

Macartan Humphreys, Constantin Manuel Bosancianu,
Ana Garcia-Hernandez, and Innocent Silver

Representative outcomes through citizen consultative meetings

A study of Kampala, Uganda



- In brief:**
- Deliberative processes are widely used across developed and developing countries. Despite this, there is limited evidence of their equitability and inclusiveness.
 - The authors partnered with the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) to examine the extent to which participatory approaches can really reflect the views of citizens.
 - 188 small-scale consultative meetings were organised with citizens to discuss their preferences service delivery and accountability as part of the development of a 'Citizens' Charter'. As part of this, the authors randomised whether facilitators come from KCCA or from an outside organisation.
 - Firstly, the authors find there is only a small difference between the policy priorities of citizens and local bureaucrats. Secondly, while specific facilitators can influence discussions, this does not systematically bias consultations towards particular socio-economic groups. Thirdly, although there is inequality in engagement, this does not translate into specific groups of citizens getting their preferred outcome in the meetings.
 - The findings suggest that such meetings can be effective as a vehicle for representative consultations, although vigilance is required to ensure participation by more marginalised citizens.

*This project was
funded by IGC
Uganda*

Mixed evidence on consultative forums for citizen engagement

Uganda, like many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, has implemented different programmes to increase the participation of citizens in decision-making and to ensure the accountability of central and local governments. One of the most popular initiatives to achieve these goals is consultative processes at the community level. When adequately implemented, such processes are expected to result in greater effectiveness by incorporating the preferences of citizens when planning budget allocations. By also including a representative set of voices, these consultations can incorporate priorities often not represented by political elites and in a heightened perception of fairness and legitimacy in the final outcome of the consultation.

In practice, however, there is evidence that many such processes do not lead to their expected benefits. One reason for this is the potential for such efforts to be captured by bureaucratic elites. A second reason is the possibility that participatory processes simply reinforce natural patterns of unequal engagement based on socio-economic status, rather than overcome them. Finally, consultation facilitators could exert discrimination when leading the meetings, especially when they represent the government in any capacity.

A key area for research and policy

Through a close partnership with the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), we study the strengths and vulnerabilities of consultative processes of this form. We examine the extent to which consultative processes are inclusive and equitable in representing citizens' preferences on issues regarding KCCA service delivery in Kampala, whether all the subgroups are able to exercise equal voice in these, and whether elite capture exists in this kind of processes. In particular, we seek to shed light on the following research questions:

1. Do citizens and bureaucrats differ in their views on policy priorities?
2. Are the outcomes of deliberative processes more skewed towards the preferences of political elites, or towards those of citizens?
3. Do disadvantaged subgroups of citizens engage in the processes equally?
4. If so, does this impact what citizens get from the consultative processes, in the form of decisions reached?

The policy implications of this research are relevant for three reasons:

- First, because participatory approaches to decisionmaking have long been advocated by civil society and aid organisations as democratic mechanisms to give voice to otherwise marginalised groups and, as such, as an essential practice for arriving at good decisions. Understanding how great such disparities in “voice” or responsiveness are, and what institutional factors moderate their magnitude is important for understanding the sources of democratic discontent, and for designing the best policies to include those “left behind”.
- Second, by sampling a representative sample of citizens and randomly inviting two thirds of them to the consultations, we are able to observe what characteristics citizens who actually attend the meetings have. It is important for an institution to know if those individuals that are already more motivated are the ones who show up to these engagements. If so, the views collected are still biased and only capture the preferences of the advantaged groups;

furthermore, collecting more views would not help reduce the bias in this case. This will undermine the advantages of these processes.

- Third, measuring the extent to which elite capture takes place is important in order to design these meetings in a way that minimises the risk of elite influence by, for example, outsourcing the process to professional moderators or by monitoring it closely.

A closer look at citizen consultations

The consultations we study took place as part of a process to inform the development of a *Citizens' Charter* for Kampala. The charter would outline the parameters of service provision by the KCCA to the citizens and serve as a monitoring mechanism. Crucially, KCCA aims to gather inputs from citizens regarding their preferences for what should be contained in the *Charter*.

To arrive at these choices, we worked with KCCA to organise a set of citizen meetings where such details are to be discussed in a collective setting. We had the opportunity to examine both the role played by discussion leaders and by individual members in shaping meeting dynamics and in influencing meeting outcomes.

Participants

Before these consultative meetings took place, we interviewed a representative sample of 2,312 citizens selected randomly, balanced by gender, but varied in their socio-economic and demographic make-up. In this survey, we collected information on preferences regarding the implementation of different policies in the city. A subsample of citizens was invited to participate in the deliberative meetings described above and we tracked which citizens chose to participate in these meetings.

We also tracked the length of speech of individual participants during consultations, as well as the number of times participants took the floor to state an opinion. This allowed us to take a closer look at whether certain types of individuals, as defined by gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic group, dominate meeting discussions.

Discussion leaders

Additionally, we randomly varied the choice of facilitators to lead these meetings, with groups being assigned to meetings moderated either by local bureaucrats with work ties to the KCCA (ward administrators) or by neutral moderators hired by our implementation partner, IPA (Innovations for Poverty Action) Uganda. An appealing feature of this variation in who facilitates is that it lets us see whether meeting outcomes are driven in part by who leads them. In other words, we can ask: are the meetings more or less representative of the views of citizens when they are led by KCCA staff? Are the voices of marginalised citizens more or less likely to influence outcomes when meetings are led by KCCA staff?

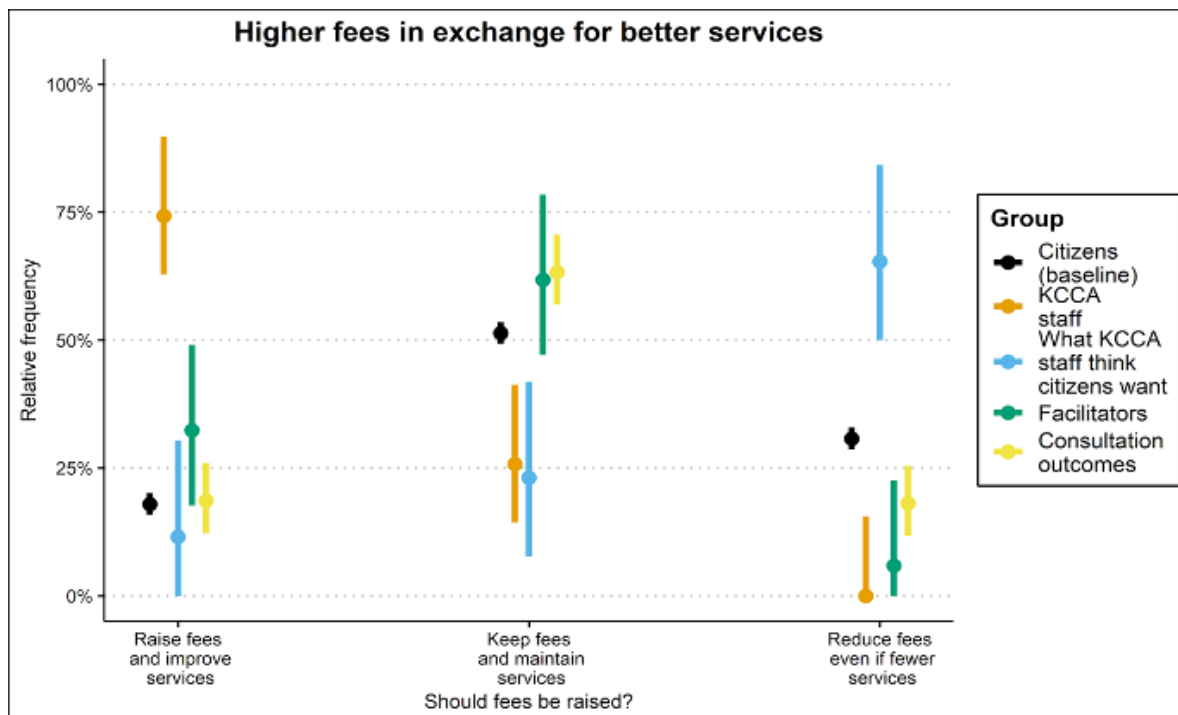
Topics for discussion

The topics for the deliberations focused on issues for which there could be reasonable disagreement among citizens, but also different views between citizens on the one hand and city authorities on the other: these are the issues where consultation and deliberation might help most. This choice of topics is what allows us to capture disparities in responsiveness.

The figure below shows a selected example of these differences in preferences. Citizens and KCCA staff were asked whether the authority should raise/lower/keep constant fees and taxes in exchange for more/fewer/same level of services. We notice marked differences between citizens and KCCA staff

in whether they favour higher fees. In results reported in our paper, we also see differences among citizens on this dimension, with wealthier and more educated respondents less likely to favour lower fees.

Figure 1: Survey locations for the Lusaka market study on taxation and service delivery



Summary of findings so far

Key policy questions	Summary of policy recommendations
1. Do marginalised groups achieve stronger voice through participatory processes like the consultative meetings?	Yes, they do. In general, marginalised citizens are much less likely to engage in political processes. However, although more politically active citizens were also more likely to attend the consultations, the attendees are more representative of different class, gender, and educational groups than participants in other types of processes.
2. Do bureaucrats and citizens differ in their policy views?	Yes, but only for KCCA central office staff. The baseline data suggest that citizens and local bureaucrats do not have substantively different views on a number of the items up for discussions. Citizens and KCCA central office staff, however, do differ in meaningful ways on preferences regarding Charter design. KCCA central staff, however, are able to accurately identify the preferences of citizens on some (but not all) of these dimensions.

3. What kind of citizens attend the consultative process and participate in the discussions?	In our implementation, participants in meetings were a representative cross-section of the wider set of respondents who agreed to participate in the project. This suggests the need to offer incentives for participation to lower-income respondents, so as to address the loss of income incurred from attending such events.
4. Do disadvantaged subgroups of citizens engage in consultative processes equally?	No, they do not. Conditional on attending, we see inequalities in participation emerge: men, wealthier and more educated respondents, and Luganda speakers are more participative, on average. Design improvements might help narrow gaps in engagement, such as providing supplementary information about topics discussed in advance.
5. Are the outcomes of deliberative processes more skewed towards the preferences of political elites or towards those of citizens?	We find consistent evidence of leader influence: for four of the five main topics of discussion, the identity of the facilitator exerts a moderately-strong effect on meeting outcomes. However, these effects are not strongly structured by institutional affiliation, that is there is no evidence that KCCA staff in particular influence outcomes in a given direction. Outcomes of meetings would be largely similar if the consultations were outsourced to a nongovernmental partner rather than implemented directly by KCCA staff.
6. Does unequal engagement impact what citizens get from consultations, in terms of decisions reached?	Most encouragingly, we find no influence of a skewed pattern of representation. No particular subgroup among participants, such as the more educated, the wealthy, or men, is better able to get decisions in line with their preferences.

In future research, we will also analyse the effects of participating in the meetings for citizen satisfaction and trust in the institution, citizen preferences and pro-social behaviour in their communities. This is important because understanding if individuals change their perceptions of the institution or their policy preferences by participating in these processes would be of great relevance for the institutions thinking of engaging with their constituents.

Policy recommendations

- Consultations can be an effective mechanism for learning the views of citizens.**
Citizens prefer meetings in which they can interact with policymakers (as judged from baseline responses). Although we can identify inequalities in participation and we can discern leader influence, the overall outcomes of consultations appear equitable and reflective of the views of a broad class of citizens.
- Consultations can be outsourced.**
We find that the outcomes of meetings are generally similar when they are run by KCCA staff and when they are run by an independent group (IPA). (It is possible that having meetings run by KCCA strengthens legitimacy, though this analysis has not yet been conducted.)

- **Consultations and individual surveys may partly substitute for each other.**
On average, we do not find significant differences between the preferences of the citizens in a survey conducted before the meetings and the outcomes of the deliberations. This suggests that the deliberations themselves adequately channelled the views of citizens and that the meetings may be a more cost-effective way of gathering information on preferences than surveys.
- **Further empowerment of disadvantaged individuals might be necessary to achieve equal participation in the meetings.**
Although procedures to ensure representative attendance were largely successful, we saw inequalities in participation among attendees. Women, less educated citizens, and non-native speakers of Luganda participated less in meetings, both in terms of the time they spoke as well as in the number of times they participated.