The Effects of Public Views Inclusivity on the Legislative Process of the Finance Bill, 2024 in the National Assembly of Kenya

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Abstract—The main objective of this study was to examine the role of participatory communication in the legislative process of the Finance Bill, 2024, in the National Assembly of Kenya. Specifically, it sought to investigate the role of facilitators' attributes on the legislative process of the Finance Bill, 2024, in the National Assembly of Kenya, to evaluate the role of public stakeholders' diversity on the legislative process of the finance Bill 2024 in the National Assembly of Kenya, to assess the role of citizen engagement methods on the legislative process of the Finance Bill, 2024 in the National Assembly of Kenya; to determine the role of public views on the legislative process in the National Assembly of Kenya to examine the moderating role of Political Will and Organizational Capacity on the legislative process of the finance Bill 2024 in the National Assembly of Kenya. The study was guided by participatory communication and deliberative theories and utilized a qualitative research design. The target population of the study consisted of 349 members of the Kenyan parliament. This included 290 members elected from constituencies, 47 women representatives elected from each of the 47 counties, 12 members nominated to represent special interests, and the Speaker. Further, 2,109,284 members of the public who are between the ages of 18 years to 28 years old (Generation Z) were drawn from four counties, namely, Nairobi City, Nakuru, Mombasa, and Kisumu Counties. The study employed both purposive and quota sampling to select respondents from the National Assembly and the public across the four targeted counties, respectively. The sample comprised 20 members of parliament. They included 3 members from the Budget and Appropriation Committee, 3 members from the Finance and Budget Committee, 1 MP from the Speaker's Panel, 1 Parliamentary Liaison Officer from the Ministry of Finance, and 12 individual MPs and key informants selected based on their active participation in public hearings, stakeholder engagements, and debates on the Finance Bill 2024. Quota sampling was used to select 40 Generation Z respondents (aged 18–28), with 10 participants drawn from each of the four counties. Interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were utilized to collect data. Members of parliament were interviewed members of the public who are between 18 years to 28 years were purposively selected and were included in the focus group discussions. The pilot study involved five (5) Senators from the Senate of Kenya and twenty (20) members of the public from Machakos County This study adopted a qualitative data analysis approach, consistent with the research design. Computer-assisted qualitative analysis in NVivo software version 9 helped to analyse relationships and themes of data in content analysis. The influence of moderating variables of political and organizational capacity was also obtained based on regression analysis. Data was presented in form of narrations and verbatims. The results revealed that the Finance Bill 2024 process showed that facilitator impartiality, clarity, and cultural sensitivity improved trust and inclusivity, while stakeholder diversity enriched deliberations but faced structural inequities. Citizen engagement raised awareness but lacked policy impact due to weak feedback loops, political dominance, and institutional capacity gaps, reducing participation to largely symbolic gestures. The study concluded that The Finance Bill 2024 process demonstrated that without neutrality, inclusivity, feedback, and institutional commitment, participatory communication remains symbolic, undermining trust, limiting public influence, and weakening the legitimacy of legislative decision-making in Kenya. The study recommended that future legislative processes should ensure impartial facilitation, inclusive engagement formats, and institutionalized feedback mechanisms. Parliament must strengthen capacity to process submissions, track amendments publicly, and communicate outcomes transparently, ensuring citizen input meaningfully shapes laws.

Index Terms—**Public participation, inclusivity, legislative process, Finance Bill 2024, Kenya, participatory communication.**

1. Introduction

The involvement of the people is generally accepted as the characteristic feature of democratic government. The Constitutional provision of the right of citizens to participate in law-making processes is not only a fundamental right in Kenya, but also a global democratic principle enshrined under international conventions, such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Under the Constitution of Kenya, Articles 1, 10, 118, and 232 provide guarantees to the citizens to take part in the decision-making processes. In particular, Article 118(1) (b) requires the Parliament to enable the participation of the population in the legislative process and other business.

Despite these legal provisions, the quality and significance of public participation are highly debatable. Some scholars and practitioners increasingly argue that much of what is labelled as participation in legislative processes is merely a formality,

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lacking mechanisms that ensure it is inclusive, responsive, and accountable (Wara, 2021; Rutere & Simiyu, 2024). The distinction between participation and inclusivity is important. Genuine involvement occurs when forums are organized, diverse voices are actively sought, heard, and meaningfully incorporated into legislative outcomes.

The Finance Bill is presented annually, and its contents are crucial revenue-raising provisions for Kenya's fiscal policy. However, the 2024 Finance Bill was the most controversial because of its supposedly punitive taxation proposals, lack of responsiveness to citizens' concerns, and the rushed nature of the participatory processes. This Bill marked the first time in recent Kenyan history that there were mass protests both inside and outside Parliament against it, led by Generation Z. Although parliamentary committees held public hearings, many submissions were not included in the final draft, which contributed to the perception that there was a predetermined outcome (Finance Bill, 2024).

Finally, the President declined to assent to the Finance Bill 2024 into law, with specific reference to the clamour of the people and the need to respect their voice. This was a rare executive move that highlighted an important fact: the validity of laws does not only lie in their conformity with the processes of participation but rather it should be legitimate in the sense that it should be inclusive of the opinions of the people (Finance Bill, 2024).

2. Problem Statement

Participatory communication in the legislative process is required to ensure that all citizens have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Public participation should be inclusive, transparent, and functional, as stipulated by Articles 1, 10, 118, and 232 of the Constitution of Kenya. However, participatory communication in the legislative process by the National Assembly of Kenya faces several challenges. It is often marred by limited outreach, insufficient information dissemination, and inadequate consideration of public input (Adhiambo, 2018). According to a study by Adhiambo (2018), a significant portion of the population remains uninformed about ongoing legislative processes, primarily due to ineffective communication methods. Despite constitutional mandates, there are instances where legislative processes are hurried without adequate public consultation, leading to a disconnect between policymakers and citizens (Adhiambo, 2018; Finance Bill, 2024).

A public survey indicated that over 60% of respondents felt that their input was rarely considered in legislative decisions (Public Participation Assessment Report, 2020). Reports show that public participation forums are often inaccessible to a large segment of the population, particularly in rural areas. Persisting with the current ineffective participatory communication can lead to several adverse outcomes including erosion of trust, unrest, poor legislations and social inequality. Continued marginalization of public input can erode public trust in government institutions, leading to disillusionment and reduced civic engagement (Kariuki et al., 2023). Laws enacted without adequate public input may not address the needs and concerns of the populace, resulting in ineffective or unpopular legislation. Without inclusive participation, policies may favour certain groups over others, exacerbating social inequities (Kariuki et al., 2023).

Previous research on participatory communication has failed to focus on legislative processes by parliaments (Agu & Nwoke, 2024; Mwangi & Kubasu, 2022; Nzimakwe et al., 1994; Wara, 2021). The effects of attributes of facilitators of participatory communication on the legislative process in parliaments remain unclear in policy and practice, and the effectiveness of public stakeholder involvement has not been established. The effects of the methods of citizen engagement used in participatory communication on the quality of legislation need to be analysed in participatory communication used in the Kenyan legislation process in the National Assembly of Kenya. Further, no research has outlined the influence of participatory communication on the quality of the legislative process in relation to the Finance Bill, 2024, as far as this study is concerned. Most studies reviewed focus on public participation with little reference to the communication structure involved. This study therefore examined the effects of participatory communication on the legislative process of the Finance Bill, 2024, in the National Assembly of Kenya.

3. Theoretical Framework

A. Participatory Communication Theory

Participatory Communication Theory is rooted in the dialogical pedagogy of Paulo Frère and the UNESCO debates of the 1970s (Fernández-Aballí Altamirano, 2016, 2020). It emphasizes the importance of democratization and participation at all levels of society. The theory postulates that effective communication and development are contingent upon the active involvement of the community in the communication process (Fernández-Aballí Altamirano, 2016, 2020). The core assumptions and tenets of this theory are that effective communication and development rely on the active involvement of the community and that inclusivity in decision-making leads to more legitimate and accepted outcomes. The theory assumes two-way communication among all participants, promotes the empowerment of individuals and communities (Fernández-Aballí Altamirano, 2016, 2020). It respects the cultural contexts and values of participants, facilitates democratic participation, and fosters mutual learning among participants. The tenets of the theory are that it emphasizes equal contribution from all parties. It necessitates collaboration to identify problems and solutions, involves listening to and addressing community needs, ensures open and honest sharing of information, and aims for viable and long-lasting solutions.

Initially, the theory was applied within educational and developmental contexts, predominantly in Latin America and other developing regions. Freire's literacy campaigns and community development programs focused on empowering marginalized communities through dialogue and collective action. Over time, the theory expanded to include participatory media such as community radio and participatory video (Reuter et al., 2019). These mediums allowed for broader public

engagement and more inclusive communication channels. In contemporary settings, Participatory Communication Theory is employed in various fields, including healthcare, environmental management, and governance (Letsie & Osunkule, 2024; Marsili et al., 2023; J. Servaes, 2022).

Several studies have utilized Participatory Communication Theory to guide their research. For instance, Amartya Sen's work on development and freedom emphasizes public participation in achieving sustainable development outcomes (Sen, 1999). Similarly, Waisbord (2005) studied participatory communication in Latin America and highlighted the role of community media in fostering democratic participation and social change. These studies demonstrate how the theory can guide research by providing a framework for analysing and improving communication processes. In relation to this study, Participatory Communication Theory provides a robust framework for analysing and improving the legislative process in Kenya. This study sought to address the current shortcomings in public participation and propose strategies to enhance citizen involvement in legislative decision-making. By leveraging this theory, the study aligns with the broader goal of promoting a more inclusive and responsive form of governance, encouraging transparency, and ensuring that policies better reflect the needs and aspirations of the populace.

However, the theory has faced criticism for its potential lack of rigor and the challenges in operationalizing participatory practices within established political structures (Jacobson, 2003; Linkoy, 2021). Despite these critiques, its relevance in the parliamentary legislative process remains significant, as it promotes a more inclusive and responsive form of governance, encouraging transparency and accountability (Jacobson, 2003). Fostering a participatory culture, the theory contributes to the empowerment of individuals and communities, enabling them to play a more active role in shaping the legislative agenda and outcomes that directly affect their lives

In the context of parliamentary legislative processes, the theory emphasizes the significance of involving citizens in the decision-making process, ensuring that their voices are heard and considered in the formulation of laws, regulations, and policies (Kiguta, 2020). The theory aligns with democratic principles and aims to enhance the legitimacy and acceptance of legislative outcomes. It fosters inclusivity in outreach efforts, as it values the input of the public in shaping policies and laws

B. Deliberative Theory

Deliberative theory originates from John Rawls' Theory of Justice (Rawls, 1971) and was postulated by Jürgen Habermas as a pivotal concept in political theory, emphasizing the role of reason and communication in achieving a just political society and legitimate democratic decisions (Habermas, 1984). Deliberative theory posits that democratic decisions should emerge from an inclusive and rational discourse rather than the mere aggregation of individual preferences. It suggests that through reasoned debate, citizens can arrive at decisions that reflect the collective good, transcending individual biases and self-interests. It assumes that open dialogue and rational discourse lead to better decision-making (Habermas, 1984). It

also assumes that participants are committed to mutual respect and understanding, and that diverse perspectives contribute to the richness of the discussion (Habermas, 1984). The theory emphasizes the importance of free and equal participation and the need for transparency in the deliberative process (Habermas, 1984). It also emphasizes the role of reasoned argumentation in reaching consensus, and the commitment to finding common ground and shared solutions (Habermas, 1984).

This theory has been applied in various democratic processes, including the parliamentary legislative process, where it underscores the importance of open debate and the informed decision-making process (Dolný, 2011; Rinne, 2020). However, it has been criticized for often revolving around its practicality and the concern that it may privilege those with more articulation and reasoning skills, potentially side-lining less privileged voices (Curato et al., 2022; Gaus et al., 2020). Despite such criticisms, the relevance of deliberative theory in parliamentary legislative processes remains significant. It serves as a normative ideal that encourages transparency, accountability, and public participation in legislative deliberations. In the context of participatory communication, deliberative theory advocates for a legislative process where diverse voices, including those of the citizens, are heard and considered in the crafting of laws and policies.

4. Literature Review

A. Inclusivity of Public Views

Using scholarship and empirical evidence, inclusivity of the views of the people can be evaluated in terms of four dimensions: Responsiveness, diversification of the mechanisms, accessibility of information and feedback mechanisms

Inclusivity of public opinions refers to the deliberate effort to make sure the public's perspective, interest, and opinions are sought after and integrated meaningfully into decision-making (Thungo, 2019). It encapsulates one of the central principles of participatory governance in which citizen involvement consolidates democratic accountability while bolstering institutions' legitimacy. Inclusivity of public views instills transparency, responsiveness, and trust between the people and government through facilitating extensive citizen participation in legislation and policy-making. The indicators to assess IPV are enhancing responsiveness to public opinion, making channels of public participation multifaceted, enhancing access to information for all, and establishing efficient feedback mechanisms. These dimensions together ensure that participation is not symbolic but meaningfully inclusive and effective (JIru et al., 2020; Rutere & Simiyu, 2024).

Enhancing responsiveness to public perceptions entails truly hearing and acting on the problems and suggestions provided by citizens in the legislature and policy-making (Thungo, 2019). Responsiveness requires institutions to go beyond symbolic behaviour and ensure that public contributions have meaningfully impacted outcomes. Thungo's study of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature discovers challenges such as

weak feedback mechanisms and delayed responses, which undermine citizen trust and participation. Good responsiveness involves prompt recognition, transparent communication, and the integration of public feedback in policy decisions. Ranking responsiveness deepens public trust and governance legitimacy and brings citizens on board as stakeholders. Without these, public engagement stands the risk of being superficial, discouraging probable participation, and sabotaging democratic responsibility (JIru et al., 2020).

Varied mechanisms of public input involve the utilization of various channels and platforms to garner a variety of citizen views (Rutere & Simiyu, 2024). These mechanisms involve public hearings, petitions, outreach programmes, online forums, and social media consultations. The study by Rutere and Simiyu in Embu County, Kenya, identifies the necessity of blending traditional and novel communication mechanisms for broadening coverage and participation. Diversification offers the marginalized groups and the diverse citizenry an equal playing field to engage, dispersing geographic, linguistic, or technological barriers. However, constraints like small institutional capacity and poor leveraging of new communications technologies may constrain such mechanisms' effectiveness. Thus, it is critical to have a multi-channel approach to enable broad and equal public participation (Campos-Domínguez & Ramos-Vielba, 2022).

Enhancing accessibility of information ensures all citizens, regardless of socio-economic background and place of residence, have access to relevant legislative and policy information in brief and clear terms (JIru et al., 2020). Accessibility involves information provision in multiple languages, media, and platforms, overcoming literacy, linguistic, and digital divides. JIru et al.'s Ethiopian study suggests such obstacles as a one-language policy and inability to access parliament, effective engagement into which is limited. Accessible information provision allows citizens to engage knowledgeably and confidently in the governance of their country. Where information is available and understandable, inclusiveness is promoted, providing constructive conversation between the authorities and the public (Thungo, 2019).

Offering adequate feedback mechanisms involves creating ongoing processes to inform the public about how their voice has been heard, received, and incorporated into decisions (Thungo, 2019). Feedback closes the participation loop, advancing transparency and accountability through proof that citizen voice matters. Thungo's study highlights suboptimal feedback processes marked by delay and non-formal processes, which undermine public trust and involvement. Optimal feedback processes are public reports, announcements, and face-to-face communication channels that rationalize legislative choices or policy changes owing to public input. These processes engender sustained public participation, improve the institution-public relationship, and enhance the general comprehensiveness of the governance process (Rutere & Simiyu, 2024).

Inclusive public participation is required in various systems of governance all around the world, yet there is uneven implementation. Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union establishes participatory mechanisms in the European Union, but there are still criticisms that such a system is too technical and inaccessible (Hurka & Haag, 2020; Van den Abeele, 2019). In the United States, the Administrative Procedure Act requires citizen input, yet legal jargon usually puts the citizens off (Wagner, 2016).

The Asian contexts give mixed lessons. Engagement with citizens is guaranteed by the kokumin sanka principle in Japan and petition rights in South Korea, although bureaucratic inertia and the digital divide limits inclusivity (Suh, 2021; Hou, 2021). Mass line policy of China promotes engagement, but the hierarchies in the structure undermine deliberation (Ergenc, 2023). These two examples demonstrate that law systems are not enough unless one designs them with inclusivity in mind.

In Africa, the role of the people has been entrenched in the Constitution in countries such as South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. In South Africa, the inclusivity has been compromised by the existence of symbolic forums and weak feedback mechanisms (Sebola, 2017). The constitution of Nigeria allows people to express themselves and participate in the political process, but due to the elite capture, the voices of people are often ignored (Ojo et al., 2019). Tanzania and Egypt recognize the involvement but are unable to practically apply it (Lihiru, 2019). These examples shed light on structural and political obstacles to inclusivity.

The 2010 Constitution of Kenyan is a progressive model of public participation. However, empirical research indicates that inclusivity is frequently undermined by logistical, financial and political considerations. Wara (2021) discovered that in Nairobi, there was a low turnout in the public hearings because they were not advertised well. According to Kariuki et al. (2023), the parliamentary committees tended to ignore citizen submissions. Rutere and Simiyu (2024) highlighted communication lapses in Embu County, where the citizens were not informed of the legislative schedules.

With regard to fiscal legislation specifically, Kiguta (2020) concluded that the expertise of facilitators enhanced participatory communication in the process of formulating the finance bill in Nairobi County, yet the lack of effective inclusivity mechanisms hampered a wider participation. In the case of the Finance Bill 2023, the Supreme Court supported the process of participation of the Parliament despite allegations of insufficiency in its nature, which demonstrated a conflict between the legal sufficiency and substantive inclusiveness (Supreme Court of Kenya, 2024).

B. Legislative Process (LP)

The legislative process refers to official procedures of legislatures to formulate, review, and enact legislation. The process involves agenda setting, bill drafting, multiple stages of review, and public engagement. An open and participatory process of legislation enhances accountability and public trust. Thungo (2019) found that although public hearings and petitions are mechanisms available in the Gauteng legislature, there is very little that public inputs contribute to final legislative decisions due to symbolic participation and weak

feedback loops. JIru et al. (2020) are also of the opinion that little constituency mobilization, rushed law-making, and weak institutional capacity forestall effective participation in the parliament of Ethiopia. The process must be participatory and inclusive at all levels to align legislation with citizen priorities and provide democratic legitimacy.

Agenda setting is the initial stage where legislative priorities are determined and placed on the agenda to be acted upon. It dictates the direction of the national conversation and identifies what matters are tackled. Citizen issue participation at this stage is critical for good representation. As JIru et al. (2020) noted, public involvement tends to be undermined by precipitate legislative agendas that ignore the voice of the people. Likewise, Thungo (2019) noted that public participation is underappreciated at initial stages, rendering participation symbolic in nature. Absent mechanisms for enabling citizens to shape what gets onto the legislative agenda, parliaments will pass legislation that will not have resonance among the people. Therefore, agenda setting has to be informed by participatory and inclusive processes to popularize the agenda and include it in the public's interests.

Bill drafting is the substantive process of translating policy proposals or public concerns into the law. This is an extremely critical process as it determines the future legal wording and enforceability of the law. Successful drafting must involve professional input and public consultation. Thungo (2019) noted that while processes have been established by the Gauteng legislature, public participation in drafting remains low. JIru et al. (2020) further stated that inadequate parliamentary capacity and stiffness in institutions limit transparency in drafting in Ethiopia. Campos-Domínguez and Ramos-Vielba (2022) suggest that digital platforms can democratize this stage, though poorly used. Inclusive bill preparation not only improves content quality but also sanctifies the legislature by including various perspectives, particularly of marginalized sections.

All-stage control of a bill ensures legislative quality, transparency, and compliance with constitutional norms. It involves committee scrutiny, debates, public hearings, and amendments. Thungo (2019) observed that despite oversight systems existing in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, marginalization of minority voices and substandard public education dilute accountability. JIru et al. (2020) reaffirmed that poor institutional backing and unaffordable parliamentary systems discourage long-term public oversight. Rutere and Simiyu (2024) also proved that low public awareness of legislative oversight in Embu County exists due to ineffective communication strategies. Continuous monitoring public scrutiny as well is essential to prevent elite capture, correct policy errors, and build trust in the law-making process.

Effective participation of citizens in the legislative process is such that it guarantees actual participation at every level agenda setting, formulation, monitoring, and implementation. It entails transparent communication, structured feedback, and participative machinery. Thungo (2019) argued that although outreach avenues exist in Gauteng, engagement by citizens is largely symbolic and lacks substantive impact on policy. JIru et al. (2020) highlighted that participatory democracy would only be realized if citizens' inputs are attended to and integrated systematically. Rutere and Simiyu (2024) reported low rates of awareness and weak citizen participation due to a lack of proper public sensitization and communication breakdown. Effective citizen participation heightens public confidence, strengthens democracy, and ensures that the laws adequately respond to the needs and wishes of society.

C. Empirical Literature Review

Thungo (2019) employed a phenomenological research approach of qualitative research design to explore the efficiency and effectiveness of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature (GPL) in involving citizens in legislative and policy-making processes in Gauteng, South Africa. The research is anchored in participatory governance theory, which emphasizes the democratic value of citizen involvement in legislative processes to strengthen accountability and improve service delivery. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study uses purposive sampling to select 43 key informants with direct experience and knowledge of public participation mechanisms within the Gauteng Provincial Legislature (GPL). The research emphasized the importance of inclusivity in public views in provincial legislation. It employed a qualitative research design incorporating both descriptive and interpretive methods for data analysis. The findings revealed that public participation positively influenced legislative quality. However, the study did not examine participatory communication or its influence on the legislative process.

Weisiko (2023) conducted research in Kenya with a mixed-method approach, combining surveys and interviews to investigate the right to public participation in the legislative process. This doctoral dissertation from the University of Nairobi used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. This study adopted various qualitative research methodologies, including desktop research and literature review of books, journal articles, book chapters, and journals. The gist of the study was a review of the legislation and bills related to public participation in Kenya. The research questions and research objectives were based on the review of these sources. The findings indicated that public participation generally had a positive impact on legislative processes. Nonetheless, the study did not specifically address participatory communication, leaving a significant gap in understanding the detailed implementation and effectiveness of these communication channels.

Malik (2023) explored parliamentary democracy mechanisms, challenges, and the quest for effective governance across multiple jurisdictions. Grounded in theories of parliamentary democracy and governance, the study uses a qualitative, analytical design based on secondary data sources. The study explored the structural and functional dynamics of parliamentary democracy with a focus on India, while drawing comparative insights from 34 parliamentary democracies globally. The purposive sampling approach enabled the selection of key literature and historical data that illustrate the functioning of democratic mechanisms such as elections,

cabinet systems, and legislative representation. The findings reveal that parliamentary democracies face several governance challenges, including political instability, coalition politics, executive overreach, and corruption. The study emphasizes the need for institutional strengthening, electoral reforms, inclusive policymaking, and civic education to ensure democratic accountability and responsiveness. The findings were broad, highlighting general mechanisms and challenges without focusing specifically on legislative processes and participatory communication. This broad approach revealed a gap in specificity, highlighting the need to delve deeper into the nuances of legislative processes and public participation.

Bwire (2024) focused on youth engagement in policy-making by assessing perspectives from Kenyan parliamentarians, civil society, and youth. A combination of sampling techniques was used to gather data. Convenient sampling selected 8 parliamentarians, purposive sampling identified 3 civil society representatives, and snowball sampling recruited 26 youth. Of the youth, 6 were interviewed in detail, while data from 20 youth participating in protests were also gathered to assess the extent of public participation in parliamentary policy-making. The research, predominantly qualitative, relied on interviews and focus group discussions, with thematic data analysis revealing that youth engagement was improving. However, it did not specifically focus on parliamentary legislation itself, indicating a gap in understanding the inclusion of youth perspectives specifically in participatory communication in the legislative processes.

Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) conducted their study in Indonesia, examining the role of a social media-based project-based learning model in increasing community participation in environmental regulation formation. The study employed a qualitative approach using a literature review method. Data was collected from academic databases using relevant keywords. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes. Data source triangulation and peer debriefing were implemented to ensure validity and reliability. The analysis considered socio-political and cultural factors influencing implementation. The findings indicated that social media significantly increased information accessibility and inclusivity. However, the research did not investigate the influence of other forms of participatory communication on the legislative process, presenting a gap when considering a comprehensive view of participatory communication. The studies collectively show the importance of public participation in enhancing the quality of legislative processes, but also highlight significant research gaps, particularly in the areas of participatory communication and the specific inclusion of various demographic groups in legislative processes. Further research is needed to explore these gaps, providing a more detailed understanding of the mechanisms and effects of inclusivity in public views on legislative quality and the political will and organizational capacity, and legislative processes.

5. Methodology

A. Research Design

Research design refers to the overall strategy and structure that guides a research project. It involves making decisions about how to collect, measure, and systematically analyse data, ensuring that the research question is answered effectively (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This research used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research design is an approach that seeks to understand human experiences, behaviours, and social phenomena through non-numerical data. It aims to explore the meaning behind people's actions, beliefs, and interactions within their natural context (Adedoyin, 2020). One key advantage of qualitative research is its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of complex issues that cannot be easily measured (Creswell, 2024). It offers flexibility, as methods like interviews and focus groups allow researchers to adapt to emerging themes during data collection (Bryman, 2022). This design also provides contextual insights by examining phenomena in real-world settings. Additionally, it is participant-centred, focusing on the perspectives of individuals and ensuring their voices shape the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2021).

The qualitative design is particularly suitable in this study since it focused on the exploration of complex social processes and meanings, which are central to understanding participatory communication in the legislative process. Since the study aims to explore the impact of facilitators, public stakeholders, and participatory citizen engagement on the Finance Bill 2024 legislative process, qualitative methods allow for in-depth analysis of participants' opinions, experiences, and interactions in their normal setting. This method observes the nuanced manner in which communication is expressed among legislators and members of the public, obtaining motivations and challenges that might be left out through quantitative analysis. Furthermore, the flexibility of qualitative research allows for reacting to emergent themes in the process of data collection, optimal for addressing dynamic and context-dependent legislative processes.

B. Target Population

The target population of the study was 349 members of the parliament in Kenya. This included 290 members elected from 290 constituencies in Kenya, 47 women representatives elected from each of the 47 counties, 12 members nominated to represent special interests (Appendix VIII), and the Speaker.

Members of the public who are between the ages of 18 years to 28 years old (generation Z) were drawn from four counties, namely, Nairobi City, Nakuru, Mombasa, and Kisumu Counties. Generation Z (ages 18–28) were included in this study because they represent a digitally engaged, civically aware, and increasingly influential demographic in public policy discourse. This group is highly active on social media platforms such as Twitter (X), TikTok, and Instagram, where much of the communication around national legislation, including the Finance Bill 2024, took place (Arzani, 2025; Kirui, 2025). During the public debates on the Finance Bill

2024, Generation Z played a key role in creating awareness, sharing infographics, organizing online forums, initiating hashtags, and amplifying youth voices through digital campaigns. Their use of online advocacy, civic tech tools, and engagement in digital protests and petitions made them central to shaping public opinion and influencing legislative discussions (Kang'ethe & Onyango, 2025).

Furthermore, as emerging voters, taxpayers, and future leaders, their views on governance, fiscal responsibility, and public participation were essential in evaluating the influence of participatory communication on legislative decision-making. Including Generation Z in this study ensured that the youth voice, especially those ones active in digital civic spaces, is meaningfully captured and analysed in the context of Kenya's evolving legislative landscape (Ingutia, 2025; Maina, 2025). Table 1 illustrates the target population. The target population for members of the public was 2,109,284, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 1
Target population of members of parliament/Sample size

Members of Parliament	Target population
Speaker and elected members of parliament	291
Women representatives	47
Nominated members	12
Total	**349**

Source: The National Assembly of Kenya (2025)

Table 2
Target population of members of the public between 18-28 years old

County	Estimated Population Aged 18–28 Years
Nairobi City	1,146,567
Nakuru	470,530
Mombasa	282,361
Kisumu	209,826
Total	**2,109,284**

Source: KNBS (2025)

C. Sampling Technique

The study employed both purposive sampling and quota sampling to select respondents from the National Assembly and the public across the four targeted counties, respectively. In the National Assembly, a purposive sampling technique was applied to identify members who play a direct role in the legislative process and participatory communication regarding the Finance Bill 2024. The sample consisted of 20 members of parliament. It included 3 members from the Budget and Appropriation Committee, 3 members from the Finance and Budget Committee, 1 MP from the Speaker's Panel, 1 Parliamentary Liaison Officer from the Ministry of Finance, and 12 individual MPs and key informants selected based on their active participation in public hearings, stakeholder engagements, and debates on the Finance Bill 2024. This approach follows the recommendation of Adhiambo (2018) and Bwire, (2024), who argue that legislative studies should focus on actors directly engaged in fiscal decision-making and public engagement processes.

Quota sampling was used to select 40 Generation Z respondents (aged 18–28), with 10 participants drawn from each of the four counties: Nairobi, Nakuru, Mombasa, and Kisumu. Within each county, one focus group discussion was conducted, each with 10 participants. A focus group typically consists of 6 to 12 participants, as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2015). Ten discussants per focus group discussion was employed in the research to facilitate productive group working, ensure maximum participation, and maintain moderation at a manageable level. This number falls within Krueger and Casey's (2015) optimal range of 6 to 12, which gave diverse but intense insights while offering each participant a voice, the sample was balanced by gender and civic engagement level. Participants were purposively identified through youth organizations, civic tech groups, university networks, and online platforms active in Finance Bill 2024 discussions. Selection was prioritized individuals who have demonstrated involvement in public debates or digital advocacy. This approach ensured diversity and relevance, allowing the study to capture informed perspectives on participatory communication in the legislative process from a digitally active and civically aware youth population.

D. Sample Size

The total sample size for this study was 60 respondents, drawn from the National Assembly and the general public across four key counties: Nairobi City, Nakuru, Mombasa, and Kisumu. The sample size was carefully determined to ensure balanced representation from legislative actors and grassroots participants involved in the Finance Bill 2024 process. From the National Assembly, the sample included 3 members from the Budget and Appropriation Committee, 3 members from the Finance and Budget Committee, 1 Member of Parliament (MP) from the Speaker's Panel, and 1 Parliamentary Liaison Officer from the Ministry of Finance. Additionally, 12 Members of the National Assembly (3 per county) were selected based on their engagement in public participation activities related to the Finance Bill. One focus group enriched the study per county. Generation Z voices were gathered through four focus group discussions (10 participants per County), totalling 40 members, reflecting youth engagement in national fiscal debates. A focus group typically consists of 6 to 12 participants, as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2015), who emphasize that this range strikes a balance between diversity of perspectives and manageability of discussion. Smaller groups may limit the range of views, while larger ones can hinder in-depth interaction. Therefore, selecting 10 participants per focus group aligns with scholarly guidance and ensures rich, interactive dialogue without overwhelming the session. The distribution is as shown in Table 2.

Table 3
Sample size

Category	Sample Size
Generation Z (Ten per county)	40
Budget and Appropriation Committee	3
Finance and Budget Committee	3
Speaker's Panel	1
Parliamentary Liaison Officer from the Ministry of Finance	1
Members of the National Assembly (3 per county)	12
Total	**60**

Source: Researcher (2025)

E. Data Collection Methods

Given the qualitative nature of the study, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were utilized to collect data from the respondents. Semi-structured interviews are guided by a flexible interview guide containing core questions that ensure key topics are covered while allowing the interviewer the freedom to probe and explore emerging themes in greater depth. This approach balances consistency across interviews with the flexibility to adapt questions based on the respondent's answers, enabling a richer understanding of complex issues (Bryman, 2016; Kallio et al., 2016). Twenty members of parliament were interviewed based on their active participation in public hearings, debates, and stakeholder engagements related to the Finance Bill 2024.

Members of the public who are between 18 years to 28 years from Nairobi, Nakuru, Mombasa, and Kisumu counties who had participated in public forums or budget hearings were purposively selected and included in the focus group discussions in each county, one FGDs was conducted. A total of 40 Generation Z participants (10 per county) were involved. This group provided insights into youth perspectives and the use of digital platforms for participatory communication.

Focus group interviews (FGDs) took place in all four counties chosen: Nairobi City, Nakuru, Mombasa, and Kisumu. For ease of access and convenience, the FGDs took place in community centers, university auditoriums, or civic association meeting rooms centrally situated in each county.

The FGDs were facilitated by seasoned research assistants who also have training in qualitative data collection and group moderation. They utilized a semi-structured group discussion guide following the objectives of the study, where there are probe questions and open-ended questions to talk about participants' views on participatory communication and engagement in the legislative process. Facilitators supported inclusive participation, guide the group process to ensure a balance of input, and ensure that they create a safe space which encourages open and substantive conversation. As needed, bilingual facilitators discussed language selection in order to optimize comfort and expression for participants.

All of the FGDs were audio-recorded with the informed consent of the participants to obtain a proper recording of the discussions. One assistant moderator also recorded detailed field notes to record non-verbal cues and group dynamics. The audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim

F. Data Analysis

This study adopted a qualitative data analysis approach, consistent with the research design. Analysis focused on understanding participants' narratives, perceptions, and lived experiences regarding participatory communication in the legislative process, especially around the Finance Bill 2024. To this end, narrative analysis was used to interpret the stories and reflections of participants (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019), while thematic analysis identified recurring patterns and categories in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The researcher began with data condensation, organizing both interview and FGD transcripts to identify key insights and emerging themes. A combination of deductive coding guided by the conceptual framework and inductive coding, which allows new themes to emerge from the data, was used (Neale, 2016). Initial codes evolved into broader thematic categories and subthemes, exploring relationships and potential causal influences (Xu & Zammit, 2020).

To enhance analytical rigor, a coding matrix was constructed, aligned with the study's theoretical structure. Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) were employed to streamline the coding process and improve thematic consistency (Dalkin *et al.*, 2021)). The researcher used Python, due to its advanced capabilities in processing qualitative data and identifying hidden patterns not easily discernible through manual techniques (Niedbalski & Ślęzak, 2017).

Data was imported and structured into nodes corresponding to major themes and sub-variables identified in the study. These nodes served as categories for systematically organizing relevant text excerpts. Thematic analysis was then applied to detect patterns, using both manual review and automated keyword identification, which assisted in highlighting frequently occurring terms and concepts (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). Findings were presented in narrative and thematic formats, supported by direct quotes to illustrate participants' views. Themes were mapped against research questions and conceptual variables, ensuring coherent interpretation and alignment with the study's objectives.

6. Research Findings and Discussions

A. Inclusivity in Integrating Public Opinion During the Finance Bill 2024

1) High Inclusivity in Outreach and Collection of Views, but Low in Actual Incorporation

The participatory communication process for the Finance Bill 2024 was characterized by extensive outreach strategies that appeared inclusive on the surface, yet ultimately failed to translate into tangible legislative influence. Stakeholders widely acknowledged that the outreach mechanisms were indeed broad and multifaceted. Public forums, digital platforms, regional barazas, and stakeholder-specific dialogues were employed to ensure voices from youth, women, persons with disabilities, informal sector workers, and professionals were collected. Interviewee R13 noted that *"the efforts to reach the public were unprecedented. There were online portals, WhatsApp groups, and regional town halls engaging all sorts of demographics"*. However, this broad-based outreach did not equate to substantive influence over the content of the finance Bill 2024.

Despite the wide reach, many participants, both legislators and citizens, felt that public views were either ignored or inadequately incorporated into the final legislative document. The same MP (Interviewee R13) observed that *"the process was not inclusive in terms of actually incorporating those diverse public views into the Bill. Public recommendations were reportedly not included in the amendments."* This sentiment was echoed across multiple FGDs, DN4 stated, *and*

"It felt like our voices were heard but not listened to or acted upon". These insights suggest that inclusivity in collection was not mirrored by inclusivity in decision-making.

The lack of a feedback loop deepened this sense of disconnect. While public forums were held and submissions received, participants were not kept informed on how their views influenced the final draft. As noted in the Interviewee R8 reflection, *"there was no structured way to report back on what feedback was incorporated and what was not. That transparency was missing"*. Such a gap undermined the credibility of the process, turning what should have been a participatory mechanism into a symbolic one.

Moreover, participants pointed out that while the platforms used had the potential to democratize access, the absence of a clear framework for integrating diverse opinions into legislative amendments rendered the engagement hollow. DR9 in Nakuru lamented that *"it's like our role ended when we submitted comments. Nothing after that. No updates, no changes we could point to and say 'this was from us.'"* This clearly illustrates the distinction between procedural inclusivity, where participation is formally allowed and substantive inclusivity, where participation influences outcomes.

This failure to integrate feedback also had real consequences on public trust. DN6 from Nairobi commented, *"The government was just collecting voices for show. If you check the final Bill, it's almost the same as the draft. So why did they even ask for our input?"* Such perceptions point to a crucial breakdown between democratic engagement and legislative accountability, resulting in a participatory process that was more theatrical than transformational.

The findings show a paradox: extensive outreach created procedural inclusivity, but actual incorporation of feedback was weak. Participatory Communication Theory (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2022) stresses that communication must be dialogical, empowering citizens not just to voice opinions but to influence outcomes. The Finance Bill 2024 process failed in this respect, collecting views without creating accountability mechanisms for integration. Deliberative Theory (Habermas, 1984) likewise emphasizes rational discourse leading to legitimate consensus. However, when public inputs are not transparently integrated, inclusivity becomes symbolic, eroding democratic legitimacy. The lack of structured feedback loops suggests the process privileged appearance over substance, undermining both participatory communication principles and deliberative ideals of responsiveness.

Empirical studies reinforce this disconnection. Thungo (2019) showed that in South Africa's Gauteng Legislature, inclusivity improved legislative quality only when feedback was integrated into decision-making, not merely collected. Similarly, Weisiko (2023) in Kenya highlighted that public participation mechanisms exist but are weakened by poor incorporation and minimal feedback structures. In the Finance Bill 2024, citizens echoed similar frustrations, noting that while outreach was unprecedented, it did not shift legislative content. This aligns with Malik's (2023) broader finding that institutional rigidity and party dominance undermine participatory democracy globally, limiting responsiveness even in the presence of inclusive platforms.

The implications are significant: without mechanisms that link outreach to legislative substance, participatory exercises risk being seen as empty rituals. Bwire (2024) found that Kenyan youth are increasingly skeptical of parliamentary consultations when their input lacks visible impact. Similarly, Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) demonstrated in Indonesia that while social media widened inclusivity, legislative quality only improved when inputs were systematically processed. For Kenya, the absence of such structures perpetuates distrust, as participants described outreach as "hollow" or "for show." True inclusivity requires moving from procedural openness to substantive incorporation, where diverse voices meaningfully shape lawmaking.

2) Perception of Tokenism and Symbolic Participation

A dominant concern raised across both interviews and FGDs was the perception that public participation in the Finance Bill 2024 was tokenistic performed to satisfy legal obligations rather than to foster genuine democratic dialogue. This perception significantly undermined the legitimacy of the participatory communication process. Many stakeholders described their experience as one where they were invited to speak but not meaningfully heard. A DN8 from Nairobi remarked, *"It felt more like a checkbox exercise. We came, we spoke, but you could tell decisions were already made."* This sentiment was echoed by multiple respondents who saw the consultative sessions as mere formalities with little bearing on actual legislative outcomes.

The Interviewee R8 provided a candid institutional perspective on the detachment, observing that *"the challenge was translating the sheer volume of diverse input into actionable legislative changes, leading to perceptions that participation was merely symbolic."* This suggests that despite receiving thousands of submissions and hosting numerous forums, the National Assembly lacked the internal mechanisms to process this data effectively, further contributing to the sense that public engagement was superficial. The implication was clear: without meaningful synthesis and integration of feedback, even the most inclusive processes can feel hollow.

Legislators, too, expressed concern about this performative element. Interviewee R12 admitted during an interview that *"sometimes the timelines we work with are too tight to accommodate deep revisions based on public feedback. So we do the hearings, but the final decisions are shaped more by party interests than what the public said."* This admission underscores how institutional pressures and political priorities may override the intent of participatory mechanisms, converting them into symbolic gestures rather than avenues for real influence.

Another clear example came from DK2 in Kisumu, who explained, *"We used social media, we sent in written submissions, we even attended the local forum. But nothing changed in the clauses we objected to. That makes you wonder if they ever read what we said."* This lack of visible policy responsiveness reinforced the idea that participation was encouraged only to create a façade of inclusion. As such, even engaged and active participants were left feeling demoralized

and skeptical about the process's authenticity.

Compounding this issue was the absence of structured feedback loops. Participants noted that there was little or no communication after the submissions phase to inform the public about what had been accepted or rejected, and why. DM3 from Mombasa pointed out, *"We should at least get a document showing what public views were accepted. Otherwise, it just feels like shouting into a void,"* (FGD, Mombasa). This further strengthened perceptions that the participatory exercises were not intended to shape legislation, but merely to fulfill constitutional requirements.

The perception that participation was tokenistic reflects a gap between participatory ideals and legislative practice. Participatory Communication Theory posits that participation must empower citizens by embedding their contributions into decision-making (Freire, 1970; Fernández-Aballí Altamirano, 2020). The Finance Bill hearings appeared to fulfill legal obligations rather than foster genuine dialogue, violating this principle. Likewise, Deliberative Theory (Habermas, 1984) argues that legitimacy arises from reasoned debate where all voices influence the outcome. When citizen voices are invited but ignored, participation becomes symbolic, eroding trust in governance. This explains why participants viewed the process as a "checkbox exercise" where decisions were predetermined despite extensive consultations.

Empirical research confirms these concerns. Weisiko (2023) noted that in Kenya, many participatory frameworks risk being reduced to formality when institutional mechanisms for integrating feedback are weak. Thungo (2019) similarly found that in South Africa, failure to act on citizen input created skepticism about participatory structures. The Finance Bill's rushed timelines and political dominance replicate this pattern, where inclusivity was performative rather than substantive. Malik's (2023) global analysis also shows how party interests and executive control frequently override citizen input, suggesting tokenism is not unique to Kenya but a systemic feature of many parliamentary democracies.

The broader consequences include disillusionment and disengagement. Bwire (2024) demonstrated that youth become disheartened when their activism and submissions produce no visible legislative changes, leading to withdrawal from civic spaces. Likewise, Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) emphasized that participation is only credible when mechanisms exist to synthesize and report back on citizen inputs. The Finance Bill process lacked such feedback loops, reinforcing tokenism. Without transparent communication showing how submissions influenced outcomes, public forums risk becoming symbolic rituals. Addressing this requires both procedural reforms and a cultural shift toward valuing public perspectives as integral to democratic decision-making rather than as political performance.

3) Disconnect Between Public Input and Legislative Outcome

A recurring and deeply concerning theme was the decoupling between public input and the legislative outcomes of the Finance Bill 2024. Despite extensive outreach and a high volume of citizen submissions, participants widely felt that their contributions had little to no effect on the final contents of the Bill. This gap undermined trust in the participatory process and raised critical questions about the actual purpose of public consultation. As one Interviewee R12, starkly put it, *"The process was not inclusive in terms of actually incorporating those diverse public views into the Bill. Public recommendations were reportedly not included in the amendments."* This view captures the sentiment that outreach efforts were not matched by substantive responsiveness.

Several Gen Z participants echoed this concern. DR2 from Nakuru lamented, *"We engaged because we believed our views would shape the law. But at the end, nothing changed. That disconnect is discouraging."* This sentiment was common, with many young participants indicating that while they appreciated the opportunity to be heard, they felt disillusioned by the lack of visible impact. This disillusionment may contribute to future disengagement from legislative processes, weakening the long-term culture of civic participation.

The procedural limitations of the National Assembly also contributed to this disconnect. According to Interviewee R6, *"There's no systematic way to track which public suggestions were integrated and why others were discarded. It becomes difficult to justify to citizens how their voices influenced the Bill."* This lack of transparency and accountability in incorporating public input was viewed as a critical flaw. Without clear documentation or feedback on how submissions were handled, many citizens assumed that their input was ignored.

Another contributor to the same disconnection was the dominance of party politics in decision-making. As Interviewee R8 acknowledged, *"In the end, party positions had more weight than public submissions. So, the same clauses that generated uproar during forums still passed unchanged."* This political override of citizen voices points to a structural limitation within parliamentary deliberations, where democratic ideals of participation are subordinated to political expediency.

The consequence of this disconnect was not only a weakened participatory mechanism but also a perception of exclusion. DM2 from Mombasa summarized this feeling: *"It felt like they just collected our views to say they did. The outcome was already decided." (FGD, Mombasa)* Such experiences diminished the perceived legitimacy of the legislative process and reinforced skepticism about whether public participation is genuinely valued.

The disconnect between extensive outreach and unchanged legislative outcomes underscores the structural limits of participatory governance. Participatory Communication Theory emphasizes two-way, empowering dialogue where citizens can see their contributions reflected in outcomes (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 2022). In the Finance Bill process, however, participants reported that party politics outweighed citizen voices, violating this principle. Deliberative Theory (Habermas, 1984) also highlights that genuine democracy requires decisions to emerge from rational discourse, not partisan alignment. The dominance of party whips and political expediency demonstrates how institutional hierarchies subverted the deliberative ideal, leaving citizen voices subordinate to political strategy.

Empirical findings echo this disconnection. Thungo (2019) highlighted how weak accountability in South Africa limited the translation of participation into legislative substance. Weisiko (2023) found similar concerns in Kenya, where citizen voices are often sidelined by entrenched institutional practices. Malik (2023) explains this as a feature of many parliamentary systems, where party politics and executive dominance create structural barriers to responsiveness. In Kenya, participants' claims that their views "changed nothing" reflect this dynamic, where inclusivity in outreach coexisted with exclusion in decision-making. The result was a widening gap between expectations of participatory democracy and the realities of legislative practice.

This disconnect has long-term consequences for democratic legitimacy. Bwire (2024) revealed that youth, once optimistic about participation, become cynical when their input is consistently ignored, weakening civic culture. Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) similarly found that in Indonesia, participation improved inclusivity only when systematic integration mechanisms were present. Without such mechanisms, engagement creates frustration rather than empowerment. For Kenya, the Finance Bill 2024 represents a case where participatory communication failed to move beyond procedural formalities. Unless institutional reforms ensure that citizen input shapes legislative content, public participation risks eroding rather than strengthening democratic accountability.

B. Measures Taken to Ensure Responsiveness, Diversity, and Accessibility

1) Multi-Modal and Targeted Diversification of Input Mechanisms

The Finance Bill 2024 participatory process introduced an unprecedented variety of input mechanisms aimed at capturing the voices of a diverse Kenyan population. This diversification marked a notable shift from conventional consultation formats to more inclusive, context-sensitive methods. One standout initiative was the deployment of *"multilingual 'Bill Explainer' caravans that visited 120 constituencies, a method praised for breaking down complex legal jargon in local languages and dialects, making legislative content more relatable and understandable to ordinary citizens"* (Interviewee R1). Additionally, the implementation of *"USSD codes for low-tech participation"* expanded access to those without smartphones, with one DN2 stating, *"I don't have internet, but I could still send my views on my kabambe."* This technological flexibility empowered a broader segment of society to engage.

The process also tailored input mechanisms to community contexts. For instance, Agricultural calendar scheduling (barazas during low-farming seasons) acknowledged rural economic rhythms, ensuring maximum turnout, while Chief's camp drop boxes for anonymous submissions offered a safe space for honest input, especially in politically tense regions. DM4 noted, *"The drop box was the first time I felt free to criticize the tax projects."* Coastal communities benefited from the creative use of *"dhow-based collection boats gathering fisher folk inputs daily,"* which bridged logistical and occupational barriers for marine-based populations (DM6,

FGD – Mombasa). These innovations reflected a genuine effort to match the communication method with the demographic, cultural, and technological realities of diverse Kenyan communities. However, while these tools broadened participation quantitatively, questions remained about the qualitative weight of the feedback once collected a concern more fully addressed under responsiveness and feedback mechanisms.

The Finance Bill 2024 participatory process introduced creative and inclusive strategies that reflect principles of Participatory Communication Theory. Freire's framework stresses that true communication requires tailoring processes to local cultural and social realities (Fernández-Aballí Altamirano, 2020). By adopting multilingual caravans, USSD codes, and context-specific forums such as dhow-based consultations, the process broadened access to marginalized groups, making legislative content more understandable. Similarly, Habermas' Deliberative Theory emphasizes that legitimate lawmaking requires equal opportunities for diverse voices to be heard (Habermas, 1984). These innovations symbolized steps toward reducing participation barriers and affirming democratic ideals of inclusion, especially for groups historically excluded from legislative dialogue.

Empirical evidence supports these gains. Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) found that digital tools like social media expand inclusivity when adapted to cultural contexts. Similarly, Thungo (2019) showed that inclusivity strengthens legislative legitimacy when outreach methods target diverse populations. The Bill's caravans and localized forums mirror these insights by decentralizing engagement and creating platforms suited to distinct social realities. Weisiko (2023), however, warns that without strong institutional structures, such efforts risk remaining superficial. In Kenya's case, despite reaching wider demographics, the qualitative weight of feedback remained questionable, raising doubts about whether inclusivity in method translated into substantive influence.

This tension reflects a recurring problem in participatory governance: inclusivity in access does not guarantee inclusivity in impact. Bwire (2024) found that Kenyan youth often appreciated being consulted but felt disillusioned when their input carried little influence on final policies. Similarly, Malik (2023) observed that while parliamentary democracies adopt diverse consultation strategies, political systems often prevent meaningful integration of grassroots perspectives. Thus, while the Finance Bill 2024 demonstrated commendable progress in diversifying input channels, the challenge remains in transforming inclusivity of outreach into inclusivity of legislative decision-making. Without institutional reforms, such efforts risk being celebrated for access while failing in substance.

2) Deliberate, Though Often Limited, Efforts towards Responsiveness and Feedback Loops

While the participatory communication framework for the Finance Bill 2024 demonstrated innovation in collecting input, efforts to provide timely, transparent feedback remained significantly limited in practice. The National Assembly attempted to establish mechanisms such as a 48-hour response

rule requiring committees to acknowledge submissions via SMS/email aimed at reassuring citizens that their views were received. However, implementation challenges persisted. According to an interview with Interviewee R8, *"only 12% of SMS respondents received follow-up,"* and *"no feedback to 89% of digital participants beyond automated 'received' messages."* This gap undermined public confidence and weakened the participatory ethos of the process.

Another initiative was the piloting of a public amendment tracker showing real-time which clauses were changed due to citizen input. Though promising, stakeholders criticized its inconsistent updates. DN1 noted, *"I tried to check if my comment on fuel tax went anywhere, but the tracker just said 'under review' for days."* This lack of clarity diluted the intended transparency. Moreover, "sector-specific feedback loops" were introduced to channel inputs to the appropriate departments, but the follow-through remained opaque. DN3 commented, *"We submitted environmental concerns through the agriculture track, but we never heard back not even an acknowledgment."* (FGD, Nairobi)

Despite these shortfalls, the attempt to institutionalize feedback marked a step forward. The foundational structure existed, but the lack of technical capacity and political will to sustain these channels hindered their effectiveness. The separation between citizen input and real-time acknowledgment created a sense of disillusionment, with several participants feeling their contributions were *"collected for the record, not to shape the actual content."* Thus, while efforts were visible, they fell short of meeting the expectations of responsiveness in democratic legislative participation.

Responsiveness is a cornerstone of both Participatory Communication Theory and Deliberative Theory, which highlight the importance of transparent, two-way dialogue (Freire, 1970; Habermas, 1984). In the Finance Bill 2024, attempts to establish SMS acknowledgments and real-time amendment trackers reflected an understanding of these principles. However, inconsistent updates and poor follow-up revealed a gap between intent and implementation. As Habermas notes, legitimacy depends not only on participation but on transparent reasoning that demonstrates how contributions affect outcomes. The failure to close feedback loops undermined trust, leaving participants convinced that their input was "collected for the record," not as a basis for policy revisions.

Empirical studies show that weak feedback structures are a recurring challenge. Thungo (2019) revealed that in South Africa, failure to communicate how citizen inputs were used undermined credibility of participatory mechanisms. Weisiko (2023) reached similar conclusions in Kenya, emphasizing that acknowledgement without substantive feedback breeds skepticism. The Finance Bill process illustrates these findings—despite having an SMS acknowledgment system, only 12% received follow-ups. This resonates with Malik's (2023) argument that institutional weakness, rather than lack of public engagement, explains why legislative processes often fail to convert citizen input into policy change.

The implication is that feedback must evolve from token acknowledgment to structured accountability mechanisms. Bwire (2024) noted that youth disengagement often results from lack of responsiveness, even when participation channels are available. Similarly, Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) showed that in Indonesia, social media-driven engagement was effective only when coupled with transparent updates on how input was used. For Kenya, the absence of meaningful feedback undermined both responsiveness and trust. Moving forward, institutionalizing amendment trackers and sector-based follow-ups could ensure that public participation is not merely procedural but genuinely shapes legislative outcomes.

3) Proactive Measures for Enhancing Accessibility

The participatory communication process for the Finance Bill 2024 was marked by deliberate and wide-reaching efforts to improve accessibility, particularly for historically excluded populations. These measures were critical in attempting to reduce structural barriers related to geography, disability, and literacy. Among the most notable initiatives was the dissemination of simplified Swahili, Sheng, and braille versions of the Bill explainer, which sought to cater to linguistically and visually diverse populations. Interviewee R2 noted that this was *"the first time we prepared civic education materials in braille and Sheng, aiming to close communication gaps."*

Live interpretation was also prioritized. Online sessions included sign language interpretation ensuring that persons with hearing impairments could engage with discussions. DN5 lauded this as *"a sign of inclusion finally being taken seriously."* Moreover, visual literacy was addressed through info graphics at matatu stages, a move designed to reach commuters and informal workers who might lack time or access to conventional policy forums. DM8 Mombasa remarked, *"Those posters in bus stops helped us know what was going on even when we couldn't attend barazas." (FGD, Mombasa).*

Innovations extended to digital adaptations for low-literacy populations. For example, Swahili voice-to-text apps for illiterate traders enabled broader understanding and contribution from informal sector actors who are often economically central but politically peripheral. Despite these gains, accessibility challenges persisted in remote areas where internet access remained erratic, and some materials arrived after scheduled participation deadlines. Still, the breadth and intent of these efforts marked a clear attempt to expand inclusion. In sum, these measures significantly improved access, though logistical constraints and uneven roll-out affected their full potential. Nevertheless, they represent a critical foundation for more equitable legislative participation.

The accessibility measures adopted during the Finance Bill 2024 reflect a genuine effort to reduce barriers for marginalized groups, aligning strongly with Participatory Communication Theory. Freire emphasized that true participation must accommodate different literacy levels, cultural contexts, and physical abilities (Fernández-Aballí Altamirano, 2020). The provision of braille, Sheng, Swahili translations, and sign language interpretation are practical examples of this inclusivity principle. Deliberative Theory also emphasizes equality in discourse, and by ensuring persons with disabilities and low-literacy populations could participate, the process

aligned with Habermas' call for open and equal dialogue in democratic decision-making. These innovations broadened the scope of voices included in legislative consultations.

Empirical studies confirm the importance of such measures. Thungo (2019) demonstrated that when legislatures provide inclusive communication formats, the diversity of input enriches legislative quality. Similarly, Weisiko (2023) stressed that linguistic and literacy barriers often prevent effective participation, and their removal is key to genuine inclusivity. The use of posters, voice-to-text tools, and infographics resonates with Lanawaang and Mesra's (2024) findings that technological and creative communication strategies expand reach to excluded populations. Nonetheless, Malik (2023) warns that while accessibility is crucial, its value is diminished if institutional systems do not ensure those voices meaningfully influence outcomes.

While accessibility innovations improved inclusion, challenges remained. Remote communities experienced delays and uneven distribution of materials, which weakened the impact. Bwire (2024) found that marginalized youth often disengage when accessibility improvements are not matched with responsiveness and legislative action. This suggests that accessibility must be paired with accountability mechanisms. In Kenya, while the intent was commendable, the uneven rollout and lack of systematic follow-up risked diluting its effect. Nevertheless, these efforts represent a strong foundation that, if institutionalized, could transform legislative participation into a more equitable and legitimate process.

C. Effects of Inclusivity on Legislative Stages and Policy Outcomes

The lack of genuine inclusivity significantly undermined the drafting and amendment stages of the Finance Bill 2024, despite broad public engagement efforts. While multiple avenues were used to solicit citizen input, the real impact of these views on the actual content of the Bill remained minimal. Interviewee R8 acknowledged, "*The process was not inclusive in terms of actually incorporating those diverse public views into the Bill. Public recommendations were reportedly not included in the amendments.*" This observation reflects a common concern that although public consultations were conducted, their influence on the core text of the legislation was superficial. The process seemed designed to satisfy procedural requirements rather than to allow citizens to shape substantive legislative outcomes.

This perception was echoed by DK6 from Kisumu who noted, "*They collected our ideas, but then the Bill came out looking almost the same.*" Such sentiments illustrate a disconnection between the input phase and actual legislative action. Public contributions, despite being collected in large volumes, had minimal bearing on the most critical phases drafting and amendment. Stakeholders consistently described this gap as both frustrating and disempowering.

Moreover, Interviewee R1 emphasized, "*The timeline between receiving submissions and the tabling of amendments was too short to seriously consider most suggestions.*" This statement highlights procedural constraints that may have

hindered meaningful integration of public input. The result was a participatory process that appeared symbolic, lacking tangible influence at the legislative core. Consequently, even though the consultation was expansive, the failure to incorporate it substantively into the Bill weakened the democratic legitimacy of the legislative process and eroded trust in the parliamentary process itself.

1) Erosion of Trust and Perceived Illegitimacy in Decision-Making

The exclusion of public input from the final stages of the Finance Bill 2024's development led to a growing sense of distrust and perceived illegitimacy in the legislative process. While participatory platforms were available and seemingly active, the lack of transparency regarding how citizen contributions were treated created a rift between Parliament and the public. DN9 from Nairobi stated, "*It felt like we were just shouting into a void no one told us what happened to our feedback.*" This absence of accountability mechanisms meant that, for many, the engagement process felt cosmetic rather than impactful.

Several participants noted that although submissions were received, there was minimal follow-through or justification for their exclusion. Interviewee R5 acknowledged, "*Specific feedback on why certain recommendations were not incorporated was absent, which diminished responsiveness.*" This statement confirms the public's perception that participation had limited bearing on the Bill's final form and highlights how the absence of a feedback loop weakened the legitimacy of the final decisions.

Moreover, this disconnect had psychological and political consequences. Interviewee R16 emphasized, "*After engaging and not seeing results, people feel used, and next time, they won't bother.*" Such sentiments suggest

long-term damage to citizen motivation and trust in government-led participatory mechanisms. The failure to close the communication loop turned public participation into a symbolic gesture rather than a democratic tool, fostering alienation. The erosion of trust, as demonstrated across interviews and FGDs, ultimately threatened the credibility of not only the Finance Bill 2024 but also of the broader democratic framework through which it was legislated.

The exclusion of citizen voices during the Finance Bill 2024 created significant legitimacy deficits. Participatory Communication Theory underscores that empowerment and mutual accountability are central to building trust in participatory governance (Freire, 1970). Yet, by failing to explain why citizen recommendations were omitted, Parliament compromised transparency and accountability. Habermas' Deliberative Theory similarly posits that legitimacy requires not only inclusion but also justifications for decision outcomes (Habermas, 1984). The absence of structured feedback loops meant that citizens perceived the process as cosmetic. This disconnect bred distrust and reinforced perceptions that the legislative framework is controlled more by elite and partisan priorities than by public deliberation.

Empirical studies highlight similar challenges. Thungo (2019) noted that in South Africa, participatory mechanisms

collapsed when feedback was ignored, leading to citizen alienation. Weisiko (2023) also reported that public participation in Kenya often feels symbolic, as legislative bodies rarely justify how public contributions are used. Malik (2023) further argued that weak institutional frameworks enable tokenistic participation, undermining democratic legitimacy. The Finance Bill's exclusion of feedback reflected these shortcomings, as acknowledged by Interviewee R5, who noted that the absence of explanations weakened responsiveness and public confidence in the process.

The political implications of this trust deficit are long-term. Bwire (2024) found that repeated exclusion leads to citizen apathy, especially among younger demographics. Similarly, Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) argued that participatory innovations such as social media or local dialogues only succeed when combined with accountability mechanisms. In Kenya, the absence of structured explanations turned an inclusive process into an alienating one. Citizens' belief that "next time, they won't bother," as noted by Interviewee R16, underscores how legitimacy erodes when participatory mechanisms fail to deliver accountability. Ultimately, the process weakened both public trust in Parliament and the credibility of the democratic system itself.

2) One-Way Communication Hindering Iterative Legislative Development

The participatory communication process for the Finance Bill 2024 was largely characterized by a one-way flow of information from citizens to legislators with limited opportunities for iterative engagement. This static model hindered the potential for real-time dialogue and adaptive policy development based on evolving citizen feedback. DM6 from Mombasa observed, "*We sent our views, but there was no conversation after that just silence until the Bill was passed.*" This highlights the structural limitation where participation was reduced to a data collection phase rather than a continuous dialogue that could shape the legislative journey.

A key concern was the absence of mechanisms that allowed the public to track how their input influenced changes in the Bill. Several MPs admitted that while participation numbers were high, the process lacked the tools to integrate and revisit feedback in multiple legislative stages. Interviewee R3 stated*, "We didn't have a clear system to circle back to the public with updated drafts or ask for further clarification once amendments were proposed.*" This absence of a feedback-response loop weakened iterative refinement and denied the public the chance to engage with evolving drafts of the legislation.

This one-directional model made the process feel procedural rather than participatory. DK6 in Kisumu reflected, "*It was like sending an email and never getting a reply not even a read receipt.*" This metaphor aptly captures the frustration caused by the lack of reciprocal engagement. Instead of enhancing legislative responsiveness, the process turned public involvement into a checkbox exercise, stripping it of democratic depth. The failure to incorporate mechanisms for follow-up or iterative dialogue significantly reduced the participatory process's ability to shape meaningful and representative policy outcomes.

The one-way communication model adopted in the Finance Bill 2024 reflects a significant limitation in participatory governance. Participatory Communication Theory emphasizes dialogical processes where engagement is iterative, allowing citizens and policymakers to co-create outcomes (Fernández-Aballí Altamirano, 2020). However, in this case, communication flowed only from citizens to legislators, without reciprocal updates or deliberative exchanges. Deliberative Theory likewise stresses the importance of iterative dialogue where public reasoning informs and reshapes legislative outcomes (Habermas, 1984). By neglecting iterative engagement, the process became extractive, reducing citizens to informants rather than partners in shaping legislation. This undermined both the quality of policymaking and democratic legitimacy.

Empirical studies confirm that iterative dialogue is essential for effective public participation. Thungo (2019) emphasized that continuous feedback mechanisms enrich legislative quality and strengthen trust. Similarly, Weisiko (2023) showed that in Kenya, participation often collapses when treated as a one-off consultation rather than a sustained dialogue. Malik (2023) also noted that parliamentary democracies often prioritize efficiency over deliberation, leading to procedural participation without substantive engagement. The Finance Bill process reflects this weakness, as Interviewee R3 admitted the absence of systems to circle back with updated drafts, limiting iterative refinement of legislation.

The consequence of this one-directional approach is citizen frustration and disempowerment. Bwire (2024) found that youth disengage when participatory channels fail to evolve into continuous dialogues. Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) similarly concluded that participatory processes in Indonesia worked best when feedback loops were iterative and adaptive. In Kenya, metaphors like "sending an email and never getting a reply" capture how citizens felt dismissed. Without two-way iterative dialogue, participatory communication becomes symbolic rather than substantive, ultimately hindering democratic responsiveness and the possibility of meaningful co-creation in legislative processes.

D. Suggested strategies to Improve Future Inclusivity in Participatory Legislation

1) Proactive, Early, and Sustained Engagement with Tailored Communication

One of the most critical recommendations for enhancing inclusivity in future legislative communication is the adoption of proactive and sustained public engagement, especially during the early phases of the legislative cycle. Participants in both interviews and FGDs emphasized the need to shift from reactive consultation to forward-thinking, anticipatory participation. Interviewee R10 noted, *"Public participation needs to start much earlier before the bill is already in its final stages. We need to shape, not just react."* This proactive stance requires that engagement be initiated during the conceptualization or drafting phase, not merely as a formality at the end.

Equally vital is tailoring communication to reflect

demographic and cultural realities. Interviewees stressed that generic approaches do not work; communication must reflect the needs and media habits of different groups. For instance, radio and vernacular media were seen as more effective in rural areas, while short-format videos and memes had greater appeal among Gen Z. DK9 from Kisumu suggested, *"Short, funny videos on TikTok or Insta would have gotten more young people to know about the Bill."* The report also references suggestions such as utilizing local barazas in farming communities during off-seasons to maximize participation and customizing content in local languages to include illiterate or semi-literate groups.

Furthermore, rather than waiting for marginalized populations to self-engage, participants called for deliberate outreach efforts. *"We can't expect people from remote areas or informal sectors to attend Nairobi hearings. We must go to them,"* (DR7, FGD, Nakuru). These insights underscore that future legislative communication must integrate continuous, demographically responsive engagement strategies. By starting early and customizing outreach, legislators can create more inclusive processes that allow public views to influence not only debates but the shaping of policies from the onset.

The recommendation for early and sustained engagement highlights the essence of Participatory Communication Theory, which stresses dialogue from the inception of policy formulation rather than after outcomes are predetermined (Fernández-Aballí Altamirano, 2020). Citizens emphasized that inclusivity must begin during drafting, allowing them to shape—not merely react to—legislation. This resonates with Habermas' Deliberative Theory, which underscores that legitimate decision-making requires open, rational discourse before final outcomes are decided (Habermas, 1984). Proactive engagement also means tailoring messages to community contexts, ensuring communication methods resonate with youth, rural, and marginalized groups. Such approaches transform participation from a procedural requirement into a meaningful dialogue, broadening inclusivity and legitimacy in lawmaking.

Empirical findings reinforce this position. Thungo (2019) concluded that in South Africa, early and targeted consultations improved both trust and legislative quality by fostering shared ownership of outcomes. Weisiko (2023) similarly emphasized that in Kenya, delayed consultations fostered disillusionment, as citizens felt excluded from shaping substantive provisions. Malik (2023) also argued that parliamentary democracies require proactive institutional reforms that embed inclusivity from the onset, not at the margins of decision-making. For Kenyan youth, as Bwire (2024) observed, the use of digital, creative, and localized platforms is essential for genuine engagement. This supports calls for TikTok campaigns, vernacular radio, and rural barazas tailored to local needs.

Without proactive outreach, participation risks remaining symbolic. Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) found that in Indonesia, participatory innovations like social media campaigns only succeeded when deployed early, giving communities time to deliberate and organize responses. Applying this to Kenya, inclusivity requires moving beyond last-minute hearings in Nairobi to proactive engagements

rooted in local contexts. Tailoring communication to linguistic, cultural, and generational realities ensures that citizens not only hear about legislation but also meaningfully shape it. Hence, proactive, early, and customized approaches foster inclusivity by aligning the participatory process with the everyday realities of citizens, strengthening legislative legitimacy.

2) Robust, Transparent, and Tractable Feedback and Accountability Mechanisms

A second major recommendation emerging from stakeholder perspectives is the urgent need to strengthen feedback and accountability systems in legislative communication. While public participation efforts around the Finance Bill 2024 reached large numbers of citizens, a common frustration was the absence of meaningful follow-up. DN6 from Nairobi lamented, *"We shared so much, but never heard back. It's like our input disappeared into a black hole."* This sentiment was echoed across interviews and FGDs, indicating that transparency and responsiveness are just as important as initial outreach.

Respondents emphasized that a functional participatory process must include real-time tracking of how public views are used. Suggestions included a "citizen's dashboard" or "public amendment tracker" where people can follow the progress of their submissions. DN6 from Nairobi noted, *"We need traceability not just an acknowledgment email. Citizens should see where their input went, what was used, and why something was rejected."* Such mechanisms not only improve trust but also encourage sustained civic engagement by showing citizens that their voices have tangible outcomes.

The report further highlights stakeholder calls for the publication of post-participation reports, summarizing what was submitted and explaining how decisions were made. DM8 from Mombasa explained, *"Even if our ideas are not adopted, we need to know why. A simple report showing what was considered would make the process feel honest."* Without these mechanisms, the legislative process risks being perceived as opaque and performative, undermining the legitimacy of outcomes.

Thus, establishing feedback loops that are detailed, public-facing, and updated in real-time would significantly enhance legislative transparency and citizen confidence. It transforms public participation from a one-way submission exercise into a reciprocal dialogue ensuring that the inclusivity promised during outreach is sustained throughout the policy-making process.

Strengthening feedback loops is critical to transforming participation into a genuine two-way dialogue. Participatory Communication Theory stresses reciprocity, where community voices are not only collected but also responded to transparently (Freire, 1970). The failure of the Finance Bill 2024 to provide feedback eroded trust, as citizens felt their submissions disappeared "into a black hole." By contrast, Deliberative Theory insists on reason-giving, where legislators justify decisions openly, ensuring that even rejected inputs are explained (Habermas, 1984). Proposals such as citizen dashboards and public amendment trackers align with these principles by making the process visible, responsive, and

accountable. Such measures strengthen democratic legitimacy by bridging the gap between citizen voices and legislative decisions.

Empirical evidence underscores this need. Thungo (2019) observed that feedback mechanisms enhanced accountability and sustained engagement in South Africa. Weisiko (2023) similarly identified Kenya's lack of structured feedback as a key reason public participation felt hollow. Malik (2023) further argued that without transparency, parliamentary processes risk fostering symbolic participation rather than substantive influence. Bwire (2024) highlighted that youth participation was only sustained when there was visible evidence that inputs shaped policy outcomes, while Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) showed that digital inclusivity in Indonesia was most effective when accompanied by transparent reporting systems. Together, these findings emphasize that responsiveness is inseparable from legitimacy.

The proposed strategies—citizen dashboards, feedback reports, and sector-specific acknowledgments—transform symbolic participation into accountable governance. When public views are traceable, citizens perceive value in engagement, even if their proposals are not fully adopted. As DM8 noted, "Even if our ideas are not adopted, we need to know why." Closing the communication loop thus prevents alienation, fosters continued civic engagement, and strengthens institutional legitimacy. By embedding transparency and responsiveness, Kenya's parliamentary processes can move from being perceived as performative to being genuinely democratic, enhancing the quality and legitimacy of legislative outcomes.

3) Capacity Building for Both Citizens and Legislators

The third critical strategy recommended to improve the inclusivity of public views in legislative communication is comprehensive capacity building both for the citizens expected to participate and the legislators responsible for interpreting and incorporating that input. Lack of knowledge and preparedness on both ends of the process hindered the effective realization of inclusive, participatory communication for the Finance Bill 2024.

Many participants voiced that citizens often lacked the requisite civic knowledge to engage meaningfully. DN2 in Nairobi observed, *"Most people don't understand how laws are made, so they're intimidated or unsure about what to contribute."* This limits the diversity and depth of input received. To address this, stakeholders recommended structured civic education campaigns, beginning from the school level and extending to targeted adult programs. These would include simplified materials on parliamentary processes, citizens' rights, and how their input can shape legislation.

Simultaneously, the need to build capacity among legislators and parliamentary staff was strongly emphasized. Several respondents noted that some MPs lacked training in conducting inclusive engagement. Interviewee R8 pointed out, *"Many MPs still treat public participation as a box-ticking exercise; they don't know how to analyze submissions or use them constructively."* Interviewed policy experts proposed tailored training for MPs on participatory governance, data analysis of

public submissions, and inclusive facilitation skills. Parliamentary committees, too, were urged to recruit or upskill technical staff to support public input processing and feedback.

As highlighted in the document, this dual-track approach ensures that both the supply (citizen input) and the demand (legislative receptiveness) sides of the communication equation are empowered. When citizens understand the process and legislators are prepared to engage inclusively, the participatory communication process becomes genuinely transformative. Capacity building, therefore, is not a peripheral activity but a core component of institutionalizing inclusive legislative practice.

Capacity building represents the foundation of sustainable inclusivity in participatory governance. Participatory Communication Theory emphasizes empowerment through knowledge, ensuring citizens understand both their rights and the processes shaping legislation (Freire, 1970). Civic education programs, simplified materials, and targeted campaigns in schools and communities directly address this gap. On the other side, Habermas' Deliberative Theory highlights that legislators must also be prepared to engage in rational, inclusive discourse (Habermas, 1984). Without adequate training in analyzing and integrating diverse inputs, MPs risk reducing participation to a ritual. Hence, equipping both citizens and legislators with the necessary skills ensures that engagement is meaningful, inclusive, and effective in shaping policy outcomes.

Empirical research supports this dual-track approach. Thungo (2019) found that effective participation in South Africa required both informed citizens and trained legislative staff to process inputs. Weisiko (2023) also emphasized that in Kenya, gaps in civic knowledge hindered meaningful engagement. Malik (2023) argued that parliamentary reforms must include capacity building for legislators to overcome procedural tokenism. Bwire (2024) highlighted youth disengagement caused by lack of civic awareness, while Lanawaang and Mesra (2024) stressed that inclusive participation thrives when both citizens and institutional actors are prepared to engage effectively. These findings demonstrate that capacity gaps on either side weaken participatory democracy.

By strengthening both supply (citizens' informed contributions) and demand (legislative receptiveness), capacity building fosters genuine inclusivity. As Interviewee R8 noted, many MPs "still treat public participation as a box-ticking exercise." Training MPs in participatory governance, data analysis, and facilitation can bridge this gap. Simultaneously, empowering citizens through civic education ensures they are confident contributors. Together, these measures transform participation from symbolic exercises into substantive, democratic practice. Building this capacity institutionalizes inclusivity, creating a culture where legislative processes are both accessible and responsive, enhancing long-term trust and democratic legitimacy in Kenya's parliamentary system.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Introduction

This chapter presents the discussions of the major findings of the study and the conclusions. Finally, the chapter records recommendations and suggestions for additional research.

B. Discussions of the Findings

1) Effects of Public Views Inclusivity on the Legislative Process of the Finance Bill, 2024 in the National Assembly of Kenya

The study revealed that while the participatory communication framework of the Finance Bill 2024 was expansive in outreach utilizing online platforms, town halls, and multilingual explainers, the actual influence of public input on the bill's substance was minimal. This created a major disconnect between public expectation and legislative outcome. Respondents, particularly Gen Z participants, consistently noted that they were "heard but not listened to," with their submissions failing to influence bill amendments. As one opposition MP observed, "Public recommendations were reportedly not included in the amendments," a sentiment echoed across interviews and FGDs.

This finding mirrors the argument in the literature review that inclusivity of public views is not merely about the presence of engagement platforms, but the meaningful integration of these views into decision-making. According to Thungo (2019), inclusivity is defined by responsiveness, access, and feedback not just symbolic participation. When respondents from Mombasa and Kisumu stated that they "received no feedback" and saw "no visible change" in the final Bill, it reflected a breakdown in these fundamental indicators of inclusivity.

A closer look at the legislative process shows how this disconnect manifested. The Finance and Planning Committee acknowledged the limited time between public submissions and the drafting of final amendments, leading to the exclusion of most public views. This highlights a weakness in responsiveness mechanisms, which, according to JIru et al. (2020), are essential to legitimate and accountable participatory governance. The perception that the process was "tokenistic" suggests that participation lacked the transformative element emphasized in the participatory governance theory and that public consultation was used to fulfill legal formalities rather than democratize legislation.

Moreover, the importance of feedback mechanisms in consolidating democratic trust. In this study, the absence of such mechanisms, such as clear justifications for excluding recommendations or trackers showing clause modifications, contributed to what one Gen Z participant described as "shouting into a void." This aligns with Rutere and Simiyu (2024), who caution that without institutionalized feedback loops, public engagement becomes symbolic, diminishing legislative transparency.

Another central issue was the one-directional nature of communication. Public participation occurred primarily during the input phase, with no structured re-engagement during drafting or post-submission review. This violates the principle of iterative participation promoted by Weisiko (2023), who argues that effective participatory communication must span all legislative stages agenda setting, drafting, debating, and oversight. Instead, the study found that legislative processes reverted to traditional top-down decision-making after collecting public views. The erosion of trust that followed especially among youth reinforces Thungo's (2019) warning that exclusion undermines both the legitimacy of legislative outcomes and the future willingness of citizens to engage. In essence, public voices were collected, but not internalized, weakening the participatory promise enshrined in constitutional and normative democratic frameworks.

The findings challenge the assumptions of Participatory Communication Theory and Deliberative Theory by showing how inclusivity can be symbolically maintained but substantively undermined. While participatory theory emphasizes empowerment through feedback and iterative engagement (Fernández-Aballí Altamirano, 2016), the Finance Bill process revealed that inclusivity was truncated at the input phase, leaving citizens excluded from deliberation and decision-making. Habermas' Deliberative Theory similarly assumes that discourse influences outcomes, yet in this case, political expedience and time pressures muted citizen influence. Theoretically, this underscores that inclusivity must extend beyond access to active integration and accountability structures. Without institutionalized responsiveness, inclusivity risks becoming ritualistic, eroding both legitimacy and trust. Thus, these findings point to the need for stronger frameworks linking participation to substantive legislative transformation.

8. Conclusions

The Finance Bill 2024 legislative process revealed a troubling gap between outreach-based inclusivity and actual influence over legislative content. Although diverse citizen voices were solicited through expansive platforms, their integration into the Bill was limited, resulting in widespread perceptions of tokenism and symbolic participation. As supported by Thungo (2019) and JIru et al. (2020), true inclusivity requires more than procedural access it demands responsiveness, feedback, and influence. The absence of feedback loops and iterative engagement weakened public trust and eroded the legitimacy of the legislative process. Without clear pathways for public input to shape outcomes, citizen engagement becomes disempowering.

9. Recommendations

To enhance the inclusivity of public perspectives in legislative communication, Parliament should institutionalize structured, tractable feedback mechanisms that inform citizens how their input influences legislative outcomes. This includes public amendment trackers, justification reports, and clear follow-up communications for accepted or rejected submissions. Additionally, participatory processes should begin earlier in the legislative cycle, allowing citizens to shape policy before draft finalization. Tailored civic education especially in local languages and accessible formats must be scaled to build capacity among citizens, while legislators and

staff should be trained in inclusive facilitation and public input analysis. Finally, digital and physical platforms should be synchronized to ensure participation is not only wide-reaching but also equitable, sustained, and impactful across Kenya's diverse social, economic, and geographic contexts.

10. Suggestions for Further Studies

A comparative study between Kenya's National Assembly and other African or Commonwealth parliaments could reveal structural or cultural influences on participatory inclusivity.

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