

FROM VALUES TO RESULTS

Organisational Transformation in Local Government



From Values to Results: Organisational Transformation in Local Government

This toolbox shows how ICLD's theory of change and value-based model can support local governments in strengthening service delivery, safety, and climate resilience by embedding democratic values into everyday governance. Drawing on Kiambu County's experience, it demonstrates how leadership commitment to equity, participation, transparency, and accountability can drive organizational change and produce tangible results for citizens. The toolbox offers practical approaches that municipal leaders can adapt to build trust, improve decision-making, and deliver inclusive, sustainable development. In short, this text describes what, why and how in relation to Human Rights Based Approach in local governance.

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1. Introduction

Local democracy is not only about elections and formal structures. It is about how decisions are made in everyday governance, how leaders listen to citizens, and how communities are included in shaping their own futures. Governing to fulfil human rights and contribute to the global goals of sustainable development requires a focus on perspective shift from a “top-down” exercise into a process of listening, power sharing and attention to marginalized groups. When public servants and leaders embrace this perspective, they shift from seeing citizens as passive recipients of services to recognizing them as active partners in co-creating solutions. This change can be transformative: it builds trust, strengthens accountability, and leads to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

A transformation felt and experienced by citizens starts with individuals in the local administration. This document traces how new knowledge on an individual level can be turned into organizational capacity, and in turn lead to societal transformation. It illustrates this with transformations in Kiambu County, Kenya, on three different policy areas: climate and sustainability, child and youth inclusion, and urban planning.

Purpose of this Toolbox

This toolbox is for municipal managers, department heads, participation officers, planners, climate coordinators, for political dialogue and peer learning around internal reform. It highlights how a rights-based approach to local governance – based in equity, participation, transparency and accountability – has the potential to improve urban safety, strengthen citizen participation, increase youth inclusion, and reinforce climate resilience. Informed by a long-standing collaboration between ICLD and Kiambu County and drawing on illustrations from this experience, it shares practical tools, approaches, and lessons that support the process from individual capacity building to societal impact.

Each tool presented here can be adapted and applied in different local contexts, helping practitioners move from inspiration to action.

This is not a manual to be followed step by step – it is a toolbox: a collection of methods, stories, and insights that you can draw on when strengthening local democracy in your own setting.

2. Theory of change for local democratic transformation

Local democracy can advance through individuals' **new skills and mindset** shifts, which then shapes **institutions**, which changes the preconditions for **communities and societies**. This progression (individual → organizational → societal) is held together by ICLD's **value-based approach** (equity, participation, transparency, accountability).



Equity

Citizens must be treated in an inclusive and fair manner. All citizens should have equal opportunity to express their needs and be considered based on their different circumstances. Efforts to ensure that no discrimination or abuse occur, and that the needs of vulnerable groups are taken into account, with a particular focus on the position of women, are examples of measures that are seen as success factors.



Participation

Local governments have a responsibility to actively promote a high level of participation in local decision-making processes concerning the design of public policies and services. Different approaches to increase citizens' participation and influence in decision-making processes should be applied. Examples of steps in this direction are the development of instruments for increased dialogue, greater responsiveness and adaptation to civic needs.



Transparency

Transparency in decision-making processes, planning and policy-making is crucial for citizens to be able to participate in local issues in a well-informed way, and for a socially sustainable local democracy. For citizens, increased transparency means that politicians and officials act in an open and predictable manner. Measures that ensure increased transparency, openness and predictability are therefore necessary in order to strengthen local democracy.



Accountability

There must be clarity in terms of power and responsibilities in a well-functioning democracy. There should also exist opportunities for sanctions and accountability. As it is not always possible for citizens to participate directly in decision-making, responsibilities must be made visible so that accountability can be demanded during ongoing processes, not just during elections. For the ICLD, signs that local governments are providing citizens with greater opportunities for accountability are when they're making information available that shows how decisions are made, who is responsible, how citizens can appeal decisions and what the consequences are for misconduct.

A local democratic perspective is a way of seeing governance through the everyday lives of citizens. Instead of designing policies in closed offices and then seeking approval afterwards, it means spending time and effort to seek the perspectives of those whose lives are affected. A shift from deciding for citizens to deciding *with* citizens that begins with dialogue, listening, and an openness to share power.

Listen first, act later

Create space for dialogue before policies are drafted.

Share power

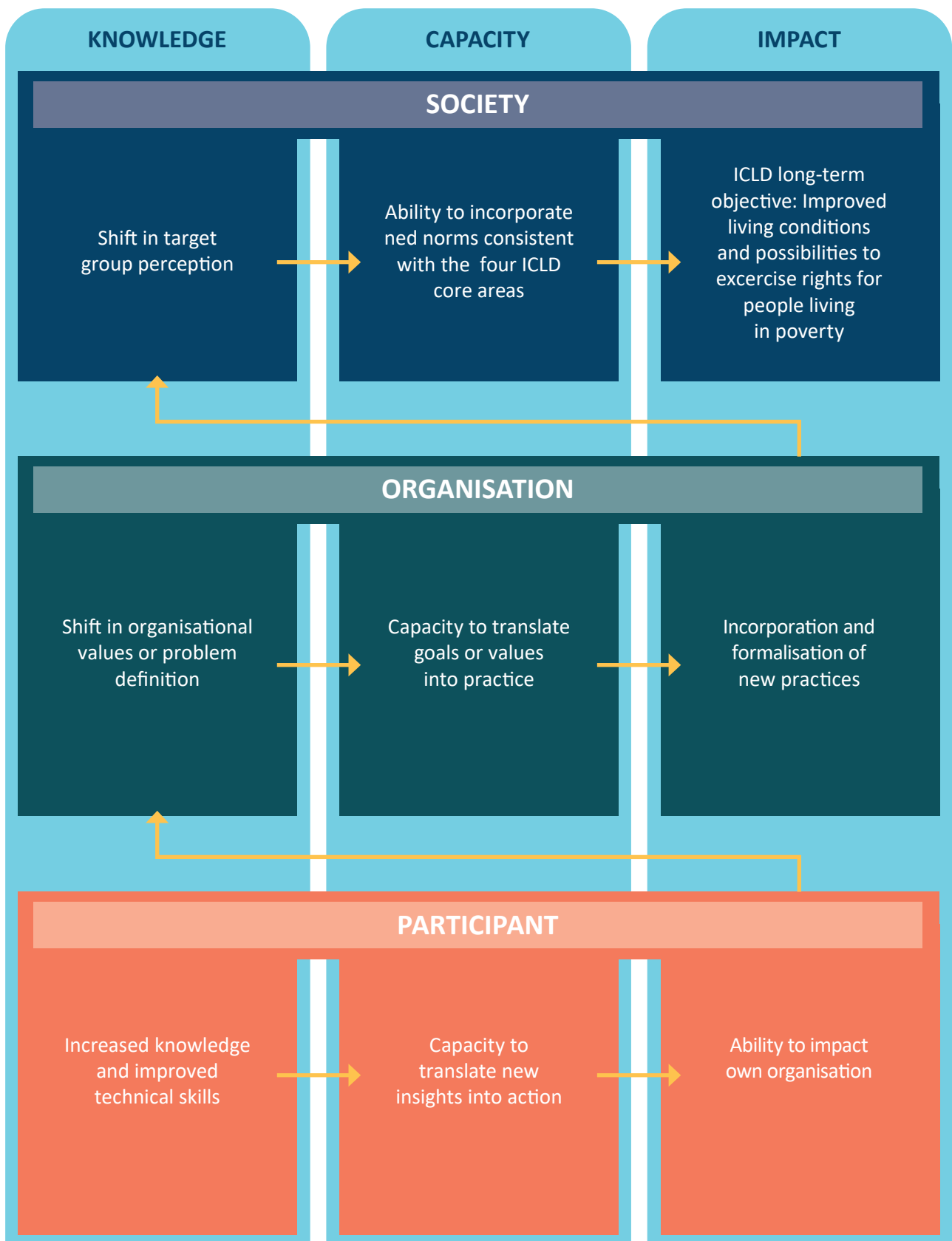
Involve different groups, including youth and marginalized voices, in meaningful ways.

Be responsive

Take citizens' input seriously and provide feedback on how it influenced decisions.

ICLD's Theory of Change

ICLD's theory of change moves through three levels, where mainstreaming of these four core values moves from individual knowledge to societal impact. The theory of change is a flowchart, from bottom left corner to the upper right corner. On each level, the ability to create impact in a given sphere follows new capacities to translate these values into practice, which in turn builds on gaining knowledge and understanding.



Individual Level:

New Capacities and Shifting Perspectives



The essence of this perspective is transformation through mindset. With ‘democratic glasses’ on, local officials begin to see that governing is less about instructing and more about listening. It is less about imposing solutions and more about enabling citizens to co-create them. That relationship, built on trust and shared responsibility, is what makes local democracy a powerful driver of long-term, sustainable development.



For several county officials in Kiambu, training and participation in ICLD programmes opened the door to a new way of thinking. Individuals reported a “perspective shift”, seeing governance not as a process of instructing citizens, but of listening and responding. This change translated into new professional skills: the ability to use the SDGs as an analytical tool, to design participatory processes, and to recognize the links between gender, climate, and inclusion.

Several officials also moved into new roles with greater responsibility, bringing their democratic mindset into broader areas of work. By teaching colleagues, running internal trainings, and constantly referring to SDGs in discussions, they became multipliers of democratic practices. Individual growth thus became a driver for organizational change.

Organizational Level:

Embedding Democracy in Institutions



A local democratic lens integrates change into existing systems – novel democratic practices become part of daily governance. It is not about creating parallel structures or add temporary projects on top of daily routines. Instead, it weaves democratic values into the core of how departments function.



In Kiambu, this is visible in the way the environmental department adopted the ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’ principle, once introduced in a training, as an everyday operational guideline used as a reference point in decision-making. Officials see the value of public participation forums, which are now held more regularly, giving citizens a predictable channel to engage with county leadership.

Twelve municipal managers and eighty-five municipal board committee members have been trained in democratic perspectives and the use of SDGs, and apply those skills in ensuring that participation is not limited to a few champions but spread across departments and embedding meaningful inclusion into the county’s internal culture.

Policies have also been developed to ensure long-term resilience: each municipality now has an approved Integrated Strategic Urban Development Plan that guides development across the county, risk profiles and climate preparedness plans that were co-created with citizens. These frameworks are no longer pilot projects but official policies integrated into county planning.



Community Level: Tangible Change in Daily Life

The societal level is what citizens notice and how people are affected by a given policy or practice. When the effects of a democratic perspective are visible in the streets, schools, and public spaces, and if norms are altered or created as a consequence.



New benches with internet access where there was previously parking and unsafe traffic.

In Kiambu County, integrated solar-powered streetlights and wider sidewalks for non-motorised transport in carefully selected areas – those identified as unsafe by vulnerable groups – have made busy streets safer. In Bosnia, Kiambu County, floodlights improved safety, extended business hours, and created safe spaces for youth activities. This simple investment has strengthened community life. Green areas and public benches with internet access have created meeting spaces for young people, many of whom are unemployed and in need of safe and constructive places to gather.

Community-run early learning hubs near major markets have enabled mothers to work with peace of mind while their children receive structured care and stimulation in a safe environment.

During floods, improved communication channels enabled rapid response and county-community coordination that could save lives in areas where the most vulnerable live. New spaces for dialogue have increased trust between citizens and leaders, strengthening accountability.

Summary box:

Integrating democratic values can easier move from short-term projects to long-term transformation. Kiambu officials perceives that this shift has led to:

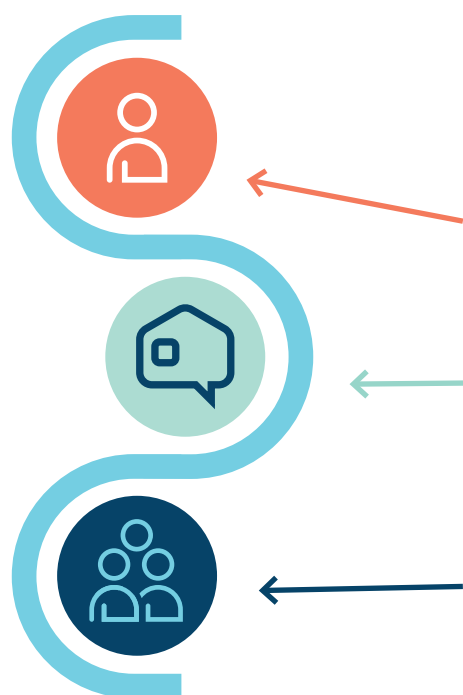
- **Equitable policies** rooted in citizen experience, such as risk profiling for climate resilience developed with community members.
- **Improved services**, like child-friendly urban spaces designed after listening to parents and children.
- **Greater accountability**, with public forums where residents can question and advise leaders.
- **Youth engagement**, recognizing that young people are not only future leaders but also *present-day stakeholders*.

Ruiru municipality kahawa sukari park

3. Operationalisation in Kiambu: Tools & Approaches

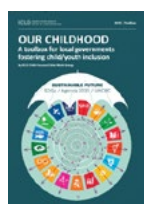
The following are examples of models that have equipped individuals to drive transformations in Kiambu. They are paired with examples that illustrate how skills and knowledge were applied at the organizational level, and in some examples led to tangible change in the physical or social environment. The symbols indicate the corresponding ToC level. All examples have in common that participation is not a burdensome extra step, but a foundation of effective, fair, and lasting change. The cumulative effect is that democracy itself is becoming becoming a driver of development: safer spaces, more inclusive education, stronger resilience to climate risks, and citizens who feel both heard and valued.

The process inevitable contains challenges and trade-offs, required political courage, and some take longer than expected or meet unexpected resistance. These examples can be considered inspiring success stories, but it is important to remember that progress is not always a straight line.



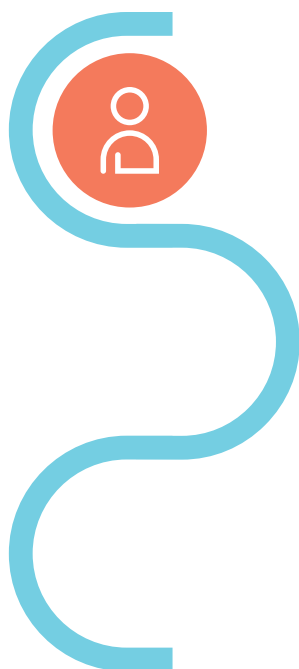
Example of individual-organisational-societal level process:

Inspired by the Urban95 initiative, Kiambu officials learned to view urban planning through the eyes of a small child—95 centimeters tall. This perspective revealed barriers that adults often overlook, such as unsafe roads and lack of play areas. As a result of spreading this understanding in the local government, more than 500 early education centers were established, designed with child safety and development in mind, with modern playing facilities, modern classrooms, modern toilet and an office. Homework areas were set up in local markets where many mothers work after school hours. These spaces created a safe environment for children while also strengthening the social fabric of the community.



For inspiration on a child-focused urban environment, in line with the Urban 95 logic, read [ICLDs Our City toolbox](#):

Youth Inclusion Tools and Models



Lundy's Model: Meaningful child and youth participation

Understanding Lundy's Model and adopting it in their thinking helped county leaders understand that youth participation must go beyond symbolic involvement. Officials learn to provide young people with safe spaces to speak, to listen actively to their contributions, and to give feedback on how their input influenced decisions. This creates a culture of respect and accountability.

The model also emphasizes transparency – young people are not only heard but were also informed about what can and can not be acted upon, helping to build trust.



Model adapted from Laura Lundy (2007)

Space: Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view

Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their view

Audience: The view must be listened to

Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate



SDG Clubs: Schools as platforms for democratic engagement

After learning from peer experiences in Kibaha, Tanzania, and applying the mindset of Lundy’s Model, Kiambu has initiated five SDG Clubs in schools within the county. These clubs use the Sustainable Development Goals as a framework for discussion and action, enabling students to link global challenges to their local context. They have their own leadership structure and empower young people to practice democracy, learn leadership, and be proactive in shaping their own local reality. They also constitute a dialogue channel with the county for a voice in broader county development. In a society where youth unemployment is a pressing issue, SDG Clubs also provide constructive avenues for civic engagement and community building. See the Toolbox to consider forming SDG Clubs in your own context, like many other local governments in Western Africa are doing.

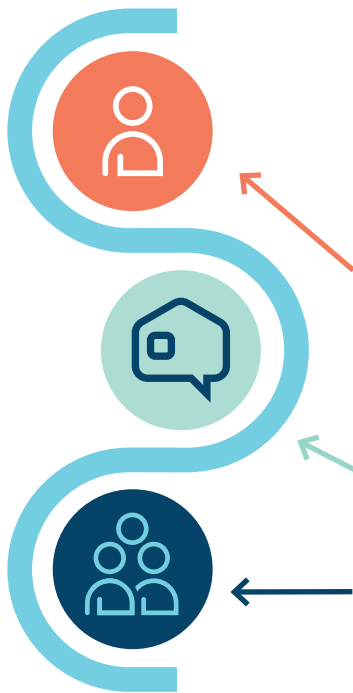


[ICLDs SDG Clubs Toolbox:](#)



Workshop about the ICLD toolbox “SDG Clubs” for ICLD Alumni in Kiambu

Safety & Urban Space Tools

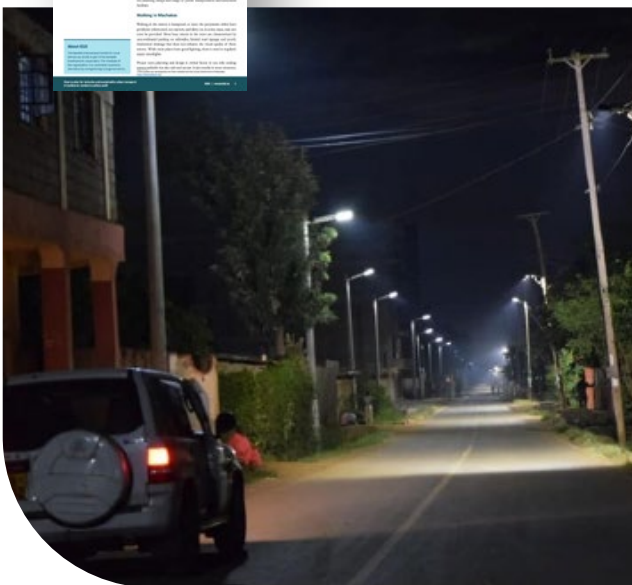


Safety Audits: Identifying unsafe areas and co-developing solutions

Safety audits proved to be a powerful tool for addressing concerns about urban insecurity. County officials walked with residents, particularly women, **persons with disability** and young people, through their neighborhoods to identify unsafe or inaccessible areas. **An exercise of simulating moving through the city with a wheelchair or visual impairments provided new understanding for the daily life of vulnerable groups.** Their findings—dark streets, narrow sidewalks, lack of safe gathering spaces—were presented to county executives, who then **worked with the communities to co-design improvements.** The results were tangible: solar-powered streetlights in streets that women often use at night, broader sidewalks, and safer parks. **Citizens could clearly see the link between their input and the changes on the ground, which strengthened both safety and democratic trust.**



ICLDs Safety Audit Toolbox:



Streetlights in an area where people, especially women, have felt unsafe walking at night.

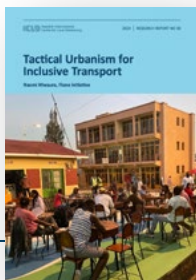


Widened sidewalks free from traffic and accessible for people using wheelchairs.



Tactical Urbanism: Small-scale, community-driven improvements

In addition to large infrastructure projects, in Thika Town, Kiambu also experimented with tactical urbanism – small, low-cost, and community-driven interventions. Pop-up parks, temporary pedestrian zones, and painted crosswalks allowed residents to experience improvements quickly and to provide feedback before permanent investments were made. This method gave citizens a sense of agency and demonstrated that democratic participation can lead to visible change in their daily environment.



[ICLDs Tactical Urbanism Research Report/Thika Town safety audit report:](#)

Climate & Sustainability Tools



Participatory Risk Profiling: Using citizen science in planning for disaster preparedness

When flooding threatened many communities in the spring of 2024, Kiambu County used a participatory method of citizen science in disaster risk profiling. Local representatives were trained to collect and share geotagged data about ground conditions, including observations and photos of water levels, drainage blockages, soil conditions, and infrastructure damage. They also reported from areas with that officials could not easily reach, with vulnerable populations, providing critical information for timely and effective disaster response.

The county established clear communication channels between the community representatives and the county, for this information to feed directly into county planning for disaster preparedness and helped shape faster, more effective responses.

Communication channels used:

- WhatsApp groups for instant messaging
- Dedicated emergency phone hotlines
- Radio announcements on local stations
- Scheduled community meetings at:
 - Chief's camps
 - Municipal social halls
 - Churches
 - Safe schools
 - Markets and shopping area

Stakeholders involved in the participatory risk profiling:

- Chiefs and assistant chiefs
- Village elders
- Community organizations
- Ward and sub-county officials
- Trained citizen volunteers
- County Disaster Management Committee
- Youth and Women's groups

The process built on skills developed through an ICLD training on Community-Based Participatory Research, was in line with strategies in the Kiambu County Integrated Development Plan (2023-2028) and leveraging models promoted by the Kenya Meteorological Department and UN-Habitat.



The Governor distributing blankets and mattresses to the flood victims during floods in Kiambu in 2024.

Each of Kiambu’s twelve municipalities now has a risk profile developed in close collaboration with residents. These profiles list hazards while also prioritizing the safety of marginalized groups and highlight community-specific vulnerabilities. The approach shifted power dynamics to recognizing citizens as knowledge-bearers. Their contributions were treated as essential to the planning process. When severe flooding struck, this collaborative approach proved vital in saving lives and ensuring that no community was left behind.

In the community-led upgrading of the Ruiru Bosnia footpaths and drainage system, trained local residents—many of whom had participated in governance and planning workshops—used their new skills to map flood-prone zones, document safety risks, and propose low-cost solutions. Their data and recommendations were formally presented to the municipality, which led to the co-design and construction of improved drains and safer pedestrian routes.



[ICLDs CBPR Toolbox:](#)



Patricia Nzioka from Kajiado County reflecting on images representing “The future we imagine” during an ICLD training on CBPR in 2022. **Photo** ICLD.



3R Operational Guideline: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle as an institutional culture

What began as a simple slogan—Reduce, Reuse, recycle—has evolved into a core operational guideline within Kiambu County’s Environmental Department. Officials conducted continuous training sessions and open dialogues to embed the 3Rs into daily workflows, policies, and decision-making. This cultural shift led to practical actions such as prioritizing eco-friendly procurement, implementing systematic waste segregation and recycling in county offices, and integrating 3Rs messaging in community outreach programs.



Value-based blueprint for waste management

Kiambu developed a value-based Solid Waste Management plan for the 12 municipalities. Instead of focusing solely on technical solutions, the blueprint emphasizes dignity, trust, and responsibility as guiding principles.

- **Dignity:** Formalize waste pickers’ roles with fair wages, training, and protective gear.
- **Trust:** Maintain transparent communication between citizens, workers, and government.
- **Responsibility:** Promote shared accountability—proper waste segregation by residents and efficient service delivery by the county.

They integrated these values into policies and staff training, and conducted community education on waste reduction. This shift in mindset attracted international partners, including a collaboration with Japan to transform a dumpsite into a modern recycling facility.

Kiambu County’s waste management development follows its own clear Theory of Change: shifting mindsets and values (dignity, trust, responsibility) → building capacity through training → embedding the 3Rs into daily operations → forming partnerships (e.g., with different stakeholders) → institutionalizing sustainable practices by intergrating best practices → achieving lasting environmental and social impact.

4. Lessons learned

Adopting the perspective of democratic values changed the rhythm of public administration. Reflection and analysis forums give space for brainstorming together, identifying root problems, and understanding the perspectives of different stakeholders. Rather than rushing into quick fixes, officials have seen the long-term benefits of inviting citizens to share their experiences and ideas before decisions are finalized. Frameworks like the SDGs help the local government in connecting community perspectives to wider development agendas, and see connections between policy areas, while also supporting dialogue with communities around development matters.

The experience of Kiambu shows that local democracy can become transformative when it is rooted in the four core values of equity, participation, transparency, and accountability. Equity has guided the county to prioritize the needs of children, women, and marginalized groups, ensuring that development benefits are fairly shared. Participation has shifted governance from a process of instructing to one of listening and co-creating, with citizens engaged not as bystanders but as partners in shaping their communities. Transparency has grown through open forums and clear feedback mechanisms, allowing residents to see how their voices influence decisions. And accountability has deepened as leaders recognize their responsibility to respond to citizens' concerns, from improving safety in public spaces to strengthening climate resilience. Taken together, these values have produced tangible outcomes—safer streets, better services, more resilient systems—but have also built trust between people and government.

Naturally, these tools and learnings, and the skills built via ICLD engagements intersect with numerous other factors. Officials attribute Kiambu's progress in participatory governance to these key factors:

- Strong leadership commitment to inclusive governance
- Vibrant civil society and community networks
- Higher education and socioeconomic levels
- Proactive implementation of devolution policies
- Institutionalized mechanisms for citizen participation
- Culture of learning and adaptability
- Focus on equity and inclusion of marginalized groups

5. Reflection & Discussion Questions

This toolbox is meant to inspire action and adaptation. The following questions can be used in workshops, staff meetings, or peer exchanges to reflect on how a local democratic perspective might be strengthened in your own context:

1. In what ways do we already practice equity, participation, transparency, and accountability in our county or municipality? Where are the gaps?
2. How can we create more space for reflection and dialogue before decisions are made?
3. Which groups are currently underrepresented in our participation forums, and how can we ensure their voices are meaningfully included?
4. What role can young people play in shaping decisions today, and how can we support them in doing so?
5. How might we adapt one of the tools presented here—such as safety audits, SDG clubs, or risk profiling—to fit our own local context?

Notes

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