

Public Awareness and Participatory Budget-Making in Devolved Government: Evidence from Uriri Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Public participation is a constitutional and administrative requirement in Kenya's devolved system, yet meaningful participation in county budget making depends partly on whether citizens receive timely, trustworthy and understandable budget information. This article examined the relationship between public awareness and the budget making process in Uriri Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and a mixed-methods orientation. The estimated target adult population was 63,600, the planned sample was 398, and 372 completed questionnaires were analysed. Primary data were gathered using a semi-structured questionnaire and an interview guide. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression, while qualitative information was analysed through content analysis. The public awareness construct was reliable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.789). Findings showed divided perceptions of county openness: 47.8% considered the county government open in providing information, while 52.2% did not. Reliable and comprehensive public finance information was accessible to a high extent for 25.8% of respondents, to a low extent for 54.0%, and not at all for 20.2%. Public awareness recorded an overall mean of 3.38 (SD = 0.852). It was positively associated with the budget making process ($r = 0.542$, $p < .001$). In a multivariable model adjusting for public involvement and budget allocation, public awareness remained a statistically significant predictor ($B = 0.198$, $SE = 0.041$, standardized beta = 0.216, $t = 4.829$, $p < .001$). Qualitative findings indicated that citizens valued information delivered through ward administrators and chiefs' barazas but experienced difficulties with technical budget information, reactive civic education and late disclosure. The article concludes that public awareness is significantly associated with the budget making process and recommends continuous civic education and timely, accessible dissemination of development plans, public accounts and participation notices.

Keywords: Public Awareness; Public Participation; Budget Making; Civic Education; Migori County

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INTRODUCTION

Budget-making is a central public finance process through which governments estimate revenues, allocate resources, set expenditure priorities and provide a basis for accountability. This study treats budgeting not merely as a technical financial exercise but also as a governance process in which citizens and other stakeholders should have opportunities to understand, question and influence public priorities. Owate et al. (2025) describe the budget process as an important instrument for service delivery, resource management and financial accountability. In participatory systems, the quality of citizen contribution is closely connected to the information available to citizens before and during the budget cycle.

International research shows that public participation in budgeting varies considerably across political and administrative systems. In some settings, legal and institutional arrangements provide citizens with extensive opportunities to participate, while in others complex rules, restricted information and unequal access reduce the practical value of participation. Mishra (2014), for example, discusses the challenges surrounding citizen participation in the budget making process in Odisha, India. Uddin et al. (2019) similarly examine participatory budgeting in a Japanese local-government context. The literature also indicates that public participation has increasingly been linked to fiscal transparency and accountability, making information disclosure a critical precondition for informed engagement.

Legal recognition of public participation does not automatically ensure that citizens influence public decisions. Devas and Grant (2003) identify access to information, local leadership and active civil society as important conditions for participation and accountability in Kenya and Uganda. These conditions matter for budgeting because citizens need notice of forums, access to documents and opportunities to question proposed priorities.

Public participation is central to Kenya's devolved governance framework. For participation in county budgeting to be meaningful, citizens need information about government operations and opportunities to interpret and discuss resource priorities. Access to understandable information can support informed contributions and scrutiny of public decisions.

Despite formal opportunities for participation, information barriers can limit effective engagement. Mbithi et al. (2019) identify constraints on public participation in Kenyan county governments, including difficulties accessing relevant information. Limited civic education, inadequate disclosure, late notices and technical budget language can prevent citizens from moving from attendance to informed participation.

Uriri Sub-County, Migori County, provides the setting for examining the relationship between public awareness and the budget making process. Public awareness was operationalized through access to participation dates, public accounts reports and county development plans, together with civic education, the quality of information and the timeliness of disclosure.

Statement of the Problem

Public participation in county financial processes depends on more than the existence of public forums. Citizens need information that enables them to understand budget proposals and make informed contributions. Where access to relevant information is limited, participatory arrangements may provide opportunities to attend meetings without supporting effective scrutiny of public priorities.

The problem is especially important at county and sub-county level, where citizens depend on county budgets for services such as roads, health care and water. Citizens may perceive that public participation meetings may be conducted while citizens still doubt whether their views affect final budget outcomes. It also identifies information gaps as a barrier to effective participation. Where budget documents are difficult to access, notices are issued late, civic education is weak or information is too technical, participation may satisfy a procedural requirement without enabling citizens to make informed contributions.

Existing research provides evidence of the information-participation problem but leaves a context-specific gap. Kituyi and Moi (2021), studying Trans Nzoia County, reported low awareness of budget participation processes, with only 29% of respondents demonstrating awareness. Otieno et al. (2016) examined financial budgeting in public secondary schools in Uriri rather than the county public-budget process. The present article therefore focuses specifically on the relationship between public awareness and county budget making in Uriri Sub-County.

Objective and Research Question

The objective is to examine the relationship between public awareness and participatory budget making in Uriri Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya.

Research question: What is the relationship between public awareness and participatory budget making in Uriri Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Budget Making Process

This study conceptualizes the budget making process as a set of guidelines and activities through which government manages expenditure, allocates resources and uses the budget as an instrument of economic strategy, management and accountability. Public-sector budgets are therefore both financial plans and governance instruments. They communicate intended revenues and expenditures, establish priorities, support control and provide a basis for evaluating public performance.

Otieno et al. (2016) examined financial budgeting in public secondary schools in Uriri, illustrating the importance of financial planning in institutional management. In county government, budgeting translates development priorities into resource commitments and provides a basis for monitoring expenditure and accountability.

Participatory budget making adds a citizen dimension to these technical functions. Citizens require sufficient information to understand proposed priorities, assess past performance and communicate preferences. Information is therefore not incidental to participation; it provides the material citizens need to evaluate choices and engage with public officials. Public awareness can consequently affect whether the budget making process is transparent, responsive and capable of reflecting citizen priorities.

Public Awareness in Budget Making

Public awareness refers to citizens' access to and understanding of information relevant to participation in budget making. The conceptual framework identifies information on public

participation dates, availability of public accounts reports and availability of county development plans as key indicators. The empirical instrument extends this concern to trustworthiness and breadth of information, civic education on participatory budgeting and timeliness of disclosure.

Kituyi and Moi (2021) found low awareness of budget participation processes in Trans Nzoia County. Only 29% of respondents demonstrated knowledge of the processes, while restricted information limited citizens' participation in budget discussions. This finding suggests that legal opportunities for participation may be underused where civic education and information distribution are weak.

Consultation enables public authorities to obtain feedback on budget information and citizens' understanding of the material presented. Stakeholder feedback helps identify differing priorities and areas of disagreement. Information sharing provides a foundation for meaningful contributions.

Other studies reinforce the relationship between information and participation. Mugambi and Theuri (2014) examine challenges in county budget preparation, while Mbithi et al. (2019) identify constraints on public participation in Kenyan county governments. These studies situate access to information within the wider administrative conditions needed for meaningful engagement.

Public awareness therefore has at least three dimensions in the present article. First is access: citizens need budget documents, participation notices, development plans and public accounts. Second is comprehensibility: citizens must be able to interpret the information they receive. Third is timeliness: information must reach citizens early enough to allow preparation before participation forums. The results examine these dimensions using survey and interview evidence.

Cognitive Engagement Theory

The study draws on cognitive engagement theory to examine how access to information and its interpretation can support participation. Meece et al. (1988) investigated cognitive engagement in educational settings. Applying this perspective to county budgeting provides an interpretive framework: citizens need both information and opportunities to process it when forming views on public priorities.

From this perspective, literacy, educational background and knowledge can affect the ability to obtain, interpret and use complex information. Applied to county budgeting, citizens who understand budget terminology, development plans, public accounts and participation procedures are better positioned to ask questions, compare priorities and make reasoned contributions. Public awareness is therefore expected to support more meaningful engagement with the budget making process.

This study recognizes a limitation of the theory: knowledge alone does not guarantee participation. Citizens may be well informed but lack motivation or confidence, or may believe that participation will not influence outcomes. For this reason, the present article treats public awareness as an important explanatory factor rather than as a complete explanation of participation or budget making outcomes.

Empirical Gap and Conceptual Focus

The studies reviewed show that information access and civic knowledge matter for public participation, but the evidence is geographically and institutionally uneven. Research from Trans Nzoia and other counties provides county-level evidence, while earlier research in Uriri addressed community projects or school budgeting rather than county budget making. This article addresses that contextual gap by focusing on public awareness in Uriri Sub-County. Public awareness is the explanatory variable, measured through access to trustworthy and sufficient information, access to county development plans and public accounts, notice of participation dates, civic education and timeliness of disclosure. The outcome is the budget making process, which was assessed through perceptions of financial management, fiscal deficits, social audit, responsiveness to citizen priorities, timeliness and transparency.

For public administration scholarship, the study contributes evidence on the informational conditions under which constitutionally mandated participation operates in a devolved African government. It links citizen access to budget information, civic education and timely disclosure to assessments of the budget making process, thereby locating public awareness within the practical operation of accountability, transparency and participatory governance.

METHODS

Research Design and Study Area

The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a mixed methods approach. Quantitative questionnaire data were complemented by qualitative interviews and open-ended responses. The design described perceptions of participatory budgeting and examined relationships among the study variables.

The study was conducted in Uriri Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya. The study area includes five wards in the study locale: Central Kanyamkago, East Kanyamkago, North Kanyamkago, South Kanyamkago and West Kanyamkago. Uriri was selected as a devolved local setting in which residents depend on county budget allocations for essential public services and where public participation forums provide opportunities for citizen engagement.

Target Population, Sampling and Response

The target adult population in Uriri Sub-County was estimated at 63,600. The planned questionnaire sample comprised 398 respondents. A total of 372 completed questionnaires were returned and used in the quantitative analysis, giving a response rate of 93.5%.

Stratification was used to represent stakeholder categories, with systematic random selection of respondents and purposive selection of institutional stakeholders. The study included citizens, community leaders, sub-county staff, NGO/CSO representatives, ward administrators and religious leaders. Quantitative results are based on the 372 completed questionnaires; interviews for key informants

Data Collection and Measurement

Primary data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire and an interview guide. Questionnaires elicited perceptions of public awareness and budget making. Interviews with

institutional and community stakeholders provided contextual insights into information access, civic education and the operation of participation forums.

Public awareness was measured using seven Likert-type statements covering trustworthiness of information, breadth of available information, accessibility of county development plans and performance information, accessibility of public participation dates, county civic education on participatory budgeting, accessibility of public accounts, and timeliness of information release. Cronbach's alpha was 0.789 for the seven-item public awareness construct, exceeding the study's minimum reliability threshold of 0.70.

The dependent variable, budget making process, was measured through six statements concerning management of public funds, fiscal deficits, social audit, reflection of citizen priorities, budget approval and implementation timelines, and transparency. Cronbach's alpha was 0.795 for this construct.

Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to assess the bivariate relationship between public awareness and the budget making process. The analysis also estimated a multiple linear regression model containing public awareness, public involvement and budget allocation; the public awareness coefficient from that model is reported in this article because it shows the association of public awareness with the budget making process while the other predictors are statistically controlled.

Qualitative data were analysed through content analysis. The analysis identified themes relating to trust in information sources, channels of access, civic education gaps and timeliness of disclosure.

Ethical approval and research authorization were obtained from Kenyatta University and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Informed consent was obtained, participation was voluntary, confidentiality was assured, and participants could withdraw without penalty.

RESULTS

Reliability of the Public-Awareness Measure

The seven-item public awareness scale recorded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.789. Using the reliability threshold of 0.70, this indicated acceptable internal consistency and supported use of the items as a composite measure of public awareness.

Table 1: Reliability of the Public-Awareness Measure

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items	Interpretation
Public awareness	0.789	7	Reliable

County Government Openness and Access to Public-Finance Information

Respondents were first asked whether they considered the county government open in providing information about its activities. Of the 372 respondents, 178 (47.8%) answered yes

and 194 (52.2%) answered no. The distribution indicates a nearly even division, with a slight majority perceiving the county government as not open in its information provision.

Table 2: Perceived County Government Openness in Providing Information

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	178	47.8
No	194	52.2
Total	372	100.0

The study then examined the accessibility of reliable and comprehensive public finance information. Only 96 respondents (25.8%) reported access to a high extent. A majority, 201 respondents (54.0%), reported access to a low extent, while 75 respondents (20.2%) indicated that such information was not accessible at all. Thus, almost three quarters of respondents placed access in either the low-extent or not-at-all categories.

Table 3: Accessibility of Reliable and Comprehensive Public-Finance Information

Extent of accessibility	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High extent	96	25.8
Low extent	201	54.0
Not at all	75	20.2
Total	372	100.0

Descriptive Statistics on Public Awareness

The seven public awareness statements produced an overall mean of 3.38 and a standard deviation of 0.852, indicating moderate agreement regarding the availability and quality of budget-related information. The highest-rated item was access to trustworthy information ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.812$), followed by accessibility of information on county development plans and track record ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.829$).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Public Awareness

Statement	n	Mean	SD
The public has access to trustworthy information.	372	3.58	0.812
The public has access to a wealth of information.	372	3.42	0.845
Information on the county's development plans and track record is easily accessible.	372	3.51	0.829
Information on the dates of public involvement is easily accessible to the county government.	372	3.36	0.861
The county government educates the public about participatory budgeting.	372	3.28	0.878
Information on public accounts is easily accessible to the county administration.	372	3.33	0.855
Information is released promptly by the county administration.	372	3.21	0.887

Statement	n	Mean	SD
Average score		3.38	0.852

Access to a wealth of information recorded a mean of 3.42 (SD = 0.845), while information on dates of public involvement recorded a mean of 3.36 (SD = 0.861). Access to public accounts recorded a mean of 3.33 (SD = 0.855). These results indicate that respondents did not reject the existence of information, but their ratings were not sufficiently high to suggest consistently strong access across the information environment.

The two lowest-rated items were county education of the public about participatory budgeting (M = 3.28, SD = 0.878) and prompt release of information by the county administration (M = 3.21, SD = 0.887). Within the study's public awareness construct, civic education and timeliness therefore emerged as the weakest dimensions. This pattern is consistent with the categorical finding that 54.0% of respondents regarded reliable and comprehensive public finance information as accessible only to a low extent.

Budget-Making Process

The study recorded an overall mean of 3.49 (SD = 0.819) for the budget making process. The strongest agreement concerned transparency (M = 3.66, SD = 0.788) and the extent to which the process reflected citizen priorities (M = 3.62, SD = 0.796). The lowest means concerned improved approval and implementation timelines (M = 3.27, SD = 0.859) and manageable fiscal deficits (M = 3.31, SD = 0.847).

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics on the Budget-Making Process

Statement	n	Mean	SD
Public participation has led to effective management of public funds.	372	3.58	0.805
The budget-making process has resulted in manageable fiscal deficits.	372	3.31	0.847
Public involvement has improved social audit of county projects.	372	3.49	0.821
The budget-making process reflects the priorities of citizens.	372	3.62	0.796
Budget approval and implementation timelines have improved due to public participation.	372	3.27	0.859
Overall, public participation has enhanced transparency in the budget-making process.	372	3.66	0.788
Average score		3.49	0.819

Relationship Between Public Awareness and the Budget-Making Process

Pearson correlation analysis showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between public awareness and the budget making process ($r = 0.542$, $p < .001$). The coefficient indicates that higher public awareness scores were associated with higher budget making process scores among the respondents. Because the study was cross-sectional, the correlation is interpreted as an association rather than proof that awareness alone causes changes in budget making outcomes.

Table 6: Correlation Between Public Awareness and the Budget-Making Process

Variables	Budget-making process	Public awareness
Budget-making process	1	
Public awareness	0.542**	1

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

Regression Evidence on Public Awareness

A multiple linear regression model included public awareness, public involvement and budget allocation as predictors of the budget making process. Public awareness had an unstandardized coefficient of 0.198 (SE = 0.041), a standardized coefficient of 0.216, $t = 4.829$ and $p < .001$. Holding public involvement and budget allocation constant, a one-unit increase in the public awareness score was associated with a 0.198-unit increase in the budget making score.

Table 7: Regression Coefficient for Public Awareness

Variable	B	SE	Standardized beta	t	p
Public awareness	0.198	0.041	0.216	4.829	< .001

Note: Table 7 presents the public awareness coefficient from a model that also included public involvement and budget allocation. It is an adjusted association, rather than an estimate from a simple regression.

Qualitative Findings on Public Awareness

Qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative evidence. Respondents linked the trustworthiness of budget information to the source through which it was received. Information communicated through ward administrators and chiefs' barazas was often regarded as more credible than informal information. One reported response stated that citizens sometimes learned of budget meetings only when a chief announced them during a baraza.

Respondents also described difficulties interpreting technical budget information. Respondents indicated that figures displayed at the sub-county office could be difficult to understand without explanation. Key informants among sub-county staff acknowledged that civic education on budget matters was often conducted reactively, immediately before a public participation forum, rather than continuously across the financial year. These qualitative findings help explain why civic education and timeliness of information release were the two lowest-rated public awareness items.

DISCUSSION

Viewed through the lens of African public administration, the findings show how information conditions shape the practical operation of participatory budgeting under devolution. The Uriri case is therefore relevant not only as a local budgeting study but also as evidence about how formal participatory institutions depend on administrative communication, civic education and usable public finance information.

The findings show that public awareness is meaningfully associated with the budget making process in Uriri Sub-County. The moderate public awareness mean of 3.38 suggests that

citizens receive some budget information and generally recognise certain channels of access, but the information environment is not consistently strong. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that 52.2% of respondents did not consider the county government open in providing information and 74.2% reported that reliable and comprehensive public finance information was available either only to a low extent or not at all.

The result is consistent with Kituyi and Moi (2021), whose Trans Nzoia study found low awareness of budget participation processes and linked restricted information to limited citizen participation. Although the contexts differ, both studies point to information availability as a practical constraint on participatory budgeting in devolved government. The Uriri findings add a sub-county perspective by showing that the issue is not simply the existence of information but also its timing, accessibility and comprehensibility.

The strongest public awareness item concerned access to trustworthy information. This is important because credible information provides a basis for citizens to engage with public decisions. Devas and Grant (2003) identify the availability of information, together with local leadership and active civil society, as a critical condition for citizen participation and local accountability. The qualitative findings in Uriri similarly show that citizens distinguish among information sources, with ward administrators and chiefs' barazas regarded as important communication channels.

Timeliness was the lowest-rated awareness item ($M = 3.21$). Information needs to be released early enough for citizens to read, discuss and interpret it before forums. This finding complements Mbithi et al. (2019), who identify access to county information as a constraint on participation, and suggests that disclosure should be assessed for its usefulness before decisions are made.

Civic education also recorded a comparatively low mean of 3.28. The qualitative findings suggest that civic education was sometimes reactive and concentrated immediately before participation forums. This pattern is important in light of Cognitive Engagement Theory. If citizens require information and cognitive processing to engage meaningfully, one-off sensitization immediately before a meeting may not provide adequate time to understand budget terminology, compare proposals, examine public accounts or formulate reasoned priorities.

The positive correlation between public awareness and the budget making process ($r = 0.542$) provides inferential support for the descriptive findings. Citizens who reported higher awareness also tended to report more positive assessments of the budget making process. The statistically significant regression coefficient for public awareness ($B = 0.198$; standardized beta = 0.216; $p < .001$) further shows that the relationship persisted within the regression model after accounting statistically for public involvement and budget allocation.

These statistical relationships should, however, be interpreted within the design of the study. The data were cross-sectional and based substantially on respondent perceptions. The findings therefore support a significant positive association and predictive relationship within the estimated model, but they do not establish a definitive causal mechanism. Other institutional, political and fiscal factors may also shape county budget making.

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative evidence converges around a consistent explanation: awareness is not simply a matter of announcing meetings. Effective public awareness requires credible sources, accessible documents, sufficient breadth of information, understandable

presentation, continuous civic education and timely disclosure. Where these conditions are weak, citizens may formally have a right to participate but lack the informational capacity to use that right effectively.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between public awareness and the budget making process in Uriri Sub-County, Migori County. Public awareness was moderate, with substantial weaknesses in perceived government openness and access to reliable and comprehensive public finance information. Civic education and timely release of information were the lowest-rated awareness items.

Public awareness was positively and significantly associated with the budget making process. The Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.542 ($p < .001$), and public awareness remained statistically significant in the multiple regression model ($B = 0.198$, standardized beta = 0.216, $p < .001$). The qualitative findings supported these results by showing that citizens valued credible local information channels but experienced technical complexity, late communication and reactive civic education.

The findings support the conclusion that public awareness is an important component of participatory budget making in Uriri Sub-County. Citizens require more than formal invitations to public forums; they require timely, credible and understandable information that enables them to prepare, evaluate alternatives and contribute meaningfully. Strengthening awareness should therefore be treated as a continuing part of the budget cycle rather than an activity confined to the days immediately preceding public participation meetings.

Recommendations

1. The Migori County Government, through the Uriri Sub-County administration, should institutionalize continuous civic education on county budgeting instead of concentrating sensitization immediately before public participation forums.
2. Development plans, public accounts, expenditure information and dates of public participation forums should be released proactively and early enough to allow citizens to review the information before meetings.
3. Budget information should be disseminated through multiple accessible channels available locally, including local radio, chiefs' barazas and ward-office notice boards, while retaining formal publication channels.
4. Technical budget information should be accompanied by simplified explanations so that citizens with different educational backgrounds can understand the implications of budget proposals and expenditure reports.
5. County authorities should strengthen the consistency of information disclosure across departments and wards so that citizens do not depend on informal channels or receive important budget information unevenly.

Policy and Practical Implications

The findings have direct implications for county public finance practice. Migori County Government and the Uriri Sub-County administration can strengthen informed participation by treating civic education and budget-information disclosure as continuous functions across the budget cycle. Timely publication of development plans, public accounts and participation notices can improve citizens' opportunity to prepare for forums, while simplified explanations can reduce the barrier created by technical budget language. The findings also suggest that ward administrators, chiefs' barazas, local radio and ward notice boards can be used alongside formal publication channels to broaden access to credible information. These implications arise from the finding that public awareness was positively and significantly associated with the budget making process and from respondents' comparatively low ratings of civic education and timeliness of information release.

Limitations of the Study and Areas for Future Research

The study relied substantially on self-reported perceptions, which may be affected by response bias. Limited access to detailed sub-county budget documents and low awareness among some respondents may have restricted responses to technical questions. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, and findings from one sub-county may not generalize to other settings.

Further research could examine how digital and mobile platforms affect access to budget information and public participation, compare awareness across sub-counties in Migori County or other counties in the Nyanza region, and investigate whether civic education programmes modify the relationship between public awareness and effective budget participation.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: Ethical approval and research authorization were obtained from Kenyatta University and NACOSTI. Participants provided informed consent; participation was voluntary and responses were treated confidentially.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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