Busara Groundwork

LESSONS LEARNED

Too, Gideon[1]

NO 16

November 2024

How can citizens' voices enhance governance?

Reflections from applied behavioral science research on what motivates citizen participation in East Africa

Busara

Key words:
citizen participation
citizen engagement
community engagement
governance
interventions
capacity building
behavioral science

Author affiliations:
[1] Busara

Conflicts of interest:
There are no conflicts of interest to declare for this study.

Copyedited by:
Michael Onsando

Designed by:
Lynette Gow

Acknowledgement
We would like to acknowledge Busara teams, past and present, for their contributions to creating this body of work and building trust with our partners. Special thanks to Alisa Zomer and Lula Chen from the MIT GOV/LAB, who offered guidance and reviews in the ideation and writing of this groundwork, which was initiated as part of MIT GOV/LAB's practitioner-in-residence program. We would also like to pay special tribute to our Funders, CSO partners and citizens who have been part of this journey.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AUDAS	Align, Understand, Design, Assess, Share
BeGov	Behavioral Science for Governance
BIT	Behavioral Insights Team
CBM	Community-based monitoring
CBOs	Community-based Organizations
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CMCP	Community Messaging and Civic Participation
FCAP	Facilitated Collective Action Process
GBV	Gender-based violence
GRA	Global Rights Alert
HIP	Healthy Internet Project
LC	Local Council
MP	Member of Parliament
NLP	Natural Language Processing
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trial
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation
TESTS	Target, Explore, Solution, Trial, Scale
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UWONET	Uganda Women's Network
WEIRD	Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Developed

Table of contents

Figures

Executive Summary

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are crucial vehicles to deepening governance, accountability, and inclusive development. They tend to address issues such as human and community rights, natural resource management, gender inclusivity, and the rights of persons with disabilities, among others. Primarily, they do this through community engagement, community empowerment, and/or grassroots organizing. Through years of collaboration with CSOs, we observed little experimentation and innovation on methods that best incorporate behavioral approaches by CSOs, relative to practitioners in the private sector. This can be attributed to a general limited awareness of resources and methods available for experimentation and innovation and a perception that behavioral science is too technical, academic, or complex for their organizations. Additionally, CSOs face particular pressures, incentives, and competing priorities, such as relationships with their communities, peer organizations, policymakers, and funders.

As Busara, we have had the privilege of bearing witness to how the public and social sectors have been re-imagining their work through behavioral science while also playing an active role in driving and shaping this evolution. With this groundwork, we provide a set of reflections from conducting our CSO research programs, which has taken us on a winding journey close to a decade and, as with all meaningful research endeavors, generated more questions than answers. The reflections provided in this groundwork are not meant to provide definitive conceptual conclusions or insights regarding how to motivate citizen engagement in East Africa. Instead, they are organized around the lessons Busara has learned. In sharing these reflections, we hope to provide civil society practitioners, applied researchers, funders, and policymakers with insights on the valuable ways to think about understanding, evaluating, and applying audience behaviors in bottom-up governance

and citizen engagement interventions in non-WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Developed) contexts.

Some initial learnings point towards expanding the meaning of civic engagement by paying attention to context. This is especially important within East Africa where social norms define individual behaviors. Through close collaboration with CSOs, we learnt that there is no simple way to motivate engagement. However, self agency plays a crucial role in engagement, but there is a constant need for incentives to foster meaningful engagement among citizens. We further found that community meetings are the most prominent form of engagement among CSOs. They are the initial points of entry into a community. Making them more effective should therefore be a top priority to encourage meaningful engagement with community members. For instance, by making them more inclusive and paying attention to the needs of the members.

We have also found that a rights based approach in community engagement is ineffective. We think that CSOs would make citizens more engaged if they showed them how their personal goals and struggles are linked to their communities. That means building effective coalition and advocacy networks in the grassroots. This is crucial to our work as we have found that group agency can be a powerful motivator of citizen engagement. More citizens are willing to engage when they see their peers doing the same. Consequently, group based interventions that target political agency can be useful tools to sustain engagement.

We understand that governance systems are complex. However, by combining a behavioral systems approach, we can tap into the opportunities that motivate engagement to understand how decisions are made. Using this framework, we can build interventions that focus on the identified behavioral

factors such as social norms, political efficacy, access to information, or trust in government.

Finally, we looked at the current funding landscape and found that it may foster or hinder collaboration and experimentation among CSOs. Due to the limited and unpredictable funding cycles, CSOs may be less willing to apply new tools and focus on completing existing projects. They may also find themselves competing for funding from the same funders; which could impact their willingness to share resources. We believe that these limitations can be tackled through a dynamic funding process that advances institutional development to propel research innovation, and testing of new methodologies that will potentially tackle the complex social, political, and economic challenges in the region.

Introduction

In November 2015, a small team from the then-nascent Busara traveled from Nairobi to Kampala to meet with the first clients within the Governance and Civic Engagement portfolio. These clients comprised six relatively small civil society organizations (CSOs), each running programs and advocacy campaigns on various issues affecting audiences across Uganda. We had been awarded a yearlong grant to work with these CSOs to explore ways in which insights and methods from the behavioral sciences could support the effectiveness of their activities and effectiveness. This first set of meetings aimed to understand the nature of each organization's work, including challenges that they felt impacted the efficacy of their programs and advocacy.

During these early meetings, we were struck by the fact that each of the CSOs, despite the variation in their audiences, regional foci, and issue areas, urgently and coherently sought support for one common, core problem: that their audiences were complacent and disengaged from the issues that affected them, and that organizing and mobilizing action to try to provide accountability to address these issues was an ongoing challenge. According to the CSOs, their audiences did not possess sufficient potential for or interest in being civically engaged. The core support that was sought from Busara was in discerning how to most effectively apply behavioral insights to motivate civic engagement in Uganda.

We subsequently created and began to iterate practical advisory-based approaches to support these CSOs. The objective was to enable these groups to learn how to employ behavioral insights and strategies to better understand the attitudes, preferences, behaviors, and decision-making of the communities they serve. This would strengthen the development and implementation of their community engagement interventions and strategies (see how this was

done in the next section). Our approach was informed by the theory of change on the impact of citizen engagement on development outcomes through increased government responsiveness, transparency, and accountability. This theory of change proposes that amplifying increasing citizen voices will make governments more responsive to the needs and demands of citizens, and therefore, more accountable. According to Menocal & Sharma (2008), amplifying citizen voices and increased accountability contributes directly to progress towards broader development outcomes, including poverty reduction, human development, and changes in policy, practice, behaviors, and power relations (ibid).

Today, Busara's collaboration with civil society practitioners has grown beyond Uganda and East Africa. Yet, what we learned from our first CSO partners in Uganda continues to inform how we intellectually and practically approach the governance program. On the applied side, these early insights provide the grounds for a portfolio of advisory engagements focusing primarily on supporting our CSO partners' target audience identification and communication strategies to inspire and mobilize action. On the research side, they inform our conceptual framework, driving us to explore the overarching question of which behavioral insights can effectively motivate civic engagement and how they should be applied.

This is particularly pertinent moving forward when looking at the current shifts in citizen engagement as recently witnessed in Kenya, where young people mobilized themselves using digital tools to debate public policies, challenge the government, and demand accountability. We explored this shift in a recent thought piece, and our conclusion is that technology will have a big impact on citizen engagement initiatives. (Too, 2024).

Busara's pathways to impact

Citizen engagement research at Busara

Busara is an advisory and research organization focused on the evaluation and implementation of behavioral, economic, and social interventions in the Global South. Our mission is to advance and apply behavioral science to pursue poverty alleviation. We work with civil society, government, and research partners to unlock impact in the Global South by walking alongside them on their journey to evidence-based program design and strategy. Busara was founded in 2013 and has active operations in Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda, and India, as well as a project presence across Africa, South Asia, and Latin America.

Citizen engagement projects at Busara are housed within the BeGOV (behavioral science for governance) portfolio. BeGOV's long-term goal is to bridge the gaps between applied behavioral science research and civil society practitioners' strategies and interventions for better citizen engagement outcomes, leading to more responsive and accountable governments and institutions.

Beyond partnerships with CSOs, BeGOV works with funders, multi-laterals, international experts (academics, think tanks, technical providers), and policymakers, mainly within East Africa. More specifically, BeGOV works with CSOs to research the drivers of citizen engagement behavior and strengthen their capacity to apply evidence, experimentation and innovation through behavioral science to motivate better and mobilize the communities and contexts they serve.

BeGOV's current research agenda explores three key themes: (mis)information ecosystems, the civic engagement cycle, and social norms. Understanding information ecosystems (and in particular, misinformation that spreads through them) is key to understanding the awareness and salience of civic issues and events that affect them (whether true or false), how citizens understand and evaluate this civic information, and as a result what motivates them to engage on these civic issues. Having a more nuanced understanding of social norms sheds light on social norms (particularly those on collective action) that help us to better understand the civic engagement cycle, particularly the issues that are considered essential and salient at the community level and what motivates engagement on these issues but not others.

Methodology

AUDAS framework

Busara applies a five-step process in research and advisory. We call this the AUDAS framework. Of course, there are other similar tools to choose from, such as UNICEF's DEPTHs framework and TESTS by the Behavioral Insights Team, among others. Our model helps us connect our mission with how we conduct our projects, from staffing to building interventions or even running lab and field sessions.[1] The figure below shows this five- step process.

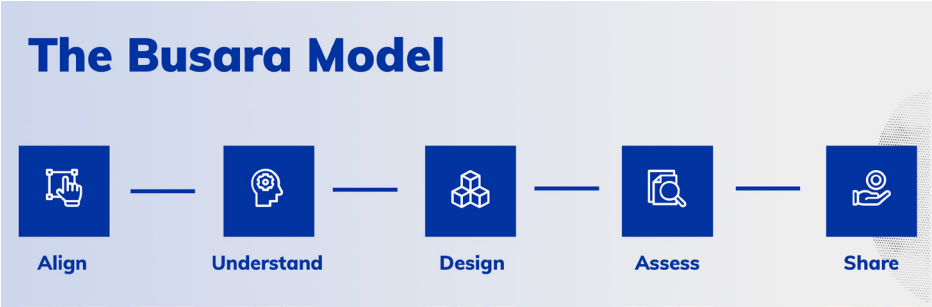

Figure 1.1: AUDAS model

1 Jang, C., Koki, E., Nyaga, R., Okafor, A., Singh, J., Vang, A., & Wendel, S. (2024). The Busara toolkit: leveraging behavioral science for development

Our research agenda was first informed by the realization that there was hardly any experimentation and innovation on methods that best incorporate behavioral science into the work of CSOs and specifically on civic engagement. From our initial interactions with CSOs, they pointed out a common challenge; that their audiences seemed complacent on issues affecting them which limited the effectiveness of any interventions (Keyman et al., 2021). This then kicked off what has become close to 10 years of Busara using research and behavioral approaches to provide technical support to empower CSOs to better their civic engagement initiatives. Our aim with this report is to foster the adoption of behavioral approaches in project interventions, including citizen engagement and advocacy messaging among CSOs within East Africa and beyond. The report synthesizes our learnings from past and ongoing projects within East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda). Through a meta-analysis of these projects, we present emerging evidence from the wider civic engagement research to examine lessons learned. The lessons come from a dozen applied research and advisory projects between 2015 and 2024. An appendix with more details on these projects is provided towards the end of this groundwork. Some of these projects include:

i. **Community Messaging and Civic Participation (CMCP) in Uganda**
ii. **Research on factors influencing community members' participation in community-driven development**
iii. **Primed, but not engaged: the poor performance of self-efficacy and rights primes in promoting civic engagement, in a laboratory experiment in Uganda**
iv. **Locally-relevant digital information for underserved communities in Kenya**
v. **Religious Leaders and Behavior Change in Uganda**
vi. **Understanding Community-Oriented Prosocial Behaviors Qualitative Research Study**
vii. **Community Monitors Program Qualitative Research**

viii. **Using natural language processing (NLP) to develop messaging and communication strategies for policymakers in Uganda**
ix. **Improving public service delivery in Uganda through feedback devices**
x. **Low-Cost Message Testing Guide for CSOs in East Africa**
xi. **Evaluating Crowdsourcing Behaviors in Identifying Online Misinformation**
xii. **Social Accountability Research in Kenya**

We may not directly mention some of our partners due to the sensitivity of their work. To maintain the confidentiality of all participants, we will not mention any names either. To unlock insights into what encourages citizen participation, we apply qualitative and quantitative methods, lab work, and field experimentation in our research projects. We also strengthen the capacity to help CSOs scale and adopt behavioral science tools in their interventions. So, how do we choose which method? We are always guided by our AUDAS approach in our studies to contextualize human behavior. Whether qualitative, quantitative, a lab experiment or a mix of these, the method to choose in each project depends on the nature of the project and the overall research question we want to answer.

In this groundwork, key findings from our projects have been analyzed through a thematic analysis, paying attention to behavioral cues that enhance civic engagement. One of our collaborators also conducted an external review to ensure that this groundwork met publication standards.

What have we learned about drivers of citizen engagement in East Africa?

1. Citizen engagement is attention and activity directed towards power

Civic engagement has been a popular concept within the academic, practitioner, and policy lexicon since its use in Putnam's 1993 book, 'Making Democracy Work. The concept is, however, "vague" and there is a clear lack of consensus about its definition. Some scholars argue that it covers almost everything citizens engage in either individually or as a group, leading to its vagueness (Berger, 2009). Others define citizen engagement as "...the ways that an individual, through collective action, influences the larger civil society"(Van Benshoten, 2001). This definition closely mirrors what (Diller, 2001) calls "experiencing a sense of connection, interrelatedness, and, naturally, commitment towards the greater community (all life forms)." A whole host of definitions of civic engagement, collected by Adler & Goggin in 2005 and captured in this document's appendix section, demonstrates the variance in definition and application of the term.

Busara's view of civic engagement, while borrowing from these definitions, has a slight deviation as we insist on contextualizing the lived experience of community members and applying behavioral science to understand engagement. First, as behavioral science researchers, we purposefully employ 'citizen' rather than 'civic' in our definition to capture and personalize the behaviors that constitute 'engagement.' Additionally, we rely on a framework that seeks to unpack the term by breaking it down into its components i.e.

distinguishing between political, social, and moral engagement (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995). This framework encompasses our understanding of 'engagement,' the distinct aspects of 'citizen' engagement, and the dimensions of citizen engagement that hold the most tremendous significance for Busara's applied behavioral science research. Our framework is built on four fundamental principles.

The first is that 'engagement' involves both attention paid to a specific topic and the expenditure of activity in its pursuit. Engagement cannot be purely attention without activity, nor activity without attention to provide a guiding framework to direct it. Second, citizen engagement can refer to two clear types of engagement: political engagement and pre-political engagement. Each type of engagement is defined by the level and type of power held by the individuals or collectives to which the engagement is directed. As such, political engagement refers to engaging with those who sit at the centers of power, in particular with politicians and bureaucrats at the national and local levels. This can, however, also include engagement with traditional and religious leaders. Increasingly, this type of engagement has moved to online platforms where citizens and their leaders, enabled by increased access to digital media platforms, communicate and engage in political discourse. This contrasts with pre-political (social and moral) engagement, which refers to engagement with peers with similar levels of power (Akman & Amna, 2012).

Social and moral engagement can be described as 'pre-political engagement' because, in behavioral science terms, they may increase capability, opportunity, or motivation for political engagement (Michie et al, 2011). The recent political protests and heightened online discourse among Kenya's young citizenry around various components and implications of the now-rejected 2024 Finance Bill and broader Kenyan constitutional provisions provide a suitable example. Third, social and moral engagement are important precursors to political engagement. Directing attention and activity to centers of power

requires resources, and many of these resources may be cultivated by social and moral engagement. Finally, for this research and portfolio of work, Busara is primarily interested in political engagement, thus directing activity and attention toward the centers of power. This is summarized below.

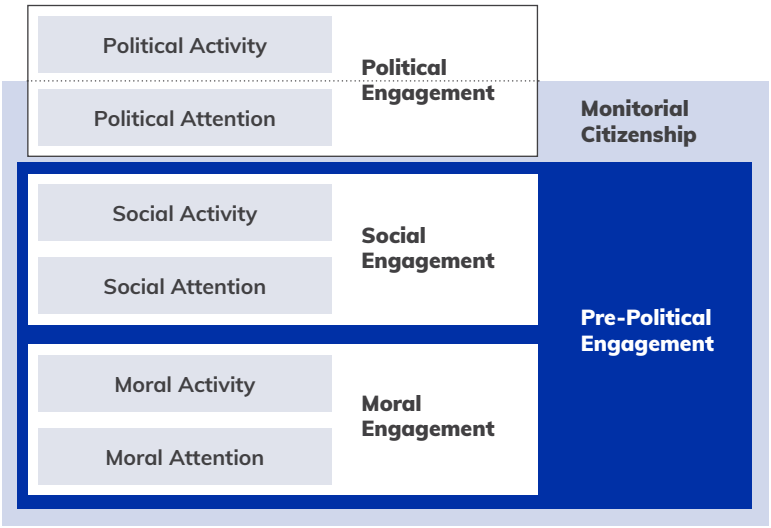

Figure 1.2: Types of civic engagement

We should note the importance of moral engagement here and that not all social engagement is good. One study shows that areas of social engagement facilitated the rise of fascism in Weimar Germany (Satyanath et al., 2014). The highest level of social engagement is often observed in a mob, in which individual moral judgment may be quickly dissolved. This has been observed around election periods in the East African context, particularly in Kenya's ethnic and identity-based political cultures (Shihalo, 2023).

Over the years, we have learned how crucial social engagement is as a precursor to political engagement. In the following section, we dive deeper into collective action as a form of social engagement that plays a central role in citizen engagement, particularly in the East African context, where social-based norms strongly define individual behaviors and preferences. Given the ubiquitous nature of citizen engagement, this conceptual framework provided helpful exclusion criteria of what to include as citizen engagement and guidance for thinking about some of the necessary conditions and interventions for meaningful citizen engagement. These have included voting and electoral behaviors, civic leadership, citizen feedback, individual and collective self-efficacy, community meetings, political debates, community-based monitoring, political information ecosystems, anti-corruption, and citizen capacity building.

2. Self-agency is a powerful driver of participation but external support is necessary to foster meaningful engagement

Policymakers, researchers, funders, and civil society organizations working to strengthen civic engagement often start with the assumption that citizens are, by default, willing to engage with centers of power but usually come across structural and behavioral barriers. While enabling citizen engagement has been found to impact development outcomes through increased government responsiveness, transparency, and accountability (Menocal & Sharma 2008), it might be worth taking a step back to interrogate our assumptions. Some scholars (Theiss-Moore & Hibbing 2005) have argued that it might be erroneous to assume that citizens naturally want to be involved in politics and that many people lack the motivation to engage in civic life and politics. And that if the right conditions are created, more people will participate (Theiss-Morse, & Hibbing, 2005).

These assumptions have informed standard strategies, practices, and procedures across many CSOs globally, including those we have worked with at Busara. Through years of close collaboration with various CSO partners, we appreciate that there is no simple solution for motivating citizen engagement. Even with ideal conditions for citizens to participate through multiple effective channels, it remains a fact that many citizens don't engage with the political/governance processes. Different strategies will yield different outcomes, but overall, we have learned that some interventions do indeed encourage some forms of engagement. For example, creating tools or incentives that support disempowered individuals that would enable them to participate in community meetings.[2] Paying attention to their unique needs and preferences, such as meeting times and locations, can also boost engagement. What drives individuals to engage with issues affecting their country and communities is, therefore, of key interest to researchers, civil society organizations, and governments seeking to strengthen citizen participation.

2.1 Our mental models, particularly our self-efficacy, play an important role in defining our willingness to engage with power

A compelling finding from our research over the years is that political agency is a powerful determinant of whether or not citizens engage with power and to what extent. Agency, as defined by Sidle (2019), is "the capacity of individuals to define aspirational goals and coordinate the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources both internally available to them (individual capacities) and externally available to them (in our social, institutional or physical environments) to take action to achieve stated goals." One's agency can help overcome some obstacles to engagement, including the intimidation of doing something new, such as actively participating in a protest for the first time. This link between

2 Busara, (2023). Understanding Participation in Community Driven Development Groups in Uganda. Unpublished report, Nairobi, Kenya

agency and citizen engagement has been well documented in the literature (Abramson, 1983; Clarke and Acock, 1989; Mc-Clondon and Riedle, 2015) and is primarily informed by our stock of mental models - the norms, values, beliefs, preferences, constructs, concepts, etc. - that helps us make sense of the world around us and predict the consequences of our actions (The Agency Fund, 2021). Our own life experiences as much shape these mental models that influence our agency as they are by our social environment. For example, people who grow up in severe poverty, with low levels of education, or people forced to live on the margins of society, such as immigrants, or those socially excluded based on identity markers like race, ability, sexual orientation, etc. have been found to have lower sense of agency (Hoff, & Pandey, 2014).

Through our research, we have observed that citizens are more willing to take ownership and actively participate in solving problems they perceive are within their control.[3] This might be why citizens' involvement in nationwide issues happens during one-off or major political events - such as the recent anti-finance bill protests in Kenya or general elections. This form of engagement can only be effective on issues with immediate responses and outcomes from the government, which isn't always productive because of the slow and complex nature of governance. Party dynamics, constituent pressures, and institutional limitations influence governance decisions and actions within any country's context while responding to external forces such as funding partners, foreign policy obligations, and regional country dynamics.

We have also found that the most engaged citizens are usually the involved community leaders and local activists, who are likely to have high levels of political agency due to the social status and access to power that motivates their engagement (Wein et al., 2021). On the other hand, we learned that

3 Busara Center for Behavioral Economics, (August 2020). Community Messaging and Civic Participation Research, Understanding community-oriented prosocial behaviors

while one's education level and socio-economic status can positively influence their individual agency and provide the necessary conditions for a citizen to engage politically, it is not always enough. Through our research in Uganda and Kenya, for example, we observed that the least engaged citizens are often people with higher incomes living in urban areas; they are employed and have time scarcity (Wein et al., 2021).

Targeting political agencies to sustain citizens' engagement in governance can be a productive avenue for relevant stakeholders. This can be achieved by cultivating a sense of responsibility, especially among the youth, and encouraging them to take on leadership roles, actively participate in their communities, challenge injustices, and contribute to shaping them. Regional programs such as the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI),[4] Emerging Leadership Foundation,[5] and Futurelect[6] are important in providing education on civic duties and creating mentorship programs and opportunities for meaningful participation in governance processes. Such programs empower young citizens by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, tools, and platforms to influence political agendas and governance and, therefore, shape their country's future.

2.2 Technology is enabling meaningful participation, especially among young citizens

The recent political movements in Kenya around the proposed 2024 Finance Bill witnessed broad participation by all types of citizens but was largely organized and made up of young citizens labeled Gen Z. Previous evidence points to the general political disengagement of young people, characterized

4 See https://yali.state.gov/
5 See https://elfafrica.org/
6 See https://futurelect.org/

by low voter registration and turnout during general elections[7] and passive political engagement, mostly on online platforms, relative to its huge demographic potential. While a significant proportion of the population still doesn't have access to reliable internet, there is a growing population of tech-savvy young citizens who are beginning to actively shape online and offline political outcomes through active citizen engagement.

Through technology-enabled innovation, young Kenyans found novel ways to communicate and organize through social media. We witnessed a vibrant online and offline public sphere where young citizens actively engaged in political discourse around various governance and accountability issues. Technology platforms like X, Instagram, and TikTok enabled young citizens to shape and control the political narrative, including on traditional media (newspapers, radio, TV) with far greater reach and influence. (Ogutu & Garcia, 2024). This was especially important because it amplified the voices of citizens that were ordinarily left out of political discourse and heaped pressure on the government to institute reforms and norms of engagement with its citizens. A few months later, we still see a thriving online public sphere, where citizens are forming their preferences, attitudes, and decisions on proposed policy changes. We're also expressing our opinions, approvals, or disapproval of our elected representatives, beginning with the President, and by doing so, holding them accountable (SpiceFM, 2024). This form of accountability mechanism not only yielded results in the rejection of the proposed bill but has also likely strengthened the individual and collective political agency of young people in Kenya moving forward. For example, we saw that some citizens online had begun building and sharing a repository of political representatives' personal information on social media, including phone numbers, urging people to directly contact their MP [Member of Parliament] and voice their opposition

7 Statement of preliminary findings: African Union and COMESA election observation mission to the 9 August 2022 general elections in the Republic of Kenya

to the proposed bill. Some of these conversations were less respectful and lacked decorum. While this can be a robust accountability mechanism, it may erode the fragile relationship between leaders and their constituents.

Young citizens' engagement through technology to reshape the political landscape is crucial for realizing a more inclusive and responsive government. Through technology, young citizens increasingly challenge the status quo by demanding a more responsible government. Therefore, it is important for all governance stakeholders to tap into this potential by exploring how young citizens' preferences, aspirations, and values can be prioritized and incorporated into policy formulation and government decision-making processes. It is also essential to recognize that governments have recognized the potential of technology as a powerful accountability tool. Moving forward, it is likely that governments across the region will seek to capture and control digital spaces. (Madung, 2024). This will threaten the vibrant, democratic public spheres that have developed. As more and more young, social media-savvy, and politically engaged citizens are coming of age across East Africa, and with Africa having the youngest population in the world, it is not difficult to imagine how this is going to influence the political and governance trajectory of the continent in the coming days.

3. CSOs should optimize community meetings for effective engagement with citizens

Through Busara's collaboration with CSOs over the years, we have come to appreciate that community meetings are the most prominent tool CSOs use for advocacy and community mobilization. For many grassroots CSOs and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), community meetings are the primary form of interaction and communication with their audiences. Therefore, they dictate their activities and interpretations of civic engagement behavior.

They are a means to an end. They provide a shared space for gathering and disseminating information about community issues and a platform to discuss and plan necessary actions. They are also an end in and of itself - they are considered an act of civic engagement by attendees or as an indicator for the potential to exhibit other forms of civic engagement. This is illustrated further below.

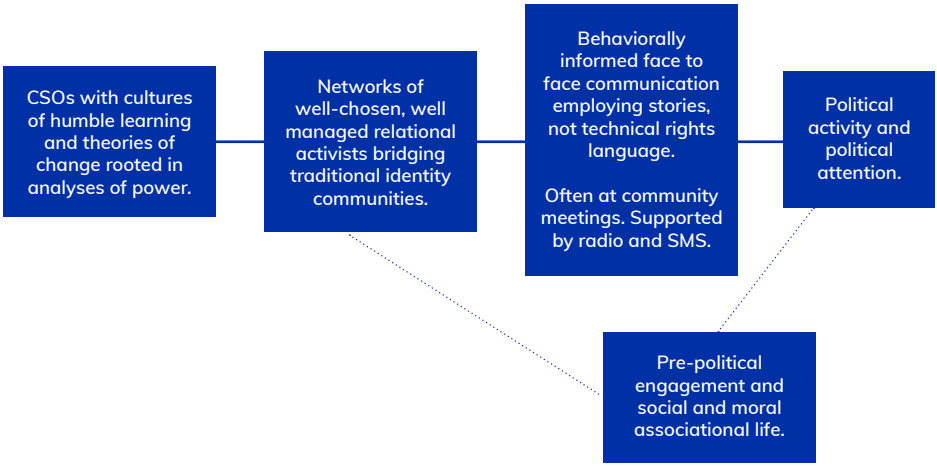

Figure 1.3: Illustration of key learnings on how CSOs enable change through community meetings

What, then, makes for an effective CSO interaction through community meetings? Firstly, community meetings can be effective, especially when properly planned and advertised. Successful meetings have logistical clarity; they have clear logistical information and agendas and use respected local speakers and relevant community information to attract larger audiences. Such grounded local persuasion can be powerfully reinforced by employing multiple touchpoints to follow up. Radio can be an important channel, while

Internet and SMS messaging are most important for those who have already intended to act (Vancel et al.,2017).

We also learned through our research collaboration in Uganda and Rwanda with Spark Microgrants that organizers and mobilizers of community meetings must pay attention to the unique needs of community members. We found that community members prefer shorter meetings, which allows them to engage in other household and income-generating activities and can motivate busy people, such as traders in the community to attend such meetings. To further encourage attendance and participation, we learned that community meetings should be held on convenient days, such as non-market days and non-worship days, depending on the religious preferences of the community. For instance, one study in Uganda found that the ideal time for community meetings is weekend afternoons. (ibid) Other considerations when planning for meetings are seasonal factors, such as planting seasons for agricultural communities. Limited resources (time and money) during peak farming seasons, such as during planting and harvesting, can reduce people's engagement in community groups and meetings.[8] When deciding on locations and venues for community meetings, organizers and mobilizers should alternate venues to benefit all members and ease accessibility as people prefer to attend meetings closer to them.[9] In rural communities in Uganda, we found that the most ideal meeting locations are in markets or the Local Council (LC) III chairperson's residences.

Perceived benefits are a significant motivation for attendance and continued participation in community meetings. Across our research, locally relevant community information was cited as the primary motivation for attending conferences, and organizers who were straightforward about the purpose of

8 Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP) Project in Rwanda and Uganda. Busara, (2024)
9 Spark Microgrants Project, Busara (2023)

upcoming community meetings and who tried to target relevant community members had good attendance numbers. To further encourage participation, we found that community members should be allowed to sell their goods or services during community meetings, including vegetables, milk, and eggs. We learned that participation can be boosted when community members are allowed to offer labor services in group projects as an alternative means of payment, especially where the traditional cash contributions are unaffordable.[10] When group members are economically empowered - they are more willing to participate in community projects.

Our research on citizen engagement further shows that communities favor large, inclusive meetings. This means ensuring that language barriers are minimized as much as possible, especially in ethnically and linguistically diverse countries like Kenya and Uganda. However, we learned that having multiple languages in one meeting would likely be time-consuming and disruptive. Therefore, CSOs reported finding balance as a critical strategy for effective interaction in particular communities. The common use of Swahili and Kinyarwanda in Tanzania and Rwanda helps mitigate this significantly.

In the same collection of studies, we found some gender differences in community meeting dynamics. Men were likely to attend political meetings, while women preferred social welfare meetings. Most female respondents preferred to attend meetings focused on agriculture, health and nutrition, and poverty eradication, as well as being part of social and welfare Saccos. Men, by contrast, attended meetings that focused on politics, security, community development, and sometimes clan issues (Vancel, et al 2017). Men were also more confident than women in making public contributions during meetings. Whereas most respondents were willing to ask simple clarification questions,

10 Ibid

men were more confident in offering opinions. We further noted that women tend to play a bigger role in rural meetings than in urban ones.

All the above notwithstanding, solely focusing on attendance at community meetings as a behavioral measure of civic engagement is limiting and erroneous at worst. Throughout our applied work with CSOs, we have observed mostly disengaged and inattentive audiences throughout numerous instances. In other situations, audience members attended community meetings for reasons other than the explicit purpose of the community meeting – for example, to socialize with other community members. As such, the extent to which a community meeting can be considered a valid act of civic engagement is highly dependent on the relevance to the audience and the quality of the community meeting being conducted. Moreover, findings from our experimental research work have suggested that attendance at a community meeting is unlikely to be a valid outcome measure for civic engagement in an experimental context. In 2018, Busara conducted a mobile lab experiment with 809 participants in two regions of Uganda to measure the impact of short behaviorally-informed messages on civic engagement behaviors, including willingness to attend a community meeting and actual attendance to said community meetings.[11] While specific interventions had either adverse or insignificant effects on attendance to a community meeting, follow-up qualitative work indicated that the same intervention had quite a positive, motivating effect on individuals' willingness to engage in other behaviors falling within the category of 'political engagement,' such as making phone calls to local municipalities to file complaints relevant to a community issue.

11 Busara Center for Behavioral Economics (2019). CMCP Phase 2 Mobile Lab Findings: Can behaviorally informed communication interventions motivate civic engagement?

4. Successful CSOs help citizens understand how their personal goals align with the broader interests of their community

At any moment, CSOs must interact with multiple stakeholders to advance their efforts to realize social change. Some of the most effective CSOs maintain and pursue diverse social networks (up to those with power, down to hear those who need support, and across to form coalitions). They employ reciprocity and encourage social learning (Wanjiku et al., 2017; Too et al., 2018). These interactions include bargaining, persuasion, dialogue, negotiation, lobbying, coalition-building, advocacy, social mobilization, and behavior change communication. While a behavioral science approach is certainly relevant across all these governance interactions and communication types, we see its greatest potential in those focused on citizens. This is because it involves changing mindsets and worldviews at the citizen level, which can simultaneously be both an important barrier and the best opportunity for long-term political and, therefore, socio-economic progress.

4.1 Conventional, rights-based rhetoric does not always persuade citizens to engage

Perhaps one of the most important lessons learned from our evolving insights on this topic is that there seems to be a striking cognitive dissonance between what CSOs suspect will be compelling, and what they, in turn, carry out in their advocacy and programming. CSOs are the closest entities to their audiences and have the most in-depth understanding of their day-to-day challenges, the language they use to articulate these challenges, the motivations their audiences have for engaging with the CSO, and the reasons they may have to be disillusioned or unmotivated. Moreover, we have consistently found that CSOs tend to have a keen appreciation for evidence, and our fieldwork with

audiences has often yielded insights and results consistent with what CSOs already suspect to be true.

Yet, through our interaction with our CSO partners, we have often observed a discrepancy in the sophistication of understanding their audiences and the methods they employ to engage them. One overarching example has been in our consistent observation that CSOs tend to use impersonal, intimidating, and abstract language relating to 'rights,' 'justice,' and 'freedom' when engaging with their audiences – language that they admit is difficult for their audiences to understand and likely ineffective at mobilizing real action.

We have become convinced that the current widespread CSO rhetoric of human rights is divorced from the everyday experiences of those they seek to persuade (Primed to Engage). Economic hardships experienced by many communities served by grassroots CSOs can often make it seem like things are always happening to them (and to a large extent, they do) and that they're not always active agents in shaping their destinies. As such, meeting their families' immediate needs is always prioritized over broader community issues that these grassroots groups work hard to solve through the community's support.

4.2 Thoughtful framing and delivery of messages can sway public sentiment and behavior

It is generally acknowledged that providing citizens with meaningful, genuine, useful, and usable information can enable citizen engagement (Arnold et al.,2019). CSO interventions that provide relevant information to people by giving them facts to navigate concrete choices have been attributed to spurring citizen participation. However, there is doubt about the efficacy of this method as people will not always be fully convinced on some matters -

such as changing people's political behavior (The Agency Fund White Paper, 2021).

However, through our research collaborations with CSOs in the region, we have learned that simple comprehension among citizens can be a bottleneck, even for topics of interest (especially true for written materials). Communications that employ self-affirmation (rather than external lecturing) and telling real stories tend to outperform rights messaging (Horn, & Keyman, 2016; Primed to Engage). This is more persuasive when it includes practical links to actual actions, and it can still be better when the message is accompanied by material and status-enhancing incentives (Wanjiku et al., 2017).

Busara has, therefore, focused a significant part of its support to CSOs on framing techniques as a tool for behavior change. Framing alters how information is presented to influence the public's thinking, understanding, and actions. This can involve changing the context, alternatives, sequence of presentation, or the relevant information presented. We have assisted CSOs in utilizing framing techniques - including integration of moral values, social norms theory, rhetorical styles, and narratives - to overcome barriers and effectively organize, connect with others, and develop compelling narratives that promote trust, understanding, and engagement with the causes they are passionate about.

We have also learned that behavioral nudges can be effective in CSO messaging. We have found that small behavioral nudges can comfortably overcome barriers to entry for changes where citizens have already formed an intention, such as to attend an event that is potentially informative, fun, educative, and financially beneficial. For instance, when encouraging people to attend one of our CSO partners, Uhuru's Cooperatives Week in 2016, all the behaviorally informed SMS treatments significantly outperformed control

messages - conventional informative messaging.[12] Yet for less attractive behaviors, where there wasn't an intention to attend, the barriers were capability, opportunity, and motivation, and behavioral nudges are often insufficient.

Finally, we also learned the level of trust in the source of information depends on the source behind each platform. We observed the messenger effect in action. A Busara-Hivisasa 2021 study found that Information received through TV was perceived as more trustworthy than from other platforms as most people believed it was well-researched and came from the government. However, we noted that people who have low trust in the government generally sought information from other sources, which might impact their ability to assess public policies.[13]

4.3 CSOs can learn a lot from how religious leaders communicate

In 2017, we ran a study on how religious leaders communicate with their congregations to identify potential techniques that could be replicated by CSOs (Wanjiku et al., 2017). We found religious leaders to be influential behavior change experts through their ability to employ bargaining, persuasion, dialogue, negotiation, lobbying, coalition-building, advocacy, and social mobilization techniques. CSOs can directly borrow from these, particularly when running group-based interactions like community meetings. For example, CSOs should learn to act as brokers by developing diverse, inclusive networks and coalitions. They should craft their rhetoric using relatable stories (such as Bible stories) that speak to people's universal values, fears, and aspirations. Some of this rhetoric can be combined with slogans and proverbs that focus on change and moral duty.

12 Uhuru Messaging Study Phase 1, Busara
13 Busara Hivisasa Digital Access Report, 2020

Additionally, it's important for CSOs to incorporate many touchpoints and multiple complementary interventions to shape desired behavior patterns and engage communities on a community issue or process. A single touchpoint is likely insufficient. Where possible, incorporate the use of appropriate status-enhancing incentives to reinforce desired behavior change. This can include the appointment of community representatives and monitors.

Finally, CSOS must understand that credibility can be fickle and must be protected. CSOs should be sensitive to the needs of community members for programs that can directly improve their material standing. Evidence from our research suggests that deeply rooted social norms and practices determine the ability to realize behavioral change, and even religious leaders cannot always overcome this (Wanjiku et al., 2017). Behavior change campaigns by CSOs aim at first deeply understanding the social-cultural dynamics of each community before developing and running any interventions targeted at promoting engagement. This can sometimes be achieved by a CSO through being embedded in a particular community for a couple of years and through the effective use of trusted community mobilizers.

5. Group agency is a powerful motivator for citizen participation, and we are exploring the precise mechanisms of this effect

As highlighted in the introduction, Busara has collaborated with East African CSOs to apply behavioral science insights and methods to address a common, ongoing challenge: citizens can often be complacent and disengaged from the political issues that affect them, and organizing and mobilizing communities is an ongoing challenge. Citizen participation in decision-making has been widely adopted to improve outcomes in democratic governance (Fung & Wright 2001) and international development (Mansuri & Rao 2004, 2012).

There are examples of multiple forms of direct democracy, such as participatory budgeting (Ganuza & Baiocchi 2012, Goldfrank 2012). This has mainly been affirmed by the World Bank's investment in community-driven development, which involves the participation of beneficiaries in decision-making around development projects (Mansuri & Rao 2004) in the last few decades.

In 2019, Busara collaborated with Hivos East Africa to research the potential of various citizen agency models that could be scaled up to facilitate citizen-driven change in Kenya (Hivos & Busara, 2020). One of the studies involved surveying respondents who had taken part in a CSO training or had received civic information, such as county budget spending. These respondents tended to score highly on the following statements: I can work with others to make a difference in the community; I can voice my opinions in my community; I can deal effectively with community issues; I can engage with public leaders. Additionally, citizens who have engaged with CSOs were more likely to seek more information and take action. For example, we found that an overwhelming majority (87% from our lab experiment) consider civic information e.g. civilian oversight training content, as provided by infomediaries, to be very relevant to their lives, and almost all expressed a willingness to learn more about the issues highlighted.

We have also found that some group-based interventions that target political agencies can powerfully encourage and sustain engagement on community-wide issues. There is substantial research evidence of the link between agency - an individual's capacity to control their life by defining goals and taking action to achieve stated goals - and citizen engagement (Abramson, 1983; Clarke and Acock, 1989; Mc-Clondon and Riedle, 2015).

Group political agency can lead to meaningful engagement when a group's actions on the world reflect their preferences and social identity and provide evidence that they are active and powerful in shaping their trajectories in life

(McGarty, et al., 2009). Without this perception that one's group can achieve change, collective action becomes unlikely. This is often why distant outcomes, such as ending global poverty, become less likely to motivate ordinary individuals and groups to act compared to more attainable outcomes, such as improving the state of security in a community. In Kenya, we witnessed how concrete, achievable outcomes like the rejection of the 2024 Finance Bill motivated citizens to mobilize and protest. While other, more distant, systemic issues like corruption and misuse of public funds were part of the citizens' grievances persist. We witnessed a sharp decline in citizen-led political activity once the proposed Finance Bill was rejected and a cabinet reshuffle implemented. Perhaps the perception that achieving such systemic change and solving issues like corruption was highly unlikely discouraged collective action.

It could also be that some of the powerful factors, such as our identity, that shape our mental models (including political agency) led to the splintering of the youthful protesters and the eventual end of the movement. This is because our mental models are complex, frequently updated, and tend to respond to cues that speak to the intersectionality of our multiple identities. In countries like Kenya, where ethnicity and voter preferences are tightly linked, an individual from a poor background but who shares ethnicity with the local elected official might rely on different accountability models that inform their decision to participate in accountability or sanctioning efforts of the leader or not, and to what extent. Therefore, while ending corruption and misuse of public resources might be beneficial to all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, it's often the case that corrupt politicians will retreat to their home regions to rally support and protection from 'their people' to slow down the momentum and maintain the status quo. Globally, this intersectionality was first well-studied in the 1970s during the feminist movement, particularly in the United States. Here, scholars observed significant variances in perspectives, therefore, collective action strategies, between black and white women - one

group advantaged due to race but disadvantaged due to gender; the other disadvantaged on both fronts (Beal, 1970; Hurtado, 1989).

5.1 CSOs can effect sustainable change through interventions that strengthen the capacity of communities to meaningfully participate

As highlighted above, CSO-led interventions that target political agencies through training have generally been found to powerfully encourage and sustain engagement on community-wide issues. In East Africa, these interventions have primarily been community-based monitoring (CBM) programs. There is no single accepted definition of community-based monitoring; the concept incorporates a spectrum of approaches that are led by communities and involve their participation, to a greater or lesser extent, in monitoring the quality of social services such as health, development aid, the management of natural resources and other phenomena. Whitelaw et al. (2003) state that CBM "is a process where concerned citizens, government agencies, industry, academia, community groups, and local institutions collaborate to monitor, track, and respond to issues of common community concern."

Literature has shown, for instance, that providing communities with information about the performance of public service providers may be crucial for the success of such interventions. Related evidence suggests that providing information alone may not be sufficient. There is also a need to give community members sufficient power or a clear avenue to effect change. In an evaluation in India, for example, informing people about low learning levels and high teacher absenteeism in their communities and the school provisions they were entitled to show no impact on parents' engagement or student learning (Banerjee et al.,2010). However, in another example, when school committees in Kenya were given specific training on monitoring and assessing teachers' effort and performance and a set of parents were asked

to perform teacher attendance checks regularly, learning outcomes improved significantly (Duflo et al., 2015).

Similarly, a community monitoring program in Uganda used information paired with a series of facilitated meetings to help community members and healthcare providers develop joint action plans that outlined specific steps to improve care, deadlines for achieving improvements, and how the community would monitor progress. Providing communities with information about their healthcare provider's performance and quality of care helped them better identify healthcare delivery problems that could be addressed locally, such as health worker absenteeism and patient wait times. Without this information component, communities created action plans that focused on issues outside their control and relied on public support and action for their health center, limiting their ability to hold healthcare providers accountable (Bjorkman and Svensson, 2009).

We have also researched the mechanisms through which information access and training of communities can lead to positive outcomes. An EGAP-funded Busara study in 2017-2018 sought to study the potential and impact of community monitoring in curbing deforestation in western Uganda. While most forests around the world are protected and administered by governments, there are some that indigenous people and local communities manage. These communities need the forest to survive and commonly engage in charcoal production, firewood harvesting, and livestock grazing, contributing to deforestation (REDD+ Readiness Preparation Proposal Government of Uganda, 2011). To promote innovative methods for community participation in forest management, this RCT study sought to investigate how community monitoring of forests leads to positive outcomes on forest conservation and household well-being across 150 villages. The innovation consisted of training select villagers to measure forest use and amount of biomass, the findings of

which are discussed in village meetings and publicly displayed around the village. This study found that community monitoring reduced the extraction of forest resources, positively impacted the community's satisfaction with community monitoring, and increased knowledge of the community members, all of which suggested the sustainability of such interventions over long periods.

One of our long-standing partners, Global Rights Alert, also runs a community-based monitoring (CBM) program with a simple community directory that provides stakeholders with the necessary information on issues raised by community members, such as gender-based violence (GBV), land conflict, environmental concerns, and illegal detentions.[14] The issues raised are investigated and forwarded to the relevant authorities.

Such programs have certainly introduced incentives and capabilities for community members to raise and follow up on community issues, but we are still learning the precise mechanisms underlying this effect. Our theory is that community monitoring may reduce corruption by providing mechanisms and pathways for the group to hold its leaders and each other accountable by introducing a watchdog effect. Community monitors who have been selected by their peers and trained on how to address issues are often put under pressure by the community to step up and address particular emerging issues that are collectively identified. They likely develop a sense of responsibility to their community and tap into their strengthened agency and efficacy as a result of training on addressing these things (Fiala & Premand, 2018).

14 See GRA. Community Monitoring Directory: A simple guide to seek redress
https://globalrightsalert.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/GRA%20Community%20Directory.pdf

> *"Genuine citizen participation in democratic processes requires the redistribution of power. Without an authentic reallocation of power—in the form of money or decision-making authority, for example—participation merely "allows the powerholders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo."*
> **- Arnstein, S. (1969.)**

Suppose we focus our attention on formal participation in governance processes. In that case, we must first understand that these activities often run across a spectrum, with varying levels of citizen agency, control, and power. On one end, there could be the illusion of participation where public officials can manufacture participation by informing citizens of their rights and responsibilities through the one-way flow of information using superficial or complex/intimidating and technical language, without channels for feedback or negotiations with citizens. There could also be situations where citizens' opinions are gathered through surveys and public participation forums, which can still be limiting if the outcomes end at attendance numbers, survey responses, number of signatures gathered, etc. Meaningful citizen participation happens when citizens are allowed to directly negotiate, veto decisions, and put forth ideas/recommendations that are to an extent incorporated. Beyond voting (e.g., through general elections or referendums) CSO/citizen-led campaigns, protests, and community organizing are noteworthy examples.

Civic engagement can also mean citizens actively planning, budgeting, making decisions, and setting policies on issues that matter to them. In 2019 we conducted research, along with 7 CSO partners, to generate knowledge and evidence on the effectiveness of various pro-civic engagement models and norms that influence citizen-driven change, the impact of citizen engagement in opening up contracts and beneficial ownership data, as well as general knowledge on citizen engagement levels within the civic space in

Kenya. Some of the partners ran interventions that aimed at strengthening the knowledge and capacity of citizens to formally participate in governance at the local and national levels. These included Uraia Trust[15] who sought to build citizens' understanding of county government procurement processes, and LENGGO[16] who sought to enhance the participation of women and youth in county planning and budgeting processes. Through these studies, we observed that factors that contributed the most to the success of capacity-strengthening interventions included thoughtful delivery of locally relevant, accessible information; training provided to long-standing groups, not individuals or random groups formed for short-term purposes; external, status-enhancing incentives like public recognition; evidence of prior success as a result of community-level engagement; careful management of a community's expectations on what change is possible in the short and longer-term; among others.

6. Applying the behavioral systems lens can unlock unique barriers and opportunities for impactful interventions that promote citizen engagement

Behavioral science seeks to understand why people make certain decisions, act the way they do, and influence others in particular ways. It involves studying how changes happening at specific parts of this process, can influence how people behave or the results of their actions. Beyond how people influence each other, behavioral science helps us understand what factors in our environment shape our attitudes, preferences, ideas, and, in turn, our decisions and actions.

15 Uraia Trust https://uraia.or.ke/
16 LENGGO https://lenggo.org/

And how these factors influence our environment and the choices available to everyone in it. This is often in complicated and subtle ways.

Some of the key challenges in the world of international development today stem from a breakdown of behavioral systems, not just structural ones (Del Valle et al., 2024). Understanding how context produces certain types of behavior in systems is an important step. Since Busara's inception, we have been trying to understand how cognitive limitations and localized context shape decision-making and action. In trying to understand citizen engagement - we have recently begun applying a systems approach to study citizen engagement, and therefore political systems more broadly.

To better study the political systems within which our citizen engagement work exists, we first needed to establish what a systems approach would look like. "A system is a set of things—people, cells, molecules, or whatever—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time. The system may be buffeted, constricted, triggered, or driven by outside forces. But the system's response to these forces is characteristic of itself, and that response is seldom simple in the real world." (Meadows, 2008). Additionally, every system has constituent components, intricate relationships, and rules that govern interactions and outcomes (Del Valle et al., 2024).

Through our work, we have, therefore, learned that we need to incorporate both a behavioral, individualized approach and a systems-based approach adept at understanding how broad structural factors impact societal outcomes and individual behaviors using established tools and methodologies.

Systems thinking can provide us with a reliable framework for understanding the intricate relationships between individual actions and institutional structures. Political systems in many parts of the world, including East Africa, are composed of various actors, including citizens, politicians, bureaucrats

working in government agencies, media, CSOs, and other interest groups, all interacting within established rules and relationships. These interactions shape political outcomes, such as policy decisions, electoral results, and public discourse, often in ways that are not immediately apparent. Additionally, political actors are embedded within broader social, economic, and cultural contexts influencing their behavior. For instance, citizens' preferences are shaped by socioeconomic conditions, media discourse, and their social networks (online and offline), which affect governance outcomes. Politicians' decisions are influenced by party dynamics, constituent pressures, institutional constraints, external forces such as bilateral funding partners, existing foreign policy obligations, and regional countries. These actors all influence and are influenced by citizen engagement interventions, including electoral participation; civic leadership and training; community meetings, deliberations, and public participation forums; community monitoring; citizen feedback of public services; public scorecards; anti-corruption tools; information aggregation and dissemination; open contracting and budget transparency; citizen participation legislation; among many others. Understanding these complex interactions is crucial for strengthening citizen engagement and achieving better governance outcomes.

As highlighted above, citizen engagement is pivotal in shaping and influencing political systems. Over the years, knowledge gaps in our citizen engagement research in East Africa have prompted us to zoom out and take a systems-based approach to better understand and enhance citizen engagement by examining the interplay of various actors and components in a political system, and the impact of individual actions on collective outcomes. This has shed new light on how priority behavioral factors such as social norms, (personal and collective) political efficacy, access to information, and trust in government collectively influence citizen engagement behaviors. Our work over the next few years will focus on this, and we will share what we have learned throughout the process.

7. Existing funding models can either foster or hinder creativity, experimentation, and collaboration among CSOs

Through our collaboration with CSOs over the years, we have come to appreciate that CSOs face significant challenges in their operations. These challenges can range from mild to existential, demanding competing attention for scarce resources from often overstretched staff. CSOs often have to maintain sustained focus across two simultaneous fronts: securing much-needed financial resources for sustainability, and maintaining credibility and legitimacy among the communities they serve and policymakers. There is a growing concern among CSOs in East Africa that they are being squeezed out of the public space. Governments' registration process for CSOs is often seen as overly burdensome, and increasing restrictions on foreign funding sources have only added to their fears.

Working in this kind of environment requires flexibility to respond to changing needs, pivoting where necessary, and delivering on identified needs quickly. As a result, relationships and the quality of interactions at these margins matter a lot. Many have come to focus primarily on their relationships with policymakers and funders, to the exclusion of more radical organizing work with those outside capital cities and outside the most educated. Some CSOs sometimes operate with a "fortress mentality," feeling under attack and rejecting criticism or opposing views. This approach ignores the valuable opportunity to listen to critiques, make improvements, and address weaknesses within the organization. This has also meant a lack of willingness to innovate and experiment with emerging tools and approaches to research evidence, including through behavioral science.

In a similar manner, funders face many opportunities and challenges in supporting CSO program delivery in East Africa, particularly as it relates to the generation of governance and citizen engagement evidence through research. For example, just two decades ago, the state of research in East Africa was fragmented and inadequate, leading to acutely low knowledge production compared to global output (Mouton, 2010). There is now a growing but patchworked governance research community surfacing in most countries in the region through academia, industries, and consultancies. The emergence of these research communities is however still largely configured by Western (Global North) donor countries and international agencies that shape the funding landscape (Mouton, 2010, & Wight, 2005).

Given the nature of different actors and cultures driving East Africa's research and program delivery environments, alongside the distinctive language used within them, it can be difficult to figure out best practices in creating arrangements that promote robust research, evaluation, and capacity building. Obstacles include a lack of knowledge about the local context; how to arrange mutually beneficial or collaborative dynamics with different or traditionally incohesive partners, how the current culture of evaluation needs to develop; and how to effectively build capacity when partners lack foundational knowledge in research and evaluation.

More specifically, we have observed how existing models for funding CSOs can shape their effectiveness, who largely rely on local and international funding to sustain their programs and realize impact. First, because of stiff competition for limited funding resources and the fear of losing competitive advantage in their sectors, CSOs tend to have little incentive for meaningful collaboration with other CSOs. Secondly, project-earmarked and quickly moving funding cycles hinder CSOs' capacities and willingness to think strategically and long-term about their value propositions in the programs. It also discouraged some CSOs from taking risks and experimenting with their approaches, outside

of standard CSO operating procedures for designing, implementing, and evaluating donor-funded programs.

On the other hand, we have also come to appreciate that funders do not often receive constructive feedback or critiques on their roles and what they can do better. This prevents critical reflection. Bolstered by the lack of rigorous feedback documentation, funders can fall into confirmation bias through anecdotal evidence, choosing to hear and see what they want. Additionally. funders do not always go for projects in which there is notable rigor in measuring impact, largely due to their higher costs and longer timelines; they are often satisfied with employing softer methodologies that lead to favorable responses instead of reaching for more scientific approaches that can objectively validate the quality and impact of their funding. Because of internal policies and strategies that seek to widen the reach of funding resources, some donors tend to not fund CSO programs any more than two or three times, which hampers the depth of iterative learning they can cultivate. Funders working on governance topics have reputational incentives to select successful and effective projects to support and so may be reluctant to fund out-of-the-box programs, particularly in politically sensitive countries in East Africa.

By prioritizing learning as an outcome in itself, funders can experiment more safely and identify what did not work and how to improve. Successful and dynamic grantmaking programs that seek to advance institutional capacities propel research innovation, and test ground-breaking methodologies have a high potential to tackle the mosaic of social, political, and economic quandaries in the region.

Conclusion and key takeaways

We hope to spark conversations on the many forms of engagement with this groundwork and inspire practitioners to think about new ways of engaging citizens to enrich the governance process. In the process, we can improve accountability mechanisms within our social and political institutions. Here are some key takeaways;

i. Framing is an important aspect of advocacy messaging. CSOs can focus away from the political gaze by building community social networks to incentivize citizens' motivation and participation. However, we cannot completely ignore the political aspects of engagement. We recommend that citizen engagement be viewed more broadly to avoid negative assumptions that directing attention towards power is confrontational. On the contrary, active engagement creates a feedback system among people and their leaders, and ultimately a more responsive governance system.

ii. Even as the different stakeholders work together to improve citizen engagement, we feel their efforts would bear more fruit if they focused on improving the conditions that create engagement. For instance, they could broaden community engagement by creating incentives that support disempowered individuals to participate in community meetings, or heed their unique needs and preferences , such as meeting times and locations.

iii. Community meetings are often an important tool in citizen engagement. To make them more effective, our research suggests that grassroots CSOs and CBOs need to rethink how they organize them. Complementing meetings with other channels, such as radio and SMS, can reinforce messaging and diversify audiences.

iv. Collective action is about aligning personal interests with community goals. Citizens are more likely to join forces if they believe it will solve their problems, fostering social learning and mutual benefits. To encourage engagement, CSOs and policymakers must adopt a more personal approach that resonates with the community's values and concerns rather than relying solely on rights-based frameworks.

v. Group agency is important to increasing community participation. We are still exploring this issue, but initial observations are that exposing citizens to information on civic issues empowers them with the knowledge and confidence to engage with their leaders. Civic education is essential, but it won't erase their fears or identities. Mental models are complex and require ongoing adaptation. Consistent engagement with citizens can help address this challenge. Research shows that mental models are complex and require constant updating. Civic education must consequently be an ongoing process, relevant, and inclusive. One example here is the community monitoring programs that could empower citizens to hold leaders accountable by training them to act as watchdogs.

vi. The concept of public participation in governance needs an update. Some officials can manipulate participation, using complex language to exclude citizens. This can lead to public rejection of policies and confrontation. To make participation more meaningful, citizens must be given a chance to negotiate policies with their leaders and in the process influence resource allocation to different programs. We are not advocating for direct democracy but rather asking policymakers to open pathways for engagement with citizens. Local planning and budgeting forums are such examples. Countries in the region must update their public participation mechanisms to reflect a genuine commitment to citizen involvement. In Kenya, the Public Participation Bill 2024 and operationalizing the Public Benefits Organizations Act 2013 would be a positive step in this direction.

vii. We are committed to helping organizations adopt behavioral science. Contextualizing leads to a better understanding of the local systems that produce conditions for certain types of behavior. These insights can inform better and more localized interventions. More broadly we are applying a systems approach to understand how different actors interact in our complex political systems. Behavioral science in governance is relatively new within East Africa, its adoption by some of the CSOs we partnered with shows positive results such as increased engagement with participants. Such lessons highlight the benefits of embedding BeSci in local interventions, where Busara has garnered expertise.

viii. Funding challenges and stringent regulatory frameworks can limit CSO operations. The funding landscape and government regulations are evolving, and local organizations may not be aware of these changes. CSOs must collaborate, share resources, and advocate collectively to stay informed. They can harness relationships that benefit local communities by partnering with government agencies and other organizations. CSOs in turn offer local knowledge, awareness, and expertise on issues like health, climate change, and natural resource management. Donors are more likely to support organizations with a track record of solving local problems through collaboration.

References

1. Abramson, P. R. (1983). *Political attitudes in America: Formation and change*. W.H. Freeman
2. African Union & COMESA. (2022, August 11), *Statement of preliminary findings: African Union and COMESA election observation mission to 9 August 2022 general elections in the Republic of Kenya.* https://peaceau.org/uploads/au-comesa-election-observation-mission-to-the-9-august-2022-general-elections-in-the-republic-of-kenya-preliminary-statement-02.47am.pdf
3. Arnold, M., Wong-Pérez, K., Kajumba, T., Percy-Smith, B., Beauchamp, E., Greene, S., Shakya, C., Walnycki, A., Fisher, S. E., Chitekwe-Biti, B., Karamallis, A., Wamalwa, R., Mukasa, C. Hajra., & Silakan, D. (2019). *Engaging Citizens for Socially Just Climate Action*. World Bank. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/787881623668240058/engaging-citizens-for-socially-just-climate-action
4. Arnstein, S. R. (1969). *A ladder of citizen participation. Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, *35*(4), 216-224.
5. Ariely, D., & Jones, S. (2008). *Predictably irrational (p. 20)*. New York: HarperCollins.
6. Banerjee, A. V., Banerji, R., Duflo, E., Glennerster, R., & Khemani, S. (2010). Pitfalls of Participatory Programs: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in Education in India. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, *2*(1), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.2.1.1
7. Berger, B. (2009). Political theory, political science and the end of civic engagement. *Perspectives on politics*, *7*(2), 335-350.
8. Beals, M. (2010). A critical inquiry into the perspectives of African Americans who consider themselves equal to other U.S. citizens. Doctoral Dissertations 369. The University of San Francisco. https://repository.usfca.edu/diss/369
9. Beals, M. (2018). A critical inquiry into the perspectives of African Americans who consider themselves equal to other U.S. citizens. USF Scholarship: A Digital Repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. https://repository.usfca.edu/diss/369?utm_source=repository.usfca.edu%2Fdiss%2F369&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

10. Björkman, M., & Svensson, J. (2009). Power to the People: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment on Community-Based Monitoring in Uganda*. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *124*(2), 735–769. https://doi.org/10.1162/qjec.2009.124.2.735
11. Busara Center for Behavioral Economics (June 2024). Designing novel ways of increasing participation and engagement in the FCAP: A summary report of the findings in Rwanda and Uganda. Internal document: Unpublished
12. Busara Center for Behavioral Economics (August 2023). *Community Messaging and Civic Participation in East Africa, Technical Proposal.* Internal document: Unpublished
13. Busara, (2023). Understanding Participation in Community Driven Development Groups in Uganda. Unpublished report, Nairobi, Kenya.
14. Busara Center for Behavioral Economics, (August 2020). Community Messaging and Civic Participation Research, Understanding community-oriented prosocial behaviors.
15. Busara Center for Behavioral Economics (June 2020). Locally-Relevant Digital Content for Underserved Communities in Kenya User Needs Assessment Report. https://sites.google.com/busaracenter.org/digitalaccessprogram
16. Busara Center for Behavioral Economics (2019). *CMCP Phase 2 Mobile Lab Findings: Can behaviorally informed communication interventions motivate civic engagement?* Internal document: Unpublished
17. Canagarajah, R., Ogutu, B., Mugi, N., Too, G., Njoro, L. (2021). *Evaluating Crowdsourcing Behaviors In Identifying Online Misinformation.* Busara Center for Behavioral Economics. https://www.undp.org/kenya/publications/evaluating-crowdsourcing-behaviours-identifying-online-misinformation
18. Clarke, H. D., & Acock, A. C. (1989). National elections and political attitudes: The case of political efficacy. *British Journal of Political Science*, *19*(4), 551-562.
19. Diller, E. C. (2001). Citizens in service: The challenge of delivering civic engagement training to national service programs.
20. Del Valle, E. D., Jang, C., & Wendel, S. (2024). *Behavioral Systems: Combining behavioral science and systems analysis.* Busara. https://www.busara.global/our-works/behavioral-systems/

21. Duflo, E., Dupas, P., & Kremer, M. (2015). School governance, teacher incentives, and pupil-teacher ratios: Experimental evidence from Kenyan primary schools. *Journal of Public Economics, 123*, 92-110. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2014.11.008
22. Fiala, N., & Premand, P. (2018). Social accountability and service delivery: Experimental evidence from Uganda. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, (8449)*.
23. Fung, A., & Wright, E. O. (2001). Deepening democracy: Innovations in empowered participatory governance. *Politics & Society, 29*(1), 5-41.
24. Ganuza E. & Baiocchi G. (2012) "The Power of Ambiguity: How Participatory Budgeting Travels the Globe,". *Journal of Public Deliberation 8*(2). doi: https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.142
25. Goldfrank, B. (2012). The World Bank and the globalization of participatory budgeting. *Journal of Deliberative Democracy, 8*(2). doi: https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.143
26. Hivos East Africa & Busara Center for Behavioral Economics (2020). Evaluation of Citizen Engagement and Participation Models Consolidated (Popular Version) Report. Unpublished
27. Hoff, K., & Pandey, P. (2014). Making up people—The effect of identity on performance in a modernizing society. *Journal of Development Economics, 106*, 118-131.
28. Horn, S., & Keyman, A. (2016). Self-Efficacy as a Driver of Civic Participation in Uganda. Busara. Unpublished manuscript, Nairobi, Kenya.
29. Hurtado, A. (1989). Relating to privilege: Seduction and rejection in the subordination of white women and women of color. Signs: *Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 14*(4), 833-855.
30. Jang, C., Koki, E., Nyaga, R., Okafor, A., Singh, J., Vang, A., & Wendel, S. (2024). *The Busara toolkit: leveraging behavioral science for development. Busara Groundwork No. 10 (Research Agenda)*. Nairobi: Busara. DOI: https://doi.org/10.62372/WQSB6195
31. Joslyn MR, Cigler A. 2001. Group involvement and democratic orientations: social capital in the post-election context. *Soc. Sci. Q.* 82:357–68
32. Keyman, A., Too, G., & Canagaraja, R. (2021). Running Research Programs to Motivate CSO Engagement: Reflections based on five years of technical field applications and capacity building by Busara. Busara Center for Behavioral Economics. Unpublished manuscript, Nairobi, Kenya.

33. Madung, O. (2024, August 17). Kenya's government has a blueprint for digital tyranny. It is working – for now. *The Continent*. (Issue 172) https://www.thecontinent.org/_files/ugd/287178_6803da55f3ba403da9f78b7315deb6a0.pdf
34. Mansuri, G., & Rao, V. (2004). Community-Based and Driven Development: A Critical Review. *World Bank Research Observer* 19 (1): 1-39
35. Mansuri, G., & Rao, V. (2012). Localizing development: Does participation work? The World Bank.
36. McClendon G. H., Riedl R. B. (2015). Religion as a stimulant of political participation: Experimental evidence from Nairobi, K. *The Journal of Politics*, 77(4), 1045–1057.
37. McGarty C., Bliuc A.-M., Thomas E. F., Bongiorno R. (2009). Collective action is the material expression of opinion-based group membership. *Journal of Social Issues*, 65, 839–857.
38. Meadows, D. H. (2008). *Thinking in systems: A primer*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
39. Mouton, J. (2010). The state of social science in sub-Saharan Africa. In: Unesco (ed.) World Social Science Report 2010: Knowledge Divides. Paris: International Social Science Council, Unesco, 63–67.
40. OECD (2017), Behavioural Insights and Public Policy: Lessons from Around the World, OECD Publishing, Paris. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264270480-en
41. Ogutu, B., & Garcia, F. (2024, August 31). From a hashtag to a movement. *Busara*. https://www.busara.global/blog/from-a-hashtag-to-a-movement/
42. Putnam, R. (2001). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (New edition edition). New York, NY u.a.: Simon & Schuster Ltd.
43. Putnam, R. D. (1994). Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy. Princeton University Press
44. Rocha Menocal, A., & Sharma, B. (2008). Joint evaluation of citizens' voice and accountability: Synthesis report. London, UK: Department for International Development.
45. Satyanath, Shanker & Voigtllnder, Nico & Voth, Hans-Joachim. (2014). Bowling for Fascism: Social Capital and the Rise of the Nazi Party. SSRN Electronic Journal. 10.2139/ssrn.2416444.

46. Shihalo, W. (2023, July 19). Kenya's politicians continue to use ethnicity to divide and rule – 60 years after independence. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/kenyas-politicians-continue-to-use-ethnicity-to-divide-and-rule-60-years-after-independence-207930
47. Sidle, A. (2019). Action on agency: A theoretical framework for defining and operationalizing agency in girls' life skills programs. *Gendered Perspectives on International Development: Working Papers, (313)*, 0_1-21.
48. SpiceFM. (2024, August 19). *Kusema Na Kutenda: Tracking Ruto's "Fake" Projects-Morara Kebaso*. YouTube Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQ8dC7jGzeY
49. Sunstein, C. R., & Thaler, R. (2016, December 7). The Two Friends Who Changed How We Think About How We Think. The New Yorker.
50. Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2008). Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness.
51. Theiss-Morse, E., & Hibbing, J. R. (2005). Citizenship and civic engagement. *Annual Review of Political Science, 8*, 227-249. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104829
52. The Agency Fund. (2021, Sep 9). Putting Data, Media and Technology in the Service of Human Agency, White Paper.
53. Too, G. (2024, July 19). *Unpacking political protest: Q&A with Busara's Gideon Too on Kenya's #RejectFinanceBill2024 - Busara*. Busara. https://www.busara.global/blog/rejectfinancebill-unpacking-political-protest-qa/
54. Too, G., Muttai, M., Busara Field Staff, Mugisha, H., Mugume, K., Orebi, R., & GRA Staff. (2018). *Community Monitors Program Qualitative Study Report*. Busara Center for Behavioral Economics
55. Wanjiku, A., Wanja, D., Mwesige, M., & Okaba, C. (2017). *Religious Leaders and Behavioral Change in Uganda*. Internal document: Unpublished. Busara Center for Behavioral Economics
56. Wein T, Kombo S & Too G,. (2021). *Community Messaging and Civic Participation: Reviewing 7 years of learning*, Internal Document, Busara.

57. Whitelaw, G., Vaughan, H., Craig, B., & Atkinson, D. (2003). Establishing the Canadian community monitoring network. *Environmental monitoring and assessment*, *88*, 409-418. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025545813057
58. Wight, D. (2005). Impediments to developing social science research capacity in East Africa. Occasional Paper. MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit.
59. Vancel, J. et al (2017). Community Meetings in Uganda: Qualitative Study. Busara. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nhevlqlrUzC_KaSUi07o_f71U5bt5R7C/view

Appendix

Summary of Busara research projects referenced in this Groundwork.

Project	Summary
Community Messaging and Civic Participation (CMCP) in Uganda	Busara conducted a series of multi-method research activities and capacity-building engagements with a selected group of CSOs in Uganda to develop a deep understanding of the drivers of civic engagement behavior and how such knowledge can be effectively used by CSOs to promote greater civic engagement and participation in Uganda. The project had 3 phases: **Phase 1 (2015-2016):** Focused on capacity building with six partners, wholly on the basics of behavioral science, with research intended only to support the capacity building process. It also included a standalone research study on self-efficacy as a driver of civic engagement. **Phase 2 (2016-2019):** The focus was more significant on research, alongside continued and expanded capacity-building work with three prioritized CSO partners. This phase tackled three broad research questions namely: • How do you gain access and trust in a new community? • How do you run an effective and motivating interaction in that community? • How do you do this at scale in a country of such striking diversity? **Phase 3 (2019-2023):** In this phase, we are working with two main capacity-building partners (while lightly supporting two more) and three research themes to understand: • The unique set of citizen profiles in Uganda and the different set of engagement behaviors they partake in; • The stories that can motivate citizens in Uganda to partake in civic engagement behaviors; • Understanding the social networks of civic engagement.

Research on factors influencing community members' participation in community-driven development	Busara has collaborated with Spark Microgrants since 2023 to conduct research in Rwanda and Uganda to understand the contextual and behavioral factors, including local norms and customs, that might impact decision-making and, consequently, influence participation (joining FCAP and taking part in activities associated with it) in Community-Driven Development interventions such as Spark's Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP). The FCAP microgrant pathway serves as a model for community-driven development, integrating inclusive village planning with a seed grant. This approach empowers residents to identify and accomplish their own goals. In addition to the microgrant pathway, FCAP includes advocacy and initiative pathways where Spark supports and guides participants through their chosen projects. Through regular facilitated town-hall-style meetings, FCAP fosters durable livelihoods and enhances social cohesion, civic engagement, and representation of women in leadership roles.
Primed, but not engaged: the poor performance of self-efficacy and rights primes in promoting civic engagement, in a laboratory experiment in Uganda	Through a mobile lab study with 809 participants in Kampala and Kabale, Busara sought to examine how different behaviorally informed communication interventions influence civic engagement as defined by civic attention and engagement outcomes, namely; attendance to a community meeting, willingness to attend a community meeting, political and pre-political attention, and general self-efficacy. Our treatments included (i) intrinsic self-efficacy (focus on past success); (ii) demonstration of engagement story; and (iii) rights information. None of our treatments significantly increased civic engagement. Listening to the rights intervention and a story demonstrating engagement discouraged attendance at a community meeting. Listening to a story demonstrating engagement led to the worst scores on the political attention measure out of all groups. Listening to the intrinsic self-efficacy intervention and the rights intervention increased scores on the pre-political attention task, while self-efficacy did not change with any intervention.
Locally-relevant digital information for underserved communities in Kenya	In 2020, we partnered with the UK Government Prosperity Fund Digital Access Program and Hivisasa to propose effective solutions that would enhance digital access and consumption of locally relevant content for underserved communities in Kenya. We interviewed 81 participants, including 61 community members and 20 citizen journalists from Kisii and Nairobi. This study revealed interesting gaps in accessing and curating local news content in a constrained environment (government restrictions on social gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Religious Leaders and Behavior Change in Uganda	Busara conducted this study to understand religious leaders' techniques and approaches to influence behavior change. Through 12 in-depth interviews with religious leaders in Uganda, the study was designed to provide insights into the most effective tools for civic-related behavior change. Specifically, we sought to understand the techniques and approaches religious leaders use to influence behavior change. This qualitative study covered themes related to their leadership roles, community engagement techniques and approaches, and challenges and successes they face in influencing behavior change.
Understanding Community-Oriented Prosocial Behaviors Qualitative Research Study	Through this study, we sought to understand civic engagement through a community lens by identifying community challenges, and prosocial behaviors among citizens to address the challenges, levers, and barriers to partaking in prosocial actions. In August 2020, we interviewed 66 participants in Kampala Central through In-depth interviews and vignettes. The study showed that communities are defined by residence, but there are smaller communities that exist within, that reflect deeper ties such as interests. We further found that Citizens' civic engagement revolves around solving economic issues at the community level and sometimes involves political interactions. Further, their motivation to engage is driven by learning, observation, and the social expectations within the community. Another interesting finding was that a citizen's level of involvement in civic activities is responsive to existing social structures in the community. In essence, communities with strong cooperative networks enable people to engage in prosocial behaviors. On CSOs' involvement, we found that it is not as popular as CBOs', but citizens consider it effective because it addresses some of their most pressing issues.

Community Monitors Program Qualitative Research	In 2018, Busara conducted 8 interviews with Global Rights Alerts (GRA) community monitors, 4 interviews with key informants at community development offices, and 4 FGDs with community members in Hoima and Buliisa in Uganda. Through the study, we sought to understand how the selection of community monitors can be improved and how to encourage diligent reporting by community monitors. Key lessons were: Community monitors are capable, but trust is fragile, therefore selecting community monitors with the right qualities can make a difference. Further, good community monitors build diverse stakeholder networks – up, across, and down. We advised that GRA's reporting tools should better serve community monitors' networks and communication styles and recommended improvements in the selection process, reporting structure, and communication to motivate the monitors.
Using natural language processing (NLP) to develop messaging and communication strategies for policymakers in Uganda	Busara collaborated with Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) on this research project to investigate and determine the primary bottleneck(s) inhibiting the passage of the Marriage Bill in Uganda, which sought to reform and integrate the law relating to marriage, separation, and divorce. Busara used NLP to compare a lexicon of speeches given by cabinet ministers and those by aspirant leaders on campaign trails (captured in local newspapers), against speeches given by MPs in the Hansard to determine whether MPs are indeed influenced by their constituents, cabinet ministers, or their peers. The findings were used to develop messaging and communication strategies that would be used by UWONET and their network to promote behavioral change amongst opponents of the bill.
Improving public service delivery in Uganda through feedback devices	Busara collaborated with SEMA Uganda to conduct a series of experiments to test mechanisms for improving public service delivery. The experiments used technology to collect, synthesize, and report citizen feedback on public services received from government agencies such as police stations, courts, hospitals, and the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA).

Low-Cost Message Testing Guide for CSOs in East Africa	Busara worked closely with 12 East African CSOs to create and disseminate a low-cost message testing guide currently being used by a wide range of advocacy groups in the region to improve the effectiveness of their messaging campaigns within their communities. This is done by incorporating basic behavioral insights into the design of messages and communication strategies and conducting simple, low-cost testing of these messages on small samples of target audiences before fully rolling them out.
Evaluating Crowdsourcing Behaviors in identifying Online Misinformation	Busara conducted a live experimental demonstration of the Healthy Internet Project (HIP) plugin, in collaboration with UNDP Accelerator Lab Kenya, and the Healthy Internet Project (HIP) incubated at TED. The Healthy Internet Project plug-in is an open-source web browser extension that allows users to flag content online; it is intended to help curb the spread of lies, abuse, and fear-mongering and uplift useful ideas on the internet. Users can mark flags as mild/minor, medium, or severe across the latter flagging categories. Our experiment sought to understand potential users' motivations, experiences, and practices using the volunteer-driven crowdsourcing platform to flag misinformation in a live experiment that encouraged natural behaviors.
Social Accountability Research in Kenya	In 2019, Busara conducted research on behalf of Hivos East Africa on citizen engagement and participation models to fill existing knowledge gaps in understanding what factors enable citizen-driven change. The 3 models were: **(i) Every Citizen Counts**—aims to improve budget and fiscal accountability at the County government level; **(ii) Community Media Fund**—seeks to improve citizens' access to relevant information that enables the public to support policies and practices that drive inclusive economic and human development at all levels; **(iii) Open Up Contracting** supports CSOs, journalists, entrepreneurs, start-ups and other frontline organizations to foster more efficient, transparent and accountable contracting processes. The research activities involved: • Formative desktop research to understand the current state of information access and citizen participation in governance at all levels in Kenya. • Qualitative research to assess the behavioral factors relevant to citizen engagement and participation, as well as the role of infomediaries in shaping these factors • Collect demographic and psychographic quantitative data to identify patterns of citizen engagement among different segments of the population • Experimentally test the efficacy of pro-civic engagement models and communication strategies, including the comprehension and retention of infomediary data, on citizen engagement and participation

Definitions of Civic Engagement

Adler & Goggin (2005) offer a useful collection of differing definitions of civic engagement, which in turn help make the point that the concept has been stretched beyond usefulness (Berger, 2009).

Category	Definition
Civic engagement as community service	"Civic engagement [is] an individual's duty to embrace the responsibilities of citizenship with the obligation to actively participate, alone or in concert with others, in volunteer service activities that strengthen the local community" (Diller, 2001)
Civic engagement as collective action	"Civic engagement is any activity where people come together in their role as citizens" (Diller, 2001) "Civic engagement may be defined as how an individual, through collective action, influences the larger civil society" (Van Benshoten, 2001) "Active citizenship is about collective action more than the behavior of individuals. It is about collaboration, about intense joint activity... pursuing community issues through work in all sectors, not just government." (Hollister, 2002)
Civic engagement as political involvement	"Civic engagement differs from an individual ethic of service in that it directs individual efforts toward collective action in solving problems through our political process" (Diller, 2001)
Civic engagement as social change	"Civic engagement describes how an active citizen participates in the community's life to help shape its future. Ultimately, civic engagement has to include the dimensions of social change." (Crowley, n.d.)

Civic engagement as social connection	"We define civic engagement [as] all activity related to personal and societal enhancement which results in improved human connection and human condition" (Diller, 2001) "[Civic engagement is] experiencing a sense of connection, interrelatedness, and, naturally, commitment towards the greater community (all life forms)" (Diller, 2001)
Civic engagement as broad social engagement	"Putnam's definition includes informal social activities (visits with friends, card games) as well as formal activities (committee service), community and political participation. Putnam's primary interest is in "social capital," and he generally uses civic engagement to refer to the entire gamut of activities that build social capital." (Adler & Goggin, 2005) "Civic engagement is individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official, or voting." (della Carpini, n.d. in Adler & Goggin, 2005)

Busara Groundwork
LESSONS LEARNED

About Busara

Busara is a research and advisory organization, working with researchers and organizations to advance and apply behavioral science in pursuit of poverty alleviation. Busara pursues a future where global human development activities respond to people's lived experience; value knowledge generated in the context it is applied; and promote culturally appropriate and inclusive practices. To accomplish this, we practice and promote behavioral science in ways that center and value the perspectives of respondents; expand the practice of research where it is applied; and build networks, processes, and tools that increase the competence of practitioners and researchers.

About Busara Groundwork

Busara Groundwork lays the groundwork for future research and program design. As think pieces, they examine the current state of knowledge and what is needed to advance it, frame important issues with a behavioral perspective, or put forward background information on a specific context.

How to cite:

Too, Gideon. *How can citizens' voices enhance governance? Reflections from applied behavioral science research on what motivates citizen participation in East Africa. Busara Groundwork No. 16 (Lessons Learned).* Nairobi: Busara, 2024. DOI: doi.org/10.62372/NBDJ8943

38 Apple Cross Road,
Lavington, Nairobi, Kenya
www.busara.global

Busara