



From Participation to Action: How Homa Bay County is Strengthening Women's Voices in Public Decision-Making

County:	Homa Bay County		
Sector/s:	Directorate of Legal Services and Gender Committee	Sub-sector/Theme:	Public Participation
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Target Audience:	County Governments, policy makers, development partners, Citizens, NGOs		
Authors (contacts and their institutions can be included as well)	Grace Kimani – Council of Governors Tom Kataka – Council of Governors		
Resource Persons (include their designations)	Zilpa Opapo – County Director, Stakeholder Management, Public Participation and Civic Education Nicholas Ayieta Odawo – Sub-County Administrator Elphick Omondi Owira – County Officer, Governance, Administration, Communication and Devolution Department)		

Introduction (**Context and Challenge**):

Meaningful public participation is not simply about bringing citizens into a meeting room; it is about creating opportunities for their voices to shape the decisions that affect their lives. In Homa Bay County, this has meant taking public participation beyond conventional forums and creating mechanisms that enable communities, including women and other vulnerable groups, to engage with County planning and decision-making at the local level.

With approximately 1.3 million residents, Homa Bay has diverse communities with different needs and priorities. Women, youth, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups can, however, face barriers that limit their participation, including household responsibilities, cultural expectations, limited facilitation and resource constraints. These challenges can affect not only whether they participate, but also their ability to meaningfully influence decisions that shape development in their communities.

Implementation of the practice (**Solution Path**):



Homa Bay County has responded by decentralizing public participation to the village level, bringing decision-making closer to women and other community members. Making the village the primary operational unit for consultations, planning and decision-making provides women with opportunities to raise issues affecting their households and livelihoods within their own communities. The approach is anchored in the Homa Bay Public Participation Policy and the Civic Education and Public Participation Act, which establish decentralized consultative structures.



Figure 1: A lady during the public participation assessment and documentation exercise

To reach women and ensure they are aware of opportunities to participate, the County uses a combination of formal and community-based communication channels. Ward administrators, village cluster leaders, public barazas, social media, the County website and local media platforms such as Ramogi TV and Ramogi FM are used to mobilize communities. Village cluster leaders play an important role in reaching women

at the grassroots, supported by databases maintained by ward administrators.

The County also takes public participation directly to communities when discussing development priorities. Women and other residents are engaged at village level on projects such as roads, classrooms and water infrastructure, creating opportunities for them to articulate their priorities and influence decisions that directly affect their lives. This approach is particularly important for women who may face practical challenges travelling to centralized forums.

Beyond creating opportunities to participate, the County has put measures in place to make participation more inclusive. Women are engaged through their leaders and caucuses, while persons with disabilities are supported through measures such as accessible venues, transport reimbursement and sign-language interpretation. These measures recognize that providing an invitation to participate is not enough; different groups may require specific support to participate meaningfully.

The County also uses standardized templates and feedback forms to capture attendance, representation and views raised during public participation. This creates a record of who participated and what was discussed. Project Management Committees, made up of community members elected



by residents, provide an additional link between communities and project implementation, enabling citizens to remain engaged beyond the initial consultation.

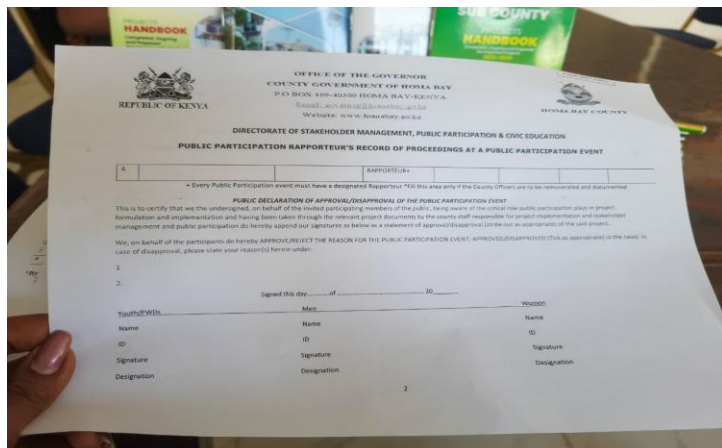


Figure 2: Form used by the County to capture the rapporteur's comments during public participation

Importantly, the County has established mechanisms through which women and other citizens can follow up on issues raised. Project booklets provide information on projects implemented across wards, while grievance-handling mechanisms at ward and sub-county levels provide avenues for communities to raise concerns and seek redress. This creates a feedback loop between citizens and the County and strengthens accountability for decisions made through public participation.

Results of the practice (outputs and outcomes):

The value of meaningful participation is most evident when community voices influence what the County ultimately delivers. Homa Bay has documented several investments responding to community priorities, including the Rodi, Watata, Kambeke, Nyagitha, Wiga and Wiobiero Community Water Projects, as well as ECDE classrooms, maternity services and the Oginga Fish Market.



Figure 3: Sub-County Projects Hand-Books



The experience at Wiga and Wiobiero demonstrates how community views can influence project decisions. In Wiga, residents proposed that the water project be located at the market rather than at a school. Similarly, the Wiobiero Water Project, initially intended for a school, was later implemented at a market following community input. These examples show that participation can go beyond women and citizens simply expressing their views; it can create opportunities for communities to shape the location and design of investments that respond to their needs.

For women, such investments can have a direct bearing on their daily lives. Water infrastructure, health services, markets and other community facilities respond to needs that often intersect with women's responsibilities as caregivers, traders and household managers. Creating opportunities for women to influence these priorities therefore strengthens the connection between women's participation and development outcomes.

Lessons learnt:

Homa Bay's experience demonstrates that women's voices are more likely to influence decisions when participation is taken to the spaces where they live and work. Decentralizing consultations to villages reduces some of the practical barriers associated with attending centralized forums and creates opportunities for women to articulate priorities within their own communities.

The County's use of multiple communication channels also provides an important lesson. Combining community structures, local leaders, public barazas, digital platforms and local media increases the chances of reaching women with different levels of access to information and technology. Trusted community structures, particularly village cluster leaders and women's representatives, can play an important role in mobilization.

Another key lesson is that participation should be measured by influence, not attendance alone. The examples of the Wiga and Wiobiero water projects demonstrate the value of creating mechanisms through which community views can shape actual development decisions. When women can see their priorities reflected in projects and services, participation becomes more meaningful and builds confidence in County governance processes.

At the same time, the experience shows that formal participation structures do not automatically guarantee meaningful inclusion. Cultural expectations, household responsibilities, limited facilitation and resource constraints continue to affect women's participation. Sustaining progress will therefore require continued civic education, targeted mobilization, stronger representation of women and youth, adequate facilitation and deliberate efforts to create safe and accessible spaces for participation.

Conclusion:



In conclusion, Homa Bay's experience demonstrates that women's participation becomes more meaningful when engagement is taken closer to communities and linked to decisions that affect their daily lives. By combining village-level forums, community structures, inclusive communication channels and feedback mechanisms, the County is creating more opportunities for women to articulate their priorities and see their voices reflected in development decisions.

For other Counties, the experience offers a practical lesson: meaningful inclusion goes beyond inviting women to public forums. It requires deliberate systems that make participation accessible, remove barriers to engagement and, most importantly, create a clear link between what women say and the decisions, projects and services that follow.

Further reading:

- <https://homabay.go.ke/resources/downloads?category=all&search=public%20part>
- <https://homabay.go.ke/resources/downloads/019daa69-736c-70c1-bff1-7a6314ec434c>



Annexures:



Figure 4: Participants present during the Public Participation Assessment and Documentation exercise

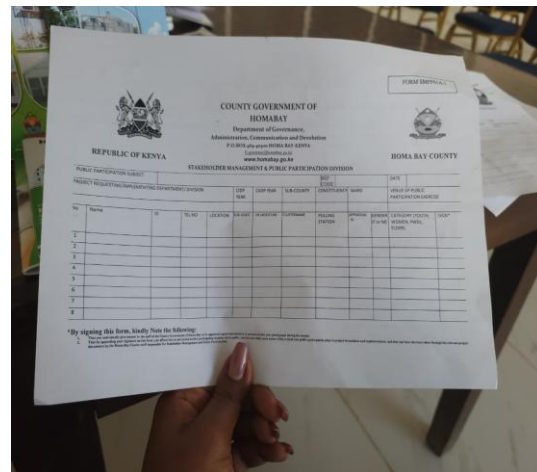


Figure 5: Public Participation Attendance form



Figure 6: Youth representative during public participation assessment and documentation exercise



Figure 7: A representative of the PWDS group during the public participation assessment and documentation exercise