

How to Strengthen Citizen Engagement

*From minimum standards to experienced-based guidance
for high impact and results in Burundi*

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The purpose of this document is to encourage and guide project teams (PIUs), Task Teams, government officials and civil society organizations (CSOs) involved in the implementation of World Bank-financed projects in Burundi to develop and integrate Citizen Engagement mechanisms to their projects to support better development outcomes.

What is Citizen Engagement?

Citizen Engagement (CE) is the **two-way interaction** between **citizens** and the **state** that gives citizens a **stake in decision-making** to improve development outcomes. CE enables citizens to:

- Access information
- Voice views
- Participate in public life
- Influence decisions that affect their lives
- Seek accountability

Examples of citizen engagement mechanisms include public consultations, citizen advisory committees, satisfaction surveys, participatory budgeting, social audits, citizen report cards, community scorecards and participatory monitoring and evaluation.

Why is it important?

Enhancing citizen engagement can lead to better development outcomes. Evidence suggests that strengthening citizen engagement in projects can enhance targeting of beneficiaries, improve the quality of service delivery and support social inclusion and empowerment, particularly for women and marginalized or vulnerable populations.

The World Bank has adopted citizen engagement Corporate Requirements:

- Citizen-oriented design: Project Appraisal Documents (PADs) must explain how the project will engage with citizens and explicitly describe the CE mechanism(s) that will be used.
- Citizen engagement indicator: PADs must include at least one CE indicator in their Results Framework, often described as a “beneficiary feedback” indicator.
- Reporting on CE indicator: Projects must report on CE results indicators from the 3rd year of implementation.
- Consultations and grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) are mandatory.

Now that the vast majority of World Bank-financed projects meet these minimal requirements, the emphasis is **on enhancing the quality and outcomes** of citizen engagement mechanisms. The goal is to ensure that we are not just “ticking boxes” but supporting high quality & **meaningful engagement with citizens**, for example, moving beyond one-off consultations and simple before/after satisfaction surveys towards mechanisms that promote ongoing dialogue and shared decision-making.

Why is it relevant for Burundi?

The 2019 Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Burundi recommended to streamline CE into the design of structural reforms for macro-economic stability and for more effective governance. Direct citizen engagement in decision-making on how public resources are spent is vital for boosting demand-side accountability and social inclusion. In April 2021, President Ndayishimiye articulated his vision for Burundi around six priorities in the *Plan National de Capitalisation de la Paix, Stabilité Sociale, et Croissance Economique (PNCP-SS-PCE)*. The PNCP-SS-PCE outlines a CE system designed to allow local village structures to report project results directly to the highest level of the State. The proposed system identifies local village structures communicating with communal technical units, in turn communicating with technical provincial units, reporting to a national execution task-force, which will be supervised by an inter-ministerial steering committee and the Presidency.

Since 2019, a series of CE activities in Burundi have revealed both the need to further develop and integrate CE into operations, as well as the use of innovative tools in the country. Initiated at a workshop in 2019, a *peer learning* approach has become an essential element for the CE agenda, building on the actual experience of projects in Burundi and learning from “what works”. This note aims to translate these impactful experiences, developed and tested by project teams, into practical guidance for other projects. Such experience-based guidance should help projects that face similar constraints to engage citizens more broadly and effectively to improve projects. Experiences and documents from the following projects have inspired this note: [Social Safety Nets \(Merankabandi\)](#), [Health System Support Project \("KIRA"\)](#), [Burundi Landscape Restoration and Resilience Project](#) and [Great Lakes Regional Integrated Agriculture Development Project](#). Documents can be accessed by clicking on the links.

What can you do about CE? 9 ideas from and for Burundi



1. **Support local committees at the Commune and Colline levels.** Commune and colline councils are the administrative entities responsible for local development and for safeguarding social peace. Their composition and membership are diverse, making them more accessible by vulnerable groups. They play an important role in many projects to enable decentralized management, community participation and monitoring. They have been essential for introducing adaptive programming that is directly informed by service users and beneficiaries. A [training module](#) has been developed on GRM to further support capacities at the Commune and Colline levels.



2. **“Draw outside the box”.** With more than 30% of the population struggling with literacy, alternative-to-text communication is key to engaging constructively with citizens. [Creative communication](#) can be very effective in conveying an idea rapidly, attracting more attention and response than text, being catchy and easier to remember and more culturally relevant. Resources exist in Burundi to translate complex messages into images. Other successful communication strategies include videos and voice-based materials, such as advertorials that allow beneficiaries to express themselves, and short documentaries that support dissemination of practices.



3. **Use community engagement to close the feedback loop.** Some projects are systemically organizing community-based workshops called *Ateliers de partage de résultats*. In these events, government actors practice transparency and accountability by informing communities of results achieved and constraints faced. Communities are enabled to give their feedback, to provide recommendations, and to have an opportunity to be part of corrective decisions. From a project management perspective, these workshops allow for various perspectives and appreciations of the results achieved to be combined to create a richer picture of achievements. They provide an opportunity for other actors and projects to link with the project.



4. **Turn up the volume of the citizens' voice through surveys.** Regular phone-based community surveys are feasible and inexpensive. Two projects have developed SMS-based consultations to monitor ongoing satisfaction with services and to gather information on important implementation issues and challenges for real-time course correction. [Community surveys](#) are a good tool to amplify citizen voice and gather data to help project teams focus on what matters most to beneficiaries. Finally, the private sector has relevant and proven experience and capacities to design and execute countrywide surveys at the sub-Colline level.



5. **Develop special tools for Batwas.** Batwas are a vulnerable indigenous minority group in Burundi who experience *de facto* marginalization, because of their history, culture and way of life. This has led to Batwas not benefiting from investments and services to the same extent as other groups in Burundi. While minimum corporate requirements are covered in *World Bank Environmental and Social Standard 7 - Indigenous Peoples/Sub-Saharan African Historically Underserved Traditional Local Communities*, some projects have gone further by co-crafting [targeted development plans](#) that directly engage and reflect Batwa voices, concerns and priority needs.



6. **Make your GRM effective.** A well-designed grievance redress mechanism is not only a means to resolve conflicts at the local level but can also serve to establish and maintain trust from communities. GRMs are also a monitoring mechanism for emerging project implementation issues. [Experience in Burundi](#) shows that the effectiveness of GRMs depends on them being in [Kirundi](#), using [multiple channels](#), and ensuring confidentiality. Explicit efforts to ensure that GRM committees are inclusive create trust for concerned parties to use the platform that best suits them and their grievance(s).



7. **Make use of tried and tested tools, such as [Community Scorecard](#) and [Social Audit](#).** A number of projects in Burundi have decided to develop and integrate these two tools into their project management to leverage citizen engagement to monitor project progress. The community scorecard and social audit processes are basically a structured conversation between the frontline service providers and the users of that service to understand and address gaps in service delivery. This prioritizes constructive conversation rather than confrontation, without diffusing the real problems that the community and frontline service providers face.



8. **Invest in grass-roots capacities.** Engage CSOs and NGOs with pre-established community links, facilitation skills and trusted staff, as they are well-placed to help design and implement mechanisms and accompany communities. These capacities are essential to prepare and facilitate community engagement, particularly for specific groups such as youth, women and vulnerable populations. Investing and supporting a network of community-level facilitators/info-mediaries is essential to deliver effective community engagement mechanisms.



9. **Build local capacity to use digital tools for real-time feedback collection with [GEMS](#).** GEMS is a technology-based solution that enables projects to get beneficiary feedback timely and in a structured way, allowing for better-informed decisions. The [GEMS method](#) aims to build local staff's capacity to use existing simple, open-source, user-friendly, and field-appropriate technology to collect and analyze beneficiary feedback. Several projects in Burundi have been trained in GEMS to digitize the project GRM and conduct beneficiary surveys. Experience has shown that integrating the use of a digital platform at the conceptual and design phase will ensure its successful deployment. However, its deployment needs to be citizen-focused, considering technological and cultural aspects to avoid marginalizing further vulnerable people. For instance, 2G technologies are still the most effective way to reach out to communities. Data privacy and confidentiality must also be strongly considered to build community trust.