

Participation and policy in the making of a refugee city: Insights from Kakuma, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to understand how and why Kakuma has become an informal “refugee city” in response to global humanitarian policy frameworks that shape both local governance and everyday forms of integration for refugees and host communities in northwestern Kenya. In particular, it looked at the extent to which refugees and host community members participate in making local decisions around their newly transformed contexts created by the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement and the municipalization of Kakuma. The study was anchored in governance theory and adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to examine refugee participation in local governance. A sample of 100 respondents was drawn from a target population of approximately 400,000 refugees using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 10% margin of error. To answer the research questions, the researchers collected data through a series of household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The findings were integrated during interpretation to provide a thorough understanding of governance participation and integration dynamics. It was found out that with the existence of inclusionary governance frameworks and policies that support refugee integration, the nature and quality of governance participation differ greatly among different types of refugees and host community members in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. While refugee-led organizations, youth, and women's organizations have been increasing their participation in consultation with local authorities/decision-makers, their ability to influence decision-making is limited by unclear legal authority and limitations based on the available resources and systems in place to support governance participation. The support of community actors within the host community for integration planning has been voiced via their perceptions of unevenly represented and distributed benefits, suggesting that these inclusion efforts may mean that local inequalities could actually be reproduced. The study concludes that while Kakuma is transforming from a refugee camp to a so-called hybrid civic space at the intersections of urbanization and displacement, successful integration will be dependent on having defined and inclusive ways for people to engage with their governments. The study recommends that to promote integrated development within newly emerging “refugee city” contexts, the study suggests ways to improve established ways of engaging with both host and refugee populations; provide clarity around legal and administrative responsibilities; enable sharing of resources to establish balance in development; and improve refugees' abilities to provide long-term support for themselves as a result of the integration process.

Keywords: Host Refugee Relations, Humanitarian Policy, Governance Participation, Refugee Integration

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, there has been significant change in the way Refugee governance is handled globally with a shift away from dealing with refugees in an emergency capacity to using models to help integrate refugees into host communities, enable refugees to be self-sufficient, and share responsibility for the care of refugees with their host communities (Bahar et al., 2024). The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) are examples of frameworks steering this effort that combine the efforts of local development systems with efforts to provide shelter, housing, and food for displaced people instead of continuing the practice of locating displaced people in humanitarian camps (Triggs & Wall, 2020). Due to this transition, there is renewed interest among scholars and policymakers in how to define refugee camps, as many refugee camps are becoming more urbanized or semi-urbanized and shaped by the market, institutions and social interactions within them. For example, Kakuma and the adjacent Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement in Northwestern Kenya are no longer seen as only sites providing aid, but as sites that are evolving to be economic centres (Betts et al., 2020). Consequently, the manner in which global norms will manifest in developing countries will be of key interest with respect to the future of refugee governance.

The existing research has provided valuable insight into issues related to legal reform, economic inclusion, and service delivery for long-term displaced populations. Previous studies have shown that host nations use development-based frameworks to align with international policies, and pursue national goals (Betts & Collier 2017; Barbelet 2018). Other studies have pointed out that successful integration can be measured based upon social cohesion, livelihood opportunities, and access to rights (Ager & Strang 2008; Oliver et al., 2020). However, most studies analyse the implementation of policy as an administrative or economic process with little consideration given to the political aspect of who has input into shaping local governance structures. Consequently, the relationship between the participation of

governance and whether equitable outcomes are achieved within integrated settlements has not been studied as thoroughly as it could have been.

The disconnect is particularly evident when reviewing studies on settlement transition into municipalities, where decision-making is distributed between many agencies (state, humanitarian, and local). The policies themselves are inclusive; however, the connections between refugees and hosts influencing planning, budget, and service oversight processes are often informal or poorly developed (Laine, 2026). Without examining participation in governance as a factor, we will not be able to determine whether the integration frameworks increase equity or just shift responsibilities without shifting power. This research attempts to fill this gap by asking how governance participation in subsequent governance decisions has influenced the local interpretation of the global humanitarian policies associated with Kakuma. In this case, this study extends the current integration research by highlighting political inclusion as an important and measurable dimension of settlement transformation.

The article examines how different forms of local governance influence perceptions of fairness and access to services for refugee communities and host communities using mixed methods research. The author argues that local governance should not merely be considered as an additional component of integration policies, but rather that it constitutes a fundamental mechanism through which globally defined norms obtain meaning on a local scale. The author concludes that when governance participation is experienced within the context of structured, inclusive processes that receive recognition from external authorities, then initiatives designed for refugee integration will produce equitable outcomes across all groups. However, when governance participation is perceived as limitations or as symbolic only, then policies that seek progressive integration will continue to yield disparate outcomes across population groups. The article will be organized as follows: a brief explanation of the conceptual framework employed for the study; a description of the study's context and research methods; the presentation of findings; and an analysis of the implications of these findings for refugee governance and urban policy objectives.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

International humanitarian policy frameworks have developed increasingly to shape international responses to forced displacement, providing more 'joined up', more sustainable, and more rights-based approaches to refugee protection and settlement (World Bank, 2022). For example, institutions such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have developed inclusive refugee management systems, which promote self-reliance, socio-economic integration, and shared responsibility between states (UNHCR, 2023). Countries are supported in their efforts to transition from traditional encampment models towards more integrated settlement strategies that link humanitarian assistance with development interventions, through initiatives such as the Global Compact on Refugees (Betts et al., 2021). Evidence from countries such as Nigeria and Egypt confirms that these frameworks support community-based settlement methods, and refugees are able to access public services, including education, health care, and employment, in host communities, thus enabling sustainable integration (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018).

In Kenya, government reforms of managing refugees were introduced in 2016 to enhance the protection of refugees while also encouraging integrating settlements so that refugees could become self-reliant and sustainable like locals (World Bank, 2022). The goal was to align the governance of refugees with global frameworks and improve socio-economic integration in refugee communities like Kakuma Refugee Camp (Betts et al., 2021). At the same time, there are challenges in implementing these reforms as Kenya continues to host over seven hundred thousand refugees and asylum seekers with over two hundred fifty thousand located in Kakuma which is putting considerable pressure on local resources and services (UNHCR, 2023). Limited financial resources, weak institutional coordination, and socio-economic pressures on host communities continue to hinder the effective implementation of integrated settlement policies according to a number of researchers (Betts et al., 2020; Crisp, 2020). Therefore, there is still much to learn about the relationship between global humanitarian policy frameworks and the actual practice of implementing integrated refugee settlements in Kenya in order to develop more effective refugee governance strategies globally, particularly within its borders.

1.2 Research Objective

- i. Examine mechanisms through which global humanitarian policies are domesticated within Kenya's local refugee integration frameworks in Kakuma.
- ii. Evaluate the structural factors within Kakuma that influence the adoption of global humanitarian policies in the local refugee integration scheme.
- iii. Assess the implications of domesticating global humanitarian policies on local refugee integration frameworks within Kakuma.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The integration of refugees at the local level has been studied using multidimensional frameworks that include social, economic, and institutional aspects of refugee Integration (Ager, 2008). These three main domains of refugee Integration focuses on social ties/relationships, ensuring that refugees have legal rights, having access to local services and being provided with access to employment, among many other aspects of refugee integration. However, while these frameworks provide insight into how refugees develop social ties to host communities and access services, there is less focus on the ways in which refugees are involved in local governance (i.e. participating in decision-making/decision-making structures) that impact refugee integration (Betts & Collier, 2017). Local governance participation is increasingly important as refugee/host-community relations are becoming increasingly urbanized allow for the development of (governance based) policies designed to provide refugees with improved access to services without providing them with improved access to representation and voice (Oliver et al., 2020). As a result, refugee governance participation is a key aspect of integration and ultimately helps strengthen many aspects of integration, including cohesion between refugees and host communities, equitable development and inclusivity for all members of the local community (Dryden-Peterson, 2016).

Governance theory further strengthens this perspective by emphasizing the role of institutions, power relations, and administrative systems in shaping participation. Governance, as it relates to participation, believes that participation can occur through both formal mechanisms (such as the use of committees or consultative forums) and informal mechanisms (such as the exercise of community leadership or negotiation) (Scott, 2020). In many cases, administrative simplification has created barriers to accessing local knowledge and has created a challenge for meaningful engagement between local populations and both state and humanitarian institutions when there is parallel governance (Krause, 2021). In addition, though the existence of formal structures for participation may create recognition of participation, the reality is that many barriers (e.g., bureaucratic processes, language barriers, or ambiguity surrounding authority) exist within those systems, which create barriers to actual participation and therefore equitable integration (Barbelet, 2018).

A key feature of humanitarian governance is recognition of the fact that accountability mechanisms that are available to refugees are primarily symbolic, having little impact on the end results of policymaking. A common mechanism for collecting views of refugees in crisis situations is consultation forums; however, the ability to fully engage with these mechanisms is limited by institutional hierarchies and resource asymmetries (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020). Additionally, there is often a lack of coordination between state-based and development-based humanitarian governance actors thus limiting the opportunities for refugees to actively participate in humanitarian governance processes (Krause, 2021). Accordingly, this research will approach governance participation as a major independent variable influencing how successfully refugees integrate in their new urban environment, using emerging refugee urban settings such as Kakuma and Kalobeyei (Betts & Collier, 2017) as primary case studies to illustrate how these issues play out in practice.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Global humanitarian policies are domesticated within Kenya's local refugee integration frameworks in Kakuma

Studies conducted empirically reveal those domestic adaptations of world humanitarian policy happen primarily through the translation of international standards into various levels of law at the national, county, and settlement levels. The emphasis placed on refugee participatory governance mechanisms when developing initiatives to assist refugees integrating into their host countries after being displaced for long periods has been notably low (Ahimbisibwe & Nkiko, 2025). Refugees living in settlement areas such as Kakuma and Kalobeyei actively participate in the economy, education, and the provision of services, thereby developing their capacities for self-reliance. However, most refugees' status is viewed by policymakers and practitioners as that of a "beneficiary" of the services provided, rather than as a decision-maker with regard to the policies that govern their service delivery (Agier 2020). Studies indicate that domestic adaptations also occur through mechanisms such as stakeholder consultations, refugee-led organisations, and partnerships between humanitarian agencies and local institutions; however, these experiences have not been widely documented (Betts et al., 2020). Finally, there is currently a large gap in empirical knowledge related to governance participation as a significant factor influencing the domestic adaptation of official institutional policy in rapidly urbanising refugee regions, including Kakuma (Oliver et al., 2020).

2.2.2 Structural factors within Kakuma that influence the adoption of global humanitarian policies in the local refugee integration scheme

Global humanitarian policies have strong impacts on the integration scheme for refugees into the local community because of the structural factors including; coordination of the institutions involved, availability of resources, capacity of infrastructure to support the integration of refugees, and the relations between the refugee and

host. For example, a study on participatory planning in East Africa showed it led to improved service delivery to refugees and hosts (Gnowa et al., 2026). Furthermore, it reinforced social cohesion, as well as improved fairness in the distribution of resources between refugees and host (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Studies in Uganda and Ethiopia also found that when decision-making structures were inclusive, it resulted in improved alignment between humanitarian and development projects and served to support the relationship between refugees and host communities (World Bank, 2022). In Kenya, however, structural barriers e.g. limited funding; lack of institution coordination; and lack of representation within all refugee populations still inhibit the effective implementation of integrated settlement policies (Government of Kenya & UNHCR, 2023). Additionally, differences in gender, age, and country of origin have affected the ability of refugees to participate in decision-making bodies; therefore, making it difficult for the equitable implementation of the global humanitarian frameworks in Kakuma's local integration scheme (Betts et al., 2020).

2.2.3 Domesticating global humanitarian policies on local refugee integration frameworks within Kakuma

Global humanitarian policies, when domesticated, impact various aspects of socio-economic integration, the provision of services, and governance participation in refugee settlements. According to empirical literature, mastermind literature demonstrates that refugees' access to market infrastructure, and public services improves by domesticating global frameworks; this leads to greater self-reliance and cohesive communities (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2018). In Kenya, the implementation of integrated development initiatives for integrated refugee settlements in Kakuma and Kalobeyei has broadened the capacity for refugee engagement within development programs and participatory governance mechanisms; nonetheless, refugees routinely have significantly limited input on final decision-making processes due to rigid institutional hierarchies and ineffective inter-agency collaboration (Oliver et al., 2020). Moreover, studies have indicated that there are numerous types of groups (women's groups, youth organizations, refugee-led organizations) that participate in participatory processes, however these groups often suffer from constraints on their capacity to influence policy outcomes, resulting in limited effectiveness of domesticated policies promoting full integration (Betts et al., 2020). Such findings indicate that determining the extent of barrier's limitations and consider the issue of governance participation is essential to understanding how domesticated global humanitarian policies affect local positive refugee integration frameworks in Kakuma.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design for the purpose of studying how local integration through local decision making impacts refugees' integration outcomes, this study combined both quantitatively and qualitatively data collection methods to obtain evidence of participation via measurable patterns and collect qualitative data pertaining to the ways in which governance effect inclusion through the use of specific institutions and/or processes to achieve the aforementioned results (Creswell's & Creswell, 2017).

3.2 Study Area

The fieldwork took place in Turkana County, Kenya, and focused specifically on Kakuma municipality and the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement including villages 1, 2, & 3 (Kalobeyei) and adjacent Turkana host community villages as evidence supporting use of the spatial configuration of integrated service delivery/participatory planning/governance committees. This approach enabled the researchers to examine how individuals experienced using their voice and being represented while also linking these experiences to larger policy domestication processes occurring at the municipality level.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised approximately 400,000 individuals, including adult refugees and host community members engaged in or affected by local planning, service delivery committees, and community leadership forums. Institutional stakeholders including representatives from national and local governments; representatives from humanitarian actors; and representatives from refugee-led organisations that are engaged in governance and integration processes were also part of the target population.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

For this study, the researcher used household survey data collected from a sample of 100 respondents was selected from the refugee and host community populations using Yamane (1967) formula at a 10% margin of error. In addition, purposive sampling was used to select participants for key informant interviews and focus group discussions based on their involvement in governance and leadership structures. This sampling plan allowed for representation from multiple groups of individuals with different social statuses to provide varied opinions, experiences and backgrounds regarding the level and type of involvement in governance.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

The structured questionnaires, focus group discussions and key informant interviews were used to collect the data; the questionnaire contained indicators regarding knowledge of governance structures, community meeting attendance, evaluation of the authorities' response and level of trust in the participatory mechanisms. Focus group discussions were conducted with groups of youth, women, men, elders and persons with disability from both refugee and host communities to identify their experiences with regard to participation, representation and influencing decision-making. Key informant interviews were held with county officials, humanitarian actors and refugee-led organisation representatives to identify and evaluate administrative procedures, coordination mechanisms and how governance structures are implemented.

3.6 Data Analysis

Across the quantitative data, which were examined through both descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation methods, were examined in order to detect and assess patterns regarding the degree of participation as well as the relationship between perceived fairness related to allocation of services and dispute resolution. The qualitative data were first transcribed and coded before being analyzed through a thematic content analysis for the purpose of identifying a number of key themes associated with how individuals participated, barriers to participation, and perceived consequences of being included or excluded within a system. Both quantitative and qualitative data were ascertained through an iterative process, with quantitative data findings integrated into qualitative themes for the purpose of interpreting governance participation and refugee integration. The use of triangulation among various methods augmented validity through the comparison of survey data to focus group and interview data, consequently allowing for the separation of nominal and effective participation in local governance (Fusch et al., 2018).

3.7 Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval and relevant research permits were obtained prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and participation was voluntary with the right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and all data were used strictly for academic purposes and securely stored. Special care was taken to protect vulnerable groups, including refugees and persons with disabilities, from any harm or undue influence.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

This study aimed to explore the connection between refugee involvement in local government (the independent variable) and their experience of becoming integrated into society (the dependent variable). Refugee involvement was measured by three different criteria: knowledge of local government structure, attendance at government meetings, and influence over local government decision-making. Refugee experiences of becoming integrated were assessed by refugees' perceptions of fairness of officials' decisions, trust in those officials, and inclusion in local government decision-making. The data from the study has been analysed both through quantitative means as well as qualitative. This will allow for a comprehensive understanding of how refugees have participated locally and how that participation will affect their becoming integrated into the community.

4.1.1 Response Rate

Out of the 100 sampled respondents, 60 participated in the study, giving a response rate of 60%. This aligns with Fincham (2008), who notes that a response rate of 60% is generally acceptable for survey-based research and adequate for drawing valid inferences.

4.1.2 Awareness and Attendance of Local Governance Structures

The level of knowledge of local government systems Table 1 and the participation in the governance meetings of the refugee and host communities were used to assess their participation in the decision-making process at local level through the knowledge of the local government systems as well as attendance at governance meetings to show actual engagement in the process of making decisions to determine how these two factors affect their ability to participate in the decision making process at local levels.

Table 1*Awareness and Attendance of Local Governance Structures*

Population Group	Location / Village	% Aware of Governance Structures	% Attended a Meeting in Last 12 Months	Sample Size
Refugees	Kalobeyei Village 1	78%	45%	10
Refugees	Kalobeyei Village 2	70%	39%	10
Refugees	Kalobeyei Village 3	68%	29%	10
Host Community	Esikiriait	65%	33%	10
Host Community	Elelea	67%	35%	10
Host Community	Ayanae-Angidapala	64%	32%	10
Overall	—	69%	38%	60

Based on the data from Table 1, the respondents had relatively high Awareness of Governance Structures at 69%. There was higher Awareness among Refugees in Kalobeyei (Village 1): 78%; Refugees in Village 2: 70%; and Refugees in Village 3: 68%. This indicates that majority of them are aware of the Governance Structures, and that they are aware that there are participation opportunities available to them through Decision-Making Forums. Since the variation between the three Villages is relatively small, this may suggest that the information about Governance Structures was widely distributed throughout the settlement area.

The host community members also had a moderate level of Awareness of Governance Structures: Elelea recorded 67% Awareness; Esikiriait recorded 65% Awareness; and Ayanae-Angidapala recorded 64% Awareness. The relatively small differences in the level of Awareness for the host community members at the three Villages suggests that knowledge of Governance Structures for those Villagers is also consistent and uniform. Thus, based upon the results of this survey, it can be concluded that Governance Structures are visible, well-known by both refugee and host populations; and that the information about the availability of opportunities to participate has been widely disseminated.

Although there was considerable awareness about governance meetings, they had low attendance overall, 38 percent of potential participants. Among refugees, attendance was highest at 45 percent in Kalobeyei Village 1, 39 percent in Kalobeyei Village 2, and only 29 percent in Kalobeyei Village 3. This variability may suggest that contextual factors (accessibility, leadership mobilization or competing priorities) could be impacting attendance across each of the refugee sites. Host communities had approximately equal rates of attendance (32 - 35 percent): 35 percent (Elelea), 33 percent (Esikiriait), and 32 percent (Ayanae-Angidapala). These statistics indicate that, less than half of respondents (both refugee and host) attended any governance meetings within the previous 12 months. Low levels of attendance consistently demonstrated, across sites, indicate that there was some level of constraint to participation for both groups. Example of the difference between the level of awareness from the level of attendance can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2*Comparison of Awareness and Attendance Levels*

Indicator	Percentage
Awareness of governance structures	69%
Attendance at governance meetings	38%
Participation gap	31%

A 31-point difference in participation shows that there is a gap of 31 % pertaining to awareness pertaining to governance (69%) vs. attendance at meetings (38%). Many participants are aware that there are governance structures, yet, not many have attended meetings to discuss these governance decisions. This indicates that just because respondents are aware of governance platforms does not mean they actively participated. Therefore, the existence of governance structures alone, does not necessarily guarantee meaningful participation. Some structural or contextual barriers likely exist that limit participation. Many respondents were aware of the governance platforms, however, not many attended meetings in which governance decisions were being discussed. This suggests that most of the opportunities to participate in governance decisions were limited to a small group of individuals, thus possibly affecting the representativeness of governance outcomes. Limited participation also suggests that individuals' perceptions of fairness or inclusion in governance decision-making processes would vary depending upon how participants interact directly with the governance structure. The findings of this study support the assumption that participation in Governance Structures is not uniform and may therefore affect the integration outcomes of trust, perceived fairness and inclusion in the decision-making process.

4.1.3 Perceived Influence in Local Decision-Making

Respondents were asked how much they think they affected decision making in their community. Responses were grouped into 3 categories of how they thought they influenced these local decisions: 1) Those who believe they were able to have a significant (directly impacted) result on the decision made; 2) Those who believe they were actively consulted about their opinions, however did not have a vote in the final decision made; and 3) Those who believe that they were excluded from the decision-making process.

Table 3

Perceived Influence in Local Decision-Making

Population Group	% Reporting "Significant Influence"	% Reporting "Consultative Role"	% Reporting "No Influence"	Sample Size
Refugees	22%	58%	20%	30
Host Community	32%	49%	19%	30
Overall	27%	49%	24%	60

The information displayed in Table 3 indicates that 27% of respondents indicated they had some degree of authority over local government decision making. 49% of respondents indicated that they were consulted for input and had no authority to decide on the outcome. 24% of respondents indicated that they did not have any authority over decision making. This demonstrates that most people involved with local governance had a consultative role and very limited ability to make decisions or revitalize the local government.

The responses were similarly examined across the two populations, as there was a difference between refugees and members of the host community. 22% of respondents who were refugees felt they had significant authority over the local government. In comparison, 32% of the members of the host community felt that they had significant authority over the local government. By comparison, more members of the host community had decision-making authority than refugees. However, more refugees reported that they were consulted for input during decision making (58% of refugees vs 49% of host community). This indicates that refugees had limited authority, but were frequently contacted to provide input in decision-making processes.

The percentage of respondents who said they had no influence was very close between respondents who identified as refugees (20 percent) and those residing in host communities (19 percent). This indicates that both populations experienced exclusion from decision-making. On the other hand, refugees had higher levels of consultation than host community members, indicating that, while they were able to participate in discussions, meaningful decision-making was not available to them. Thus, host community members indicated higher levels of significant influence than those who identified as refugees, indicating that host community members had a stronger level of participation in governance structures. The level of influence across respondents is summarized in Table 3 to provide a general view of the range of depth of participation across all respondents.

Table 4

Overall Level of Participation Depth

Level of Influence	Percentage
Significant influence	27%
Consultative role	49%
No influence	24%
Total	100%

Table 4's analysis shows that by far the majority (49%) of those surveyed are in the consultative category of participation level. In addition to nearly 50% of respondents being consultative participants, slightly more than a quarter report some degree of significant influence (27%) in decision-making and almost a quarter (24%) have no influence at all in decision-making. Overall, these data indicate that these types of participation structures are predominately consultative rather than empowering; therefore, stakeholders were provided the chance to provide input on issues but decisions were made by a small number of people. The finding illustrates that centralized authority was identified to limit decentralization of governance; therefore limiting opportunities for meaningful projects related to refugee integration processes as identified by use of stakeholders engagement within governance structures.

One of the key informants' interviews confirmed the data from this data set; stating limited influence can impact negatively on both the stakeholders' trust in the governance system and the effectiveness of governance outcomes. The informant noted; "As indicated by the findings, the lack of influence can limit the ability of governance systems to produce strong integration outcomes. When people do not believe that their input will have an impact and/or make a difference on the decision-making process of others, it decreases the perceived trust in leadership and creates the impression of being treated unfairly." (Interviewee KII-03, March 15, 2025; Kakuma Refugee Camp). Therefore, one

way of looking at the findings is that the quality of participation rather than frequency of participation plays a critical role in determining how successful integration outcomes are; therefore consultative participation without having decision-making power can decrease the ownership, accountability, and sustainability of refugee integration efforts.

4.1.4 Participation by Gender

Gender disaggregation was used to better understand inclusivity within local decision-making, both in terms of attendance at governance meetings as well as their perceived influence upon decision-making processes. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Participation by Gender

Gender	% Attended Meeting	% Reporting Influence	Sample Size
Men	44%	30%	30
Women	31%	23%	30
Overall	38%	27%	60

The gendered patterns of participation in governance as detailed in Table 5 show that men had much higher attendance rates (44%) than females (31%) over the previous year. Nearly half of the male respondents reported having attended at least one governance meeting, whereas less than one-third of the female respondents had. This disparity in attendance indicates that men are more likely than women to attend governance forums and participate in local decision-making processes. In terms of perceived influence, men reported a greater sense of influence (30%) than women (23%) in making decisions. This suggests that even among attendees, men are more likely to perceive themselves as having helped shape decisions. However, the lower percentage of female attendees may suggest that women had fewer opportunities to influence the outcome of decisions or were less likely to have their contributions recognized during the decision-making process. These data indicate significant gender disparities in both participation and influence in local governance systems.

Reduced numbers of women participating would suggest that there are structural obstacles preventing most women from fully participating in governance processes. The obstacles could be such things as household duties, lack of mobility, cultural expectations, and time constraints, which can all contribute to preventing women from being able to go to meetings. Because participation is often tied to being perceived as fair and included, and therefore possibly lead to perceived inequitable outcomes due to the limited representation of women in decision-making forums who could lead to feelings of exclusion from governance and potentially may also create reduced confidence in how decisions are being made. Additionally, there appears to be a gender gap in whether a female individual feels that she has any influence once she attends a meeting. Therefore, it appears that participation alone does not guarantee that there are adequate mechanisms in place to create equitable opportunities for women to have their opinions heard, and the gap between the percentage of women attending (31%) compared to the percentage of women feeling they were able to influence the decision-making process (23%) would indicate that although some women attended meetings, they did not actively engage in the decision-making process.

These kinds of gender disparities highlight the importance of having inclusive governance structures in place in promoting equitable outcomes for both genders in the refugee and host community through strengthening women's participation and decision-making process to promote fairness, trust in leadership, and inclusion within the refugee and host community therefore improving the integration of both communities.

4.1.5 Participation Constraints

The qualitative findings collected from the focus groups and interviews with key informants provided more in-depth insights into factors related to their participation. While attending meetings where their elders participated in discussion, youth participants generally felt like they were there only as observers, thereby minimizing their input into decisions and perceived role in the governance process. Some women participants noted that their caregiving responsibilities or the demands of their household and language barrier were barriers to fully participating. These barriers made it challenging for women to both attend and engage meaningfully. Participants with disabilities cited that the inaccessibility of meeting locations and lack of targeted outreach were major barriers preventing them from participating. These barriers resulted in their inability to attend meetings and discuss issues, thereby excluding them from participating in governance.

The key informants explained that there are structures in place to supporting participation, but that budget constraints, logistical challenges, and external timelines limited the number and quality of opportunities for all to participate. These constraints led to fewer meetings being held and reduced opportunities for broad participation. Anticipatory barriers were found to be primarily due to structural institutional and systemic issues. Governance structures did exist; however, the nature of how the participatory system worked limited to some degree the extent to

which participants were able to engage with inclusivity and effectiveness. Consequently, there was an uneven distribution of participation throughout demographic groupings, which resulted in significant variations in how participants perceived fairness, trust, and inclusion.

4.1.6 Participation and Integration Outcomes

The results also indicated a positive connection between participation levels and outcomes of inclusion. Respondents who attend at least one meeting related to governance described higher levels of perceived fairness and trust than individuals who had never participated. More specifically, 54% of those in attendance at governance meetings perceived equity in the distribution of resources whereas only 26% of those who had not attended a meeting perceived equity. The data imply that a person who participates in the decision-making process is likely to have a better sense of fairness with respect to the results achieved from the governance process. Further, it appears that participants have greater confidence in the leadership since 61% of participants indicated a level of trust in their local leaders as opposed to 34% of non-participants indicating that they trust their local leaders. This also implies that when participants engage in governance structures, confidence is created in leaders which serves to further enhance the legitimacy of the institution. Further, participants also reported greater levels of feeling they were involved in the decision-making process, thus indicating that participation within a governance structure helps create a sense of belonging and is an overall means of facilitating social inclusion.

Findings demonstrate limitations regarding the effectiveness of participating. The participants identified that even if they were an active participant they would still have limited influence on significant decisions regarding; Land tenure and large scale Infrastructure projects. It appears participation was generally effective for smaller community level issue, and less effective for larger; strategic issues. While participants identified that participation enhances their sense of fairness and trust, it also illustrates the limits for how participation affects the high level strategic decision-making process

Overall, the findings support the hypothesis of a positive relationship between participation in local decision-making and outcomes of refugee integration. Greater levels of awareness and attendance along with higher levels of perceived influence lead to more favourable views on fairness, greater trust in leaders, and increased feelings of being a part of the community. However, due to the disparities of participation by gender, by population groups, and by other demographics will ultimately limit the overall effectiveness of the governance structure. This suggests that improving the inclusive nature of the participation mechanisms would greatly enhance the integration process for the refugees and host communities.

4.2 Discussion

Findings indicate that participation in local-level decision making has strong effects on terms of refugees integrating into a community. By comparison, although awareness of local governance was high, actual participation was low – particularly among women, youth, and those with disabilities. The results support integration frameworks that suggest inclusion requires access to services and meaningful participation in governing processes (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Limited participation diminishes opportunities for marginalized populations to influence resource distribution and service delivery decisions, leading to poorer results for this population during their time within a community (Oliver et al., 2020).

Barbelet (2018) illustrates the gap between formal structures for participation and informal avenues for having influence via a high degree of perceived lack of influence. Many respondents reported that final decisions were made by outside entities although consultative forums did exist. This supports governance literature that suggests that when institutional powers remain centralized, then participation may only exist in a symbolic sense (Krause, 2021). Less influence in decision-making leads to less ownership of communities and softens perceptions of fairness; as a result, soft of trust and social cohesive; thus negatively impacting integration outcomes.

Gender differences in participation access illustrate how unequal access to governance structures impacts integration. Women were under-represented for attendance and influence due to caregiving commitments, language barriers and/or sociocultural norms. It is clear from the findings that social and structural barriers shape the availability/likelihood of having the opportunity to participate, thus creating inequities in integration through limited access to integrate. Similar studies conducted within refugee hosting contexts have also highlighted the benefits of inclusive participation, including better services alignment and stronger host-refugee relationships, whereas exclusion will replicate inequalities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020).

The relationship between fairness perceptions and participative governance confirms again how vital participating in governance is for integration success. Participation at meetings as reported by respondents corresponded to greater perceptions as having trust in leaders, and fairness regarding wealth distribution than did non-participation. These results support governance theory that highlights participative governance as an avenue by which legitimacy and accountability can be increased (Krause, 2021). However, with limited power over decisions, participatory structures remain constrained by institutional hierarchies and administrative systems (Scott, 2020).

Ultimately, evidence shows that participation of local individuals in decision-making is crucial for determining whether refugees integrate successfully. Although there are systems of governance operating in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, there is substantial variability in levels of participated among groups and the degree to which these groups have voice in governance. These findings contribute to existing research by illustrating how outcomes related to success such as fairness, trust, inclusivity are all contingent upon the level of participation that occurs through strong governance mechanisms. Therefore, developing and fortifying mechanisms that encourage inclusive participation is critical to ensuring equitable refugee integration within the context of emerging refugees' cities.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The research concluded that taking part in making decisions at a local level was a key factor that influenced the results of refugee integration at Kakuma and Kalobeyei's integrated settlement. According to those surveyed, there was generally a high level of understanding of how to engage with decision-making processes/structures of governance; however, participation and levels of engagement in meetings were for the majority of the population quite low and not equitable across villages, between genders and across social groups. Most respondents indicated that they were primarily involved in a consultative capacity and did not have the ability to influence decisions that were often made by an outside actor or a representative of a formal authority. Refugees, women, youths, and people with disabilities were significantly less likely than other members of their communities to be engaged in active decision-making. Overall, participation in the decision-making process was inconsistent (from community to community), limited in terms of how much influence a participant actually had on the outcome of the decision and uneven in terms of impact or outcome on the decision-making process, thereby limiting the contribution that participation can make to equitable integration outcomes.

5.2 Recommendations

To foster greater accessibility and inclusivity in local governance structures, the authors recommend that participation forums be carried out in a decentralized way through mobile or roaming community meetings in Kalobeyei and the host communities that surround it. This will help to eliminate the mobility and logistical barriers that currently prevent women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups from participating fully in local governance processes.

Furthermore, the study recommends that both refugees and host community representatives have access to targeted capacity-building programmes aimed at improving their capacity to engage with the governance process. Such training will decrease the need for intermediaries and allow for more direct and meaningful engagement in the decision-making process. Improving these capacities is critical to ensuring the quality of participation is improved beyond simply attending or providing input to decision-makers.

The study furthermore suggests institutionalising transparent and accountable feedback mechanisms that regularly provide updates on decision-making and allocation of resources to communities. Independent monitoring and regular audits of local processes will allow for verification of equitable representation among demographic groups, continuous identification of inclusion gaps and restore community trust in governance structures and increase fairness perceptions within service delivery and allocation of resources respectively.

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