

Public participation in parliament and its impact on parliamentary democracy:

Strengthening legislation for enhanced governance

(Webinar, 28 April 2025)

Summary report

On 28 April 2025, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Centre for Parliamentary Studies and Training (CPST) in Kenya co-hosted a webinar on the topic “Public participation in parliament and its impact on parliamentary democracy: Strengthening legislation for enhanced governance.” The discussion explored how citizen engagement strengthened legislation, enhanced policy outcomes, and helped build trust in democratic institutions and parliaments. Moderated by Mr. Jeremiah M. Nyegenye, CBS, Clerk of the Senate of Kenya, the webinar convened parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and experts.

Prof. Nyokabi Kamau, EBS, Executive Director of CPST, and Ms. Kareen Jabre, Director of Programmes at IPU, provided opening remarks emphasizing how meaningful public participation improved governance and fostered citizen trust. The critical role of Parliamentary Training Institutes (PTIs) – such as the CPST – in building the capacity of both parliamentarians and staff to engage with the public was also highlighted.

Key insights from speakers

The Moderator opened the meeting and noted that public participation was a pillar of democracy. It was important to ensure that democratic governance extended beyond merely elections, to include ongoing citizen engagement in between them as well.

Mr. Andres Lomp, Community Engagement Specialist, delivered a keynote presentation outlining the impact of public participation on governance. Referring to the IPU and UNDP publication [Global Parliamentary Report 2022: Public engagement in the work of parliament](#), he demonstrated how inclusive and well-structured public engagement could lead to better laws and accountability. He highlighted key principles for successful engagement, including:

- Mapping out an engagement strategy
- Setting clear objectives
- Embedding a culture of engagement
- Investing in skills
- Diversifying communication channels.

He advocated for community-generated pathways where citizens were not merely informed but helped set parliamentary agendas. Mr. Lomp described participation models ranging from formal committee hearings to social media platforms, noting that combining different approaches reached wider audiences. He also emphasized the importance of engaging youth.

Hon. John Kiarie, Member of Parliament, National Assembly of Kenya, shared his perspective as a sitting MP actively involved in public participation processes. He affirmed the importance of engagement as not only being about informing citizens, but as a two-way

feedback loop between parliament and the public. Public participation was enshrined in Kenya's Constitution and was at the heart of Parliament's work to empower citizens, enhance policy responsiveness and build trust. Hon. Kiarie recounted how parliamentary committees in Kenya routinely invited citizens and stakeholders to provide input on bills, including through public forums. He also emphasized the importance of education to build resilience among the public against misinformation and added that the Parliament of Kenya was working on a public participation bill to better institutionalize participation with citizens.

Dr. Mohammed Amali, Senior Research Fellow, National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, National Assembly of Nigeria, agreed that many countries, including Nigeria, were increasingly embedding public consultation into their legislative processes – for instance, through public hearings on key bills and the use of constituency outreach programmes. Dr. Amali also highlighted ongoing obstacles, including limited public awareness of parliamentary activities and mistrust stemming from being unsure whether collected inputs would be reflected in final outcomes. If citizens saw that their voices could tangibly shape legislation, they would be more likely to engage consistently, which in turn would strengthen democratic governance. He also reiterated the important role of PTIs in building capacity for legislators, providing advisory services and sensitizing the public.

Q&A session

During the moderated Q&A session, participants from different countries raised questions on enhancing public participation. Key highlights included:

- **From informing to involving:** Speakers emphasized that traditional one-way communication approaches were insufficient. Public engagement meant moving beyond simply informing citizens to actively involving them in parliamentary work.
- **Showing the impact of public input:** In response to questions that public consultations may end up as a formality, speakers stressed the importance of instituting requirements for follow-up and encouraging the principle of co-ownership with the public (rather than simply seeking buy-ins). Parliaments could close the feedback loop and build confidence by showing citizens how their input was considered and what impact it had on decisions.
- **Reaching often overlooked groups:** Participants also inquired about strategies to engage communities often left out of parliamentary engagement – such as rural populations, women, youth and persons with disabilities. Panellists agreed that proactive outreach was necessary to include these voices whose perspectives could lead to improving laws.

The following are key takeaways that emerged from the webinar:

1. **Institutionalize public participation**, including through rules, strategies, implementation plans, and monitoring and evaluation rather than ad hoc arrangements.
2. **Invest in capacity-building** for both parliamentarians and citizens, including through PTIs. Focus could be on facilitation and technical skills, as well as civic education for citizens.

3. **Use a flexible mix of engagement methods** – combining traditional formal public hearings with less formal methods, such as through social media – to ensure broader access and responsiveness to different community needs.
4. **Promote inclusive engagement** by designing outreach strategies that intentionally involve groups that may be in marginalized or underrepresented situations.
5. **Close the feedback loop** by reporting publicly on how citizen input shaped legislation, thus strengthening accountability and encouraging continued public engagement.