



# SNAPSHOT

## Communities Championing Change in Meru County

*“Now not only the market but residents too boast of access to safe clean water.”*

***Julius Kinoti, Food Vendor,  
Kagene Market***

Meru County Government seemed like a progressive county, it was quick to enact the Public Participation Act, 2014, which paved the way for the establishment of the Department for Public Participation, Public Participation Office, and Public Participation Advisory Committee. These are all essential platforms to promote active citizen participation in governance and development.

But in the last 6 years, the county government has failed repeatedly to comply with the Public Finance Management (Amendment) Act 2015. The Act requires county governments to publish budget information during formulation, approval, implementation, and audit stages of the budget cycle.

Food vendors like Julius Kinoti, in Kagene Market, struggled to access water in the market to clean fruits and vegetables, compromising the health and safety of the products they sold. But even with the policy framework existing in the county, Kinoti didn't know how to have the matter addressed.

The Catholic Diocese of Murang'a (CDM) conducted a governance and public participation training funded by USAID through the Agile Harmonized Assistance for Devolved Institutions (AHADI) program.

The training covered the Public Expenditure Management (PEM) cycle, i.e. county budget cycle, budget formulation and monitoring of budget execution; public participation in the county development processes; social accountability techniques; the right to access to information; policy analysis and advocacy; and devolution and the functions of national and county governments.

This saw 85 community trainers and 25 civil society organization representatives from across 45 wards trained, who then educated residents across Meru County. As a result of this training, 95 social audits were conducted to evaluate government projects in education, health and water sectors.

“After the civic education, the citizens, through the office of the Ward Administrator, demanded the formation of a project management committee. This committee manages the borehole and oversees the supply of water. Now not only the market but residents too boast of access to safe clean water,” Kinoti points out.

Ntunene Ward, which had suffered from severe water shortage following the breakdown of equipment for 6 months was also restored following the community filing complaints to the county government.

“The civic education exercise empowered residents, who made several trips to the area Member of County Assembly and presented their concern. The county administration promised to put up a water kiosk in each village to improve water access to residents. Three water kiosks are currently under construction,” states Zipporah Nkatha, a civic educator within the ward.

Similar to the water sector, residents across various wards in Meru rallied for government intervention to construct and rehabilitate schools and school facilities.

Nguthiru Primary School, in Muthara Ward, sanitation blocks were extremely dilapidated; some toilet blocks were crumbling with doors falling off, making its use by students and teachers life-threatening. Community members lobbied the county government to allocate resources for the construction of these blocks.

The Member of County Assembly of the area promised to lobby the county administration for resources in the next financial year to construct an early childhood development education (ECDE) classroom and toilet. As a matter of urgency, the community and alumni of the school came together and contributed funds towards the construction of toilets at the school.

In Humbi Primary School, Igembe South sub-county, agitation by parents resulted in the county government allocating KES 300,000 (USD 3,000) towards the repair of severely dilapidated classrooms to restore space for learning.