

## Levels of Stakeholder Participation in Urban Central Market Planning Process: A Case Study of Kabale and Mbarara

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### Abstract

### Original Research Article

This study investigates the levels of stakeholder participation in planning for the effective management of Kabale and Mbarara Central Markets in Uganda. Using a descriptive case study design, data were collected through interviews, and questionnaires. The findings reveal that stakeholder participation remains limited and largely consultative, with minimal influence in decision-making. Market vendors, often feel sidelined in key planning stages such as market research, budgeting and resource allocation, and implementation and control. This exclusion has contributed to poor service delivery, resource allocation, and project sustainability having limited cultivation of trust and shared responsibility, which is vital during the implementation stage. The study underscores the need to adopt a more inclusive and participatory planning approach that empowers stakeholders to contribute effectively to market governance. It recommends strengthening participatory budgeting, promoting participation in market research, and developing feedback loops to facilitate joint market planning for successful market governance. By recognizing stakeholders as critical actors in planning, urban authorities can foster greater ownership, improve market operations, and promote sustainable management of public markets. The study contributes to literature on participatory urban governance and offers practical insights for policymakers, planners, and development practitioners seeking to enhance stakeholder engagement in urban market management.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder, participation, planning, effective management, urban central markets.

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## INTRODUCTION

Urban central markets are vital to the socio-economic fabric of towns and cities, particularly in developing countries such as Uganda. Functioning as key hubs for trade and urban services, these markets offer income-generating opportunities and employment to a broad array of stakeholders, including vendors, traders, local government officials, and consumers (UN-Habitat, 2018). As focal points of economic activity and urban life, central markets play a critical role in poverty reduction, food security, and community development. However, the effective management of these markets remains a persistent challenge, often due to limited or ineffective stakeholder participation in planning processes.

Stakeholder engagement is widely recognized as a cornerstone of sound public administration and urban governance. It promotes transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility, thereby improving service delivery, resource allocation, and the sustainability of public projects (Mota, 2005; Theiss-Morse & Hibbing, 2005; Panday & Chowdhury, 2020). Within the context of urban markets, inclusive stakeholder participation is not merely a democratic ideal but a practical necessity for ensuring that policies and interventions are responsive to the needs and realities of diverse actors involved.

Planning for urban market management typically involves interconnected processes such as market research, budgeting, resource allocation, and implementation oversight. Active participation during these phases enhances the relevance and efficiency of

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planning outcomes. For instance, engaging stakeholders in market research allows for a better understanding of consumer behavior and trader needs, ensuring that market infrastructure and services align with actual demand (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Terdoo, 2024; Wilker *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, stakeholder involvement in budgeting and resource allocation cultivates transparency, prioritization, and accountability (OECD, 2019; Nuwagaba, 2020), while inclusive participation in implementation fosters coordination, real-time problem-solving, and stronger compliance with rules and regulations (Bryson *et al.*, 2014; Magoola, Mwesigwa, & Nabwami, 2023).

Despite the recognized benefits of participatory planning, evidence suggests that in many Ugandan urban markets, stakeholder involvement remains superficial, irregular, or symbolic, often constrained by weak institutional frameworks, limited capacity, and political interference. This has significant implications for market functionality, vendor satisfaction, and long-term sustainability. While literature points to the theoretical value of stakeholder participation, there is a notable lack of empirical studies exploring how participation actually plays out in real-world planning and management processes in Ugandan markets.

This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the levels and quality of stakeholder participation in the planning processes of Kabale and Mbarara Central Markets. The focus is on assessing participation across key planning dimensions—market research, budgeting, resource allocation, and implementation oversight—and understanding the implications for inclusive urban development. By drawing on stakeholder experiences and practices in these two urban centers, the study contributes to the growing discourse on participatory urban governance and offers practical recommendations for improving stakeholder engagement in market planning across Uganda.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: the next section provides a review of relevant literature, followed by the methodology, presentation of findings, and a concluding section with key insights and policy recommendations.

Effective planning and management of urban markets require continuous adaptation to dynamic socio-economic and technological environments. Brenner (2018) emphasizes the importance of ongoing market research at individual, organizational, and external levels to understand client needs and behaviors in an evolving digital business landscape. He identifies critical components such as co-creation, agility, asset sharing, and collaborative ecosystems, all of which require vendors to adapt to shifting consumer preferences, including the adoption of digital payment systems and

organic products. Celestin and Sujatha (2024) build on this by exploring how digital payment platforms influence consumer behavior. While these technologies enhance convenience and boost sales, the authors highlight persistent concerns over security, which continue to impede widespread adoption.

Strategic responses to market trends also require careful analysis of competition and industry dynamics. Aaker and Moorman (2023) underscore the necessity of competitor analysis and tracking evolving consumer trends to create robust, market-driven strategies. They advocate for integrating modern tools such as influencer marketing and gamification to enhance consumer engagement. Similarly, Gupta (2022) notes that e-commerce success hinges on companies' ability to anticipate and respond to market shifts through ongoing competition analysis and flexible strategies.

Supply chain management in urban markets is another critical concern. Ssenoga, Mugurusi, and Oluka (2019) examine the banana supply chain in Uganda, revealing significant post-harvest losses due to inefficiencies, which they propose to address through supply chain redesign. Wilson, Tewdwr-Jones, and Comber (2019) extend this logic into urban planning, suggesting that digital technologies—such as participatory dashboards—can enhance policy formulation by incorporating citizen feedback.

Resource mobilization is also vital for effective urban market management. Iwan and Arisman (2023) stress the importance of prudent financial planning and budgeting to achieve organizational goals. They highlight challenges such as financial illiteracy and economic uncertainties, recommending the use of sophisticated financial models and constant monitoring. Zhao *et al.*, (2019) and Yan *et al.*, (2023) introduce data-driven models—such as neural networks and optimization algorithms—to allocate marketing budgets more efficiently. However, Mishra *et al.*, (2024) note a key limitation in these approaches: the inadequate incorporation of qualitative aspects like stakeholder satisfaction and engagement, which are vital for ensuring accountability and effective resource use.

Inclusivity in service design and decision-making is another emerging theme. Fisk *et al.*, (2018) propose the concept of "Design for Service Inclusion," which prioritizes the creation of services that accommodate diverse client needs to ensure equity and satisfaction. Yet, the practical application of this principle in market planning remains under-researched. Lock *et al.*, (2020) explore similar issues through a review of urban dashboards, pointing out limitations in stakeholder interaction due to poor data visualization and passive engagement. Samrose *et al.*'s *MeetingCoach* project offers a promising alternative by using intelligent dashboards to monitor participation and emotional tones

in meetings, thus promoting more inclusive decision-making environments.

Stakeholder engagement remains central to market governance and planning. Kaptein and Van Tulder (2017) introduce "struggle theory" to illustrate how organizations must respond to internal and external pressures to maintain ethical standards. This aligns with Herremans, Nazari, and Mahmoudian (2016), who identify three stakeholder engagement approaches—informing, responding, and involving—within sustainability reporting. These models illustrate the increasing importance of stakeholder feedback in shaping institutional strategies.

Public urban markets require strategic planning to maintain functionality amid evolving urban dynamics (Kabeyi, 2019). Strategic planning encompasses resource allocation, budgeting, and stakeholder coordination, yet challenges such as political interference and resource constraints persist. George, Walker, and Monster (2019) argue that stakeholder participation enhances decision-making and service delivery. Szpilko (2020) adds that early stakeholder involvement fosters co-creation and shared ownership of outcomes.

Participatory governance is essential in this context, particularly through structures like vendor associations. Hummel (2017) and Smit (2018) highlight how such associations enhance collective action and regulate market operations, contributing to improved planning outcomes. However, Wilson *et al.*, (2015) caution that limited community participation—as seen in cases like Paidha—can lead to alienation and resistance. Mapfumo and Mutereko (2020) stress that effective legal frameworks are needed to institutionalize citizen participation and promote inclusivity.

Despite these insights, existing studies largely rely on literature reviews or focus on broader market systems without delving into specific empirical realities of public urban markets. There is a notable lack of in-depth, mixed-methods research that examines the actual levels and dynamics of stakeholder participation. The urban markets in Kabale and Mbarara present unique governance and socio-economic challenges, making them ideal for empirical investigation. This study, therefore, fills this critical gap by exploring stakeholder participation levels in urban market planning and their implications for effective management.

## METHODOLOGY

The research adopted both quantitative and qualitative methods within a case study framework, ideal for deeply exploring complex issues in real-life settings (Yin, 2018). The quantitative method enabled data collection from vendors at Mbarara and Kabale Central Markets, while the qualitative method offered rich

insights from key informants, which included market leaders and elected as well as technical officials from the local government.

The research focused on Kabale and Mbarara Central Markets, selecting key informants purposefully. This group comprised two Division Mayors, two Division Town Clerks, two Commercial Officers, two Market Masters, and two Vendor Leaders from each market. Vendors were chosen using a proportionally stratified random sampling technique, based on Slovin's formula, which ensured representation from various market areas. Consequently, a sample of 288 vendors was drawn from Kabale Central Market and 308 from Mbarara Central Market.

This sample size was deemed representative of the overall study population, which included crucial stakeholders such as vendors, market leadership, and both elected and appointed local authorities.

To select vendors, a stratified sampling approach was used, segmenting the target population into various categories based on business types like agro-inputs, butcheries, and electronics. This categorization enabled consistent comparisons within each group according to relevant survey criteria. The differing numbers of vendors in each category facilitated proportional respondent selection, enhancing the sample's fairness and representativeness. Furthermore, purposive sampling pinpointed key participants—including political and technical leaders and vendor association heads—due to their expertise in stakeholder participation in public market management. This combination of sampling methods yielded a diverse and informed pool of respondents, enriching the study's findings.

Five research assistants with prior experience in research ethics and methodology were recruited for each market had (totaling 10) to aid in questionnaire distribution, provide completion guidance, and collect responses. The researchers conducted interviews directly. The questionnaires were pre-tested with 30 participants at Owino Market in Kabale to verify their validity and reliability.

Frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations were produced for the quantitative data analysis with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis of qualitative data began with reviewing interview transcripts to grasp participant responses, followed by thematic coding relating to the study's core themes: comprehensive communication, inclusive engagement strategies, capacity building, and effective market management. Patterns and relationships across the themes were explored to uncover insights, nuances, and variations.

To maintain research integrity and protect participant rights, ethical considerations were rigorously implemented. All participants provided informed consent after being thoroughly briefed on the study's aims, their roles, and their voluntary participation. Confidentiality was preserved by anonymizing responses, safeguarding participant identities.

## RESULTS

Participants shared their views using a five-point Likert scale to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with various statements in the questionnaire. The scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), abbreviated as follows: SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), N (Neutral), A (Agree), and SA (Strongly Agree). Table 1 summarizes their responses.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Stakeholder Participation in Planning in Mbarara and Kabale Central Markets (n = 586)**

Stakeholder Participation in Planning	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std Dev
<b>Market Research</b>							
I have participated in gathering information about customer preferences for this market	11.4	12.3	17.4	39.6	19.3	3.43	1.25
I have participated in gathering information about customer needs for this market	9.9	11.8	12.8	45.1	20.5	3.54	1.22
I have participated in gathering information about customer behaviours for this market	10.1	10.3	15.0	41.8	22.9	3.59	1.30
I have participated in discussions about competitors for this market	9.4	9.9	15.7	41.5	23.5	3.59	1.21
I have participated in discussions about customer industry trends for this market	10.3	9.6	14.8	40.3	25.1	3.65	1.70
I have participated in discussing changes in the supply and demand for this market	10.2	9.4	16.7	39.1	24.6	3.58	1.24
<b>Budgeting and Resource Allocation</b>							
I have participated in determining the financial resources needed for this market	21.7	15.7	18.6	33.1	10.9	2.95	1.33
I have participated in prioritizing allocation of funds to different marketing initiatives	23.7	19.3	20.1	27.0	9.9	2.80	1.33
I have participated in monitoring and controlling expenditures for this market	24.4	18.9	21.2	24.7	10.8	2.80	1.41
<b>Implementation and Control</b>							
I have been involved in coordinating and executing marketing activities	10.9	14.8	17.9	42.0	14.3	3.33	1.21
I have been involved in monitoring the performance and results for this market	10.8	15.5	19.1	39.8	14.8	3.32	1.21
I have been involved in making necessary adjustments based on feedback and changes for this market	9.9	15.9	19.8	38.2	16.2	3.34	1.21

**Source:** Primary Data (2024)

The results in Table 1 show relatively high levels of stakeholder participation in market research activities. Respondents reported notable involvement in collecting data on customer preferences (Mean = 3.43), customer needs (Mean = 3.54), customer behaviours (Mean = 3.59), and discussing market trends and competitors (Means = 3.59 and 3.65, respectively). However, participation in budgeting and resource allocation received lower mean scores (2.80–2.95), indicating limited involvement of stakeholders in financial decision-making processes. This suggests a lack of transparency and inclusivity in financial planning.

Similarly, in the implementation and control domain, stakeholders showed moderate involvement, with mean scores around 3.3. This reflects a degree of detachment from operational decision-making, performance monitoring, and adaptive management, implying that vendors often serve as passive recipients rather than active contributors.

These findings suggest that while vendors are actively involved in market research—likely due to its direct impact on their businesses—their involvement in budgeting, resource allocation, and operational control remains minimal. This could be attributed to the absence of formal systems for participation. As supported by Cockburn-Wooten & McIntosh (2024), participatory



governance in such contexts is often hindered by centralized regulation and socio-economic constraints.

### Qualitative Data on Stakeholder Participation in Planning

The qualitative data results encompass the major themes of Market Research, Budgeting and Resource Allocation, and Implementation and Control of this study, as conceptualized below:

#### Top-Down Planning

The qualitative findings align with the quantitative data. Local authorities acknowledged that they dominate the planning processes, occasionally informing market leadership about decisions already made. One official explained:

“You know they are generally composed of local and uneducated people; they are sometimes not interested or may not understand some of the management issues.” (A4, 5th April 2024)

#### Bias against Vendor Participation

Authorities further revealed a bias against vendors' ability to contribute meaningfully to planning and management:

“They sometimes do not pay attention when sensitization is being made on issues that could affect them. They sometimes do not use the facilities we provide for them like toilets, cleaning facilities, daycare, etc.” (A5, 9th April 2024)

#### Absence of a Policy Framework

Several respondents pointed out that existing legal frameworks—such as the *Market Act (2023)* and the *Reference Guides for Market Operation (2020)*—assign power to local authorities but do not provide guidelines for direct vendor participation. This institutional gap hinders inclusive governance in market planning and management.

#### Hypothesis Testing

This study hypothesized that: “**Stakeholder participation significantly correlates with effective planning in urban markets in Uganda**” and participation was conceptualized in terms of Comprehensive Communication, Inclusive Engagement Strategies, and Capacity Building.

**Table 2: PLCC Statistics between Stakeholder Participation and Effective Planning**

Stakeholder Participation Aspect	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Comprehensive Communication	.072	.083	586
Inclusive Engagement Strategies	.129**	.002	586
Capacity Building	.125**	.002	586

**Note:** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 2, comprehensive communication was not significantly correlated with effective planning ( $r = .072$ ,  $p = .083$ ), meaning that enhanced communication alone does not necessarily

improve planning outcomes. However, inclusive engagement strategies and capacity building both showed statistically significant correlations with effective planning ( $p = .002$ ), supporting the hypothesis.

**Table 3: Multiple Regression Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.818	0.184	—	15.34	.000
Communication	0.037	0.045	0.037	0.834	.405
Inclusive Engagement	0.056	0.047	0.067	1.190	.234
Capacity Building	0.063	0.044	0.077	1.454	.146

$R = .144$ ,  $R^2 = .048$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .042$ ,  $F = 4.135$ ,  $\text{Sig.} = .006$

The regression model reveals that stakeholder participation accounts for 4.2% of the variation in effective planning (Adjusted  $R^2 = .042$ ). Among the predictors, capacity building had the highest Beta coefficient ( $\beta = .077$ ), followed by inclusive engagement ( $\beta = .067$ ), with communication having the least influence ( $\beta = .037$ ). While the overall model is statistically significant ( $p = .006$ ), individual predictors did not reach significance at the 0.05 level, indicating a need for stronger participatory mechanisms to yield more substantial planning outcomes.

## DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that while vendors are generally willing to participate in market research, they are significantly less involved in budgeting, resource allocation, implementation, and control. This disparity likely stems from the fact that market research has a direct and immediate impact on their businesses. In the absence of formal systems by market authorities to conduct such research, vendors take the initiative to do it themselves to boost sales and ensure business growth. In contrast, processes like budgeting and implementation, though important, are more collective in nature and less

directly controlled by individual vendors. Consequently, vendors may feel disempowered or excluded from these areas.

This limited involvement in broader planning processes puts the sustainability and performance of the markets at risk. Kabeyi (2019) emphasizes that strategic planning is essential for sustaining market systems and outcompeting rival markets. For vendors, sustainability is not merely an abstract goal—it directly affects their daily livelihoods. Strategic planning involves key functions such as research, budgeting, resource allocation, and implementation. While Kabeyi (2019) acknowledges the influence of broader constraints like limited resources, political interference, and global economic trends, our study points more directly to local institutional and structural limitations, including the absence of policy frameworks to facilitate meaningful vendor participation. Even some local authority members expressed doubts about vendors' capacity to contribute effectively to planning, reinforcing barriers to inclusion.

These findings also have implications for the effectiveness of planning outcomes. George, Walker, and Monster (2019) argue that stakeholder participation mediates the relationship between planning processes and their outcomes. Similarly, Szpilko (2020) stresses the importance of involving stakeholders from the early stages to foster a sense of ownership and co-creation, which enhances implementation success. This aligns with our findings: while participation in market research was relatively strong, there is a pressing need to strengthen vendor involvement in budgeting, resource allocation, and implementation to ensure that planning efforts are both realistic and effective.

The role of vendor associations is also worth noting. Hummel (2017) found that participatory governance is more successful when vendor associations are actively recognized and integrated into market governance. Such associations can enhance social capital and collective action, empowering vendors to advocate for their interests. Other scholars (Apparao, Garnevskaya, & Shadbolt, 2019; Knoke, 2019; Hunecke *et al.*, 2017; Paul *et al.*, 2016) support this view, suggesting that strong social networks among vendors increase trust and facilitate engagement in planning processes.

Market research emerged as the area with the highest levels of stakeholder engagement in both Kabale and Mbarara Central Markets. This is encouraging, as effective planning and administration of urban markets depend heavily on accurate knowledge of supply-demand trends, consumer preferences, industry dynamics, and competitor strategies.

Mean scores (3.43–3.59) indicate a good understanding of client needs and behaviors. When

stakeholders are involved in identifying customer preferences, markets are better positioned to offer high-demand products, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. For instance, vendors who track trends such as digital payment adoption or interest in organic products can gain a competitive edge (Celestin & Sujatha, 2024; Brenner, 2006). However, the presence of neutral responses implies that some vendors are not fully engaged in such practices, potentially creating responsiveness gaps.

Slightly higher scores (3.59–3.65) were observed for competitor analysis and awareness of industry trends. These activities help vendors understand pricing, product diversification, and customer retention strategies employed by their peers (Aaker & Moorman, 2023). Awareness of broader market developments, such as e-commerce growth, helps keep urban markets competitive (Gupta *et al.*, 2023).

A key aspect of this engagement was the identification of shifts in product availability and consumer preferences (mean = 3.58), particularly important in Uganda's urban markets where seasonal fluctuations and climate change influence supply chains (Ssenoga, Mugurusi, & Oluoka, 2019). Inclusive participation in such discussions enables proactive responses, such as adjusting pricing or sourcing models.

However, for stakeholder involvement in market research to be truly effective, vendors must have access to appropriate tools and resources. Tools such as data collection forms, mobile surveys, and digital analytics platforms—paired with training—can enhance vendor engagement and data accuracy (Wilson, Tewdwr-Jones, & Comber, 2019). Participatory research models that integrate vendors throughout the research process foster greater ownership of the results and ensure that planning aligns with on-the-ground realities.

Stakeholder participation in budgeting and resource allocation was relatively low in both markets, with mean scores ranging from 2.80 to 2.95. Budgeting is a foundational component of strategic market management, determining how financial and material resources are distributed to meet market goals. Stakeholders' limited involvement in identifying financial requirements (mean = 2.95) suggests a gap in transparency.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate that while vendors are engaged in some level of moderate planning, including market research and implementation oversight, their involvement in financial decision-making and budgeting remains relatively limited. This low level of participation in key resource allocation processes constrains transparency and efficiency within the governance of urban markets and renders national economic

policymaking opaque. The lack of active involvement from stakeholders in the implementation of policies not only diminishes the effectiveness of market governance but also poses a significant barrier to the long-term sustainability of market operations. Therefore, addressing these gaps requires an approach that empowers stakeholders at every level to take a more active role in the decision-making processes that directly affect them.

## Recommendations

### Enhance Participatory Budgeting

Market authorities, in partnership with section leaders and stakeholder committees, should prioritize the enhancement of participatory budgeting processes. This can be achieved by encouraging early calls for stakeholder engagement from the various sections within the market, which should take responsibility for engaging in the budgeting process. These committees can monitor financial allocations and ensure transparency in the utilization of funds. Regular and periodic invitations should be extended to these committees to review financial plans, discuss revenue collection, and offer suggestions for fund allocation that prioritize market improvements. The process should not be restricted to physical meetings but should also leverage online platforms, where stakeholders can track financial allocations, submit budget proposals, and provide feedback on expenditure reports.

### Promote Participation in Market Research

Market authorities, in collaboration with vendor committees, should broaden their efforts to educate and train vendors on the importance of market research. Vendors should understand key aspects such as customer preferences, seasonal demand fluctuations, and prevailing product prices. This can be achieved through partnerships with educational institutions, including colleges and universities, under the umbrella of corporate social responsibility initiatives. Such collaborations can facilitate market studies that offer data-driven, evidence-based insights, thereby improving planning decisions through active vendor and citizen participation. Furthermore, a structured mechanism, such as suggestion boxes or an online survey system, should be established to capture vendor feedback and incorporate their input into market development strategies.

### Develop Feedback Loops

To improve communication and responsiveness, market authorities should establish real-time feedback mechanisms. A toll-free hotline or dedicated social media channels could be set up for vendors to report planning issues and receive rapid responses. These platforms would allow for more direct interaction between vendors and market authorities, ensuring that concerns are addressed in a timely manner. Additionally, as part of a broader transparency initiative, performance scorecards should be published to ensure

public accountability. These scorecards would highlight project progress, budget expenditures, and future plans, keeping all stakeholders informed and engaged.

By implementing these measures, market governance in Kabale and Mbarara Central Markets will become more transparent, participatory, and inclusive. This will not only improve operational efficiency but also foster a more sustainable and resilient market environment where stakeholders can actively contribute to shaping the future of their local markets. Enhanced participation will empower vendors and stakeholders, leading to better resource management and more effective policy implementation, thereby supporting the long-term success and sustainability of the markets.

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