the importance of participating in its development and linking the citizens with the County Government during the CIDP development processes. The aim was to facilitate meaningful participation of the citizens in the CIDP development. Act! undertook the interventions supporting the government on public participation while those targeting citizens were led by Tharaka Nithi CSOs Development Network. The activities were implemented under the Kenya Devolution Programme - Timiza Ugatuzi with funding from the UK Government.

To deliver meaningful community engagement and effective participation, several activities were undertaken by the CSOs Network in collaboration with Act! and the County Government Department for Finance and Economic Planning. These activities includes:



Training of the CSOs network members on the county CIDP development process, who in turn carried out vigorous civic education to community members. The training was done collaboratively by Act! and technical officers from the County Government Department for Finance and Economic Planning. Twenty-five civic educators and three project personnel were trained on the CIDP development process.

Use of fliers and radio to sensitise the community on what the CIDP is and their role as citizens in participating in its development. Four radio programmes were held on the local radio stations (Mwendantu FM), featuring the CSO network representatives and county technical staff. Ten thousand copies of the CIDP fliers were produced and distributed by the civic educators and ward administrators during the civic education forums one week before the actual county public participation forums for the 3rd Generation CIDP. The fliers entailed a general overview of the CIDP, its mandate in county development, the role of the citizens in CIDP development, participation opportunities and the step-by-step CIDP development process. The fliers had phone numbers for the CSO network officials, who were available to offer clarity and further information upon request by the community members.



Use of social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook and LinkedIn. Sharing a soft copy of the CIDP flyer via social media and sharing the email address of the Department for Finance and Economic Planning ensured the participation of Tharaka Nithi County residents who did not attend the public forums held. The County Finance and Economic Planning Department confirmed that they received several emails containing project proposals from the public and other key stakeholders.

The activities above ensured that the information reached a larger county population and increased community awareness of the CIDP process. This was an improvement from the previous strategy of advertising the public participation forums only on the print media, such as newspapers, which are inaccessible to most community members.

Results of the Intervention

Over six hundred copies of memoranda were developed by members of the public and submitted to the County Government Department for Finance and Economic Planning. This was an improvement since, previously, the community members did not know how to develop memorandums.

Community members from all fifteen wards were sensitised and received summarised information in their local dialect through the flyers. This was done during the CSO Network Civic Educators' community-based sessions with the Ward Administrators. The flyers enhanced the community members' understanding of CIDP because the public could refer to the flyer in case they needed any clarification on the process.

Public participation in the development of the 3rd Gen. CIDP in the year 2022 was one of the most successful processes in the county, as per the county government Director for the Department of Finance and Economic Planning. The county government mentioned a good turnout of over 8,000 community members across Tharaka Nithi County. It constructively gave its proposals compared to the past years when the turnout for such activities was less than two thousand people. In the past, the county team faced hostilities from some communities demanding allowances.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Lessons

- Goodwill by the Governors propelled the success of the intervention. The County Government of Tharaka Nithi, led by the Governor, embraced public participation. The county officers of the Department for Finance and Economic Planning had the buy-in of the Governor to collaborate with the CSO network in planning to engage the citizens in developing the CIDP.
- Partnership between the Tharaka Nithi County CSOs network and the County Government was key to the success of the intervention. This led to the improvement of accountability in the public engagement processes through enhanced access to information and civic education before public participation. For instance, during the preparation for the CIDP public participation forums, the county government, in collaboration with the CSOs network, participated in joint sensitisation and planning sessions and conducted collective civic awareness through community forums and media using local newspapers and radio stations.
- Active involvement of experts from the county government and members of the CSO network during the training and sensitisation forums contributed to undertaking meaningful public participation. The trained teams were also equipped with the relevant tools, e.g. stakeholder analysis and data-capturing templates. They did simulation exercises using the tools, which enabled them to gain some experience. A better understanding of the areas mentioned above promoted confidence among citizens, improving the quality of public engagements.

Recommendations

- The involvement of Act, the CSO Network and other stakeholders sensitising community members on their roles in Tharaka Nithi County was key to the success of the public participation process for the 3rd Generation CIDP. The process could be emulated in all counties and government processes as it makes public participation more meaningful to the public. Sustainable community civic education on public participation and devolution should be practised.
- The Tharaka Nithi County CSO network should leverage the goodwill of the current leadership and continue engaging with the county government on pertinent development issues, especially on the rollout of the implementation of the 3rd Gen. CIDP. The County Government should continue collaborating with the relevant non-state actors in implementing the third-generation CIDP and in monitoring and evaluating the same, especially by strengthening their inclusion in the sector working groups.
- Both the County Government and the CSO network should continue utilising the media platforms (Social media, Radio and Print media) to inform, empower and enhance the role of citizens in the county development processes.



**KENYA
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