



## Public Participation in Local Government Planning and Development: Evidence from Lagos State, Nigeria

Ayodele. I. Shittu & Abiodun M. Musbaudeen

Department of Economics, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria  
(Corresponding email address: [ishittu@unilag.edu.ng](mailto:ishittu@unilag.edu.ng))

**Abstract:** When members of the public are given the opportunity to participate in local governance, the benefits are immeasurable. Unfortunately, the structure and mechanisms for promoting public participation, especially in the context of a developing country, is underexplored. In this paper, we examine the structure and mechanisms for public participation in two randomly selected communities within Lagos Mainland Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, we measure public participation in terms of the quality of interaction among the members of the community, as well as the interaction between the community and the Local Government Council. Selected Heads of Traditional Councils in these communities were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The findings show that “face-to-face” relationship is a dominant strategy for promoting public participation within the Makoko/Iwaya communities. Consequently, we established that the potential of ICT in the promoting of public participation is far from being explored in these communities. The corresponding policy implications are discussed and recommendations to enhance the use of ICT for promoting public participation are suggested.

**Keywords:** Information Technology, Local Planning, Public Participation, Participation, Mechanism, Participation Structure

### Introduction

The contention that public policy making remains incomplete without public participation is increasing rapidly in today’s modern world (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). In the context of local government planning and development, public participation is a reflection of democratic ideals, especially at the grassroots level (West, 2015; Lafront, 2015). It fosters public trust in governmental legitimacy and responsiveness (Royo, Yetano, &

Acerete, 2014), and it also enhances transparency in the local government regulatory system. Despite these benefits, it is rather unfortunate that experts, practitioners, and policy advocacy groups are yet to better understand how to promote progressive relationship between local people and institutions that affect their lives (Abelson, Forest, Eyles, et al, 2003).

Whether members of the public are sophisticated or not, allowing them to have a say in local governance

through informed, effective, and legitimate channels is currently being canvassed. For instance, Putnam (1993), Frederickson and O'Leary (2014), as well as Polletta (2014) argue that if ordinary people are provided with effective public participation mechanisms, positive pro-poor and pro-democratic outcomes will be manifested. Consequently, continuous and dynamic learning, as well as constructive dialogue between the ordinary people and the local government has the potential to stimulate innovative social solutions. While we do not contest this line of argument, we wonder what participatory mechanisms are available to the ordinary people of Lagos Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.

This study, therefore, examines the structure and mechanisms of public participation in two randomly selected communities (i.e. Makoko and Iwaya) in Lagos Mainland Local Government Area. Specifically, we seek to answer three research questions, which include; what is the structure of public participation in these communities? What are the mechanisms of public participation that are available for the people of these communities? What is the role of information technology (ICT) in ensuring that the people of these

communities participate in local governance? The study is, therefore, structured as follows: section two is the literature review, section three focuses on the research methodology, section four discusses the findings, and section five the concluding part of the study.

### **An Explorative Analysis**

For the purpose of this paper, public participation is defined as the peoples' access, whether directly or indirectly, to policy and operational engagements of the government for the purpose of promoting a well-informed public, enhanced inclusive decision-making making, and altered patterns of political power (Wang & Wart, 2007). The significance of this definition is better appreciated if more attention is given to the underlying components (Table 1). In other words, public participation requires that stakeholders' involvement in government functions and decision-making processes should be encouraged using the available participation mechanisms. While the participation in decision-making processes defines the depth of participation in a society, both participation in government functions and the available participation mechanisms define the widespread of participation within a society.

**Table 1: Dimensions and Measures of Public Participation**

Concept	Dimensions	Definitions	Measurement Indices
Public Participation	Participation Mechanisms	Organizational Establishment/Tools for Participation	Participation Mode Index (PMI)
	Participation in Functions	Managerial Functions	Functions Participation Index (FPI)
		Service-Delivery Functions	
Participation in Decision-making	Public involvements in Decision-making Processes	Decision-Making Participation Index (DMPI)	

Source: Compiled by the Authors (2015)

**Models of Public Participation**

Elitist model of public participation (Brown, 1990) asserts that the members of the decision making group should consist of qualified candidates. According to this model, the qualified candidates comprise the informed members of the community such as the socialites, the educated, and the wealthy few among the residents in a given community. Unfortunately, this model gives little or no recognition to the non-informed public members.

Building on the elitist model, the incremental gains model (Torgerson, 1986) argues that not all members of the public are well informed about the process of making decisions. In other words, the non-members of the elite groups can also contribute meaningfully to local decision-making. This model posits that rather ignoring this class of citizens, they can be empowered through public education. Although, the gains of public empowerment may not suffice in the short-run, there will be broad based decision-making in the long run by members of the

public. By then, they would have been better equipped to participate proficiently in local decision making processes. However, if the small elites were to be dominant, public education for the uneducated may not be supported.

Evan Vlachos (1993) model of public participation focuses on the levels of public participation. This model postulates that there is a clear distinction among public awareness, public involvement and public participation. Public awareness entails a unidirectional dissemination of information to the members of a community. Public involvement comprises a bi-directional dissemination of information between the public authorities and the members of a community. Unlike these two, public participation is broader. It focuses more on public involvement, as well as democratic and shared delegation of authorities between the public authorities and the people.

“If an important decision that will shape a community’s future is made by an elite group of insiders or by

outside experts, community residents who are left out may not stand for it. The result can be delay, distrust, controversy, litigation, or inaction. In contrast, when decisions are developed by all different kinds of people in the community, they're likely to enjoy broad support." (Kinsley, MJ 1997)

The discussion so far in this section can be compressed as follows:

- Decision-making at the grassroots may be complex but it is wrong to underestimate the power of "common" people. They can also contribute positively to the decision-making process.
- When decision-making is confined only to the hands of the "qualified," confrontations can easily ensue.
- Public education is germane to building a knowledge-based community.
- Public participation is complex and laden with interactions among the public authorities, the experts, and the people. Thus, the role of joint planning is clearly underlined.
- Inequality, however, remains an issue of concern especially in the context of the distribution of human and institutional resources. Thus, the maximization of value preferences of the stakeholders in local government planning is clearly underlined.

## **Public Participation and Local Government Planning**

The main conclusions of the preceding sections are that public participation is a complex act with varying dynamics, especially when the focus is on planning. On the other hand, local planning has received little or no attention so far. In this section, we, therefore, consider the objectives of public participation and how they are related to, or influence, local government planning. Specifically, we look into how information exchange, building community support, and representational inputs promote local government planning. In addition, we review extant evidences relating to why public participation remains elusive in local government planning.

### *Information Exchange*

The role of information exchange in local planning process cannot be emphasized. The concept of information is well entrenched in economics of information. According to Stiglitz (1991), *information is neither perfect nor costless*. Depending the prevailing structural setting, the selection of information, the presentation, and the interpretation of information exchanged will determine the extent to which public participation will influence local government planning. In addition, the competence model (Webler, 1995) emphasizes that appropriate knowledge dissemination predicts the perceived understanding of

extant issues at the grassroots, which in turns, predicts the extent of public participation in local planning. These imply that when the available technical information meet public understanding, especially at the grassroots, such information are better digested and appropriately interpreted. Thus, the quality of information exchanged has impact on local government planning.

#### *Community Support*

King et al. (1998) argue that citizens are willing and ready to participate provided their efforts and opinions count. Harnessing the support of the community in a planning process requires wide consultations among the stakeholders. In addition, public authorities need to promote fairness in their selection processes such that equal access to opportunities and mutual respect will be guaranteed. No doubt, community dynamics, culture, and shared histories vary. Yet, they play important role in community deliberative process (Abelson et al, 2003). Besides, the dynamism that engulfs existing participation mechanisms can either motivate or discourage grassroots mobilization. When the modes are open, transparent, and fair enough to guarantee social accountability, the task of mobilizing community support for local government planning will be enhanced. Thus, community support, with minimal interest group capture through equity and fairness in grassroots mobilization, has impact on local government planning.

#### *Representational Input*

Although equity in grassroots selection matters, geographical, demographic, and political representation also counts in the process of deliberation and political dialogue. The variance in community dynamics attests to the wider views that are present in a community setting. Given the level of information available to empower the public, and the support garnered from the grassroots, their respective inputs has the potential to make or mar local government planning. The contributions of representational inputs to local government planning will be better appreciated if equal opportunities are extended to all existing groups in the community such that they have access to the available modes of participation, issues raised are clarified without ambiguity, and the legitimacy in their selection process is honoured. Hence, trust will be entrenched among the stakeholders and consequently, they will be motivated to contribute progressively to the planning processes.

At this juncture, we reiterate the position of Reeds (2008) who posited that “... *stakeholders’ participation needs to be underpinned by a philosophy that emphasizes empowerment, equity, trust and learning*”. Our discussion so far demonstrates that of the link between public participation and local government planning is not direct. Rather, the peoples’ will to

participate in the local planning processes depend on a number of factors including, the political structure, the participation mechanisms, the perceived level of empowerment, equity, and trust between the public authorities and other stakeholders. Hence, weak legitimacy of decision-making process, weak accountability, weak constituency, and poor project planning are a few of the reasons why public participation in local government planning in a developing country like Nigeria remains elusive.

### **Information Technology (IT) and Public Participation**

The emergence of information technology (IT) is rapidly changing the dynamics of public participation and its potential impacts on local planning (Ferraz de Abreu, 2002; Kingston, 2002; Hanzl, 2007; Twitchen & Adams, 2011). The level of influence posed by information technology (IT) on public participation, however, varies from continent to continent, and from country to country. Despite this, however, the potentials of IT in mobilizing the public to engage in local planning processes abound. For instance, technology-based tools provide strong support for democratic innovations through localised planning systems and participatory democracy (Twitchen & Adams, 2011). They provide platforms for qualitative improvement in participation, decision-making, and localised

planning (Ferraz de Abreu, 2002). They facilitate collaborative distance work among citizens and concerned local stakeholders (Hanzl, 2007). They also support analytic deliberative processes (Nyerges et al, 2006).

### *Public Participation: Criteria for Adopting Information Technology*

The choice of selecting a technology for the purpose of mobilizing people for planning can be based on several criteria. For the purpose of this article, we discuss only the two most compelling criteria (Ferraz de Abreu, 2002; Macintosh & Whyte, 2006; Hanzl, 2007; Twitchen & Adams, 2011). These are adequacy and communication.

#### *Adequacy Criterion*

As the name connotes, the technology to be adopted by a community for the sake of mobilizing and engaging the people in local planning processes must be adequate. This criterion emphasizes that the following items should be looked into very closely:

- ❖ The type and quality of data required
- ❖ The choice of media, especially in terms of sound, text, picture, map, video, etc
- ❖ The ease of use of such technology
- ❖ The accessibility of the people to such technology
- ❖ The trust and response legitimacy to be generated.

The adequacy criterion, if adhered to, helps to minimize the barriers associated with the use of

technology after its adoption. It also caters for a very wide range of literacy and IT-related skills.

#### *Communication Criterion*

The communication criterion emphasizes that “kinds of communication”, “types of communication”, and “forms of communication” are distinct concepts, which should be better understood before adopting a technology for public participation sake. Communication forms an integral part of the participatory process. Open communication, in particular, fosters discussion, deliberation, and interaction among the stakeholders in local planning processes. Open communication consists of a two-way information exchange between the people and the local authorities. If well harnessed, it has the potential to contribute progressively to local trust building process. Based on this criterion, the technology to be adopted should support information exchange, information up-date, and the quality interaction among the existing actors.

Consequently, communication through IT can enhance the quality of plans, decisions, and public interactions.

#### *Public Participation: Barriers to Information Technology Adoption*

Beyond the gains attributable to the choice of information technology embraced for the purpose of public participation, the features of these technologies pose some adoption barriers, especially among developing countries such as

Nigeria. Some of these features include; versatility, adaptability, robustness, non-structured search, and support-user input. In addition, selected needs such as contents, feedbacks, corrections, upload/downloads, and up-to-date data management showcase the shortcomings associated with the capacity to use technology-based tools for public participation and planning at the local levels. Some of the visible barriers include:

- ❖ High cost of implementation
- ❖ Time and financial resources required are quite limited
- ❖ The multidisciplinary issues embedded in IT makes its adoption a complex task
- ❖ Lack of will to let go of prevailing institutional norms
- ❖ The existing value system
- ❖ IT infrastructural shortfalls
- ❖ IT usage and planning evaluation gaps

So far, our discussion implies that information technology (IT) can push people to participate in local planning provided that the adopted IT is well coordinated with the public participation objectives identified in the previous section: information exchange, support building, and representational inputs. Interestingly, IT does not affect local planning directly. Some internal drivers, especially the level of literacy among the people mediate between IT for public participation and local planning. For instance, information exchange comprises gathering of data, structuring the

data, and analyzing the data for a deep understanding of the existing local issues. Thus, IT for public participation among enlightened community members will foster strategic, investment, institutional, and regulatory choices for enhanced local planning purposes.

**Mechanisms for Public Participation**

Public participation mechanisms are the approaches available for the purpose of consulting, involving and informing the public concerning matters that affect them. Beyond these, public participation mechanisms seeks to gather public opinions for the purpose of enhanced decision-making (Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Wang & Wart, 2007). At

present, we can classify these mechanisms into two groups namely, the conventional mechanisms and the technology-driven mechanisms.

*Conventional Public Participation Mechanisms*

Conventional mechanisms for public participation are the common traditional methods of public participation. These mechanisms are available for the purpose of consulting, involving and informing the public concerning matters that affect them. They also seek to gather public opinions for the purpose of enhanced decision-making (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). Beyond these, however, they are neither technology-based nor are affiliated to web-based innovations.

**Table 2: Formalized Public Participation Mechanisms**

Participation Mechanisms	Nature of Participation	Time Scale/ Duration	Characteristics
Referendum	All members of local population	Vote cast at a single point in time	Participants have equal influence Participants have two options Final outcome is binding
Public Hearing	Only interested citizens attend Expert participants Politicians	Often last many weeks	Special agencies make presentations Public may voice their opinions Public have no direct impact on recommendations
Public Opinion Survey	Large sample Representative of the target population	Single event Last for few minutes	Written questionnaires Telephone survey
Consensus Conference	10 to 16 members of the public represents the	Preparatory demonstrations (i.e.	Lay panel with independent facilitators



	general public Members have varying backgrounds	small group meetings)  3-days conference	Meetings opened to public  Conclusions accessible to public via press conference
Citizens' Jury/Panel	12 to 24 members of the public	Meetings extend over a few days	Lay panel with independent facilitators  Meetings not opened to public  Conclusions accessible to public via press conference
Citizens' Advisory Committee	Small group Members selected by a sponsor	Often last over period of time	Examines significant issues  Often interact with professionals
Focus Groups	Small group 5 to 12 members selected to represent the public	Single meeting  Often last up to 2 hours	Free discussion on a general topic  Discussions are often recorded  Assesses public opinion

Source: Rowe and Frewer (2000)

Public hearing helps to build community support and trust, especially for new development initiatives. It neither yields a two-way dialogue nor meaningfully engages the public in affairs that are of broader concerns to the community. It also breeds single-interest individuals, which delays local planning process.

### **Technology-Driven Public Participation Mechanisms**

Technology-driven mechanisms for public participation, as the name connotes, are based on the evolving technology (i.e. the internet and the World Wide Web). The internet is progressively assuming the role of democratising tool and it is creating an innovative platform for people to come closer and participate in public debates and deliberations for the

purpose of local planning. More importantly, *e-Participation* is progressively becoming an alternative for the famous conventional mechanisms. With *e-Participation*, citizens in local communities can explore, experiment, formulate, review, and comment on other peoples' idea with immediate feedback. Thus, the advent of the internet eliminates the need to sit for long hours in an enclosed setting deliberating on public matters. The internet is arguably one of the steps to building an information-rich society.

Geographic Information System (GIS) constitute a leading technology innovation poised for promoting public participation for local planning purposes. Built on the flexibility of Web 2.0 technologies,

grassroots/community-based GIS and public participation GIS (PPGIS) are gaining prominence in the mobilization of people in local planning processes. The growth in the relevance of technology-enhanced public participation can be attributed to the relative accessibility of the internet, its relative low cost of entry, its potential for interactions and connectivity among diverse user-groups (Twitchen & Adams, 2011). GIS-based mechanisms are, however, subject to systemic barriers including the disparity in income levels, prevailing user diversity, and increasing cost of acquiring data copy rights (Twitchen & Adams, 2011). In addition, issues of trust and legitimacy limit the prospect of using technology innovations to drive public participation for local planning motives.

### **Research Methodology**

Public participation in local planning and development is rapidly gaining prominence among policy makers and scholars (Macintosh & Whyte, 2006). But the ability to raise questions that encompasses political, technical, and social perspective remains a challenge in the evaluation of the role of public participation in local government planning (Li, Liu, & Li, 2012). In fact, public participation in several developing countries, including Nigeria, is still in its infancy (Li, Ng., & Skitmore, 2012). These make the measurement of public participation a daunting task among extant scholars. Thus, focused conversational meeting

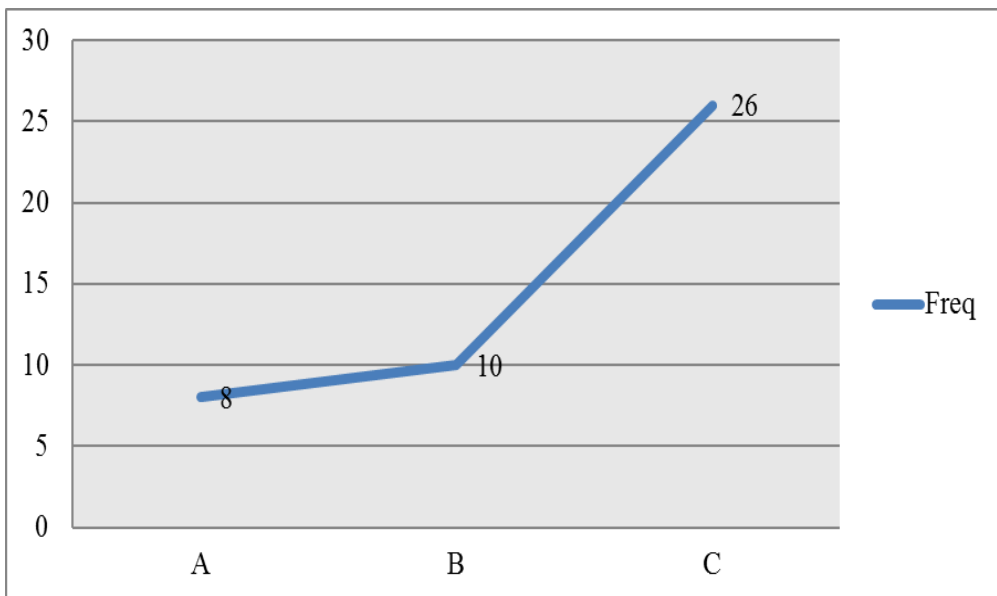
(Halvorsen, 2003), interviews (Dangi, Fernandez, Bom, et al, 2015) and in some cases, structured interview (Li, Ng., & Skitmore, 2012) are common methods of gathering data for the purpose of examining the roles of public participation.

Following Li, Ng., and Skitmore (2012), as well as Nguyen, Le, Tran, and Bryant (2015), we conducted a semi-structured interview among the existing chiefs in three selected communities (Makoko and Iwaya) in Yaba Local Community Development Area (LCDA) of Lagos State, Nigeria. We preferred this method because it affords us the opportunity to interact with respondents and also helps us to identify the mechanisms of participation that is often used in these communities. Besides, semi-structured interview supports the exploration of perceptions, creates room for probing for more information, and also gives spaces for the clarification of answers (Barriball & While, 1994). We use an interview guide to identify each chief's perception and opinion of (i) interaction, (ii) influence, (iii) institution, (iv) integration, and (v) ICT utilization. The survey questions are provided in Appendix.

Our choice of the Makoko and Iwaya Communities is based on its rapid growing prominence among Nigerian scholars and policy makers, especially the Lagos State Government. The evidences obtained from Google scholar support this

assertion. Using the key words (“makoko, iwaya, and Lagos”), we had a total outcome of fifty-nine articles, including chapters in books. Following a careful check, fourteen had no date of publication at all and were consequently deleted. We divided the remaining forty-five into three cohorts according the following years: (A) < 2000 – 2004, (B) 2005 – 2009, and (c) 2010 – 2014. We observe a growing trend in the

volume of articles which cited Makoko or Iwaya communities one way or the other. Figure 1 shows that the volume of articles published during the second cohort (B) increased by two (i.e. 25 percent growth rate). Moving to the third cohort (C), the volume of published articles increased exponentially, with a corresponding growth rate of 160 percent.



**Figure 1:** Trend in the Volume of Articles Published on Makoko/Iwwaya (<2000 -2014)

Interestingly, the distribution of these articles comprises four broad areas of interest: environmental sciences (e.g. Adedibu & Okekunle, 1989; Yadau, 2012; Simon, Adegoke, & Adewale, 2013; Akinsete, Hoelzel, & Oshodi, 2014), natural sciences (e.g. Adeboyejo, 2011; Odunuga, Oyebande, & Omojola, 2012), health (e.g.

Kunnuyi, Adejoh, Esiet, & Esiet, 2013), and tourism (Uduma-Olugu & Oduwaye (nd)). Both communities share similar characteristics. These communities accommodate low-income earners living amidst visible poverty. The communities have two diverse settlements: settlement squatter and slum settlement. In addition, the communities are

considered to be neighbourhood hotspot, especially in the context of Lagos State mega city project. We identified 18 Heads of Traditional Councils (Báálès) across Makoka and Iwaya communities. However, we were able to interview only 5 of them, representing 42 percent. These interviews were conducted on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2015.

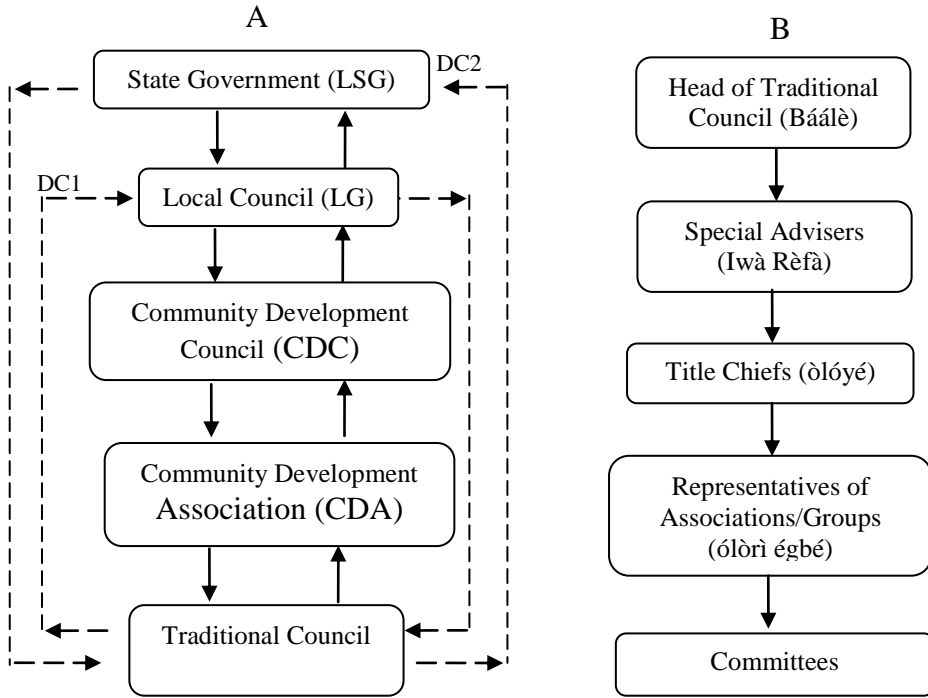
### **Research Results**

This study sets out to identify the structure and mechanisms of public participation for local government planning and development with special attention accorded the Makoko/Iwaya Communities in Lagos State of Nigeria. So, our questions were structured to capture both objectives. In this section, we present our findings based on the interviews with the selected chiefs. First, we present the structure of public participation in local planning, as explained to us by the chiefs. This is followed by the choice

of public participation mechanisms they use within their respective communities.

### **Structure of Public Participation in Makoko/Iwaya Communities**

All the Heads of Traditional Councils interviewed, for the purpose of this study, attest to the fact that there is a structure for local planning in Lagos State. On one hand, there is a structure for the local communities to connect with the local authorities (Fig. 2A). In this case, the Heads of the Traditional Councils are at the bottom of the ladder. On the other hand (Fig. 2B), they are at the top of the ladder. Thus, Fig. 2B can be described as a structure, which is put in place in order to further penetrate into the local community for the purpose of effective information exchange, mobilization for community support, as well as ensuring equal representational inputs, especially in matters that are of importance to the welfare of the local people.



**Figure 2:** The Structure for Public Participation in Lagos State, Nigeria

*Public Participation Structure:  
Community vis-à-vis Local  
Authorities*

In Lagos State, according to the Heads of Traditional Councils, the welfare of the local people in Makoko/Iwaya Communities is of significance to the local authorities. While the channels of communication, up the ladder, is well articulated in Fig.2, we observe during our interaction with these Heads of Traditional Councils that they sometimes have direct communication with the higher local authorities (i.e. Chairman of the Local Council Development Area, LCDA) as well as the state government (i.e. State Governor). The choice of a direct

communication is taken only if the need warrants such. By law, the Heads of Traditional Councils must follow the hierarchy as demonstrated in Fig. 2A.

Standing between the Heads of Traditional Councils and the Local Government are two important bodies: the Community Development Associations (CDAs) and the Community Development Councils (CDCs). Although the latter is higher in hierarchy, they both perform similar functions of ensuring effective information exchange, mobilization of community support, and providing representational inputs. At present, there are fifty-seven Community Development Councils (CDCs) in Lagos State,

while the Community Development Association (CDA) exists in each administrative ward across the state. In addition, the CDAs serve as liason between the local people and the Local Councils.

The Local Government (LG), which is also the third tier of government in Nigeria, has both the Legislative and the Executive arms. At this level, the Legislative arm (i.e. the Local Councils) plays a key role in local planning and development process. As such, public participation matters in the effective delivery of their legislative functions. While the 1999 Constitution recognizes only 20 Local Government Areas (LGA) in Lagos State, there are thirty-seven (37) Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs) in the state. Specifically, Makoko/Iwaya Communities are under the control of Yaba LCDA.

Furthermore, three other bodies came to light during our interview with these Heads of Traditional Councils. That is, Lagos State Waste Management Authority (LAWMA) Enlightenment Gang (i.e. for community waste management and enlightenment matters), the Neighborhood Watch (i.e. for community security matters), and the Lagos State Community Development Advisory Council (LSCDAC). Among these, LSCDAC has been in existence since May 06, 1992. It comprises the Chairman of LSCDAC, Secretaries of the CDCs, and two (2) members each from the fifty-seven CDCs across the state.

The current administration of LSCDAC (i.e. the 8<sup>th</sup> Council) was inaugurated in September, 2014. The tasks of this body include: to mobilize community support for development initiatives, to boost participation in meaningful governance, to promote adequate community influence in governance, and to plan, coordinate, and execute community development projects for the purpose of improving welfare at the grassroots.

#### *Public Participation Structure: Traditional Councils vis-à-vis Communities*

The relationship between the Heads of Traditional Councils and the community members is also guided by a clearly defined structure of public participation. Evidences derived from our discussions with the Heads of Traditional Councils reveal that there are three important bodies between them and the community members. This is not saying that the Heads of Traditional Councils do not communicate directly with the subjects. They do but the procedures already laid out for the purpose of public participation have to be abided with accordingly.

Immediately after the Báálès, we have the special advisers. As their title implies, they body of people perform two important tasks for the Báálès. They act in their capacity as think tanks. They also advice the Báálès on issues that have the prospect of causing confusion before the Báálè speaks on the matter.

Members of the special body are selected based on the Báálè's discretion and level of trust among his Title Chiefs. Usually, this body has a maximum of three members with at least one woman (i.e. the Igbogi Iyalòdé).

At the base of the ladder are the local people or the community.

In Lagos State, according to the Heads of Traditional Councils, the welfare of the local people in Makoko/Iwaya Communities is of significance to the local authorities. While the channels of communication, up the ladder, is well articulated in Fig.2, we observe during our interaction with these Heads of Traditional Councils that they sometimes have direct communication with the higher local authorities (i.e. Chairman of the Local Council Development Area, LCDA) as well as the state government (i.e. State Governor).

Next the Special Advisers are the Title Chiefs (i.e. the òlójé). Their functions include settling disputes among members of the community, deliberating with the Báálè on matters arising within the community, gathering opinions from members of the community on behalf of the Báálè, and they also facilitate interactions between the Báálè and the members of the community. The representative groups stand in the middle of the òlójés and the Committees. This body comprises the head of the existing groups and associations within the community. The Báálè

also holds the body with high esteem. Although their function is not in any way similar to that of the Báálè's Special Advisers, they act as a source of information exchange between the Báálè and the community members. They also serve as negotiators and mediators for their respective group members, who cannot air their voices to the Báálè at all times.

Finally, the committee comprises at most thirteen members. They perform more of integration functions including: agenda-setting, planning, preparations, decision-making, implementation, evaluation, and control. The Báálè knows well that the entire community members cannot perform a given task at the same time. So, he discusses with the Committees after due consultation with his Special Advisers, due deliberation with the chief, and effective negotiations with the representative groups. We have no course to doubt the Heads of Traditional Councils on the flow of communication because it obviously reduces the rate of disagreement between them and their community members. We also gathered that this structure as it is being practised in Makoko/Iwaya Communities has so far facilitated political transactions between the Heads of Traditional Councils and their community members, as well as between the Heads of Traditional Councils and the Local Council authorities.

So far, we concur with the arguments that the structure of public

participation precedes the mechanisms of public participation, especially in the contest of local planning and development. While both the structure and mechanisms of public participation are of significant importance, the structure of public participation underlies the creation of citizen-centered solution, especially at the grassroots. Beyond this, the quality of the structure in terms of accountability, equity, and transparency matter for the purposes of taking strategic choices, investment choices, institutional choices, and regulatory choices. Thus, the structure of public participation supports local planning and development.

### **Conventional Mechanisms of Public Participation in Makoko/Iwaya Communities**

Earlier in section 2.4.1, we identified seven distinct conventional mechanisms for public participation. We observe that only one of the mechanisms is commonly used among these local communities (i.e. public hearing). Following a successful interview with the available Heads of the Traditional Councils, in Table 3, we summarize their responses in terms of the conventional mechanisms employed in their respective communities. Another visible fact from Table 3 is that only one of the Heads of the Traditional Councils acknowledges the use of focus group for the purpose of enhancing public participation within their local community.

**Table 3:** Public Participation Mechanisms in Makoko/Iwaya Communities

Public Participation Mechanisms	Head of Traditional Councils				
	I	II	III	IV	V
Referendum	X	X	X	X	X
Public Hearing	•	•	•	•	•
Public Opinion Survey	X	X	X	X	X
Consensus Conference	X	X	X	X	X
Citizens' Jury	X	X	X	X	X
Citizens' Advisory Committee	X	X	X	X	X
Focus Groups	X	•	X	X	X

Note: (X) implies that the public participation mechanism is not in use in these communities, otherwise, the mechanism is in use.



### *Citizens' Participation in Public Hearing*

The nomenclature Public hearings in these communities merit our attention so much that we sought further clarifications from the Heads of the Traditional Councils. Our findings reveal that this mechanism, as practiced in these communities, includes: town-hall meetings and community stakeholders' meeting. Of these two, the former is prominent among all the communities in Makoko and Iwaya. It is only of recent that community stakeholders' meeting was conceived when the sitting Chairman of Yaba LCDA organised one in order to carry the communities along.

### *Experts' Participation in Public Hearing*

Another revelation from our interview with the Heads of the Traditional Councils of these communities is that so far three classes of experts have had regular meetings with the communities using the town-hall platform. These are the Nigerian Police, health officials, and varying non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They all recounted their meeting with the Nigerian Police which took place because of the rising crime rate in the communities. For health matters, the health officials come around regularly to sensitize the people, especially the mothers, in order to boost local health consciousness among the inhabitants. They also appreciate the roles of the NGOs,

especially with respect to community-related services.

### *Public Opinions in Public Hearing*

Beyond the presence of citizens who are willing to participate in the town hall meetings, and the presentations made by the experts, this medium affords the people of these communities to speak out what they have in mind, whether it will further the course of the gathering or not. An interesting findings revelation from our discussion with the Heads of the Traditional Councils is that the communities have varying associations. Some of these include the Landlords' Association, Association of Artisans, Youth Movements, etc. Each of the existing associations in these communities gets an invitation to attend the town-hall meetings anytime such is conveyed. Equal representation by these associations increases the depth of opinion polls in this type of gathering, put together for the purpose of local planning and development.

Despite the lofty goodwill attached to the choice of town-hall meetings in these communities, it has a strong setback. These Heads of Traditional Councils lament bitterly that they still do not understand the practical viability of the town-hall meetings. In other words, several of the decisions made at the end of several town-hall meetings are thrown into the dust. And if not, they get a different feedback from the concerned authorities. Consequently, the legitimacy of holding town-hall

meetings is gradually being eroded off.

Another challenge confronting the choice of town-hall meetings in these communities is the struggle for power between the landlords and the tenants. According to the Heads of Traditional Councils, the landlords have an erroneous belief that the tenants have no role to play in the process of decision-making at the community level. On the other hand, many of the tenants are more politically sophisticated. Thus, the role of politics takes precedence in extant town-hall meetings.

Furthermore, poor cooperation among the Heads of Traditional Councils reduces the significance of town-hall meetings in these communities. For instance, the communities comprise several tribes including the Egùns, the Hausas, the Ilajes, the Yorubas, and the Ijaws. However, among the Heads of the Traditional Councils currently recognised by Lagos State Government, twelve are Egun Báálè and only two are Yorubas. Thus, effective communication, constructive dialogue, and efficient coordination among the Heads remain a challenge in these communities.

### **IT-Based Mechanisms of Public Participation in Makoko/Iwaya Communities**

The choice of using technology-driven participation mechanisms by the Heads of the Traditional Councils in Makoko and Iwaya communities is laden with several challenges. One, we discovered that only two of these Heads of Traditional Councils have a functioning “android-based” mobile phone. Consequently, we sought to know if they use media such as facebook, twitter, wecaht, and likedIn to seek participation among their community members. Our findings reveal that of the two, only one Head uses twitter but for personal communication with friends and associates only.

Two, the level of literacy among the inhabitants of these communities is relatively low. For instance, we had a fruitful discussion with one of the CDA Chairman, who laments that many of the community members barely have up to twelve years of schooling. They neither appreciate the essence of the GSM phones nor can they read short messages (SMS). This Chairman concludes that many of the community members are yet to accept the new world order of technology.

**Table 4:** Selected ICT Media for Public Participation in Makoko/Iwaya Communities

IT-Based Mechanisms	Head of Traditional Councils				
	I	II	III	IV	V
Facebook	X	X	X	X	X
Twitter	X	•	X	X	X
Wechat	X	X	X	X	X
Likedln	X	X	X	X	X

This is not to say that many of these community members do not have phones. Yes, they do but many do have the opportunity of using generators to charge their phones. In other words, electricity is a big challenge in these communities. While this is not a peculiar challenge, our emphasis is on the fact that many cannot afford to pay for generator-used charging points. Hence, the choice of exchanging information among the community members using ICT would probably be an option among generations yet unborn, says one the Heads of the Traditional Councils.

To make up for all these lapses, we asked each Head of the Traditional Councils the methods adopted in their various communities. Two options appear very glaring:

- Letter Writing
- Town Criers

Each community has a secretary, who takes minutes during meetings, irrespective of the magnitude of the meetings. The Secretary is also

charged with the responsibility of writing official letters and correspondences between the community and the public authorities. According to one of the Secretaries, *“letter writing remains a preferred option, especially when communicating with recognized public authorities.”* On the other hand, the use of town criers is the most preferred option. This involves the use of gong, a traditional tool, followed by the messages from the Heads of the Traditional Councils to the members of the community. Using this medium, each message is passed out to the people at least twice daily: morning and afternoon.

**Policy Implications of the Findings**

The summary of the findings from this study is that the power of decision-making within and around these communities is limited to a small class of rulers and decision-makers. This aligns with the postulations of the elitist model (Brown, 1990), which emphasizes that

planning and development decision-making is limited a selected few, especially the upper-middle class minority in the community. It is also in consonance with Arnstein's (1975) principle of tokenism, which stresses that community participants are mere information providers. Both of these have implications for local planning and development. In other words, when local planning decision making is limited to a selected few, while the majority in the community is relegated to the provision of information only, democratic innovations and good governance will be at stake.

### **Implications for Democratic Innovations**

No doubt, we are currently in a democratic regime, where the common man is expected to have a voice in matters affecting local planning and development. Unfortunately, the elites have an upper hand when it comes to mobilizing popular participation for specific outcomes. In short, democracy has become a territorially-based competitive platform among the elites for securing power either through legislative or executive offices (Fung & Wright, 2001). Consequently, democratic innovations are utterly discouraged because local democratic structures are under siege, and gross inefficiency characterises locally administered services. What is the way out of this? There is an urgent need for the Local Government Chairman in this

vicinity, as well as the Traditional Heads of the various communities, to establish new channels of participation for the common man. Public participation, if promoted with sincerity, can boost communication between the common man and the government and it can also legitimize political decision (Vogt & Haas, 2015).

### **Implications for e-Participation**

The Legitimation hypothesis argues that the internet and different types of information and communication technology (ICT) are tools for providing public services and promoting economic growth (Åström, Karlsson, Linde & Pirannejad, 2012). In the context of local planning and development, can ICT promote local economic growth? Obviously, our answer will be in the affirmative. E-participation will boost local economic growth as long as ICT infrastructure is available up to the local communities. The utilization of the ICT infrastructure will, however, be undermined where the common man lacks the requisite ability and capability. For instance, in the course of our interview with the Traditional Heads of these selected communities, we were informed that many members of these communities can neither read nor write short messages (SMS). So, using existing mobile technology for the purpose of promoting public participation is currently a big challenge in these communities. Consequently, the potentials of e-participation for local

economic growth in these communities are undermined.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has identified the structure and mechanisms of public participation for local government planning and development, with special attention accorded the Makoko/Iwaya Communities in Lagos State of Nigeria. Following an in-depth interaction with five Heads of Traditional Councils in these communities, our findings reveal that “face-to-face” participation mechanisms prevail in these communities. On the other hand, the use of technology-driven participation mechanisms is not often considered due to the realities that pervade these communities.

Technology-driven participation mechanisms, of course, require some level of literacy and relative availability of electricity to charge and recharge available mobile phones. Unfortunately, the poverty level among the members of these communities is so glaring that many are not bothered about the quality of the mobile phone they use. What is rather important to them is that they are receiving calls and can also make calls. They can hardly read short messages (SMS) even if bulk SMS is to be explored.

In terms of the structure for public participation, we observe that power and legitimacy are recurring issues in these communities. Although the

structure is well spelt out, the question of who has the authority to nominate the members of Community Development Associations (CDAs), as well as the Community Development Councils (CDCs) was not clearly answered. Another issue that is attached to this - who is more qualified to represent the community, the landlord or the tenants? Consequently, there is a growing perception that the process of public participation has been politicized and its implications on trust cannot be over-emphasized.

The study has a noticeable limitation. The findings are based on the interaction of the researchers with the Heads of Traditional Councils in these communities. They constitute a small fraction of the entire stakeholders in local planning processes. An empirical study which seeks to establish the impact of public participation on local planning and development would make an enduring direction for future research. In addition, the relationship between perceived public participation and public trust, and their effect on local planning process is still under-explored in these communities.

Furthermore, establishing, systematically, the barriers to the adoption of ICT-based public participation mechanisms in these communities would make a fruitful research endeavour.

deliberative methods: Issues in the design and evaluation of public participation process.

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