



This report explores how public participation functions within Jamaica’s wider urban governance landscape. Jamaica’s governance landscape features an impressive array of mechanisms for public participation, from community meetings and surveys to digital platforms and youth councils. Yet despite this abundance, citizens—especially young people—frequently report feeling unheard, with participation often occurring without clear pathways to implementation: citizens are invited to speak, but rarely see or experience how their input shapes decisions.

Building on the Right to the City (RTTC) framework utilized in Who Gets What?, Who Gets Heard? shifts the focus from access to services toward access to decision-making. It draws on ecosystem mapping, elite and institutional interviews, youth-led focus groups, stakeholder workshops, and service evaluations to provide the first systems-level analysis of Jamaica’s public participation architecture. It maps over thirty engagement channels across community, municipal, parish, and national levels, classifies them by execution structure, capital ownership, institutional permanence, and level of influence, and ultimately evaluates how well they meet citizen needs, particularly but not limited to those of young people

The findings reveal a participatory ecosystem characterized by abundant channels for participation, but lacking the coordination or coherence needed for them to function as a connected system. Instead, the country’s participation system is defined by fragmentation across its spheres, and results in consultation without impact, dialogue without feedback, and engagement without empowerment.

These structural issues result in a persistent paradox: Jamaica’s participation ecosystem is extensive in form but limited in function, with the problem not the absence of participatory mechanisms but rather weak coordination, unclear ownership, limited capital alignment, and insufficient and inefficient institutional responsiveness. This leads to participation frequently operating as a procedural requirement rather than an effective channel for partnership between communities and the state.

The report challenges the common narrative of citizen “apathy.” Instead, it positions citizen disengagement as a rational response to repeated experiences of consultation without visible outcomes, thereby reducing the willingness to participate in future processes. Public participation, therefore, operates more like a reputational system—

each unacknowledged consultation diminishes trust, while visible follow-through strengthens it.

To improve the citizen experience, the report examines public participation as a service design challenge. Across interviews, channel evaluations, and co-design workshops with institutional convenors, citizens, and young people, a new Public Participation User-Needs Framework was developed. It captures a set of core needs (standards) that shape citizens’ experiences of public participation exercises.



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# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Operationalize the Local Governance Act

The Ministry of Local Government should fully implement the participatory provisions of the Local Governance Act, clarifying the roles of Parish Development Committees (PDCs) and Community Development Committees (CDCs).

## 2. Fully Implement Shared Participation Standards Across Government

Full implementation of the 2005 Consultation Code of Practice, regularly updated and reviewed to reflect contemporary governance realities. Adherence to these standards would ensure clarity of process, accessibility, timelines, feedback obligations, and documentation of outcomes.

## 3. Harmonize Participation Mandates Across Governance Levels

Convening institutions of participation channels should coordinate engagement and planning to reduce duplication and consultation fatigue. This may also include practical reference models for common participation stages, including announcing opportunities, onboarding participants, facilitating engagement, and providing feedback.

## 4. Resource Citizen Engagement as Shared Infrastructure

Government should formally recognize and resource the Social Development Commission (SDC) as a core engagement infrastructure, maintained through partnership or cost-sharing mechanisms.

## 5. Strengthen Core Participation Functions Across Institutions

Public bodies that oversee or delegate participation processes should strengthen coordination by maintaining a public registry of delegated entities and their outputs, standardizing engagement practices, aggregating recurring record of citizens' concerns,

and providing shared tools to reduce execution burdens.

## 6. Use the Citizen Public Participation User-Needs Framework

Programme managers should apply the Citizen Public Participation User-Needs Framework to identify gaps in being able to Find, Understand, Participate in, and Access records for participation channels.

## 7. Increase Visibility of Community Development Plans

Government should adopt an Open by Default principle for community development plans and consultation outputs and explore establishing a federated public registry to improve discoverability, coordination, and accountability.

## 8. Incentivize Cross-Institutional Investment in Participation

The Ministry of Finance and Cabinet Office should explore coordination mechanisms that encourage joint investment in participation processes. Matching or collaborative funding arrangements could reward institutions that have shared priorities or reuse existing community inputs.

## 9. Develop a Public-Facing Participation Tracking Platform

We are developing a public-facing platform that aggregates participation activities, outputs, and implementation status across ministries, agencies, and municipal bodies. Organized by geography, issue, and institution, the platform would improve transparency and allow citizens to track outcomes