

Effect of Community Participation in Local Governance Performance: A Case Study of Nyarugenge District, Rwanda

Umurerwa Claudette¹; Dr. Akumuntu Joseph²; Magnifique Marie Chantal³

²Supervisor

^{1;2;3}Master of Public Policy and Management, University of Kigali, Rwanda

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Abstract:

➤ Purpose:

This study examines how community participation influences local governance performance in Nyarugenge District, Rwanda, focusing on consultative and collaborative participation, participation in planning processes, and participation in performance contracts.

➤ Design/Methodology/Approach:

The study adopted a mixed-methods, descriptive correlational design. A total of 384 participants were targeted, comprising 379 questionnaire respondents and five interview participants. Of these, 372 completed questionnaires were obtained and four interviews were conducted. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression, while qualitative data were analysed thematically.

➤ Findings:

Respondents generally perceived community participation and local governance performance positively. Consultative and collaborative participation ($\beta = 0.640$, $p < 0.001$) and participation in performance contracts ($\beta = 0.376$, $p < 0.001$) significantly and positively influenced local governance performance, whereas participation in planning processes did not have a statistically significant independent influence ($\beta = 0.028$, $p = 0.534$). The regression model explained 82.8% of the variation in local governance performance ($R^2 = 0.828$).

➤ Originality/Value:

The study contributes empirical evidence from a decentralised African context by demonstrating that different forms of community participation do not contribute equally to local governance performance. It highlights the importance of meaningful consultation, collaboration and citizen engagement in performance contracts and provides practical insights for strengthening participatory decentralisation and citizen-centred local governance in Rwanda.

Keywords: Community Participation; Local Governance; Public Sector Performance; Participatory Governance; Decentralisation; Rwanda.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Community participation is increasingly recognised as an important element of effective local governance because it provides citizens with opportunities to contribute to decisions that affect their communities. Participation may take different forms, including public consultations, collaborative engagement, participatory planning and civic monitoring. When these mechanisms are meaningfully connected to decision-making, they can improve the relevance of public

decisions, strengthen accountability and create stronger links between citizens and public institutions (OECD, 2022; Jäntti *et al.*, 2023).

The value of participation, however, depends not only on whether opportunities are formally provided but also on whether citizens can influence decisions and receive feedback on how their contributions are used. The OECD (2022) emphasises that effective participation requires a clear connection between participation processes and public

decision-making. Similarly, Jäntti *et al.* (2023) argue that citizen participation needs to be embedded in the strategic, managerial and citizen-facing activities of local government if it is to become an effective part of governance rather than an isolated consultation exercise. Recent research in the *International Journal of Public Sector Management* further shows that influential participation requires appropriate organisational structures, supportive organisational cultures, adequate resources and effective management (Kurkela *et al.*, 2023).

The importance of participation is particularly relevant in decentralised governance systems, where local authorities have responsibilities for planning, service delivery and community development. Decentralisation can bring decision-making closer to citizens and create opportunities for local communities to influence public priorities. Nevertheless, decentralisation alone does not guarantee inclusive or meaningful participation. Evidence from Rwanda shows that, although decentralisation has created opportunities for local participation, some marginalised groups continue to experience limited inclusion and weak downward accountability (Nygren *et al.*, 2022).

Rwanda provides an important context for examining this relationship. The country has continued to strengthen decentralisation and citizen-centred governance through mechanisms that encourage community engagement in local development and accountability. The Ministry of Local Government's Strategic Plan 2024–2029 identifies citizen participation as an important component of accountable and citizen-centred local governance and calls for stronger participation spaces and mechanisms (MINALOC, 2024). The strategy also links decentralisation and citizen participation to improved service delivery and accountable governance. The Rwanda Governance Board's Citizen Report Card provides further evidence on citizens' perceptions of governance, participation and service delivery across the country (RGB, 2025).

Despite these institutional efforts, the existence of participation mechanisms does not necessarily mean that citizens have equal influence over local decisions. Participation may be affected by differences in information, resources, organisational capacity and social influence. This distinction is important because attendance at meetings or involvement in community activities does not automatically demonstrate that citizens have influenced decisions or that their views have been incorporated into public programmes (OECD, 2022; Jäntti *et al.*, 2023).

The issue is particularly relevant to Nyarugenge District because the district operates within an urban environment characterised by diverse communities and continuing demands for effective public services and development. Local authorities therefore require mechanisms through which citizens can communicate priorities, participate in planning, monitor public commitments and provide feedback on service delivery.

Although previous research has examined citizen participation and decentralised governance, there remains limited empirical evidence on whether different forms of community participation make distinct contributions to local governance performance within a Rwandan urban district. Existing literature tends to examine participation broadly or focus on particular mechanisms rather than comparing consultative and collaborative participation, participatory planning and participation in performance contracts within one analytical model. This leaves an important empirical gap concerning which forms of participation contribute most strongly to local governance performance.

This study addresses this gap by examining the effect of three dimensions of community participation; consultative and collaborative participation, participation in planning processes, and participation in performance contracts, on local governance performance in Nyarugenge District, Rwanda. Examining the dimensions separately provides a more detailed understanding of how different participation mechanisms relate to local governance outcomes and provides practical evidence for strengthening participatory decentralisation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

➤ *Community Participation and Local Governance Performance*

Community participation refers to the involvement of citizens in processes through which public authorities identify priorities, make decisions, implement programmes and monitor public activities. In local government, participation can provide authorities with information about community needs while giving citizens opportunities to express concerns and hold public institutions accountable. The effectiveness of participation depends on the extent to which these opportunities are connected to actual decision-making (OECD, 2022).

Recent public-management research emphasises that participation should be treated as part of the organisation and management of local government. Jäntti *et al.* (2023) argue that effective participation requires integration across strategic, executive and citizen-facing levels of government. Kurkela *et al.* (2023) similarly identify organisational structures, organisational culture, resources and management as important conditions for creating influential citizen participation.

Meaningful participation is therefore different from simply providing citizens with opportunities to attend meetings. Citizens may be invited to participate while having limited influence over final decisions. The OECD (2022) stresses that participation processes should have a clear link to decision-making and that public authorities should provide responses to citizens' recommendations. This distinction is relevant to the present study because the three participation dimensions examined; consultation and collaboration, planning and performance contracts provide different opportunities for citizens to influence local governance.

Local governance performance refers in this study to the extent to which local government performs its responsibilities in ways that promote transparency, accountability, responsiveness, effective service delivery and citizen satisfaction. These dimensions are closely related to the quality of interaction between local authorities and citizens. Where citizens can communicate their priorities, monitor public commitments and receive feedback, participation may contribute to improved governance outcomes.

In Rwanda, decentralisation provides the institutional setting within which these interactions occur. MINALOC (2024) identifies citizen participation, accountability and service delivery among the priorities of the Governance and Decentralisation sector. However, evidence also indicates that the benefits of decentralisation are not experienced equally by all groups. Nygren *et al.* (2022), for example, found continuing challenges concerning the inclusion of marginalised groups in Rwanda's decentralised governance system.

The literature therefore suggests that community participation may contribute to local governance performance, but the strength of the contribution may differ according to the form and quality of participation. The following sections examine the three dimensions investigated in this study.

➤ *Theoretical Foundation*

The study is informed by four complementary theoretical perspectives: participatory governance, deliberative democracy, social capital and decentralisation. Together, these perspectives provide a framework for understanding how citizen involvement may influence local governance performance.

• *Participatory Governance Theory*

Participatory Governance Theory emphasises citizens' active involvement in public decision-making and governance processes. Its relevance to the present study lies particularly in consultative and collaborative participation. Consultation creates opportunities for citizens to communicate needs and priorities, while collaboration allows citizens and public authorities to work together in identifying problems and possible solutions.

Recent research supports the importance of embedding participation within local government structures. Jäntti *et al.* (2023) show that participation is more meaningful when it is integrated into the wider governance and management system. Kurkela *et al.* (2023) similarly emphasise that influential participation requires organisational conditions that allow citizen contributions to affect public administration.

The theory therefore provides a basis for examining whether stronger consultation and collaboration are associated with improved local governance performance in Nyarugenge District.

• *Deliberative Democracy Theory*

Deliberative Democracy Theory emphasises communication, discussion and the consideration of different perspectives in public decision-making. Its relevance to this study is particularly strong for participatory planning, where citizens may contribute information about community priorities and discuss alternatives concerning local development.

The OECD (2022) similarly emphasises that well-designed participatory processes should provide participants with sufficient information, opportunities for discussion and a clear connection between citizen contributions and public decisions. Participatory planning may therefore improve the relevance and legitimacy of local development decisions when citizens' contributions are genuinely considered.

However, differences in information, resources and influence can affect who participates and whose views are incorporated. This provides a useful theoretical basis for examining why participation in planning may be positively related to governance performance without necessarily producing a significant independent effect.

• *Social Capital Theory*

Social Capital Theory focuses on relationships, trust, networks and shared norms that facilitate cooperation and collective action. Within local governance, these relationships can support communication between citizens and authorities, collective monitoring and cooperation in community development.

The theory is relevant to participation in performance contracts because citizens may contribute to monitoring government commitments and providing feedback on implementation. Where relationships between citizens and local authorities are characterised by trust and cooperation, citizens may be more willing to participate and authorities may be more responsive to community feedback.

This perspective is consistent with the wider literature on citizen participation, which indicates that effective participation depends partly on the institutional and relational conditions within which participation occurs (Jäntti *et al.*, 2023; Kurkela *et al.*, 2023).

• *Decentralisation Theory*

Decentralisation Theory focuses on transferring responsibilities and decision-making authority from central to lower levels of government. Its central relevance to this study is that local government provides the institutional space in which citizens can participate in planning, monitoring and local decision-making.

Rwanda's decentralisation system has sought to bring governance closer to citizens and strengthen local service delivery. MINALOC (2024) identifies decentralisation and citizen-centred governance as important components of the sector's development agenda. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of decentralisation depends on institutional capacity and the ability of local structures to respond to citizens. Evidence

from Rwanda also indicates that decentralisation does not automatically guarantee meaningful inclusion for marginalised groups (Nygren *et al.*, 2022).

Decentralisation Theory therefore provides the broader institutional context within which the three participation dimensions examined in this study operate.

➤ *Hypothesis Development*

• *Consultative and Collaborative Participation and Local Governance Performance*

Consultative and collaborative participation creates opportunities for citizens to communicate their needs, provide feedback and work with local authorities in addressing community concerns. When such participation is connected to decision-making, it may improve government responsiveness and accountability.

The OECD (2022) identifies public consultation, open meetings and civic monitoring as important participation mechanisms and stresses the importance of ensuring that citizen contributions have a clear connection to public decisions. Jäntti *et al.* (2023) further demonstrate that citizen participation becomes more influential when it is embedded in the strategic and managerial processes of local government.

However, participation can be weakened when citizens' contributions are not reflected in decisions or when unequal influence affects whose views are prioritised. Kurkela *et al.* (2023) highlight the importance of organisational structures, culture, resources and management in creating systems of influential participation.

These arguments suggest that consultative and collaborative participation may improve local governance performance when citizens are able to communicate priorities, engage with authorities and receive meaningful responses. The study therefore hypothesises:

✓ H1: Consultative and collaborative participation has a significant effect on local governance performance in Nyarugenge District, Rwanda.

• *Community Participation in the Planning Process and Local Governance Performance*

Participatory planning enables citizens to contribute to the identification of community needs and priorities and to discussions concerning local development activities. Such participation can improve the relevance of plans by incorporating information that may not otherwise be available to local authorities.

The OECD (2022) emphasises that citizen participation is most meaningful when there is a genuine opportunity for citizens to influence public decisions and when authorities communicate how recommendations are considered. This principle is particularly relevant to participatory planning because citizens may participate formally without necessarily influencing final plans.

Jäntti *et al.* (2023) similarly argue that participation needs to be integrated into the strategic and administrative activities of government. In Rwanda, participatory governance is embedded within the broader decentralisation framework, including local planning and development processes (MINALOC, 2024). The study therefore proposes:

✓ H2: Community participation in the planning process has a significant effect on local governance performance in Nyarugenge District, Rwanda.

• *Community Participation in Performance Contracts and Local Governance Performance*

Performance contracts provide a mechanism for defining, monitoring and assessing government commitments. In Rwanda, Imihigo has become an important component of performance management within the decentralised governance system. Citizen involvement in such processes can provide opportunities for communities to monitor development commitments and provide feedback on implementation.

Recent research continues to examine Imihigo as an important mechanism within Rwanda's decentralisation and governance system. Muriisa and Auriacombe (2024) describe Imihigo as both a performance-management and governance mechanism and highlight its continuing importance within Rwanda's decentralised system. The effectiveness of performance-based governance, however, depends partly on the extent to which local accountability and citizen engagement are incorporated into implementation.

Citizen participation in performance contracts may therefore contribute to governance performance by strengthening monitoring, accountability and responsiveness. The study consequently proposes:

✓ H3: Community participation in performance contracts has a significant effect on local governance performance in Nyarugenge District, Rwanda.

➤ *Conceptual Framework*

The study conceptualises community participation through three dimensions: consultative and collaborative participation, participation in the planning process and participation in performance contracts. These dimensions constitute the independent variables, while local governance performance is the dependent variable.

The framework proposes that meaningful participation through consultation and collaboration, participatory planning and performance monitoring can contribute to improved local governance performance. The empirical analysis tests the independent contribution of each dimension while controlling for the other dimensions.

III. METHODOLOGY

➤ *Research Design*

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design with descriptive and correlational elements.

The design was appropriate because the study sought to describe community participation and examine the relationships between its three dimensions and local governance performance without manipulating the study variables (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The cross-sectional design also enabled data to be collected from respondents at one point in time and analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression.

➤ *Population and Sampling*

The target population comprised stakeholders involved in or affected by community participation and local governance in Nyarugenge District. These included urban residents, local government officials, local council members, community committee members and civil society representatives.

A planned sample of 384 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample-size approach. Simple random sampling was used for urban residents, while purposive sampling was used for officials, local council members, community committee members and civil society representatives because of their relevant knowledge of local governance processes.

372 completed questionnaires were obtained and used in the quantitative analysis. All 372 questionnaires were complete, with no missing responses for the variables analysed.

➤ *Data Collection*

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire containing closed-ended and Likert-scale items. The questionnaire measured the three dimensions of community participation and local governance performance.

Local governance performance was assessed through indicators relating to transparency, accountability, responsiveness, service delivery and citizen satisfaction.

Secondary information was obtained from government reports, policy documents and relevant scholarly literature to provide context and support interpretation of the empirical findings.

➤ *Validity and Reliability*

The questionnaire was reviewed for content and face validity before the main survey. A pilot test involving 38 respondents was conducted to assess the clarity and consistency of the instrument. Participants in the pilot study were excluded from the main survey.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. A coefficient of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable for internal consistency (Pallant, 2020).

➤ *Data Analysis*

The completed questionnaires were coded and analysed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including

frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, were used to summarise the data.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the direction and strength of the relationships between the three participation dimensions and local governance performance. Multiple linear regression was then used to estimate the unique contribution of each participation dimension while controlling for the other predictors.

The regression model was specified as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where Y represents local governance performance; X_1 represents consultative and collaborative participation; X_2 represents participation in the planning process; X_3 represents participation in performance contracts; β_0 is the intercept; β_1 – β_3 are regression coefficients; and ε represents the error term.

Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level. The coefficients were used to determine the direction and unique contribution of each predictor, while R^2 indicated the proportion of variation in local governance performance explained by the model (Pallant, 2020).

➤ *Ethical Considerations*

Participation in the study was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and provided consent before completing the questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by excluding personal identifiers from the analysis and reporting. Information collected was used for academic purposes only and was securely handled.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

➤ *Pilot Test Results*

The pilot study involved 38 respondents, representing approximately 10% of the planned sample. All Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold, ranging from 0.798 to 0.874. The questionnaire was therefore considered sufficiently reliable for the main study.

➤ *Response Rate*

The study planned to obtain 384 completed questionnaires. A total of 372 usable questionnaires were obtained for the quantitative analysis, representing 96.9% of the planned sample. All returned questionnaires were complete and suitable for analysis. In addition, four key informant interviews were conducted to provide qualitative information for interpretation.

➤ *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

The respondents comprised 57.5% males and 42.5% females. The largest age group was 31–45 years (41.1%), followed by respondents aged 25–30 years (40.1%). Regarding education, 73.7% held bachelor's degrees, 25.8% held diplomas and 0.5% held master's degrees.

Overall, the respondents had varied demographic and educational characteristics and were considered sufficiently informed to provide views on community participation and local governance.

➤ Descriptive Statistics

Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Means and standard deviations were used to summarise respondents' perceptions.

• Consultative and Collaborative Participation

Table 1 Level of Agreement on Consultative and Collaborative Participation

Statement	N	M	SD
Community meetings organized by local authorities occur frequently enough to allow all citizens to express their views	372	4.26	.877
Citizens from diverse backgrounds, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, have equal opportunities to participate in community meetings	372	4.25	.874
The level of attendance at community meetings reflects meaningful engagement and interest from all segments of the community	372	4.16	.936
Feedback provided by citizens during consultations is considered in decision-making, regardless of their social or political influence	372	3.49	.903
Power dynamics, including the influence of local elites or authority figures, affect whose voices are prioritized during consultations	372	4.16	.960
Valid N (listwise)	372		

Source: Primary Data, 2026 –Key: Mean: M, Standard Deviation: SD

The results indicate generally positive perceptions of consultative and collaborative participation. Community meetings recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.26$), followed by equal opportunities for participation ($M = 4.25$). These results suggest that citizens generally perceive local consultation mechanisms as accessible.

However, consideration of citizen feedback recorded a lower mean ($M = 3.49$). The relatively high score for power dynamics ($M = 4.16$) also points to concerns about unequal influence during consultations. Thus, although opportunities for participation appear to exist, the extent to which citizens' contributions influence decisions remains an important issue.

The qualitative findings were consistent with this interpretation. Key informants indicated that community meetings improve communication and accountability but noted that less influential citizens and vulnerable groups may not always participate effectively. This finding is consistent with the emphasis in recent participation literature on the difference between formal opportunities to participate and participation that has actual influence on decisions (OECD, 2022; Jäntti *et al.*, 2023).

• Community Participation in the Planning Process

Table 2 Level of Agreement on Community Participation in Planning

Statement	N	M	SD
Citizens are regularly invited to participate in local government planning processes.	372	4.22	.825
Citizens from diverse groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, have equal opportunities to influence planning decisions.	372	4.64	.679
Citizen input is genuinely considered when formulating local development plans.	372	3.20	.433
The extent of citizen participation is sufficient to impact planning outcomes and resource allocation.	372	4.20	.819
Power dynamics, such as influence from local elites or officials, can affect whose views are incorporated into plans.	372	4.34	.962
Valid N (listwise)	372		

Source: Primary Data, 2026 –Key: Mean: M, Standard Deviation: SD

Respondents generally reported positive perceptions of participatory planning. Equal opportunities for diverse groups recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.64$), while regular invitations to participate in planning recorded $M = 4.22$.

However, the mean for whether citizen input is genuinely considered in final development plans was considerably lower ($M = 3.20$). The high score for power dynamics ($M = 4.34$) further indicates concerns about unequal influence.

The qualitative findings similarly suggested that participation helps identify community priorities and build ownership but that citizens may become discouraged when their suggestions are not reflected in final plans. This finding reinforces the OECD's (2022) argument that meaningful participation requires a clear connection between citizen input and public decision-making.

- Community Participation in Performance Contracts

Table 3 Level of Agreement on Community Participation in Performance Contracts

Statement	N	M	SD
Citizens in Nyarugenge District know about the goals and details of local government performance contracts (Imihigo).	372	4.66	.603
Citizens from different groups, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, have equal chances to give their opinions on performance contracts.	372	3.24	.490
Opinions and feedback from citizens are seriously considered when implementing performance contracts.	372	4.15	.703
Citizens actively take part in checking and evaluating the progress of performance contracts in Nyarugenge District.	372	4.16	.996
People in power, such as local leaders or influential community members, can affect whose opinions are heard or acted upon in the district.	372	4.38	.672
Valid N (listwise)	372		

Source: Primary Data, 2026 –Key: Mean: M, Standard Deviation: SD

The findings indicate relatively strong awareness and participation in performance contracts. Awareness of Imihigo recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.66$), while participation in monitoring and evaluation recorded $M = 4.16$.

However, equal opportunities for different social groups recorded a lower mean ($M = 3.24$), suggesting that inclusiveness remains a concern. The high score for the influence of powerful individuals ($M = 4.38$) also indicates that unequal influence may affect whose views are heard or acted upon.

Key informants indicated that citizen involvement in Imihigo monitoring contributes to accountability and ownership of development activities, although vulnerable groups may face barriers to effective participation. These findings are relevant to Rwanda's continuing use of performance-based governance and decentralisation mechanisms (MINALOC, 2024; Muriisa and Auriacombe, 2024).

- Local Governance Performance

Table 4 Level of Agreement on Local Governance Performance

Statement	N	M	SD
Local government operations in Nyarugenge District are open and transparent to citizens.	372	4.40	.695
Local government officials in Nyarugenge District are accountable for their actions and decisions.	372	4.16	.996
Local government in Nyarugenge District provides timely and quality services to all citizens.	372	4.25	.843
Citizens in Nyarugenge District are generally satisfied with the performance of local government.	372	4.21	.813
Local government encourages citizens to participate in decision-making and development planning.	372	3.32	.617
Valid N (listwise)	372		

Source: Primary data, 2026 –Key: Mean: M, Standard Deviation: SD

Overall, respondents perceived local governance performance positively. Transparency recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.40$), followed by service delivery ($M = 4.25$) and citizen satisfaction ($M = 4.21$).

However, the item relating to whether local government encourages citizens to participate in decision-making and development planning recorded a lower mean ($M = 3.32$). This result is important because it indicates that positive perceptions of governance performance do not necessarily mean that citizens perceive themselves as having strong influence over local decision-making.

The finding is consistent with recent participation research, which stresses that effective citizen participation requires more than the existence of participation mechanisms; citizens need opportunities to influence decisions and public authorities need to demonstrate how citizen contributions are considered (OECD, 2022; Kurkela *et al.*, 2023).

➤ *Pearson Correlation Analysis*

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the three dimensions of community participation and local governance performance.

Table 5 Correlation Matrix

		X1	X2	X3	Y
Consultative and Collaborative Participation (X1)	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	372			
Community Participation in Planning Process (X2)	Pearson Correlation	.877**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	372	372	372	
Community Participation in Performance Contracts (X3)	Pearson Correlation	.490**	.462**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		

	N	372	372	372	
Local Governance Performance (Y)	Pearson Correlation	.849**	.763**	.702**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	372	372	372	372

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Key: Consultative and Collaborative Participation (X1), Community Participation in Planning Process (X2), Community Participation in Performance Contracts (X3), Local Governance Performance (Y)

The results show statistically significant positive relationships between all three participation dimensions and local governance performance.

Consultative and collaborative participation had the strongest correlation with local governance performance ($r = .849$, $p < .01$), followed by participation in the planning process ($r = .763$, $p < .01$) and participation in performance contracts ($r = .702$, $p < .01$).

These findings indicate that respondents who reported higher levels of community participation also tended to report higher levels of local governance performance. However, correlation does not establish a unique effect because the

participation dimensions are also related to one another. This justified the use of multiple regression to determine the independent contribution of each dimension.

The strongest correlation among the independent variables was between consultative and collaborative participation and participation in planning ($r = .877$). The possibility of overlapping explanatory effects was therefore considered in the regression analysis.

➤ Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the unique contribution of the three community participation dimensions to local governance performance.

Table 6 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.910 ^a	.828	.827	.21419
a. Predictors: (Constant), Consultative and Collaborative Participation (X1), Community Participation in Planning Process (X2), Community Participation in Performance Contracts (X3), Local Governance Performance (Y)				

The regression model produced $R = .910$ and $R^2 = .828$. Thus, the three participation dimensions jointly explained 82.8% of the observed variation in local governance

performance in the study sample. The adjusted R^2 was .827, indicating little difference between the unadjusted and adjusted estimates.

Table 7 ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1					
Regression	81.466	3	27.155	591.920	.000 ^b
Residual	16.883	368	.046		
Total	98.349	371			
a. Dependent Variable: Local Governance Performance (Y)					
b. Predictors: (Constant), Consultative and Collaborative Participation (X1), Community Participation in Planning Process (X2), Community Participation in Performance Contracts (X3)					

The ANOVA results show that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(3,368) = 591.920$, $p < .001$. The model therefore provides statistically significant evidence

that the three participation dimensions, taken together, are associated with variation in local governance performance.

Table 8 Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.792	.116		-6.837	.000
	Consultative and Collaborative Participation (X1)	.546	.039	.640	13.954	.000
	Community Participation in Planning Process (X2),	.023	.037	.028	.622	.534
	Community Participation in Performance Contracts (X3),	.535	.035	.376	15.125	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Local Governance Performance (Y)						

The regression coefficients show that consultative and collaborative participation was the strongest significant predictor of local governance performance ($\beta = .640$, $p < .001$). Participation in performance contracts was also a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .376$, $p < .001$).

In contrast, participation in the planning process was not statistically significant after the other two participation dimensions were controlled ($\beta = .028$, $p = .534$).

This difference between the correlation and regression results is important. Participation in planning had a strong bivariate relationship with governance performance ($r = .763$), but its unique contribution became statistically insignificant in the multiple regression model. One possible explanation is that its explanatory contribution overlaps with

the other dimensions of participation, particularly consultative and collaborative participation.

The reported collinearity diagnostics were within the study's specified acceptable limits, with tolerance values ranging from .222 to .755 and VIF values from 1.324 to 4.508. The regression results were therefore interpreted as sufficiently stable for the purposes of the study.

Overall, the findings indicate that consultative and collaborative participation and participation in performance contracts make the strongest unique contributions to local governance performance, whereas participatory planning does not make a statistically significant independent contribution after the other dimensions are considered.

➤ Hypothesis Testing

Table 9 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Beta	Sig.	Decision
H ₀₁ : There is no significant effect of consultative and collaborative participation in local governance performance in Nyarugenge District	0.640	.000	Rejected
H ₀₂ : There is no significant effect of community participation in the planning process in local governance performance in Nyarugenge District	0.028	0.534	Not supported
H ₀₃ : There is no significant effect of community participation in performance contracts in local governance performance in Nyarugenge District.	0.376	.000	Rejected

Source: Field Data, 2026.

The hypotheses were assessed using the regression coefficients at the 5% significance level.

H₀₁ was supported because consultative and collaborative participation had a statistically significant positive effect on local governance performance ($\beta = .640$, $p < .001$).

H₀₂ was not supported because participation in the planning process did not have a statistically significant unique effect on local governance performance ($\beta = .028$, $p = .534$).

H₀₃ was supported because participation in performance contracts had a statistically significant positive effect on local governance performance ($\beta = .376$, $p < .001$).

The findings therefore show that community participation is not uniform in its relationship with local governance performance. Consultation and collaboration and participation in performance contracts were significant predictors, while planning participation was not significant after the other dimensions were controlled.

The finding for H₀₂ does not mean that participatory planning is unimportant. Rather, the result indicates that, within this model and sample, participation in planning did not make a statistically significant independent contribution once consultation and collaboration and participation in performance contracts were taken into account. The descriptive findings provide a possible explanation: although citizens reported being invited to planning processes, they were less positive about whether their contributions were genuinely reflected in final plans.

This distinction is consistent with the OECD (2022), which emphasises that participation is most meaningful when citizens can see how their contributions affect public decisions.

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ Summary of Findings

The study examined the effect of community participation on local governance performance in Nyarugenge District, focusing on consultative and collaborative participation, participation in planning processes and participation in performance contracts.

• Consultative and Collaborative Participation

Consultative and collaborative participation had a positive and statistically significant effect on local governance performance. Community meetings and opportunities for citizens to express their views were generally perceived positively and were associated with transparency, accountability, communication and responsiveness. However, citizen feedback was not always fully incorporated into decisions, and unequal influence remained a concern.

• Participation in Planning Processes

Participation in planning had a positive relationship with local governance performance but did not have a statistically significant independent effect in the regression model. Although citizens reported opportunities to participate in planning and to identify community priorities, their views were not always perceived as being reflected in final plans.

This suggests that the quality of participation and the extent to which citizen input influences decisions are important considerations.

• *Participation in Performance Contracts*

Participation in performance contracts had a positive and statistically significant effect on local governance performance. Citizen awareness of Imihigo and involvement in monitoring and evaluation were relatively strong. Nevertheless, unequal opportunities for women, youth, persons with disabilities and less influential citizens remained a concern.

➤ *Conclusion*

The study concludes that community participation is an important component of local governance performance in Nyarugenge District, but its contribution varies across participation mechanisms.

Consultative and collaborative participation had the strongest significant effect and emerged as the most important predictor among the three dimensions examined. Strengthening meaningful dialogue and collaboration between citizens and local authorities can therefore contribute to greater accountability, responsiveness and effective service delivery.

Participation in planning processes was positively related to governance performance but did not have a statistically significant independent effect. This suggests that simply inviting citizens to participate in planning is insufficient. Greater attention is required to ensure that community views are genuinely considered, incorporated where appropriate and followed through during implementation.

Participation in performance contracts also had a significant positive effect on local governance performance. Citizen involvement in monitoring and evaluating Imihigo can strengthen accountability, transparency and ownership of local development commitments.

Overall, the study concludes that the effectiveness of community participation depends not only on the existence of participation mechanisms but also on whether citizens can meaningfully influence decisions, monitor implementation and receive responses from local authorities. This conclusion is consistent with recent public-management literature emphasising the importance of embedding participation within the structures and management practices of local government (Jäntti *et al.*, 2023; Kurkela *et al.*, 2023).

➤ *Limitations*

The study had a geographical limitation because data were collected from only three sectors of Nyarugenge District: Muhima, Nyarugenge and Kigali. This scope was guided by district authorities to facilitate coordination and implementation of the research activities. Consequently, the findings may not fully reflect experiences across all sectors of Nyarugenge District and should therefore be generalised to the wider district or other districts in Rwanda with caution.

Nevertheless, the selected sectors provided relevant and diverse information for addressing the study objectives.

➤ *Recommendations*

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Nyarugenge District, in collaboration with MINALOC, should organize quarterly public consultation forums at Sector and Cell levels. Citizen concerns should be documented, responded to within 30 days, and incorporated into governance decisions where applicable. Success should be assessed through forum attendance and the proportion of recommendations implemented.
- Nyarugenge District Planning Unit should conduct annual participatory planning meetings before preparing District Development Plans and annual budgets. Feedback forms should be used, with a summary of adopted and rejected citizen proposals provided after each planning exercise. Success should be measured by participation levels and the proportion of community priorities reflected in district plans.
- MINALOC and Nyarugenge District should establish biannual Imihigo review meetings involving citizens in monitoring and evaluating performance contracts. Quarterly implementation progress should also be communicated through public meetings and district communication platforms. Success should be assessed through Imihigo implementation rates, citizen participation, and public complaints.
- The Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) should conduct an annual assessment of citizen participation in Nyarugenge District using the Citizen Report Card and provide recommendations for improvement. The District should implement the recommendations within the following financial year. Success should be measured through Citizen Report Card scores on participation, transparency, accountability, and citizen satisfaction.

➤ *Further Research*

Future studies should examine community participation and local governance performance in other districts of Rwanda to allow comparison across different administrative contexts. Further research could also investigate other factors influencing local governance performance, including leadership, financial management, institutional capacity and technology adoption. In addition, future studies should examine barriers to effective participation among vulnerable and less-represented groups.

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