

10 Things to know about

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WHO GETS HEARD?

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND
YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN
URBAN GOVERNANCE

fondation
BOTNAR

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1 PARTICIPATION IS ABUNDANT, INFLUENCE IS SCARCE

Jamaica has an abundance of participation channels—more than 30 were evaluated in the study—yet many citizens report feeling unheard. The participation landscape offers forms of engagement but consistently lacks the function of genuine influence.



2 DISAFFECTION IS RATIONAL, NOT APATHETIC

Low participation, especially among youth, is not a sign of citizen apathy. It is a rational response to a system that extracts time and data from individuals and communities without returning consistent change or even simple acknowledgements.



3 THE “IMPLEMENTATION GAP” UNDERMINES TRUST

Approximately 60 percent of the engagement channels evaluated were led by “Planners” who lacked the budgetary or implementation authority to act on citizen demands or inputs. This structural misalignment weakens accountability between consultation and implementation.



4 TRUST IS CUMULATIVE BUT FRAGILE

Public participation operates as a reputational system: each unacknowledged consultation reduces future willingness to engage. Conversely, visible follow-through in even small decisions measurably strengthens long-term civic confidence.



7 FRAGMENTATION PRODUCES CONSULTATION FATIGUE

Fragmented approaches to engagement mean citizens must repeatedly “relearn” how to participate across agencies. This lack of coordination leads to redundant consultations that deplete willingness to participate.



5 THE UNCLOSED LOOP IS A WEAK LINK

The absence of a formal “System of Record” is the most consistent failure. Citizens rarely receive a “Response to Consultation” explaining how input was considered or why certain proposals were accepted or rejected.



6 PERSONAL SAFETY IS A PREREQUISITE FOR PARTICIPATION

In many urban contexts, physical safety is a prerequisite for engagement, especially for young people. Levels of community violence and the lack of “neutral” meeting spaces act as a filter, where evening meetings or gatherings in contested spaces exclude those most affected from local governance decisions.



10 THERE ARE FOUR CORE “USER NEEDS” FOR PARTICIPATION

Engagement must meet four fundamental “User Needs”: the ability to find the opportunity, understand the process, participate without friction, and provide a system of record for consultation and results.



8 DIGITAL TOOLS ARE BRIDGES, NOT ISLANDS

Digital platforms can expand reach and convenience, but their impact is limited when deployed in isolation. The most resilient participation models combine online tools with in-person dialogue embedded in existing community patterns of engagement.



9 THE SDC IS ESSENTIAL BUT LACKS CAPACITY

The Social Development Commission (SDC) seeks to function as a shared infrastructure for community-level mobilization but it lacks adequate and consistent resourcing to fulfil its purpose.

