Making Every Voice Count: Samburu County's Approach to Inclusive Public Participation

County:	**Samburu 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**		
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Introduction

In Samburu County, the priorities raised by women and vulnerable groups reflect the realities of everyday life. Access to water, maternal health services, security, livestock and livelihood support, and assistance for persons with disabilities are among the issues that matter to communities. Creating meaningful opportunities for these groups to participate in County decision-making is therefore an important part of ensuring that development planning is informed by diverse community experiences.

Participation, however, takes place within a challenging geographical and social context. Samburu is vast, and some residents have to travel long distances to reach engagement venues. Insecurity and limited transport can make this journey more difficult, while household and caregiving responsibilities may affect the ability of some women to attend. Participants also identified patriarchal norms, literacy levels and communication barriers as factors affecting how freely and effectively different groups participate.

For persons with disabilities and residents of remote areas, accessibility presents additional considerations. The location of forums, physical accessibility of venues and availability of appropriate communication support can determine whether an invitation to participate translates into meaningful involvement.

Against this backdrop, the County Government of Samburu has put in place measures to broaden participation and create space for women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups to contribute to County processes. The approach combines grassroots mobilization, deliberate representation, accessible engagement and documentation of community views, providing an important avenue for these groups to bring their experiences and priorities into discussions on development.

Implementation of the practice

Public participation in Samburu is coordinated through the Public Participation and Civic Education Directorate within the Department of Finance and Economic Planning. To extend this function to the community level, the County works through village administrators, who provide an important link between residents and the County by mobilizing communities and supporting local engagement. This grassroots approach also allows the County to consider who is represented in the process, with deliberate attention given to the participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities.

Supporting this community-level structure is a mix of communication channels designed to reach residents in different settings. Village administrators and community barazas provide direct links with communities, while the County website, social media and ward WhatsApp groups extend information through digital platforms. Local radio stations, including *Serian FM, Radio Ashe, Radio Mchungaji* and *Watchman Radio*, broaden this reach, particularly for residents who may have limited access to digital channels. To give communities time to prepare for participation, County officials indicated that notices are generally issued 14 days in advance, with the mode of communication adapted to the intended audience.

Mobilizing residents, however, is only one part of creating an inclusive process. In Samburu, women and men participate in the same forums, with moderators deliberately ensuring equal opportunities to speak. Although the County does not hold separate forums specifically for women, facilitators create space for them to raise concerns and contribute to discussions on community priorities. This approach is particularly important where patriarchal norms may constrain women's participation. For persons with disabilities, the County provides sign-language interpretation and selects wheelchair-accessible venues, including the Maralal Youth Polytechnic social hall. Community representatives confirmed the availability of ramps, helping reduce physical barriers to participation.

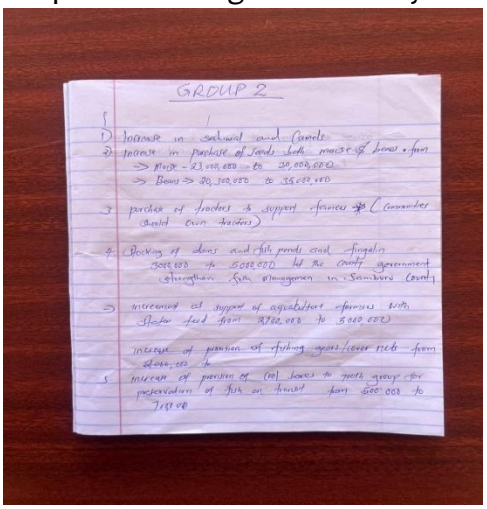


Figure 1: A photo of a notebook used to document community's views during public participation

Once these views are expressed, the process moves from participation to documentation so that community input can be carried forward for consideration. Contributions are recorded using notebooks and reporting templates before being entered into the County system. Where the engagement concerns legislation or policy, comments can be attached to the relevant documents, creating a record of the issues and proposals raised by residents. Community-based and civil society organizations can further contribute through written memoranda, providing an additional avenue for presenting community priorities and proposals.

Together, these arrangements connect mobilization, access, participation and documentation within the County's public participation process. Residents are not only informed about opportunities to participate, but are provided with channels through which they can contribute and have their views captured for consideration within County processes.

Results of the practice

The issues raised through public participation provide an important window into the priorities of women and vulnerable groups and the kinds of services that matter most in their daily lives.



Maternal health is one such area. Community members cited maternity manyattas, including at Lolkuniyani Dispensary, as an intervention intended to make facility-based delivery more acceptable and accessible to women who may otherwise give birth at home. The model takes into account the local context while providing an opportunity for expectant mothers to remain closer to health services as they approach delivery.

Women have also raised concerns connected to pastoral livelihoods, particularly the availability of milk for households when livestock move in search of pasture. The Lengerded, Lesirikan, Ngilai and Lulu Pasture Farms were among the initiatives highlighted during the assessment. These facilities allow lactating animals to remain closer to households while other livestock move to grazing areas, helping maintain access to milk for women and children during grazing seasons.

Support for persons with disabilities has similarly received attention. The County allocated KES 5 million to the PWD Fund in FY 2025/26, alongside KES 1 million for vulnerable groups. Participants further reported that the PWD Fund increased to KES 10 million in FY 2026/27, indicating growing attention to the needs raised by persons with disabilities and their representatives.

Security emerged as a priority during public participation, with residents calling for camps in areas affected by insecurity, including Suguta Marmar, Loosuk and Baragoi. The County highlighted completed investments addressing these concerns, including Lesirikan Rangers Camp in Ndooto Ward, Samburu North, which received an allocation of KES 4 million in FY 2020/21, with expenditure of KES 3,802,510. Pura Fortified Camp in Loosuk Ward similarly received KES 12 million in FY 2023/24, with expenditure of KES 11,947,860 upon completion. These projects illustrate the County's response to the security needs raised by communities.

Residents also described how proposals raised during public participation informed investments in education, health, roads and water services. Community members in Shabaa Village cited a satellite school among the outcomes of their engagement. The County also reported completing Shabaa ECDE

Class in Maralal Ward, Samburu Central, in FY 2019/20, with an allocation of KES 1 million and expenditure of KES 880,000. Other interventions residents linked to their proposals included dispensaries, boreholes, water kiosks and piped water. Water supply nevertheless remained an outstanding priority, with communities calling for further investment to meet their needs.

Taken together, these experiences show why inclusive participation matters. Women and vulnerable groups often experience County services in ways that cut across traditional sector boundaries. Providing space for these perspectives can therefore give decision-makers a more grounded understanding of community needs and the different ways development interventions affect people's lives.

Challenges:

Despite the measures already in place, participation is not equally accessible to everyone. Samburu's vast geography remains one of the most significant challenges, particularly for residents who must travel considerable distances to attend engagements.

One of the participants during the assessment exercise noted that long distances, household responsibilities and transport costs continue to make participation difficult for some women. Participants also identified patriarchal norms, literacy levels, poor communication networks and drought as barriers. Although moderators ensure equal speaking opportunities in mixed forums, participants identified patriarchal norms as a continuing barrier, underscoring the need for facilitation that supports women to express their views freely.

Insecurity further complicates participation by restricting movement in some areas and increasing the difficulty of reaching communities. This can have a greater effect on people who already face barriers to mobility, including women and persons with disabilities.

Financial limitations also affect the reach of public participation. Conducting engagements across a geographically large County requires resources for mobilization, transport, interpretation and accessible venues. Limited funding can therefore constrain efforts to take participation closer to remote communities.

Participants also raised concerns about what happens after public views are collected. They noted that feedback on prioritized projects needs to be strengthened, particularly so communities can understand which issues have been taken forward and follow progress after the engagement. This is important in maintaining confidence in the process and demonstrating that participation extends beyond the forum itself.

Lessons learnt and Recommendations:

Samburu's experience demonstrates that inclusive public participation begins with understanding the barriers different groups face. Village administrators provide an important connection between County structures and communities, while radio, barazas and digital platforms broaden the channels

through which information can reach residents. Deliberate consideration of women, youth and persons with disabilities during mobilization can further support more diverse representation.

Accessibility must, however, extend beyond communication. Bringing engagement closer to communities can reduce the time and cost involved in participation and make it easier for women with household responsibilities, persons with disabilities and residents of remote areas to contribute. Where social norms constrain women's contributions, facilitated small-group or women-only discussions could provide additional space to raise concerns, with those proposals carried into final prioritization.

Participants recommended further decentralizing public participation to ward level and, where practical, closer to villages. They also proposed increasing participant slots to reflect the geographical size of the wards and providing transport facilitation or reimbursement for those travelling long distances.

Adequate notice is equally important. While County officials indicated that notices are generally issued 14 days before engagement, community experiences suggest that this is not always consistent. Applying sufficient notice periods across engagements would give residents more time to prepare, organize travel and balance participation with other responsibilities.



Figure 2: A photo of the hall that County holds their public participation exercise

The County can also build on existing accessibility measures by sustaining the use of appropriate venues and sign-language interpretation. These efforts require adequate financing, particularly where distance, terrain and insecurity increase the cost of reaching communities.

Strengthening the institutional framework provides another opportunity for improvement. The County Public Participation Bill is currently in draft form and awaits Cabinet approval. Finalizing the framework would provide a clearer basis for coordinating inclusive participation and sustaining the approaches already being implemented.

Finally, feedback should form a more visible part of the participation cycle. Communities need clear information on which priorities were adopted, what could not be accommodated, the reasons behind those decisions and the progress of approved projects. Strengthening this feedback loop would help residents understand how their contributions relate to subsequent County decisions.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Samburu County's experience demonstrates the value of creating deliberate opportunities for women and vulnerable groups to contribute to decisions that affect their communities. Their perspectives bring attention to interconnected priorities such as maternal health, pastoral livelihoods, disability inclusion, water and security, giving the County a fuller picture of local needs.

The structures already in place provide a useful foundation for inclusive engagement, while the challenges identified by participants highlight where further attention is required. Strengthening decentralized participation, accessibility, feedback and the supporting institutional framework can help deepen this approach.

Ultimately, meaningful public participation is strengthened when diverse community experiences are not only heard, but are given a clear and credible place within County planning and decision-making.

Further reading:

- https://www.facebook.com/SamburuCounty025/posts/residents-and-stakeholders-from-samburu-east-sub-county-today-participated-in-pu/1532661878889352/
- https://www.samburu.go.ke/docs/
- https://projects.samburu.go.ke/departments/4220/completed_projects
- https://projects.samburu.go.ke/departments/4216/completed_projects

Photo Gallery



Figure 3: Community representatives during the Public Participation Assessment and Documentation exercise



Figure 4: A representative of the PWDS group during the public participation assessment and documentation exercise



Figure 5: Women representative during public participation assessment and documentation exercise



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



Figure 7: Representatives of the Council and the County Government during the Public Participation Assessment and Documentation exercise



Figure 8: Director in charge of Public Participation and Civic Education, Samburu County, during the Public Participation Assessment and Documentation Exercise