



IASSW **AIETS**

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

- Professor & Interim Dean of the School of Social Work at Monmouth University, New Jersey, USA.
- Chair, Advisory Board of the Katherine A. Kendall Institute for International Social Work Education, CSWE
- President of the North American and Caribbean Association of School of Social Work (NACASSW)
- Vice President of the International Association of School of Social Work (IASSW)

WHY PARTICIPATION MATTERS NOW



- Community participation has emerged as a central pillar in developmental discourse.
- Participation enhances democratic legitimacy and sustainability.
- Links to equitable resource distribution and environmental protection.
- Participation aligns with sustainable development goals (SDGs).

DEFINING PARTICIPATION



- A rich concept that varies within its application and definition.
- A social construct shaped by values, goals, and context.
- Includes citizen, public, and community engagement.

POWER & PARTICIPATION



- Real participation requires power-sharing.
- Arnstein's Ladder: from manipulation → citizen control.
- Participation is meaningful only when it involves redistribution of power.

EVOLUTION OF PARTICIPATION



- Past: top-down, technocratic.
- Shift to empowerment and local ownership.
- Today: institutionalized engagement + digital tools.
- With participation, communities could take ownership of their own development and still have guidance from the organization.

MECHANISMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Mechanism	Description	Example
Public Hearings	Formal gatherings to discuss policy or projects	Local government planning meetings
Participatory Budgeting	Citizens decide allocation of local funds	Porto Alegre, Brazil
Community Councils	Representative bodies for decision-making	Village development committees
Grassroots Movements	Informal networks advocating for local needs	Environmental Activism groups
Social Networks	Use of digital and offline networks for engagement	WhatsApp community groups

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

- Elite capture: the dominance of local elites can skew outcomes.
- Limited resources: funding or staffing can hinder participation.
- Tokenism: superficial involvement without real influence.
- Digital divide: excludes individuals without digital literacy.
- Culture and Social barriers: elite dominance and culture norms can suppress community voices.

Civic Engagement



Governance Equity Sustainability



Transparency, Benefit, Environmental Protection



Trust, Local Ownership, Accountability



Adaptive & Resilient Communities



PARTICIPATION AND SUSTAINABILITY



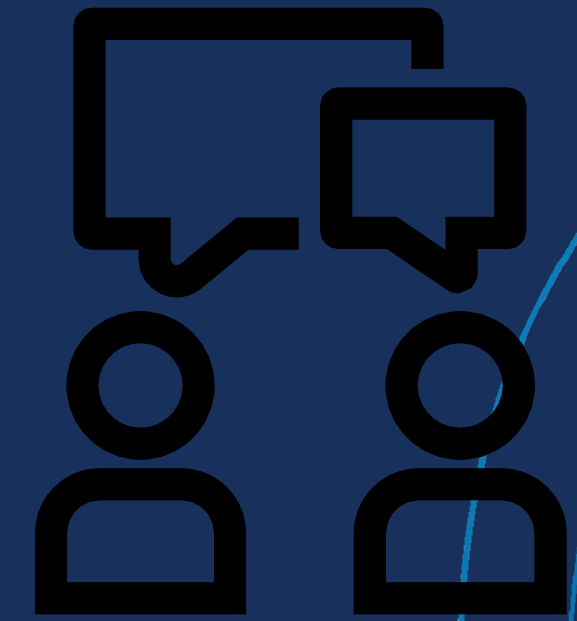
- Environmental: watershed, mangroves, green spaces.
- Social/economic: employment, budgeting, local economic development.
- Health: improves access, strengthens trust, increases service use, and supports resilient health systems

STAKEHOLDER INCLUSION

- Residents, CBOs, government, NGOs.
- Must include marginalized groups.
- Avoid tokenism.
- Successful participation begins with clear identification of stakeholders.



COMMUNICATION AS FOUNDATION



- Ongoing, two-way communication.
- Meetings, workshops, radio, digital platforms.
- Prevents mistrust and misinformation.
- Sustained communication is essential to bridge trust gaps.

GLOBAL EXAMPLES

- Brazil: participatory budgeting → transparency.
 - Uganda: water committees → sustainability.
 - India: forest management → conservation + livelihoods.
 - Improved service delivery, increased transparency, reduced corruption.
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- An abstract graphic consisting of numerous thin, light blue curved lines that sweep across the right side of the slide, creating a sense of motion and depth.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Participation is both process and outcome.
 - Power-sharing is essential.
 - Trust, capacity, and communication drive success.
 - Effective participation requires accountability and strong local commitment.
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THANK YOU!



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