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Linking Demographic Voices to Devolution Outcomes: Public Participation and Service Delivery in Limuru East Ward, Kenya

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of public participation in shaping service delivery within Limuru East Ward, Kiambu County, Kenya, under the devolved governance framework of the 2010 Constitution. It evaluates whether citizen engagement enhances equity, accountability, and trust across five critical sectors water, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and food security while examining demographic and institutional determinants of effectiveness of participation. A mixed-methods survey conducted in October 2025 employed purposive and snowball sampling, yielding 68 responses from adult residents affiliated with churches, chamas (self-help and investment groups), professional networks, school alumni, and workers in both formal and informal sectors. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations, while qualitative inputs were thematically coded and triangulated. Awareness of public participation was high (90%), yet actual involvement was limited to 54% (n=37). Among those who had participated, 64% attended forums, 19% engaged in civic education, and 8% each mobilized residents or submitted memoranda. Service delivery ratings (1–5 scale) ranked water services highest (mean 3.94), followed by food security (3.81), infrastructure (3.19), education (3.07), and healthcare (2.96), the latter constrained by drug shortages, understaffing, and inefficiency. Participation was strongest among middle-aged, diploma-educated residents, while youth, seniors, and less-educated respondents expressed skepticism. Trust clustered around the Ward Member of County Assembly (MCA, 55%), churches (45%), and chamas (41%), with county offices perceived as least credible. Findings reveal participation is constitutionally valued yet demographically skewed, institutionally mistrusted, and insufficiently linked to outcomes, and risks elite capture. The study recommends structured county partnerships with MCAs, churches, and chamas; targeted

outreach; simplified civic education; and explicit integration of citizen inputs into budgetary outputs to strengthen equitable and accountable service delivery.

Keywords: *Public Participation, Devolution, Service Delivery, Development planning, participatory Budgeting, Inclusive governance*

1.0 Introduction

Public participation has become a cornerstone of development planning worldwide, evolving from a technical recommendation to a fundamental principle of legitimate and sustainable governance. Landmark global frameworks such as the 1992 Rio Earth Summit's Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992), the Millennium Declaration (2000), the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005), and Sustainable Development Goal 16 (United Nations General Assembly, 2015) have collectively elevated citizen engagement, calling for "responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels." These frameworks have inspired a suite of participatory instruments—participatory budgeting, community-driven development, social audits, citizen report cards, and multi-stakeholder forums—now embedded in international development practice.

Empirical successes abound: Latin America's participatory budgeting, pioneered in Porto Alegre, Brazil, led to dramatic increases in municipal revenues and reductions in tax delinquency (Baiocchi, 2005; Sintomer et al., 2016). In Asia, India's Gram Sabhas and Kerala's People's Plan Campaign have empowered local communities, especially women and marginalised groups, to shape priorities in water, sanitation, and agriculture (Isaac & Franke, 2000; Heller, 2001). Theoretical traditions such as Habermas's deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1996), Sen's capability approach (Sen, 1999), and Gaventa's analysis of power (Gaventa, 2006) converge on the view that excluding beneficiary voices from planning yields technically sophisticated but socially misaligned and ineffective outcomes.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, global participatory norms have been translated into law and policy. The African Charter on Popular Participation (1990), NEPAD governance frameworks, and the African Union's Agenda 2063 all emphasize citizen-centred planning. Decentralization reforms in South Africa, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, and Ethiopia mandate public participation at every stage of the planning cycle—from needs assessment to evaluation (Commonwealth Local Government Forum, 2018; RESCOPE, 2019). Yet research consistently reveals an implementation gap: forums are often tokenistic, citizen inputs rarely influence final plans, and accountability is skewed upwards to central government rather than downwards to communities (Awortwi & Helmsing, 2014; Ribot et al., 2010; Hasselskog, 2020).

Kenya's 2010 Constitution and subsequent devolution framework represent one of Africa's most ambitious attempts to institutionalize participatory development planning. The objectives of devolution include promoting self-governance and enhancing citizen participation (Constitution of Kenya, 2010, Article 174(c)), with public participation enshrined as a national value (Article 10(2)(a)). The County Governments Act (2012) and Public Finance Management Act (2012) require structured citizen engagement in the preparation of County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs), Annual Development Plans (ADPs), and all major budgetary decisions. Despite this elaborate legal architecture, national evaluations reveal a persistent gap between high ambition and ritualistic practice, with limited perceived influence

and weak feedback mechanisms (Kramon & Posner, 2011; IEA-Kenya, 2020; Hasselskog et al., 2017; World Bank, 2021).

Locally, Limuru East Ward, situated in Kiambu County approximately 40 km northwest of Nairobi, offers a unique lens for examining the realities of participatory development planning in peri-urban Africa. The ward combines agricultural highlands, informal settlements, and commuter estates, with an estimated population of 32,000–35,000 (KNBS, 2019a; KNBS, 2019b). Its socio-economic profile—high literacy rates, dense organizational life (churches, chamas, professional associations), and proximity to Nairobi—positions it favourably within the African devolution landscape. The 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census records Limuru Sub-County with 159,314 residents in 49,174 households, a near-perfect gender balance, and a population density of 559 persons/km² (KNBS, 2019a). Limuru East mirrors these trends, with a large working-age bulge (25–54 years), high educational attainment, and a majority still living in rural areas and engaged in farming (KNBS, 2019b; Kiambu County Government, 2023). Poverty rates are lower than national averages (20–25%), but pockets of vulnerability persist, especially among tea-estate labourers and informal settlement dwellers (KNBS, 2020; World Bank, 2022).

Examining public participation in Limuru East carries significance far beyond its boundaries. Globally, it tests whether participatory planning can migrate from its Latin American and South Asian heartlands to African peri-urban realities. Regionally, it offers lessons for rapidly urbanizing districts facing similar challenges. Nationally, success or failure in Limuru East speaks to the viability of Kenya's constitutional promise of citizen-centred development planning. Locally, it provides actionable pathways to transform participation from a constitutional ritual into a practical tool for equitable, accountable service delivery.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite Kenya's progressive 2010 Constitution and robust legal frameworks mandating public participation in development planning, the process in Limuru East Ward remains largely consultative rather than transformative. While residents are regularly invited to forums for County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs), Annual Development Plans (ADPs), and sectoral budgets, their contributions seldom translate into tangible changes in project selection, design, or prioritisation. A persistent lack of systematic, timely, and transparent feedback mechanism leaves citizens uninformed about whether their inputs were considered. This erodes trust and weakens accountability. The disconnect between community priorities and actual resource allocation highlights a systemic failure to operationalise participatory planning. This turns public participation into a process that risks becoming a ritualistic exercise rather than a genuine avenue for citizen influence. This study addresses the critical gap between constitutional promise and the lived reality in Limuru East by diagnosing the barriers to effective participation and proposing practical, context-specific solutions to make public engagement meaningful and impactful in development planning.

1.2 Research Objectives

i. Assess the patterns of awareness, engagement and influence of residents in formal county development and budgeting processes and how they vary across different demographics and socio-economic status.

ii. Evaluate the extent to which public participation mechanisms enable citizens to identify needs and prioritize projects to enhance accountability, bridging the gaps between expectations and actual practice.

iii. Identify the principal barriers and enablers that translate county plans, budgets and project implementation into observable outcomes.

iv. Identify a practical, ward-specific model of accountable public participation that leverages the social capital and demographic strengths to close the gap between legal mandate and lived reality.

2.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, centred on a comprehensive digital questionnaire that integrated both quantitative and qualitative elements. The research focused on the experiences and perceptions of residents on five core public services: water, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and food security. This focus was chosen to illuminate how public participation might support improved service delivery in areas central to daily life. The target population comprised adult residents (aged 18 and above). Participants were purposively and systematically recruited from established community networks that span the ward's socio-economic and geographic diversity. These networks included: chamas (self-help groups, table-banking groups, merry-go-rounds, investment clubs, and welfare associations); residents' associations; Church groups and fellowships; School and college alumni (former students of local institutions now resident in the ward). These networks were selected because they are the primary channels for information, mobilisation, and civic activity in Limuru East. This approach avoided reliance on potentially outdated voter registers or household listings.

The main research instrument was a structured Google Forms questionnaire, administered entirely online in English in October 2025. The questionnaire was designed to capture both measurable patterns and lived experiences, using a blend of question types:

- Closed-ended items collected socio-demographic profiles, 5-point Likert-scale satisfaction ratings for the five core public services, participation history, and responses to 28 attitudinal statements on the perceived value and effectiveness of public participation.
- Multiple-choice and multi-select questions identified the institutions residents trusted most to strengthen participation and the specific roles assigned to these institutions.
- Open-ended questions invited respondents to explain their service ratings, describe personal experiences from attending forums, and propose practical improvements, generating rich qualitative data alongside quantitative responses.

The survey link was distributed directly to contacts and influential community members, who then shared it within their respective WhatsApp groups, restricted to Limuru East residents. This snowball sampling technique, rooted in pre-existing trust relationships, proved highly effective in a digitally connected peri-urban ward, ultimately yielding 68 complete responses in a 24-hour span with a dataset of 47 variables.

Data Analysis

Survey responses were automatically captured in Google Sheets and later exported to Microsoft Excel for cleaning and coding. The data was then imported into SPSS for analysis. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations, while open-ended responses underwent thematic content analysis. The integration of multiple question types within a single digital instrument enabled efficient, comprehensive data collection from primary sources. Ethical standards were rigorously upheld throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent secured through a mandatory digital consent statement at the start of the form. No personal identifiers were collected, ensuring complete anonymity and confidentiality. The study complied with county and national ethical guidelines for non-sensitive social surveys. This focused, digitally driven, network-based, mixed-methods design delivered timely, representative, and contextually rich evidence on the state of public participation in development planning in Limuru East Ward under Kenya's devolved governance system.

Limitations of the County Public Participation Learning Survey

While the research design was well-suited to Limuru East's highly literate and digitally connected context, several limitations must be acknowledged: The questionnaire was administered exclusively in English. Although justified by the ward's high educational attainment (over 75% tertiary-educated) and the routine use of English in civic and professional communication, this may have excluded less-educated residents, particularly older adults, casual labourers, and recent migrants who prefer Kiswahili or local languages. Their perspectives may therefore be under-represented. Data collection relied entirely on an online Google Forms link This potentially excluded residents without reliable smartphones, stable internet, or membership in targeted digital networks—such as some elderly persons, the poorest households, and tea estate workers.

Purposive and snowball sampling through chamas, churches, professional associations, alumni groups, and personal networks achieved good socio-economic and geographic diversity, but did not constitute a probability sample. Selection bias may have favoured more civically active or outspoken individuals, potentially over-representing those with stronger views on public participation. The final sample of 68 respondents is adequate for descriptive and exploratory analysis in a single ward and allows for saturation of major themes in open-ended responses. However, it limits the ability to conduct robust subgroup comparisons (e.g., tea-estate workers vs. middle-income estate residents).

Responses on participation history, perceived influence, and institutional trust are self-reported and may be affected by recall bias or a tendency to give socially desirable answers, especially on sensitive issues such as corruption or distrust of county officials. Despite these limitations, the study's design and strategic, network-based recruitment produced rich, contextually grounded evidence. The findings remain highly valid for diagnosing participation dynamics in similar peri-urban, educated, and organised wards across Kenya. Future research could usefully complement these findings with Kiswahili or in-person surveys targeting the digitally excluded, and with longitudinal tracking of specific planning cycles.

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3.0 Findings and Discussion

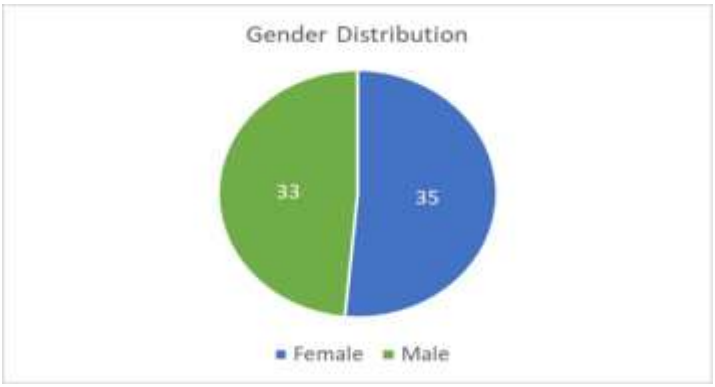

Figure 1: Gender distribution of respondents

A detailed demographic analysis of the 68 respondents from Limuru East Ward provides crucial context for understanding patterns of public participation and perceptions of service delivery. The sample is balanced, economically active, and relatively well-educated, offering valuable insight into the community's capacity for engagement in development planning.

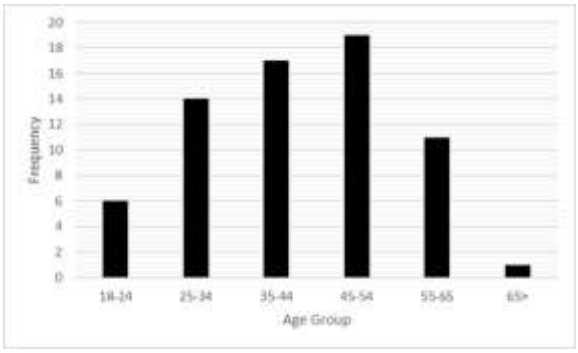

Figure 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

The gender split among respondents is nearly equal, with females comprising 51% and males 49%. This parity is notable in a context where traditional gender roles often skew public participation towards men. The slight female majority reflects broader trends in Kenyan wards, where women's roles in household management and local economies increasingly draw them into community affairs. This balance enhances the representativeness of responses, particularly on services like water and healthcare, which disproportionately affect women. However, it also raises questions about whether this numerical parity translates into equitable influence in decision-making forums, given persistent cultural and practical barriers.

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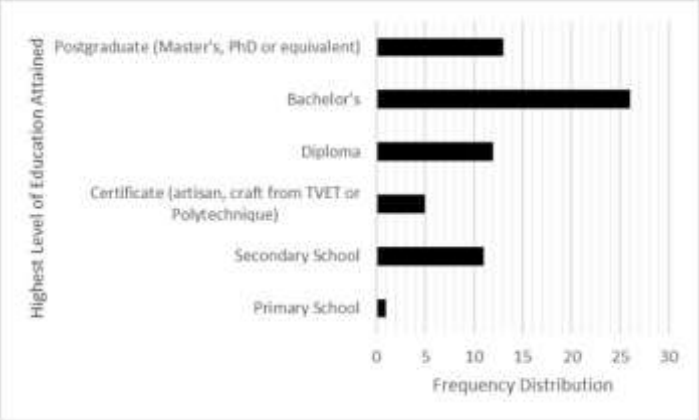

Figure 3: Level of Education

The age profile is dominated by the 25–54 age bracket, representing the most economically active segment of the population. These individuals—farmers, entrepreneurs, and salaried workers—are directly impacted by development outcomes such as infrastructure and job creation. Their overrepresentation suggests a sample biased towards those with higher stakes in local governance and the flexibility to participate in civic forums. Youth (under 25) and seniors (over 65) are underrepresented, indicating potential gaps in capturing intergenerational perspectives. Youth may prioritise digital participation or innovation, while elders may focus on historical inequities in service access. This age skew highlights the need for tailored mobilisation strategies to broaden engagement and avoid elite capture by the economically dominant group.

Education emerges as a defining feature, with most respondents holding at least secondary education. This high attainment equips the community to navigate participatory processes, interpret budgets, and monitor accountability mechanisms. The strong educational profile correlates with higher literacy rates and more critical engagement in public forums. Respondents with higher education levels are more likely to understand and participate effectively in public participation exercises, as evidenced by their strong agreement with statements on citizen oversight and reducing corruption. However, high awareness of forums does not always translate into attendance, possibly due to opportunity costs for this working-age, educated group. In less urbanised Kenyan wards, lower education often correlates with passive participation or scepticism towards governance.

Implications for Participation

The demographic profile gender balance, middle-age dominance, and high educational attainment paints a picture of a vigilant, capable community, well-positioned for meaningful contributions to development planning. Respondents are not only affected but also equipped to influence outcomes in key service domains. However, inclusivity challenges remain and strategies must address the underrepresentation of youth and seniors and sustain gender equity amid practical barriers. These findings advocate for hybrid participation models that blend physical forums with digital tools, amplifying diverse voices and strengthening feedback loops. In summary, the demographic landscape of Limuru East Ward underscores the potential for participatory governance when anchored in an engaged, demographically robust base.

Addressing gaps in age and education representation will be critical to ensuring that public participation is truly inclusive and effective in driving equitable, evidence-based development.

4.1 Service Delivery

Table 1: Service Delivery Ratings

Service Area	Mean Rating	Std. Deviation
Water services	3.94	1.12
Food security / access to food	3.81	0.98
Infrastructure (roads, transport)	3.19	1.25
Education	3.07	1.18
Healthcare	2.96	1.31

In Limuru East Ward, where tea estates sweep across the highlands, five service domains—water, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and food security—form the backbone of daily life and resilience. These are not abstract indicators; they determine whether a mother can cook a meal, a child reaches school on time, a commuter can rely on a dispensary that has drugs or whether a farmer's harvest survives the next dry spell. In this rapidly urbanizing yet deeply agricultural ward, these services are the clearest measure of whether Kenya's devolution experiment is delivering equity and dignity. When residents rated these domains on a 1–5 scale, water emerged as the unexpected bright spot, approaching "good" at 3.94. This reflects peri-urban advantages: widespread piped connections, boreholes, and a history of community water projects. Yet, the score masks sharp inequalities—lower-educated residents rate water only 3.55, women 3.83 versus men's 4.06, and seniors 3.33—showing that reliable water remains a privilege of location and income.

The remaining services cluster in the "fair-to-poor" range: food security (3.81), infrastructure (3.19), education (3.07), and healthcare (2.96). Roads are the most frustrating deficit, followed by chronic drug shortages in public health facilities. These moderate scores, alongside narratives of long dispensary queues and impassable roads, paint a picture of services that function just well enough to prevent crisis but fall short of expectations. Public participation emerges not as an optional add-on but as the most credible path to close these gaps, if only the county can move beyond token consultation and genuinely harness the ward's informed, organized citizenry.

4.2 Age Tells a Story of Service Delivery

Table 2: Rating of Services by Age Group

Age Group	n	Water Services	Food Security	Infrastructure (roads, transport)	Education	Healthcare	Overall Average
18–24	6	3.67	3.5	2.83	3.17	2.83	3.2
25–34	14	4.14	3.93	3.36	3.21	3.07	3.54
35–44	17	4.05	3.89	3.26	3.11	3.05	3.47
45–54	19	3.89	3.79	3.21	3	2.95	3.37
55–64	11	3.73	3.64	2.91	2.82	2.73	3.17
65+	1	3.33	3.67	2.67	2.67	2.67	3
Total	68	**3.94**	**3.81**	**3.19**	**3.07**	**2.96**	**3.39**

Age shapes service perceptions in Limuru East, producing a clear U-shaped curve: youth and seniors are more positive, while those in their prime working years (35–54) are the harshest critics. Youth (18–24) display guarded optimism, rating water highest at 3.67 and food security at 3.50, but infrastructure and healthcare lowest at 2.83, citing "dangerous roads" and "dispensaries with no drugs." The 25–34 group, the most economically mobile, gives the highest overall marks—water at 4.14 and all services above 3.0—reflecting better access in commuter zones. Middle-aged respondents (35–54), the core family providers, post the lowest scores: water drops to 4.05 and 3.89, infrastructure to 3.26 and 3.21, education to 3.11 and 3.00, and healthcare to 3.05 and 2.95. Their comments link these deficits to household stress: "water rationing means children go to school late," "poor roads delay milk delivery and hospital trips," and "medicine shortages hit hardest when you have young children." Seniors (55+) rebound with greater acceptance, rating water at 3.73 and infrastructure at 2.91, often describing services as "better than in the past." This age progression—youthful hope, midlife urgency, elder pragmatism—captures evolving needs and generational inequities. To ensure all voices shape solutions, participatory forums must be age-sensitive: youth-led sessions for innovation, dedicated slots for working parents, and senior-inclusive budgeting. Only then can Limuru East's participatory processes address the full spectrum of community needs.

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4.3 Gender and Service Delivery

Table 3: Gender and Rating of Services

Gender	Water Services	Food Security	Infrastructure (roads, transport)	Education	Healthcare	Overall Average
Female (n=35)	3.83	3.74	3.09	2.97	2.89	3.3
Male (n=33)	4.06	3.88	3.3	3.18	3.03	3.49
Total	**3.94**	**3.81**	**3.19**	**3.07**	**2.96**	**3.39**

Gender produces modest differences in service ratings, but qualitative accounts reveal starkly divergent experiences shaped by traditional roles. Women consistently rate every service lower than men, with the largest gap in water (women 3.83 vs men 4.06). Women describe water as a daily burden: "pipes run dry for days and we wake at 4 a.m. to queue," and "children are late for school because there was no water to bathe." Men, by contrast, see piped connections as "generally reliable." For infrastructure, men score it slightly higher (3.3 vs women 3.09), focusing on economic consequences like "delayed milk delivery" and "higher boda-boda fares." Women, however, frame roads as threats to safety— "pregnant women slip on muddy paths," "children walk along the highway because there are no footpaths." Education ratings are not far apart (women 2.97 vs men 3.18), but women emphasize overcrowding and hidden fees, while men treat education as a longer-term investment. Healthcare ratings are almost the same (women 2.89 vs men 3.03), yet women's frustration centers on caregiving crises— "no paracetamol for a feverish child," "long queues with a sick baby"while men cite systemic corruption. Food security is virtually tied (women 3.74 vs men 3.88), with women focusing on kitchen gardens and sanitation, men on market linkages. These differences indicate why gender-blind forums often miss women's priorities. Gender-sensitive mechanisms—women-only caucuses, flexible meeting times, and outreach through chamas—are essential for capturing these realities and achieving equitable reforms in Limuru East.

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4.4 The Education Divide in Service Delivery

Table 4: Education Attainment and Rating of Services

Education Level	n	Water Services	Food Security	Infrastructure	Education	Healthcare	Overall Average
Bachelor's Degree	11	4.09	3.91	3.27	3.18	3.09	3.51
Certificate (artisan/TVET/Polytechnique)	25	3.84	3.76	3.12	2.96	2.88	3.31
Diploma	26	4.08	3.92	3.35	3.23	3.12	3.54
Postgraduate (Master's/PhD or equivalent)	13	4.15	4	3.38	3.31	3.15	3.6
Secondary School or below	11	3.55	3.45	2.82	2.73	2.64	3.04
Total	**68**	**3.94**	**3.81**	**3.19**	**3.07**	**2.96**	**3.39**

Education creates a striking hierarchy in service ratings in Limuru East: the higher the formal attainment, the greater the satisfaction across all domains. Postgraduates are the most positive, followed by Bachelor's and diploma holders, who award the highest scores for water (up to 4.15), infrastructure, and other services, often praising "reliable private connections" and "consistent county supply." Their comments acknowledge improvements but rarely with the urgency heard from less-educated respondents. Certificate holders sit in the middle, describing services as "better than before" or "manageable with effort," reflecting a pragmatic approach. At the lower end, those with only secondary education or below give the lowest ratings, with blunt comments like "water is fetched from far," "roads are completely bad," and "no drugs at the dispensary." These respondents often live in tea-estate lines or informal settlements, where even the ward's relative strengths feel precarious.

This education gradient mirrors socio-economic location and exposure to higher benchmarks. Paradoxically, the most educated—who dominate discussions—are the least dissatisfied, while the most vulnerable remain underrepresented. This highlights the risk of elite capture in participation processes. To ensure inclusivity, forums must provide simplified materials and outreach for lower-literacy residents, structured space for secondary-educated youth, and mechanisms to use the analytical power of university-trained citizens to amplify, not overshadow, the realities of those at the bottom. Only then can devolved planning in Limuru East truly reflect and redress the full spectrum of its inequalities. These demographic patterns reveal entrenched inequities and highlight the need for participatory processes that are inclusive, age- and gender-sensitive, and accessible to all educational backgrounds.

The Age and Generational Perspectives: Identity, Accountability, and Equity

The Limuru East survey data reveal that age is a powerful lens through which residents interpret the value and purpose of public participation in development planning. Each generation brings distinct expectations, experiences, and priorities to the participatory process, shaping both the perceived legitimacy and practical outcomes of citizen engagement.

Youth: Participation as Identity and Belonging

Younger respondents (18–34) overwhelmingly view participation as a means of forging civic identity and belonging. Their strong agreement that involvement in budgeting makes it "our budget" reflects a symbolic politics of ownership, resonating with theories of participatory democracy that emphasize inclusion as a pathway to civic identity (National Youth Council of Kenya, 2024). For these youth, participation is not just about influencing decisions, but about being recognized as stakeholders in their community's future.

Table 5: Age and Perception of Elite Capture of Projects

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
18-24	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	2 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)
25-34	5 (35.7%)	1 (7.1%)	2 (14.3%)	5 (35.7%)	1 (7.1%)
35-44	7 (41.2%)	3 (17.6%)	4 (23.5%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)
45-54	9 (47.4%)	2 (10.5%)	5 (26.3%)	3 (15.8%)	0 (0.0%)
55-64	6 (54.5%)	2 (18.2%)	3 (27.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
65+	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

However, their optimism is tempered by skepticism regarding the structural efficacy of participation. While they believe in the idea of participation, they are less convinced that it effectively reduces elite capture or ensures project maintenance, often expressing neutrality or uncertainty on these points. This ambivalence may stem from limited real-world exposure to the complexities of governance, as well as a desire for more visible, tangible outcomes from their involvement.

Middle-Aged Adults: Participation for Quality, Accountability and Efficiency

Table 6: Age and Perception of Project Quality

Age × Projects last longer when citizens are involved in evaluation					
	Agree	**Strongly Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
18-24	4 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)
25-34	2 (14.3%)	7 (50.0%)	4 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.1%)
35-44	10 (58.8%)	4 (23.5%)	1 (5.9%)	1 (5.9%)	1 (5.9%)
45-54	14 (73.7%)	2 (10.5%)	2 (10.5%)	1 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)
55-64	8 (72.7%)	2 (18.2%)	1 (9.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
65+	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Respondents in the 35–54 age bracket adopt a more pragmatic and instrumental view of participation. For them, participation is valued as a governance tool—a mechanism to ensure accountability, transparency, and efficiency in resource allocation. They consistently affirm that citizen involvement reduces elite capture, enhances project quality, and leads to more equitable outcomes. This perspective aligns with deliberative democratic theory, which posits participation as a corrective to technocratic dominance and elite-driven decision-making (International IDEA, 2025; Martin, 2025). Middle-aged adults, often balancing family responsibilities and economic pressures, see participation as a practical necessity for ensuring that their priorities—such as reliable infrastructure, quality healthcare, and fair access to education—are addressed by county authorities. Their responses suggest a steady, high level of agreement across most participatory benefits, reflecting both experience and a results-oriented mindset.

Seniors: Participation as Equity and Sustainability

Table 7: Age and Perception of Equity

Age and Perception that Public participation ensures marginalized voices are heard					
	Agree	**Strongly Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
18-24	2 (33.3%)	2 (33.3%)	2 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
25-34	3 (21.4%)	9 (64.3%)	1 (7.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.1%)
35-44	5 (29.4%)	8 (47.1%)	3 (17.6%)	1 (5.9%)	0 (0.0%)
45-54	8 (42.1%)	7 (36.8%)	4 (21.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
55-64	7 (63.6%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	1 (9.1%)	0 (0.0%)
65+	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Older respondents (55+) bring a justice-oriented and historical perspective to participation. They strongly agree that public involvement ensures marginalized voices are heard and that projects are better maintained and more sustainable when communities are engaged. Seniors' outlook is shaped by decades of observing governance cycles, blending hope with caution and a demand for inclusivity and durability. Their responses often reference the importance of fairness, long-term impact, and the need to protect vulnerable groups. While generally supportive, seniors also exhibit higher levels of neutrality or mild disagreement on some issues, reflecting a tempered outlook born of both optimism and lived experience with the limitations of participatory processes.

Implications for Participatory Governance

The data sketch a lifecycle of belief: youthful hope and idealism, midlife commitment and pragmatism, and elder wisdom and caution. These generational perspectives are not merely academic—they have real implications for the design and effectiveness of participatory forums. To sustain meaningful engagement across all ages, forums must adapt: digital tools and innovative approaches for youth, accessible venues and practical follow-through for the middle-aged, and inclusive, respectful spaces for seniors. By honoring the unique contributions and concerns of each generation, participatory governance in Limuru East can become more inclusive, resilient, and effective, ensuring that development planning truly reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of the entire community.

Gendered Interpretations: Knowledge versus Accountability

Gender in Limuru East shapes both the experience and meaning of public participation. Women and men broadly agree on the value of citizen involvement, but their perspectives diverge in important ways, reflecting practical realities and deeper social dynamics.

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Table 8: Gender and Filling Gaps in Needs Assessments

Gender × Public participation helps accurately identify local needs					
	Agree	**Strongly Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Female	13 (37.1%)	14 (40.0%)	4 (11.4%)	2 (5.7%)	2 (5.7%)
Male	13 (39.4%)	10 (30.3%)	9 (27.3%)	1 (3.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Women consistently emphasise participation as a means to correct technocratic knowledge gaps, asserting that citizens understand local challenges better than officials. For women, participation is not just a civic duty but a source of recognition and empowerment, enabling them to advocate for priorities like water access, school proximity, and healthcare quality. This reflects feminist critiques of governance, which highlight the epistemic value of lived experience and the importance of voice in countering patriarchal and bureaucratic blind spots (Elomäki & Ylöstalo, 2024; Ng'ang'a & Muhingi, 2025). This is reflected in their strong support for citizen monitoring: 88.6% of women agreed or strongly agreed that oversight improves project quality, with 40% strongly agreeing, compared to 81.9% of men and only 15.2% strongly agreeing. Women's greater conviction likely stems from their disproportionate responsibility for community resources, making effective participation a practical necessity.

Table 9: Gender and Perception of Quality of Projects

Gender × When citizens monitor, projects are completed to better quality				
	Agree	**Strongly Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**
Female	17 (48.6%)	14 (40.0%)	4 (11.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Male	22 (66.7%)	5 (15.2%)	3 (9.1%)	3 (9.1%)

Men, while supportive, display more pragmatism and scepticism. Their enthusiasm for monitoring is tempered by higher rates of neutrality or disagreement, possibly due to greater exposure to formal governance structures or technical networks. Men's responses often focus on systemic accountability and corruption, viewing participation as a tool for oversight rather than empowerment. Both genders find participatory forums helpful for understanding budgets, but women again show stronger conviction. These patterns highlight the need for gender-sensitive participatory processes—flexible scheduling, simplified materials, and safe spaces—to ensure women's voices are fully heard. Such findings align with broader literature on gendered participation in devolved governance (e.g., Tripp, 2015; Chant & Sweetman, 2012), which highlights how women's lived experiences in marginalized roles amplify their support for inclusive mechanisms that mitigate elite capture and ensure equitable outcomes. Addressing these barriers can make public participation in Limuru East truly inclusive and transformative.

Building Trust in County Government

Table 10: Gender and Perception on Trust

Gender and Perception of Increase in Trust in County Government Through Public participation					
	Agree	**Strongly Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Female	14 (40.0%)	12 (34.3%)	4 (11.4%)	2 (5.7%)	3 (8.6%)
Male	17 (51.5%)	10 (30.3%)	4 (12.1%)	2 (6.1%)	0 (0.0%)

Trust in local government is a cornerstone of effective participatory governance, and the Limuru East survey reveals nuanced gendered patterns in how trust is built—or eroded—through public participation. Trust in county government in Limuru East is shaped by gendered experiences and expectations. While both women and men recognise the potential of participation to foster trust, their levels of conviction and sources of scepticism differ, shaped by their distinct roles and experiences within the community. For women, trust in county government is closely tied to the tangible outcomes of participation. Survey data show that 74.3% of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed that public participation builds trust in county government, with 34.3% expressing strong agreement. However, women also reported higher levels of outright disagreement and strong disagreement (14.3% combined) compared to men (6.1%). This duality reflects women's deeper emotional and practical investment in county services—particularly in sectors like health, education, and water, where they bear the brunt of service failures. Women's trust is therefore conditional: when participatory processes lead to visible improvements in daily life, trust is strengthened; when promises are unmet or feedback loops are weak, disappointment is sharper and trust erodes more quickly. This pattern aligns with broader research on gendered trust in devolved systems, where women's reliance on public services makes them both the most passionate advocates for participation and the most critical when it falls short.

Men, by contrast, display a steadier but less fervent trust in county government. 81.8% of male respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participation builds trust, with 30.3% strongly agreeing. Men's responses show less outright disagreement and a higher tendency towards neutrality. This may stem from men's more frequent engagement with formal governance structures or economic ties to local administration, which can foster a more pragmatic, less emotionally charged relationship with county authorities. Men are more likely to view participation as a reliable bridge to accountability, focusing on systemic improvements and oversight rather than personal or household-level impacts. Their trust is built incrementally, through consistent processes and visible accountability, rather than through single events or promises.

Implications for Participatory Practice

These gendered contours of trust have significant implications for the design and implementation of participatory processes in Limuru East and similar contexts. First, they highlight the need for participatory forums to deliver tangible, visible results—especially in

sectors that directly affect women's daily lives. County governments must ensure that citizen inputs are not only heard but acted upon, with clear communication about how feedback has influenced decisions and resource allocation.

Second, participatory processes must be designed to accommodate women's specific needs and constraints. This includes flexible scheduling to fit around caregiving responsibilities, safe and welcoming spaces for women to speak, and targeted outreach. By reducing structural barriers and demonstrating responsiveness, county governments can deepen women's trust and sustain their engagement. Finally, building trust requires ongoing, transparent communication. Both women and men need regular updates on the status of projects, explanations for delays or changes, and opportunities to hold officials accountable. Trust is not built in a single forum but through a sustained relationship between citizens and government, grounded in mutual respect and shared responsibility.

Educational Attainment: Transparency, Practicality, and Neutrality

Education is a powerful lens through which the residents of Limuru East experience and interpret public participation. The survey data reveal that educational attainment not only influences optimism about participation but also shapes the way residents engage with, critique, and ultimately benefit from participatory processes. These differences can be interpreted through theories of civic literacy and empowerment (Verba et al., 1995), where education enhances understanding of governance processes, yet vocational or basic levels may prioritize practical outcomes. The interplay between education and participation is nuanced, revealing gradients of trust, practicality, and critical awareness that are essential for understanding how to make participation truly inclusive and effective.

Identifying Local Needs: Hope, Experience, and Realism

The belief that public participation helps accurately identify local needs is strongest among those with secondary education, all of whom agreed with this statement. Certificate holders also showed high positivity (80%), while diploma holders were more cautious (66.6%). This pattern suggests that those with moderate schooling, often deeply embedded in community life, retain a strong faith in the promise of participation. For them, forums and public meetings are genuine opportunities to voice concerns about water shortages, poor roads, or unreliable healthcare—issues that directly affect their daily lives. However, as educational attainment rises, so does critical realism. Diploma holders, who often work as artisans, site clerks, or in middle-level county roles, are close enough to the machinery of local governance to witness both the potential and the pitfalls of participation. They see how ideas collected in forums can be sidelined during budget revisions or implementation, leading to a sense of disappointment grounded in lived experience rather than cynicism. University graduates and postgraduates, meanwhile, bring an analytical perspective. Their responses are marked by cautious support: they value participation but are acutely aware of its limitations, including the risks of elite capture and bureaucratic inertia. This aligns with prior research on participatory budgeting in developing contexts, where lower education correlates with optimism about inclusivity, but higher education introduces critical realism (Sintomer et al., 2016). Their belief in participation is strong, but it is tempered by a clear-eyed understanding of how processes can be manipulated or reduced to ritual.

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Building Trust in Governance: Education as a Moderator

Table 11: Education Attainment and Trust

Education and Public participation increasing trust in county government					
	Agree	**Strongly Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Bachelor's Degree	12 (46.2%)	9 (34.6%)	1 (3.8%)	3 (11.5%)	1 (3.8%)
Certificate (artisan, craft from TVET or Polytechnique)	2 (40.0%)	2 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)
Diploma	4 (33.3%)	4 (33.3%)	3 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (8.3%)
Postgraduate (Master's, PhD or equivalent)	8 (61.5%)	4 (30.8%)	1 (7.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Primary School	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Secondary School	5 (45.5%)	3 (27.3%)	2 (18.2%)	1 (9.1%)	0 (0.0%)

Trust in county government is also shaped by education. Postgraduates are the most positive (92.3%), followed by bachelor's degree and certificate holders. This suggests that advanced education, with its exposure to civic education and professional networks, fosters a greater appreciation for the role of participation in promoting accountability and transparency. This supports human capital theories positing that higher education equips individuals with tools to evaluate institutional reforms (Dee, 2004). These respondents are more likely to see participation as a meaningful bridge between citizens and government, capable of building trust and ensuring that public resources are used effectively. Diploma holders, however, show a dip in positivity. Their vocational training may focus more on practical skills than on governance literacy, making them more attuned to the limitations of participatory processes. Their responses reflect a pragmatic awareness of both the strengths and weaknesses of participation, shaped by their proximity to the realities of project implementation.

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Project Maintenance and Sustainability: Ownership and Oversight

Table 12: Education Attainment and Perception on Project Sustainability

Education × Participatory projects are better maintained by communities	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Bachelor's Degree	10 (38.5%)	11 (42.3%)	5 (19.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Certificate (artisan, craft from TVET or Polytechnique)	3 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Diploma	6 (50.0%)	3 (25.0%)	3 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Postgraduate (Master's, PhD or equivalent)	7 (53.8%)	3 (23.1%)	2 (15.4%)	1 (7.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Primary School	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Secondary School	4 (36.4%)	4 (36.4%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (9.1%)

Education also influences perceptions of project sustainability. Bachelor's degree holders are the most likely to agree that participatory projects are better maintained by communities (80.8%), while certificate holders are less convinced (60%). For those with higher education, participation is seen as a way to foster ownership and ensure the longevity of community projects, resonating with theories of community-based management. Certificate holders, often in technical roles, may view project maintenance as a technical rather than participatory challenge. Their practical experience makes them more aware of the limitations of community oversight, especially when resources or expertise are lacking. This highlights the need for participatory processes that not only invite input but also provide the technical support necessary for effective project maintenance.

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Budget Transparency and Accessibility: Demystifying the Numbers

Table 13: Education Attainment and Understanding Budget Processes

Education × Public participation makes county budget documents easier to understand					
	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Bachelor's Degree	11 (42.3%)	9 (34.6%)	2 (7.7%)	2 (7.7%)	2 (7.7%)
Certificate (artisan, craft from TVET or Polytechnique)	3 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Diploma	6 (50.0%)	4 (33.3%)	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Postgraduate (Master's, PhD or equivalent)	7 (53.8%)	4 (30.8%)	2 (15.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Primary School	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Secondary School	6 (54.5%)	3 (27.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (18.2%)	0 (0.0%)

The ability of public participation to make county budget documents more accessible is another area where education matters. Postgraduates again lead in positivity (84.6%), with diploma and secondary school holders also reporting strong gains. This pattern indicates that mid-to-high education levels benefit most from participatory processes in demystifying fiscal tools, consistent with findings that education amplifies financial literacy in public finance contexts (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014). For these groups, participatory forums provide practical insights into public finance, helping to demystify complex budget documents and empower citizens to hold officials accountable. Certificate holders, however, are less positive (60%), suggesting that budget transparency remains a challenge for those with vocational training. This may be due to the complexity of financial documents or a lack of targeted education on public finance. Simplified materials and practical demonstrations are essential for making budget processes accessible to all educational levels.

The Human Story: A Gentle Hill of Hope and Experience

The survey results paint a human story about how education shapes trust in public participation. Secondary school leavers, who retain the strongest faith in participation, are often those most affected by unreliable water, impassable roads, and understocked dispensaries. Their optimism reflects both acute need and enduring belief in the promise of devolution. Diploma and certificate holders, frequently employed in the very systems that deliver (or fail to deliver) these services, see firsthand how budgets are diverted, contracts stall, and resources are misallocated. Their disappointment is grounded in daily evidence of broken processes. University graduates, while enjoying better access to services, bring critical analysis, recognising that sustained improvements require vigilance against manipulation and elite capture. This creates a gentle hill in the data: hope is highest among those with moderate schooling, dips among the practically trained, and rises again among the highly educated—

though now with a critical edge. They echo critiques of elite bias in participation (Fung, 2006), where higher education may amplify voices but risks alienating others. Public participation, then, is not experienced equally. It shines brightest for those who still believe in its textbook promise, hurts most for those who have seen it broken up close, and survives, tempered but alive, among those who understand both its potential and its pitfalls.

These findings have clear implications for participatory governance in Limuru East and similar contexts. To make participation truly inclusive, forums must be designed to bridge educational divides. This means using simplified language, materials in various languages, and practical demonstrations for those with less formal education; engaging diploma and certificate holders as community monitors; and leveraging the analytical skills of university graduates for advocacy and oversight. By weaving these educational perspectives into participatory processes, Limuru East can confront its intertwined service delivery challenges—extending equitable water connections, prioritising road upgrades, ensuring bursary fairness, and demanding consistent healthcare staffing. In doing so, participation becomes not just a constitutional ritual, but a practical, community-owned tool for building resilient, equitable service systems in a peri-urban ward still navigating the uneven realities of devolution.

Implications for Participatory Governance Scholarship

The findings from Limuru East contribute to participatory governance scholarship by demonstrating that public participation is interpreted differently across demographic lines, challenging the notion that it is a singular practice. Age, gender, and education intersect to produce distinct meanings and expectations, highlighting the multidimensionality of participation as a mechanism for identity, accountability, equity, and sustainability. This complexity strengthens the case for designing participatory processes that are inclusive and adaptive to community diversity. By recognising and addressing these intersecting factors, policymakers and scholars can better understand how to transform participation from a ritualistic exercise into a genuinely transformative tool for equitable and effective local governance.

Who Can Make Public Participation Work: Trust and Institutional Legitimacy

In Limuru East Ward, the effectiveness of public participation is shaped not only by constitutional mandates but by the lived realities of trust, mobilisation, and institutional credibility. Survey results reveal a clear hierarchy of trust among residents regarding who can make participation meaningful and deliver improved services.

Table 14: Ranking of Institutional Drivers of Public Participation

Rank	Institution	Overall Selection	Core Perceived Strength	Core Perceived Weakness
1	Ward MCA	55 %	Direct power, information, follow-up	Political, not neutral
2	Churches	45 %	Reach, neutrality, moral authority, infrastructure	None significant in residents' eyes
3	Chamas	41 %	Member-owned, financial discipline	Homogeneous membership
4	Youth/Women Groups	41 %	Represent marginalised, energy	Lack experience and resources
5	Nyumba Kumi / Chiefs / Elders	38 %	Traditional legitimacy (among older/less educated)	Seen as state agents, not civic partners
6	NGOs/CBOs	48 %	Training and funding	External, episodic
7	Professional Associations	<15 %	Technical expertise	Too narrow
8	County Public Participation Directorate	<2 %	(none identified)	Complete lack of trust

At the top is the Ward Member of County Assembly (MCA), with 55% of respondents identifying this office as the most important actor for convening forums, defending community priorities, and ensuring follow-through on promises. The MCA is seen as having direct power and information, but also as inherently political and not always neutral. Churches follow closely, selected by 45% of respondents. They are valued for their reach, neutrality, moral authority, and infrastructure. Residents expect churches to mobilise, educate members about county budgets, prepare them for forums, monitor projects, and support the vulnerable. Churches are trusted across gender, age, and education groups, especially among women, youth, and tea-estate workers. Chamas are next, with 41% of respondents believing they can play a major role in mobilisation, preparation, and monitoring. However, their homogeneous membership limits their ability to represent the entire ward.

Youth and women's groups also score 41%, appreciated for representing marginalised voices and energy, but seen as lacking experience and resources for technical oversight. Traditional authorities—Nyumba Kumi clusters, elders, and chiefs—command respect from 38%, especially among older and less-educated residents. They are useful for mediating disputes but not for technical or budgetary matters. NGOs and CBOs are respected for training and funding (48%) but viewed as outsiders rather than owners of the process. Professional associations are rarely selected, valued mainly for technical expertise in specific sectors. At the bottom sits the county government's Directorate of Public Participation, with fewer than 2% naming it and virtually no one assigning it a meaningful role. The official machinery created to facilitate participation is the least trusted and least capable in the eyes of residents. Residents have drawn a blueprint: for participation to be continuous, inclusive, and accountable, county government must build formal partnerships with the institutions citizens already trust.

Demographic Patterns in Belief and Engagement

Table 15: Gender and Perception of Potential benefit of Public Participation

Gender	Water Services	Food Security	Infrastructure (roads, transport)	Education	Healthcare	Overall Average
Female (n=35)	3.83	3.74	3.09	2.97	2.89	3.3
Male (n=33)	4.06	3.88	3.3	3.18	3.03	3.49
Total	**3.94**	**3.81**	**3.19**	**3.07**	**2.96**	**3.39**

Both women and men in Limuru East score every thematic cluster between 4.33 and 4.57 on a 5-point scale, with no statistically significant differences. Men are marginally more optimistic about monitoring, trust-building, and project sustainability, but the gap is negligible. Notably, women participate less often in forums, but their belief in the potential benefits of participation is just as strong. Their lower turnout is structural—due to time constraints, childcare, or mobilisation channels—rather than attitudinal.

Age

Table 16: Age and Perception of Potential Benefit of Public Participation

Age Group	n	Water Services	Food Security	Infrastructure (roads, transport)	Education	Healthcare	Overall Average
18–24	6	3.67	3.5	2.83	3.17	2.83	3.2
25–34	14	4.14	3.93	3.36	3.21	3.07	3.54
35–44	17	4.05	3.89	3.26	3.11	3.05	3.47
45–54	19	3.89	3.79	3.21	3	2.95	3.37
55–64	11	3.73	3.64	2.91	2.82	2.73	3.17
65+	1	3.33	3.67	2.67	2.67	2.67	3
Total	68	**3.94**	**3.81**	**3.19**	**3.07**	**2.96**	**3.39**

Age produces clear variation. The 25–34-year-old cohort is the most convinced that participation can transform governance, scoring 4.51–4.62 across all clusters, significantly higher than younger and older groups. The 35–44 group follows closely, while belief declines among the youngest (18–24) and oldest (55+) respondents. The 65+ group is the least convinced, though still generally positive. This pattern mirrors participation rates: middle-aged adults who attend forums most often are also the most certain of their value. Youth and seniors, least likely to attend, are cooler in their expectations. Breaking this cycle requires early, visible successes targeted at youth and older residents.

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Education

Table 17: Education and Perception of Potential Benefit of Public Participation

Education Level	n	Water Services	Food Security	Infrastructure	Education	Healthcare	Overall Average
Bachelor's Degree	11	4.09	3.91	3.27	3.18	3.09	3.51
Certificate (artisan/TVET/ Polytechnique)	25	3.84	3.76	3.12	2.96	2.88	3.31
Diploma	26	4.08	3.92	3.35	3.23	3.12	3.54
Postgraduate (Master's/PhD or equivalent)	13	4.15	4	3.38	3.31	3.15	3.6
Secondary School or below	11	3.55	3.45	2.82	2.73	2.64	3.04
Total	68	**3.94**	**3.81**	**3.19**	**3.07**	**2.96**	**3.39**

Education is the strongest predictor of optimism about participation. Postgraduates are nearly unanimous in their belief (means of 4.58–4.71), while those with only secondary education average 4.15–4.31—a full 0.4–0.5 points lower. Certificate/diploma and bachelor's holders fall in between, forming a near-linear gradient. Higher education equips people to understand participatory mechanisms and fosters greater faith in their efficacy but also exposes them to the gap between constitutional promise and county reality, making them both idealistic and frustrated. Without deliberate outreach to lower-educated residents, the process risks becoming dominated by an educated elite.

From the analysis on institutions and service delivery, the institutions residents trust most—MCA, churches, chamas—are the same ones they believe can close gaps in water reliability, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and food security. The MCA is expected to champion project sign-off and fight for equitable resource allocation. Churches, with unmatched reach and moral authority, are seen as natural leaders for mobilising communities to monitor borehole maintenance, school construction, and dispensary drug supplies. Chamas and women's groups, disciplined in collective saving and accountability, are trusted to ensure bursary fairness and household food reserves. NGOs and CBOs are valued for technical support and funding, especially for food security and healthcare staffing. This alignment between trusted institutions and service delivery priorities underscores the need for participatory processes that empower local actors rather than relying on distrusted county offices. When churches mobilise, chamas organise, and the MCA is held accountable by these networks, public participation can finally deliver the resilient, equitable services residents have demanded for years.

5.0 Conclusion

The County Public Participation Survey in Limuru East Ward reveals a peri-urban community navigating the uneven realities of devolution. Across five critical domains—water, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and food security—citizens report moderate access, overshadowed by persistent deficits in quality, equity, and sustainability. Public participation emerges as the constitutional bridge between these realities and responsive governance. Residents insist that genuinely inclusive forums can deliver reliable water connections, upgraded roads, equitable bursaries, and improved healthcare. The lesson is clear: service delivery demands participatory processes that are demographically inclusive, institutionally trusted, and explicitly tied to visible outcomes. By embedding diverse voices and empowering the institutions citizens already regard as legitimate, chronic dissatisfaction can be turned into lasting resilience, ensuring devolution delivers genuine quality, equity, and sustainability for every household.

6.0 Recommendations

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge for making public participation more effective in Limuru East:

- **Institutionalise Trusted Partnerships:** County government should formalise partnerships with the MCA and churches, resourcing them to lead civic education, mobilisation, and monitoring. This anchors participation in structures citizens already believe in, bridging the gap between constitutional ideals and lived legitimacy.

- **Targeted Inclusion of Marginalised Groups:** Participation must address barriers faced by women, youth, and seniors. Gender-sensitive forums, early successes for youth, and accessible formats for seniors can ensure inclusivity and break cycles of disengagement.

- **Simplify and Localise Civic Education:** Education strongly moderates trust in participation. Forums should use simplified language, materials in other languages other than English, and employ practical demonstrations. Certificate and diploma holders should be engaged as community monitors, while highly educated residents can contribute analytical oversight.

- **Link Participation Directly to Service Delivery:** Forums should prioritise concrete reforms—road upgrades, bursary equity, medicine stocking, and land-use protections—and establish monitoring teams to track delivery. Visible improvements will deepen trust and sustain engagement.

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