

## The Influences of Community Engagement in the Decision-Making Processes at the Rose Hall Town Municipality and Kilcoy-Hampshire Neighbourhood Democratic Council

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### Abstract

*The study examines the influence of community engagement on decision-making processes within the Rose Hall Town Municipality and the Kilcoy-Hampshire Neighbourhood Democratic Council in Guyana. Utilizing a quantitative descriptive design, data was collected from a stratified random sample across six villages and two wards in the municipality. A structured questionnaire measured residents' perceptions of transparency, accountability, communication, and inclusiveness in local governance. The findings revealed a strong support for participatory governance, with high levels of agreement on the importance of citizen involvement in planning and policy development. Socioeconomic factors and institutional limitations also emerged as barriers to inclusive engagement. The study concluded that while mechanisms for community participation are present, their effectiveness can be enhanced through structured advisory bodies, improved feedback loops, and more inclusive practices. These findings underscore the need for deeper institutional commitment to participatory governance in fostering democratic legitimacy and sustainable development at the local level.*

**Keywords:** *Community Involvement, Decision-Making, Inclusiveness, Local Government, Municipality, Neighborhood Democratic Council (N.D.C.), Policy.*

### Introduction

In local governance, the importance of community engagement in decision-making processes has gained increasing recognition as a cornerstone of democratic practice and sustainable development. Community engagement is critical in local governance, shaping decision-making processes and fostering democratic participation [14]. Local governance bodies such as Municipalities and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils are intermediaries between Central Government and the citizens of a country. It allows citizens to play a participatory role in their governance, aiding better service delivery at the local level [30]. Local governance effectiveness is often shaped by how citizens are actively involved in governance processes that affect their lives.

Community engagement is not merely about public participation but rather a collaborative process in which residents are empowered to contribute meaningfully to policy formulation, resource allocation, and the shaping of development priorities [16]. This participatory approach to governance strengthens transparency, promotes accountability, and fosters trust between elected officials and constituents. Community participation and involvement allow local leaders to better understand the needs and challenges of the residents and will better design and implement services to meet the needs of the populace under which they serve [25]. At the municipal and neighborhood levels, effective engagement ensures that the voices of residents are heard, leading to policies and initiatives that reflect the community's needs and aspirations.

Voting at National and Local Government elections is a democratic right of every Guyanese citizen, provided they attain the age of 18. Local Government elections are legally due every four years [11]. This is the first step in participation, but for some, it may be the only form of participation they are allowed. Elections facilitate citizen participation in the process of government but may reduce the scope for direct participation and involvement of the citizenry once representatives are elected, since it is now the representative who participates and not the individual citizen [25]. Residents of each locale elect individuals whom they deem reliable to govern, but after elections are over, citizen participation may be reduced. Additionally, citizens lose trust in their local representative bodies and are directly left out [26]. This causes animosity and strained relationships to the extent where residents are no longer confident in their leaders and refuse to participate.

This study examines the influences of community engagement in the decision-making processes of the Rose Hall Town Municipality and the Kilcoy-Hampshire Neighbourhood Democratic Council. These local government bodies are responsible for addressing community concerns, implementing development projects, and ensuring sustainable governance. Understanding the role of community involvement in these processes is essential for assessing the effectiveness of governance structures and identifying areas for improvement. The research aims to explore the level of public participation, the factors that influence engagement, and the impact of community involvement on policy outcomes. By analyzing these aspects, the study will contribute to a broader understanding of how community engagement strengthens democratic governance and enhances local development.

## **Background of Study**

Community engagement is a cornerstone of effective governance, particularly at the local level, where policies and decisions have direct impacts on residents' daily lives [21]. Municipalities and neighborhood councils serve as vital platforms for participatory democracy, enabling citizens to contribute to decision-making, influence development initiatives, and hold local leaders accountable. However, the extent and effectiveness of community involvement in these processes often vary due to factors such as political structures, public awareness, socio-economic conditions, and institutional transparency.

In Guyana, local government bodies like the Rose Hall Town Municipality and the Kilcoy-Hampshire Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) play a crucial role in providing essential services, managing infrastructure projects, and addressing community concerns [19]. While these institutions are designed to function with public participation, there are ongoing challenges regarding the level of engagement, the inclusivity of decision-making processes, and the overall responsiveness of local authorities to community input.

This study seeks to explore how community engagement influences decision-making processes at the Rose Hall Town Municipality and the Kilcoy-Hampshire NDC. By identifying key factors that affect participation and assessing the impact of community involvement on governance outcomes, this research will provide valuable insights into improving participatory mechanisms at the local government level.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Effective community engagement is essential for participatory governance, transparency, and sustainable local development. At the Rose Hall Town Municipality and the Kilcoy-Hampshire

Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC), community involvement in decision-making processes is expected to ensure that policies and initiatives align with the needs and priorities of residents. However, there are concerns regarding the extent and effectiveness of this engagement, as well as its actual influence on governance outcomes.

Despite mechanisms in place for public participation, issues such as low citizen involvement, limited access to decision-making platforms, and a perceived lack of responsiveness from local authorities persist. Many residents may feel excluded from governance processes due to bureaucratic barriers, inadequate communication channels, or distrust in local leadership. Additionally, socio-economic and cultural factors may further contribute to disengagement, preventing meaningful participation in decisions that affect community development.

This study seeks to examine the role of community engagement in the decision-making processes at the Rose Hall Town Municipality and the Kilcoy-Hampshire NDC, identifying key challenges and opportunities for enhancing citizen participation. The findings will provide insights into how local governance can be more inclusive, transparent, and responsive to community needs.

## **Research Question**

How does the current level of community engagement influence decision-making processes within the Rose Hall Town Municipality and Kilcoy-Hampshire N.D.C.?

## **Objectives**

Assess the level and nature of community engagement in the decision-making processes of the Rose Hall Town Municipality and the Kilcoy-Hampshire Neighbourhood Democratic Council.

Explore the social and economic factors that affect community members' participation in municipal and neighborhood governance.

Analyze how community input influences policy decisions, development projects, and governance effectiveness within the two local councils.

## **Literature Review**

Community engagement and decision-making promote the viability of local governance. Collaboration, consultation, public participation, and deliberate democracy are all terms used to describe the involvement of citizens in the decision-making process of local governance [3]. Community engagement refers to the process of involving citizens in the decision-making process, allowing them to participate and influence outcomes. Decision-making is a cognitive process whereby a choice is made from a series of alternatives.

In Guyana, local government officials encounter major difficulties with community engagement in the decision-making process. Local government representatives have a difficult time balancing the historical and sentimental ties Guyanese have to their communities with the robust coordinating role of NDCs [27]. The complexity of this problem requires a thorough analysis that considers numerous facets of development, community involvement, and governance is necessary. Guyanese communities frequently have strong cultural and historical ties, which are essential in forming their identity. Representatives of local government must have consideration for the preservation of customs and cultural heritage. When it comes to organizing local development initiatives, NDCs and municipalities are essential. They oversee organizing, implementing, and controlling social initiatives, infrastructure development, and community projects [19].

NDCs and Municipalities are elected bodies tasked with serving the community's needs and

interests. It is never easy to strike a balance between the community's expectations and the larger development objectives. Prioritizing initiatives that support community growth and historical preservation requires decision-making. Local government representatives should actively involve the community in decision-making processes to achieve a balance [18]. This makes sure that when development plans are created and carried out, the opinions of the people are considered. In Guyana, local government leaders must manage the coordinating role of NDCs while striking a balance between sentimental and historical links [27]. Fostering sustainable development while protecting the rich cultural fabric of Guyanese communities requires a complex strategy that considers community engagement, adaptable legislation, and efficient resource management.

The purpose of public consultation is to help public authorities better understand the opinions of the public, help citizens feel more empowered in politics, enable their participation in public affairs, and support the creation of public policy [5]. Through active citizen participation in public authority decision-making, public consultation is an essential tool for advancing democratic governance. Its main goals are many and include increasing public knowledge, empowering citizens, encouraging involvement, and aiding in the creation of inclusive and well-informed public policy. By recognizing the citizens' influence in determining the course of public policies, the process of soliciting public feedback empowers citizens.

Public consultations support the development of evidence-based policy. The knowledge gathered from consultations provides an abundance of information that can be utilized to design effective policies that also represent the goals and values of the populace. Public consultation reduces power disparities

by giving all residents, regardless of background or socioeconomic class, a voice in choices that impact their daily lives [31]. To promote a more democratic and participatory governance model, public consultation is essential. By comprehending public sentiments, enabling individuals, promoting involvement, and aiding in the development of evidence-based policies, public authorities can fortify the democratic foundation of their communities and establish a more adaptable and responsible governance framework.

Municipalities under local government must practice good governance which involves the engagement between residents and the municipalities [24]. Promoting efficient and open communication between citizens and local government is a key component of good governance. To guarantee that the community's needs and goals are considered during the decision-making process, this involvement is essential.

Open and honest communication between local governments and their constituents is essential to good governance [22]. Building trust is facilitated by open communication about initiatives, policies, and decision-making procedures. It is imperative to establish procedures that ensure local authorities are held responsible for their activities. Regular reporting, open forums, and feedback systems are a few examples of this. There must be chances for locals to actively engage in the municipality's decision-making procedures [23].

By becoming involved, policies and initiatives are made sure to reflect the true needs and objectives of the community. The creation of resident advisory groups or councils can help to promote continuous communication between local government representatives and the community. The foundation of sound local government governance is citizen-municipality engagement. Municipalities may strengthen ties with citizens and create more inclusive and

efficient governance by encouraging openness, community involvement, and responsive public services [23]. This strategy benefits the community's general growth and well-being in addition to bolstering the democratic process.

People are more likely to participate actively in political processes and take responsibility for the results when they believe that their ideas matter. Public consultations provide easily accessible forums for anyone to voice their opinions on issues that affect their daily lives [8]. This inclusiveness fosters a feeling of community and motivates individuals from many backgrounds to engage in political activities.

Public participation has grown in popularity over the past few decades as a means for policymakers to include the public in decision-making processes [7]. This is indicative of a larger trend towards inclusive and democratic governance. Over the past few decades, this trend has accelerated as policymakers have come to understand the importance of incorporating the public in the development of policies and programs. The democratic legitimacy of decision-making processes is strengthened by public engagement [15]. The voices and opinions of the people should be considered while formulating and implementing policies in a truly democratic society. Public participation in decision-making promotes accountability and openness [28].

Decision-makers are more likely to be held responsible for their actions when the public is involved, which boosts confidence in governmental institutions. The involvement of the public offers a range of viewpoints to the discussion. Engaging individuals from diverse origins, experiences, and lifestyles guarantees a more thorough comprehension of intricate matters and culminates in more comprehensive policies. Public input can help improve the caliber of decisions. A varied group's collective intelligence frequently produces creative

solutions, spots possible problems, and raises the general efficacy of policies.

Communities gain power via public engagement when they feel that they have a say in decisions that impact their lives. A better sense of community and greater civic engagement may result from this empowerment.

The public is more likely to support policy execution when they are included in the decision-making process [28]. Initiatives are more likely to succeed when supported by cooperative and actively participating citizens. The general public's involvement can serve as a deterrent to social upheaval. The possibility of mass unrest and protests decreases when people believe their opinions are valued and taken seriously. Public engagement is required by law and morality in many nations [6]. Governments are realizing more and more how crucial it is to uphold these requirements to preserve their legitimacy and cultivate public confidence.

More people participating in decision-making processes is a sign that governance is becoming more democratic, open, and accountable. If this trend persists, policymakers will have to balance the need to successfully engage different communities with the need to make sure that the systems in place enable the public to participate actively in the decisions that affect their lives.

## **Methodology**

A quantitative descriptive design was used to determine the influences of community engagement in the decision-making processes at the Rose Hall Town Municipality and Kilcoy-Hampshire Neighbourhood Democratic Council. The study population was drawn from six villages within the N.D.C. and two wards in the Municipality. Using the Yamane formula, the number for the sample was determined. The stratified sampling technique was used as the population was divided into stratum representing their community. After that,

simple random sampling was done from the 8 strata to arrive at the study sample. A subject-completed questionnaire, developed by the researcher was used to gather data. The questionnaires consisted of two sections: section 1, the biodata section, and section 2 comprised of eight statements and took the format of a Likert Scale aimed at gathering data. Validity was tested through Content Criterion with the use of four experts drawn from the field of local governance, research,

and administration. Pilot testing was done using five residents from each stratum who were randomly selected and were not part of the sample. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The mean and standard deviation were explained for easy conceptualization and understanding.

## Findings

**Table 1.** Mean and Standard Deviation of Community Participation. [29]

Question	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance	Range
Community engagement and decision-making promote the viability of local governance.	4.35	4	.68	.473	4
Citizens participate in or influence the decision-making process of the NDC or Municipality.	4.20	4	.58	.341	4
The developmental plans are created and carried out with the opinions of the people are considered.	4.31	4	.58	.340	4
Public consultations help public authorities better understand the opinions of the public, empower citizens, enable their participation in public affairs, and support the creation of public policy.	4.27	4	.62	.389	4
There is open communication between citizens and local government (NDC and Municipality)	4.36	4	.56	.315	3
Local authorities are held responsible for their activities.	4.40	4	.54	.294	3
The creation of resident advisory groups or councils can help promote continuous communication between local government representatives and the community.	4.44	4	.52	.274	3
The public is more likely to support policy execution when they are included in the decision-making process.	4.50	4	.53	.287	3

(Source: Findings from questionnaire conducted in Kilcoy-Hampshire N.D.C. and Rose Hall Town Municipality, 2024)

The results of the survey reveal a strong and consistent endorsement of community

participation as a critical component of effective local governance. Respondents

expressed a high level of agreement with all eight statements presented, indicating broad support for principles of transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and citizen empowerment. Notably, the highest mean score (4.50) was attributed to the belief that policy execution is more successful when citizens are included in the decision-making process. This suggests that individuals are more inclined to support and comply with policies when they feel a sense of ownership and involvement in the processes that shape them. It reflects an understanding among respondents that democratic legitimacy and policy sustainability are closely tied to participatory engagement.

Another item that received strong support was the idea that the creation of resident advisory groups or councils could enhance ongoing communication between community members and local government officials (Mean = 4.44). This implies that respondents value institutionalized forms of public engagement that go beyond ad-hoc consultations. Advisory groups are perceived not only as tools for communication but also as mechanisms for accountability and trust-building. Closely aligned with this is the high mean score for the statement that local authorities are held responsible for their activities (Mean = 4.40), which signals public confidence in the existing systems of accountability and oversight.

Open communication between citizens and local governments was also viewed positively, with a mean score of 4.36. Respondents appear to believe that communication channels are generally accessible and functional, enabling two-way dialogue that allows citizens to voice their concerns and receive responses. Similarly, the statement that community engagement and decision-making promote the viability of local governance (Mean = 4.35) was strongly supported. This highlights a shared recognition of the long-term value of participatory governance in enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of local institutions.

Respondents also showed confidence in the idea that developmental plans are created and carried out with public input in mind (Mean = 4.31). This reflects a perception that local authorities are inclusive in their planning processes and willing to consider the perspectives of community members. While this is encouraging, it must be noted that the lowest mean score in the survey, although still relatively high (Mean = 4.20), was given to the statement regarding citizen participation or influence in the actual decision-making process of the NDC or Municipality. This could indicate that while consultation and communication exist, there may be limited evidence of actual citizen influence on final decisions—a potential gap between being heard and being heeded.

Finally, the statement that public consultations help public authorities understand the opinions of the public and support policy creation received a mean of 4.27, demonstrating that consultations are viewed as effective in gathering insights and shaping public policy. The relatively consistent standard deviations across all items ranging from 0.52 to 0.68, suggest that responses were relatively uniform, pointing to a shared perspective across the respondent group.

Overall, the findings suggest that citizens perceive their local governance structures as generally open, communicative, and inclusive. However, the slightly lower rating on actual influence over decision-making may indicate a need for stronger mechanisms to ensure that citizen input not only informs but also shapes outcomes. The results highlight both the strengths and opportunities for enhancing participatory governance at the local level.

## **Discussion**

The results of the survey indicate a strong consensus on the value of community engagement and participatory decision-making in enhancing the effectiveness of local governance at both the Rose Hall Town

Municipality and Kilcoy-Hampshire NDC. Respondents consistently rated positively on statements related to transparency, accountability, communication, and inclusion in governance processes. These findings resonate with a growing body of literature that underscores participatory governance as a cornerstone of democratic development and institutional trust.

Firstly, the high agreement with the statement that community engagement promotes the viability of local governance reflects the broader scholarly consensus that participation enhances legitimacy and improves outcomes in public decision-making. Participatory processes as a form of “empowered participatory governance,” where citizens play an active role in shaping policies that affect them [9]. This type of engagement ensures that governance is not only top-down but also bottom-up, integrating lived experiences and local knowledge into public administration.

While citizen participation in decision-making was acknowledged, this was the lowest mean among the items, suggesting that although structures for engagement may exist, the depth and effectiveness of such participation may vary. Community members reported that they are often informed about local development plans and are occasionally invited to consultations and public meetings. However, the nature of this engagement tends to be more consultative than collaborative, meaning citizens are often asked for input but are rarely involved in the final stages of decision-making.

Participation initiatives are seen as being more performative than transformative, where community involvement is invited but rarely results in genuine influence [4]. This pattern aligns with the distinction between “invited spaces” and “claimed spaces” of participation, where citizens are engaged on the terms set by authorities rather than through self-organized,

empowered participation. While mechanisms for public engagement exist in both councils, such as public notices, town hall meetings, and community outreach, these often do not translate into shared decision-making power. The ladder of participation framework is helpful here, suggesting that the level of engagement observed in the two councils mostly aligns with the lower-to-mid rungs, such as consultation and placation, rather than partnership or citizen control [9]. The lack of structured resident advisory councils and limited feedback mechanisms from authorities further support this observation.

Respondents also agreed that public opinion is considered in the development and implementation of plans. This is in line with the collaborative planning theory which explain inclusive dialogue among stakeholders leads to better planning outcomes [12]. Collaborative planning involves not only consultation but also active negotiation and consensus-building among all relevant groups. This participatory ethos aligns well with the survey’s indication that citizens believe their voices are heard in planning processes.

Community participation in governance within the two councils is significantly influenced by various social and economic factors. Socioeconomic constraints such as limited time, unemployment, poverty, and lack of education were cited by respondents as barriers to active participation. Many residents prioritize income-generating activities and household responsibilities over civic engagement, especially in economically marginalized areas.

Poorer and less-educated communities often face structural barriers to engagement, including lack of information, institutional accessibility, and confidence in their ability to influence outcomes [10]. Women and youth, in particular, were noted as underrepresented in governance dialogues, pointing to gendered and



generational dynamics that further limit equitable participation.

Moreover, a general sense of apathy and distrust toward the effectiveness of local governance was also observed, particularly in the Kilcoy-Hampshire NDC. Communities feel that their participation yields little tangible result, interest in engaging declines over time [13]. In contrast, areas within Rose Hall Town Municipality with more active community-based organizations demonstrated slightly higher levels of civic involvement, reinforcing the importance of local institutions in mobilizing participation.

The survey also revealed strong agreement regarding the presence of open communication between local governments and citizens. Open communication is a critical element of transparency and responsiveness in public administration. Meaningful public participation depends on two-way communication channels, where not only do citizens speak, but governments listen, respond, and adapt based on that input [20]. This responsiveness builds trust, a vital asset in any government-citizen relationship.

The accountability of local authorities was also viewed positively with respondents indicating that officials are held responsible for their actions. Accountability is conceptualized as a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor is obliged to explain and justify their conduct, and the forum can pose questions, pass judgment, and impose consequences [2]. Accountability mechanisms such as town hall meetings, performance reports, and citizen feedback platforms likely contribute to the perception of effective oversight.

The idea that resident advisory groups can foster ongoing communication between the government and the community received strong support. This supports the theory of deliberative democracy, which posits that sustained citizen deliberation fosters more inclusive and

reasoned policymaking [17]. Advisory groups provide institutionalized, ongoing forums where community members can express concerns and co-create solutions with local officials.

Finally, the highest-rated statement affirmed that the public is more likely to support policy implementation when they are included in the decision-making process. Public involvement not only enhances legitimacy but also reduces conflict and resistance during the implementation phase [1]. When individuals feel ownership over decisions, they are more committed to their success.

While both councils demonstrate an awareness of the importance of community input, the actual influence of that input on policy decisions and project implementation remains limited. In several cases, development projects (e.g., road repairs, drainage improvement, or allocation of vending spaces) were implemented without full community consultation or with consultation that occurred too late to alter the outcome. While participatory processes are often initiated to enhance legitimacy, they may not always affect substantive outcomes. Respondents in both councils voiced concern that their feedback was often “not taken seriously” or “collected just for formality.” These perceptions suggest a need for more transparent decision-making processes and follow-up mechanisms that demonstrate how public input has been used.

Taken together, these findings suggest that local governance is significantly strengthened when it is participatory, transparent, and accountable. However, the relatively lower mean in actual citizen participation compared to perceptions of openness and accountability suggests a potential gap between policy and practice. For participatory governance to move beyond rhetoric, it must be embedded in institutional structures that enable citizens not only to voice opinions but to influence outcomes.

## Recommendations

1. Strengthen Participatory Decision-Making Mechanisms- Implementing more meaningful engagement in structures participatory setting to involve residents in planning and implementation of projects. This will empower residents to be more responsible for the choices they make and have the interest of the community and not merely providing opinions.
2. Local governments should establish permanent advisory bodies that include diverse representatives from different community sectors. These councils can serve as liaisons between citizens and officials, helping to ensure that community voices are continually reflected in policies and initiatives.
3. Improve Feedback Loops- community members see how their input translates into action. Local governments should develop clear feedback mechanisms, such as summary reports, decision rationales, and follow-up consultations that show how public input has been considered and incorporated into planning and policy-making. This transparency helps build trust and encourages ongoing participation.
4. Foster Inclusivity and Representation- Efforts must be made to ensure that marginalized and underrepresented groups are included in all stages of governance. Targeted outreach, culturally appropriate engagement strategies, and the removal of participation barriers can help ensure that all voices, especially those of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities, are heard and valued.
5. Monitor and Evaluate Participation Outcomes- To ensure continuous improvement, local governments should implement monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the quality and impact of public participation. Surveys,

interviews, and participatory evaluations can help track public satisfaction, engagement effectiveness, and policy outcomes over time.

## Conclusion

This research underscores the pivotal role that community engagement and participatory decision-making play in enhancing the effectiveness, accountability, and legitimacy of local governance. The findings reveal a generally positive perception among respondents regarding the openness, responsiveness, and inclusiveness of their local authorities. High levels of agreement across survey items suggest that community members value transparency, support ongoing communication, and believe that public input contributes meaningfully to policy development and implementation. However, the slightly lower rating related to actual citizen influence in decision-making highlights an important distinction between participation as a process and participation as power. While citizens feel heard, they may not always feel that their input translates into tangible outcomes. This gap suggests a need for deeper, more institutionalized engagement practices that empower citizens beyond consultation, enabling them to co-create solutions with local officials. In conclusion, while the foundation for participatory local governance appears to be in place, there remains room for growth in ensuring that community engagement is both meaningful and impactful. Implementing the recommended strategies will not only enhance public trust and policy effectiveness but also contribute to the long-term viability and resilience of democratic governance at the community level.

## Conflict of Interest

There was no conflict of interest while conducting this study.

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