



International

Fostering Trust through Participation in Local Decision- Making

Factsheet

VNG International's approach to
citizen participation

Citizen Participation: Putting People at the Centre of Local Governance

In many regions across the globe, citizens often feel disconnected or even excluded from the decisions that affect their daily lives. As the most accessible level of government, local governments have a unique responsibility to actively involve citizens in decision-making processes. Inclusive citizen participation not only enriches policy development by incorporating a wide array of perspectives, but it also fosters public trust and enhances the overall effectiveness of government actions. However, many local governments struggle to engage citizens meaningfully due to limited tools, resources, or capacity.

At VNG International, we believe that genuine citizen involvement is a cornerstone of transparent, accountable governance. When citizens are empowered to voice their concerns, and local governments are open to listening and engaging, the decisions made are more likely to align with community needs and aspirations. By strengthening existing community structures—such as youth, women’s, and disability associations—we promote social accountability, build trust, and ensure that local governance is not just a top-down process but one rooted in collaboration and shared responsibility.

About VNG International

VNG International is the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). Rooted in the Netherlands’ rich tradition of local governance, we invest in empowering local governments worldwide to build better futures for all. Established in 2001, we focus on practical and innovative solutions that enhance the capacity and resilience of local governments.

VNG International designs and manages large, complex projects across a variety of sectors, collaborating with a diverse range of donors, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Commission, World Bank, and USAID. We take pride in our ISO-9001 certified quality management system, which underpins our commitment to high standards and client satisfaction. Our success is driven by our ability to combine local expertise with international knowledge, enabling us to implement solutions that are both practical and effective.

Together with local governments and their citizens, we are creating resilient, thriving communities that are equipped to face the future. At VNG International, we are not just building projects, we are building better futures for all.



Our approach to citizen participation

VNG International's approach to citizen participation focuses on fostering **inclusive dialogue** between citizens, local governments, and public service providers. The ultimate goal is to ensure that community needs and priorities are reflected in both **policy-making and service delivery**. Citizen participation is not merely a tool for improving transparency; it is essential for ensuring that local governance is **responsive, equitable, and accountable**.

Our methodology is two-pronged:

1. Empowering Civil Society & Community Groups

We actively engage community groups in meaningful dialogue with local governments. Through targeted training and coaching, we strengthen community structures, enabling them to become effective partners in governance. These include Social Accountability Committees at the government level, local security councils, and disability-mainstreaming committees, among others. This approach fosters deeper collaboration, ensuring that local government decisions reflect the real needs and concerns of the people they serve.

2. Strengthening Dialogue Platforms

We facilitate the creation and strengthening of platforms for continuous citizen-government dialogue. Tools like Citizen Report Cards and Community Score Cards (CSC) are used to collect feedback, monitor service delivery, and jointly develop action plans that involve both citizens and government at the local and national levels. By integrating these tools with government planning processes and participatory budgeting, we ensure that community input is not just heard, but incorporated into official policy and practice. This increases transparency, builds trust, and leads to more equitable and sustainable service delivery.

The Impact of Citizen Participation

This inclusive approach has profound and lasting effects on local governance. In sectors such as Local Economic Development (LED), involving citizens in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of economic planning and budgeting helps reinforce the social contract between local authorities and citizen groups.

For instance, in our projects in Somalia and Benin, active citizen participation has been key to creating economic policies and local projects that truly reflect community priorities.

In Burundi, citizen engagement is supported by Own Source Revenue (OSR), ensuring that participatory planning is sustained financially and that decisions are implemented effectively.

Leveraging Technology for Broader Impact

To amplify our efforts, VNG International sets up municipal information and resource centers, for accountability purposes, and integrates ICT tools and media engagement. By utilizing digital platforms, we can reach wider audiences, ensure broader citizen participation, and collect real-time feedback that enhances the responsiveness of local governments.

Why Citizen Participation Matters

At VNG International, we believe that when communities are actively engaged in decision-making, governance becomes more transparent, accountable, and effective. Citizen participation is the key to ensuring that local governments can meet the evolving needs of their communities, adapt to challenges, and foster a sense of ownership and pride among citizens. By empowering communities and strengthening local institutions, we are not only improving governance today but also building a foundation for a more resilient and equitable future.



Ethiopia Social Accountability Programme

Where
Ethiopia
When
2011-2024

The Ethiopia Social Accountability Program (ESAP) involved citizens in service delivery improvements and monitoring in over 400 municipalities, institutionalizing the approach in collaboration with the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance. Social Accountability refers to citizens holding service providers and local governments accountable for service delivery. Through dialogue and feedback loops between basic service users and service providers, joint action plans were developed to enhance the quality and accessibility of services. ESAP3 worked in 416 woredas (local governments) in Ethiopia across all regions. An innovative feature of ESAP is that through a Management Agency in Addis Ababa, the programme was implemented through a grant scheme for 43 clusters of more than 70 different Ethiopian CSOs that implement the social accountability cycle in these woredas and expand into regional level monitoring and accountability. VNG International was responsible for capacitating the CSOs, to monitor and evaluate outcomes and ensure adequate financial management. ESAP3 has adopted a strategy of digitalized process monitoring.

Sustainable Development through improved Local Governance

Where
Burundi
When
2022-2026

The SDLG project in Burundi aims to promote more accountable, responsive, and inclusive local governance. The project's goal is to strengthen the mandate and framework of local governments to improve the social contract between communes and citizens through more transparent and accountable leadership, increased citizen participation, and improved local policies and procedures for generating own-source revenue. These advancements are intended to enable communes to finance their inclusive local development plans and budgets, which are responsive to citizens' needs, positioning them to deliver better basic services.

Citizen participation is encouraged in the planning and budgeting processes of communes through community development committees, with a focus on including women and youth. Additionally, accountability in the implementation of these plans is enhanced through the use of Community Score Cards, which allow citizens to provide feedback on the quality of services they receive from the communes.





Municipal Authorities in Türkiye Realizing Alliances with Citizens' Assemblies (MATRA-CA)

Where
Türkiye
When
2020-2022

The MATRA-CA Project in Türkiye aimed to improve local governance through strengthened public participation and participatory decision-making methods in collaboration with the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (UMT). The focus was on three pilot municipalities within Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, where procedural participation processes were implemented and public participation methods were integrated into strategic management. Key outputs of the project included the formation of a UMT Team of Trainers, who were pivotal in executing project activities and fostering procedural participation. The project involved baseline assessments, governance workshops, and tailored Training of Trainers programs, the development of a comprehensive Procedural Participation Module (below), and a Public Outreach Conference.

A sample of VNG International's key products on citizen participation & social accountability:

- Toolkit for strengthening the social contract in fragile and conflict-affected states (2022)
- Handbook on citizen participation for civil servants of local governments (2022)
- Online training course (MOOC) on Social Accountability in the case of Ethiopia (2024)
- Social Accountability in Practice (2020)
- Community Score Cards and Citizen Report Cards: A toolkit (2025)





**Vereniging van
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