



Received: 13-04-2026
Accepted: 23-05-2026

ISSN: 2583-049X

Examining the Effectiveness of Youth Participation in Budget Formulation and Resource Allocation: A Case Study of Lusaka City Council Constituency Development Fund Committees

¹ Marion Kaira, ² C Katongo

^{1,2} Department of Public Administration, Information and Communication University, Lusaka, Zambia

Corresponding Author: **Marion Kaira**

Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of youth participation in budget formulation and resource allocation, focusing on the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Committees of the Lusaka City Council. Despite growing global advocacy for participatory governance, youth engagement in local budget processes often remains limited by structural, cultural, and institutional barriers. The study was guided by three objectives: (i) to assess the level of youth participation in CDF budget formulation; (ii) to determine the influence of youth participation on the allocation of CDF resources toward youth-prioritized projects; and (iii) to evaluate youth perceptions of the effectiveness and inclusiveness of their participation in budget processes. A mixed-methods approach was employed within a descriptive and explanatory design, using structured questionnaires administered to 120 youth respondents, complemented by interviews with committee leaders, council officials, and community representatives. Secondary data were drawn

from policy documents, CDF guidelines, and council budget reports. Quantitative data were analyzed using STATA and Excel, while qualitative data were thematically interpreted. Findings revealed that although 61% of youth reported being active participants, their actual influence on resource allocation was moderate, with only 36% of CDF funds consistently directed toward youth-prioritized projects. Regression analysis indicated that youth participation significantly predicted perceptions of project effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.57$; $F(5,114) = 21.38$, $p < 0.001$), with leadership support and awareness emerging as the strongest determinants. However, challenges such as inadequate representation, limited communication channels, and lack of capacity-building opportunities hindered inclusiveness. The study concludes that meaningful youth participation enhances transparency, accountability, and the relevance of projects, but requires strengthened institutional frameworks, training, and consistent consultation mechanisms.

Keywords: Youth Participation, Budget Formulation, Resource Allocation, CDF Committees, Lusaka City Council

1. Introduction

Youth participation in governance and budgetary processes has become a central theme in global development discourse, particularly since the adoption of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasizes inclusive decision-making and active youth involvement in shaping policies that affect their futures (United Nations, 2015). Participatory budgeting has been widely adopted to strengthen democracy, accountability, and transparency by allowing citizens to influence how public funds are allocated (Wampler, 2015). Including youth in these processes is vital for sustainable governance, as they represent a large segment of the global population and are directly impacted by development policies (OECD, 2020). Empirical studies further indicate that participatory budgeting enhances service delivery, civic trust, and inclusion when youth voices are meaningfully integrated (Sintomer *et al.*, 2016; Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2019). Across Africa, the debate on youth participation has intensified due to the continent's youthful demographic, with over 60% of Africans under the age of 25 (African Union, 2019). Youth inclusion is both a democratic and developmental necessity; however, systemic barriers such as patronage politics, tokenism, and limited access to information continue to constrain genuine engagement (Resnick & Thurlow, 2015; Honwana, 2019) ^[20, 12]. Some African nations have introduced participatory budgeting reforms to address these barriers. For instance, Kenya's Accountable Devolution Program has created youth engagement forums in budget consultations, while Burkina Faso's village-level pilots have improved inclusivity despite

concerns of elite capture and sustainability (World Bank, 2018; Creative Associates International, 2023). These experiences reveal both the opportunities and challenges of deepening youth influence in fiscal decision-making.

In Southern Africa, participatory governance is closely tied to decentralization reforms, which aim to empower citizens in local resource allocation and strengthen accountability (De Visser, 2019). However, the depth of youth involvement remains inconsistent. Research in Malawi, South Africa, and Uganda shows that youth are often included in consultative roles but have little influence over actual budget outcomes (Tsekpo, 2019; Nyamnjoh & Amutabi, 2020). This reflects a pattern of rhetorical inclusion with limited substantive empowerment.

In Zambia, youth participation has been advanced through several policy and institutional reforms. The National Youth Policy (2015) promotes youth empowerment, while the Decentralization Policy enhances local decision-making through Ward Development Committees (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development, 2015; Ministry of Local Government, 2017). The expansion of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in 2022 further decentralized resources, explicitly allocating support for youth empowerment, skills training, and bursaries (Ministry of Finance, 2022) ^[14]. However, despite these frameworks, actual youth influence in decision-making remains constrained. Studies reveal that while youth are represented in CDF structures, political elites and older members dominate decision processes (Mukwena & Habasonda, 2019; Kawimbe & Tembo, 2024) ^[17, 13]. Moreover, legislative gaps such as the absence of mandatory youth representation in the CDF Act of 2018 limit participation (Chikoko, 2022) ^[6].

Thus, this study situates youth participation in Lusaka City Council's CDF Committees within broader global and regional debates on inclusive governance. It explores whether Zambia's decentralization and institutional frameworks translate into meaningful empowerment or perpetuate symbolic inclusion, contributing to discussions on how resource allocation can better reflect youth priorities and promote sustainable development.

1.1 General Objective

To examine the effectiveness of youth participation in budget formulation and resource allocation within the Constituency Development Fund Committees of Lusaka City Council.

1.1.1 Specific Objectives

1. To identify the level of youth participation in the budget formulation process within Lusaka City Council's CDF Committees.
2. To examine the influence of youth participation on the allocation of CDF resources to youth-prioritized projects.
3. To establish youth perceptions on the effectiveness and inclusiveness of their participation in CDF budget processes.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

This study is guided by Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969), a widely recognized theoretical model for analyzing the extent and quality of citizen involvement in governance processes. The model conceptualizes

participation as a continuum, ranging from non-participation, through tokenism, to full citizen power. The first rungs manipulation and therapy represent non-participation, where involvement is merely symbolic. The middle rungs informing, consultation, and placation signify tokenism, where participants are heard but lack real influence. The upper rungs partnership, delegated power, and citizen control indicate genuine participation, where citizens share or exercise decision-making authority (Arnstein, 1969; Cornwall, 2016) ^[2, 8].

Applied to youth engagement in budget formulation and resource allocation, the framework enables an assessment of whether youth involvement in Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Committees under Lusaka City Council is substantive or symbolic. The ladder allows the study to interrogate not only the numerical presence of youth in committees but also their actual influence in shaping budget priorities and decisions. For instance, if youth are merely invited to meetings without real input, their participation aligns with tokenism. Conversely, if youth are empowered to design, propose, and influence approval of projects, their role shifts towards partnership or citizen power.

This framework is particularly suitable given Zambia's policy commitments to decentralization and youth inclusion in governance, which in practice often contrast with political realities where elites dominate decision-making (Mukwena & Habasonda, 2019) ^[17]. The ladder helps to illuminate the gap between formal structures that guarantee youth representation and the substantive outcomes of their participation in budgeting processes. By situating youth experiences along this continuum, the study captures both the extent (level of involvement) and the effectiveness (degree of influence) of youth participation in CDF Committees.

Thus, Arnstein's Ladder of Participation provides a robust analytical lens for understanding whether youth participation in Lusaka's CDF Committees is meaningful and transformative, or whether it remains tokenistic and symbolic, with limited impact on budget formulation and resource allocation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Level of Youth Participation in Budget Formulation Processes

Youth participation in budget formulation has evolved significantly over the past decade, mirroring shifts in governance and civic engagement globally. Experiences from Brazil, Portugal, Spain, South Korea, Canada, and the United States reveal diverse models and outcomes of participatory budgeting (PB), underscoring both its transformative potential and inherent challenges.

Globally, participatory budgeting emerged as a democratic innovation to strengthen citizen involvement in public finance. Brazil's pioneering model in Porto Alegre remains influential, demonstrating how annual participatory assemblies empower residents to steer municipal investment decisions. However, youth engagement has often been weaker than anticipated, constrained by socioeconomic and structural barriers that limit their influence (EPA, 2021; Plan International, 2025 ^[19]). Recent initiatives have used digital platforms, youth organizations, and civic education campaigns to enhance inclusion and agency in cities like São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, although sustaining engagement among marginalized youth remains difficult.

Portugal offers one of the most advanced models of Youth Participatory Budgeting (YPB), institutionalized in 2017. The national YPB program allows citizens aged 14–30 to propose and vote on projects, aligning public investments with youth priorities such as mental health, sports, and environmental sustainability (Falanga, 2024) ^[11]. The system's accessibility through online, SMS, and community-based channels has strengthened inclusivity, though policy fragmentation across governance levels remains a challenge. Similarly, Spain's participatory budgeting processes have increasingly recognized the importance of youth involvement, integrating students and young delegates into municipal PB forums. Cities like Barcelona have successfully incorporated youth-driven projects promoting social, cultural, and environmental objectives, revitalizing democratic participation and local ownership (Shared Future, 2025; Yeh, 2024).

In Asia, South Korea has rapidly expanded participatory budgeting since 2015 through its "My Budget" platform, enabling both youth and adults to submit proposals reviewed by citizen panels (OIDP, 2020). Youth participation has led to greater focus on employment, education, and social welfare priorities, supported by transparent digital systems that enhance trust and accountability. Similarly, Canada's approach relies on structured civic consultations such as Student Budget Forums, attracting thousands of young participants who shape national priorities around climate, mental health, and employment (Canada.ca, 2024) ^[4]. Research confirms that sustained civic education and visible policy impact foster lasting youth engagement and trust in governance.

In the United States, youth PB programs operate mainly at the municipal level, with New York, Boston, and Long Beach providing platforms for youth as young as eleven to participate directly in funding decisions (Participatory Budgeting Project, 2025). These youth-led cycles allocate substantial funding to education, housing, and community projects while nurturing civic learning and collective problem-solving. However, inconsistent funding and uneven policy support across jurisdictions limit the scalability of these efforts. Persistent inequalities linked to race, class, and geography continue to hinder universal participation (SAGE, 2023; Plan International, 2025 ^[19]).

Cross-cutting global themes reveal that effective youth participation depends on institutional design, inclusivity, and sustained evaluation. Evidence shows that dedicated youth budget cycles, consultative panels, and school-based PB projects yield stronger engagement outcomes. Digital platforms enhance transparency and accessibility, while civic education programs cultivate confidence and capacity among participants (Shared Future, 2025; People Powered, 2025). The sustainability of youth PB also requires consistent evaluation and adaptation, ensuring that youth influence translates into measurable fiscal outcomes and perceived fairness.

In Africa, participatory budgeting is increasingly seen as both a democratic ideal and a practical governance reform. In Kenya, the Kenya Participatory Budgeting Initiative (KPBI) has institutionalized local-level participation, though youth underrepresentation persists due to limited outreach, civic education, and inclusion in formal committees (World Bank, 2020; The Youth Cafe, 2025). County-level interventions, especially in Baringo and Laikipia, have

improved youth literacy and accountability in budget processes. Uganda's Youth Livelihood Programme similarly promotes engagement in project monitoring, though actual decision-making power remains concentrated within centralized structures (Bikadho, 2025). In South Africa, youth participation in Integrated Development Planning (IDP) and municipal forums has advanced, yet socioeconomic inequalities and geographic disparities still constrain inclusivity.

Burkina Faso's PB initiatives, aligned with decentralization, highlight the role of youth-led community organizations in prioritizing education, agriculture, and infrastructure projects. However, limited resources and political instability hinder program sustainability (CESIE, 2024) ^[5]. Ghana, through youth councils and local PB pilots, demonstrates gradual progress, emphasizing civic education and dialogue between youth and policymakers. Still, uneven program distribution risks excluding rural youth populations (Youth Cafe, 2020).

Across these African contexts, recurring themes include the importance of institutional design, capacity-building, outreach, and policy continuity. When governments integrate youth-specific mechanisms, training programs, and partnerships with civil society, engagement rates and accountability improve (Alda Europe, 2025) ^[1]. Conversely, exclusionary practices and inconsistent funding threaten long-term participation.

In Zambia, youth participation in budget formulation reflects the intersection of decentralization, empowerment policies, and civic activism. The 2024 National Youth Policy emphasizes youth inclusion across governance and economic development through training, entrepreneurship support, and resource funds (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts, 2024) ^[16]. However, poor coordination, inadequate staffing, and limited resources continue to constrain impact. Participatory budgeting under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) offers a localized framework for citizen involvement, with NGOs such as the Zambia Civic Education Association equipping youth with tools to engage effectively in resource allocation and monitoring (Zambia Civic Education Association, 2022) ^[21].

Despite progress, studies show that bureaucratic inertia, limited information access, and weak technical skills restrict youth influence in budgeting (World Bank, 2022). Initiatives like the Zambia Youth Parliamentary Caucus (ZYPC) and ActionAid partnerships amplify youth voices in fiscal policy debates, yet engagement remains inconsistent and often symbolic (Zambia Parliament, 2024). Persistent barriers such as socio-cultural exclusion, funding gaps, and minimal access to decision-making platforms undermine the inclusivity of participatory budgeting (Democracy Fund, 2023) ^[9].

Nonetheless, Zambia's evolving framework demonstrates strong potential for transformation. With effective coordination among government agencies, civil society, and youth networks, participatory budgeting can align national resource allocation with youth priorities in education, ICT, employment, and social services. Strengthening decentralization and institutionalizing youth participation in budgeting will be pivotal for enhancing democratic accountability and sustainable development outcomes (World Bank, 2022; Zambia Parliament, 2024).

2.2 Influence of Youth Participation on Resource Allocation to Youth Prioritized Projects

Youth participation in budget formulation has increasingly influenced resource allocation toward projects aligned with young people's priorities across countries with mature participatory budgeting (PB) systems such as Brazil, Portugal, Spain, South Korea, the United States, and Canada. These models provide vital lessons on how institutional design, inclusivity, and political commitment enable youth-driven decision-making to translate into tangible fiscal outcomes.

Brazil's pioneering PB experience in Porto Alegre laid the foundation for inclusive citizen participation, later integrating youth-focused mechanisms to enhance responsiveness to education, health, and recreational needs (EPA, 2021). Studies reveal that youth-specific outreach and civic training strengthen their decision-making influence, resulting in more efficient and equitable resource allocation (SAGE, 2023). Portugal's Youth Participatory Budget (YPB), established in 2017, institutionalized youth involvement nationwide, enabling citizens aged 14–30 to propose and vote on projects financed through an annual €500,000 budget. Funded initiatives spanning digital learning, inclusion programs, and sports facilities demonstrate direct links between youth engagement and resource impact (European Social Fund Plus, 2022) ^[10].

Spain's municipal PB programs similarly embed youth delegates in decision-making forums, influencing investments in cultural, environmental, and employment projects (Tandfonline, 2024). South Korea's "My Budget" initiative offers digital platforms for young citizens to propose projects addressing education, employment, and social welfare, ensuring transparency and accountability through expert reviews (OIDP, 2020). In the United States, youth-focused PB programs in Boston and New York allow young residents to allocate over \$1 million annually to projects on safety, education, and recreation, cultivating civic skills and enhancing community trust (Participatory Budgeting Project, 2025). Canada's Student Budget Consultations further reveal that when youth input is institutionalized, government allocations increasingly reflect youth-driven climate, health, and employment priorities (Canada.ca, 2024) ^[4]. Collectively, these experiences underscore that legislative frameworks, digital participation, and sustained political support are vital for ensuring youth engagement produces substantive budgetary influence.

Across East and Southern Africa, participatory budgeting has gained traction as a tool for civic empowerment and accountability. Kenya's Public Finance Management Act (2012) mandates public participation, with counties now incorporating youth input via digital platforms and local forums. This has led to increased allocations toward youth-prioritized sectors such as education, health, and the environment (The Youth Café, 2025). In Uganda, youth involvement through the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP) supports project monitoring, though centralized fiscal systems still limit decision-making influence (Bikadho, 2025). South Africa's integration of youth participation in Integrated Development Planning (IDP) forums has enhanced community engagement, while in Ghana and Nigeria, decentralized PB pilots are gradually empowering youth to advocate for employment and education-focused investments (CESIE, 2024 ^[5]; Youth Café, 2020). Rwanda's institutionalized PB mechanisms further promote youth

inclusion in local infrastructure and social welfare planning (International Budget Partnership, 2019).

In Zambia, youth participation in budgeting aligns with decentralization and empowerment policies under the 2024 National Youth Policy. The policy emphasizes youth engagement across governance and development but faces challenges including weak institutional coordination, limited funding, and inadequate youth capacity (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts, 2024) ^[16]. Participatory budgeting within the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) framework, supported by the Zambia Civic Education Association, trains youth in budget literacy and monitoring (Zambia Civic Education Association, 2022) ^[21]. However, participation remains inconsistent due to limited access to budget information and bureaucratic delays (World Bank, 2022). Youth-led initiatives such as the Zambia Youth Parliamentary Caucus advocate for equitable resource distribution and accountability, although their reach remains limited (Zambia Parliament, 2024).

Overall, empirical evidence from global and African contexts affirms that when youth engagement is institutionalized through legal frameworks, civic education, and digital participation, it leads to more inclusive, transparent, and equitable budgetary outcomes. Zambia's expanding PB landscape offers strong potential to embed youth priorities in public finance, thereby strengthening accountability, service delivery, and democratic legitimacy.

2.3 Youth Perceptions on the Effectiveness and Inclusiveness of Participation in Budget Processes

Youth perceptions of the effectiveness and inclusiveness of participatory budgeting (PB) provide vital insight into how young people experience democratic engagement across diverse governance contexts. In countries such as Brazil, Portugal, Spain, South Korea, Canada, and the United States, young participants generally view PB as a valuable platform for civic expression, though varying institutional designs shape their satisfaction and influence.

In Brazil, youth acknowledge PB's potential to elevate community voices but often feel marginalized by adult-dominated assemblies and inconsistent transparency (CESIE, 2024) ^[5]. Young Brazilians appreciate opportunities to shape decisions on education and health but highlight the need for clearer communication, continuity, and inclusion of marginalized groups (The Youth Café, 2025). Similarly, Portugal's Youth Participatory Budget (YPB) stands out for its nationwide inclusiveness. Evaluations indicate that digital and in-person voting, project monitoring, and integration with schools foster strong youth confidence that their ideas influence outcomes (European Social Fund Plus, 2022 ^[10]; URBACT, 2024).

Spanish youth in local PB initiatives report satisfaction with enhanced government accountability and tangible youth-focused investments such as cultural and recreational spaces, yet they stress the persistence of bureaucratic barriers and rural exclusion (Tandfonline, 2024). South Korean youth in the "My Budget" program appreciate technology-enabled access and transparent review processes but remain frustrated by slow implementation and administrative rigidity (OIDP, 2020). In Canada and the United States, PB programs have generated positive youth perceptions of empowerment and learning. Participants in Boston's "Youth Lead the Change" and Toronto's community budgeting express confidence that their inputs

shape real projects on safety, climate, and education, though they continue to call for sustained inclusion of marginalized youth and stronger accountability mechanisms (SAGE, 2023; GMF Cities, 2025).

Across Africa, youth perceptions follow similar patterns. In Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana, participatory budgeting initiatives supported by the World Bank and civil society have enhanced awareness and inclusion but face barriers of tokenism and weak follow-through (World Bank, 2020; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2023^[7]). Rwandan and Nigerian youth appreciate digital and community consultations that enhance transparency but express concern over limited funding and bureaucratic bottlenecks (International Budget Partnership, 2019; CESIE, 2024^[5]).

In Zambia, youth increasingly view participatory budgeting under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) as promising but constrained. Surveys and reports reveal appreciation for the opportunity to influence local decisions but frustration with low representation, poor access to information, and inconsistent engagement (ZCEA, 2022; Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts, 2024)^[21, 16]. While initiatives such as youth budget literacy training and the Youth Parliamentary Caucus enhance awareness, many young people perceive inclusion as symbolic rather than substantive.

Overall, youth perceptions across global and African contexts reveal that PB effectiveness and inclusiveness depend on transparent communication, feedback mechanisms, civic education, and visible policy responsiveness. Where these conditions exist, participatory budgeting is widely perceived as a credible avenue for youth empowerment, democratic accountability, and equitable public resource allocation.

2.4 Literature gap

Globally, youth participation in governance and budgeting processes has become a cornerstone of inclusive development. Countries such as Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Canada, and South Korea have institutionalized participatory budgeting mechanisms that allow young people to influence spending priorities and resource distribution (Ganuza & Baiocchi, 2019; Guerra, 2023). These initiatives demonstrate that when youth are meaningfully engaged, they enhance democratic legitimacy and redirect resources toward key sectors such as education, employment, and community infrastructure. However, participation outcomes remain uneven, with critiques citing tokenism, limited influence, and weak linkage between youth proposals and final budget allocations (Collins *et al.*, 2017; Farahmandpour & Zrudlo, 2023).

In Africa, countries such as Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, and Rwanda have adopted decentralized frameworks and youth advisory mechanisms to strengthen inclusivity (Resnick & Thurlow, 2015; Chikoko, 2022)^[20, 6]. Despite these reforms, youth often face institutional barriers—ranging from limited technical capacity to entrenched political gatekeeping—that hinder their substantive influence on fiscal decisions (Honwana, 2019; Cornwall, 2016)^[12, 8]. Consequently, youth inclusion frequently appears symbolic rather than transformative.

In Zambia, decentralization through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) has expanded local participation in budgeting. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (2022)^[15] underscores youth involvement in

CDF Committees; yet, research reveals minimal impact on actual allocations, as youth lack technical knowledge and decision-making power (Mukwena & Habasonda, 2019; Kawimbe & Tembo, 2024)^[17, 13].

This study therefore examines youth participation in CDFC budget processes under the Lusaka City Council—assessing levels of involvement, influence on youth-prioritized projects, and perceptions of inclusiveness and effectiveness to determine whether participation is genuinely empowering or merely procedural.

3.1 Research Methods

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), mixed-methods research enhances validity through triangulation, allowing statistical patterns to be contextualized through lived experiences. The quantitative component employed structured questionnaires to capture measurable data on the extent of youth participation, perceptions of inclusiveness, and the effectiveness of participation in influencing budget decisions. The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews with youth representatives, local government officials, and CDF committee members to gain deeper insights into the dynamics, challenges, and successes of youth engagement.

3.2 Target population

The target population comprised three groups: The target population of the study consisted of youth members of Lusaka-based CDF Committees, local government officials at Lusaka City Council, and community stakeholders such as civil society and ward development committee leaders. Lusaka District has a population of approximately 3.3 million people, with about 36% being youth aged 15–35 years (ZamStats, 2022). Each of the district's 7 constituencies has a CDF Committee of 15–20 members, giving a total of about 105–140 youth members, alongside over 200 local government officials and an estimated 80–100 community leaders (MLGRD, 2022; LCC, 2023). This brings the total study population to roughly 3,500+ individuals directly or indirectly involved in budget formulation and resource allocation processes.

3.3 Sampling design

A stratified random sampling was used for youth respondents to ensure fair representation across different constituencies in Lusaka where CDF committees operate. The strata was based on constituency divisions. For the qualitative strand, purposive sampling was employed to select key informants such as CDF committee chairpersons, local council officials and youth leaders who have direct involvement in budget formulation and decision-making. This approach ensured the collection of rich and relevant data from individuals with specialized knowledge (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016).

3.4 Sample Size determination

Sample size refers to the number of units selected from the population for inclusion in the study (Kumar, 2005). Because this study will target youth members of Lusaka-based CDF Committees, the sampling frame for the quantitative strand is taken as the estimated population of youth serving on CDF committees across the city. Based on

committee size estimates (15–20 members per constituency across seven constituencies), the population of youth members is approximately $N = 140$. The Taro Yamane (1967) formula was used to calculate a statistically valid sample at a 95% confidence level ($e = 0.05$):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

N = population of Study (160)

n = sample of study

(e) = level of significance

Note $(e) = 0.05$ (95% confidence level)

$$n = \frac{140}{1 + 140(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{140}{1 + 140(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{140}{1 + 0.35}$$

$$n = \frac{140}{0.35}$$

$$n = 104$$

The formula therefore yields a minimum required sample of 104 youth respondents to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error (Yamane, 1967; Kumar, 2005). However, to improve precision, allowed for non-response, and ensured proportional representation across selected constituencies, the study practically target 120 youth respondents, drawn proportionally from four purposively selected constituencies (30 respondents per constituency). The modest oversampling (120 vs. 104) enhanced subgroup analysis and compensated for potential absentees during data collection.

In addition to the quantitative sample, 15–20 key informants were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. These included CDF committee chairpersons, Lusaka City Council officials, and civil society representatives with direct knowledge of budget formulation and CDF operations. Thus, the total planned sample for the study ranged from 135 to 140 respondents (120 youth survey respondents + 15–20 interviewees). This combined approach balances statistical representativeness with qualitative depth, enabled a robust triangulation of findings while remaining feasible within the study’s logistical constraints (Kumar, 2005; Yamane, 1967).

3.5 Data collection methods

Two primary methods were used to collect data:

3.5.1 Questionnaires (Survey)

Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to youth members of CDF Committees across the seven constituencies of Lusaka. The questionnaires consisted mainly of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items, designed to capture measurable data on perceptions of inclusiveness, levels of decision-making power, and the influence of youth in resource allocation towards youth-prioritized projects. Questionnaires were physically distributed during committee meetings and, where possible, were shared electronically via Google

Forms to reach participants who were not available in person. This approach ensured wide coverage and encouraged honest responses due to the anonymity of the tool.

3.5.2 Interviews (Interview Guide)

To complement the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected CDF Committee leaders, Lusaka City Council officials, and representatives from civil society organizations. The interview guide provided consistency across respondents while allowing flexibility to probe deeper into emerging issues. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via online platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams when physical meetings were not feasible. These sessions focused on challenges experienced in youth participation, transparency in budgetary processes, and fairness in resource allocation. Notes and audio recordings (with consent) were taken to ensure accuracy of the data collected.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected from questionnaires was analyzed using STATA and SPSS. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) summarized responses on participation levels and perceptions. Inferential tests such as chi-square and regression analysis were employed to examine the relationship between youth participation and effectiveness in resource allocation.

Qualitative data from interviews was analyzed thematically. Interview transcripts were coded to identify recurring themes such as inclusiveness, accountability, and the impact of youth decisions on project prioritization. The integration of both strands provided complementarity and strengthened the reliability of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

4. Findings and Results

4.1 Demographic Information

4.1.1 Age of Respondents

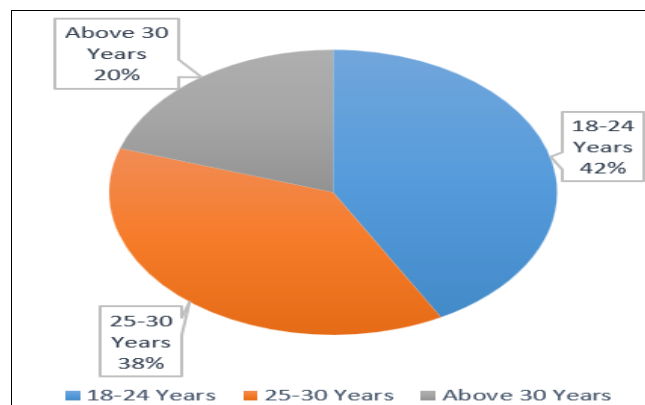


Fig 1: Age of respondents

The age distribution reveals that the majority of respondents are between 18–24 years (42%), followed closely by those aged 25–30 years (38%). This suggests that youth participation in CDF committees is dominated by younger individuals who fall within the conventional youth bracket, reflecting the inclusiveness of the committees in engaging energetic and innovative members. The smaller representation of those above 30 years (20%) indicates that older youths may be less involved, possibly due to

competing responsibilities or disinterest in community-based governance. Overall, this age spread demonstrates that the study captures the perspectives of key youth demographics actively engaged in CDF budget processes, which directly aligns with the study’s objective of examining the effectiveness of youth participation.

4.1.2 Sex of Respondents

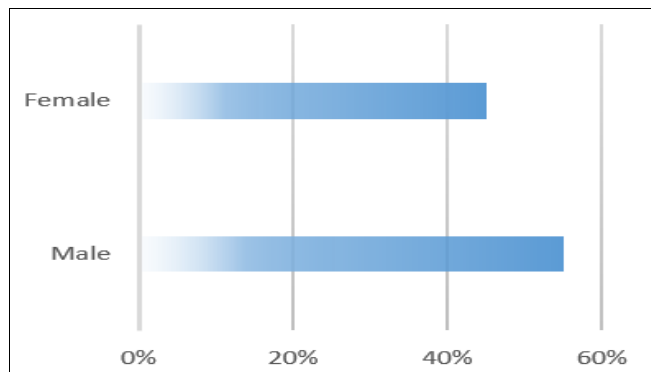


Fig 2: Sex of Respondents

The results indicate that male respondents (55%) slightly outnumber female respondents (45%). This near balance implies that both genders are meaningfully represented in the CDF committees, though men still hold a marginal advantage. The findings highlight that youth participation is not exclusively male-dominated, with women also playing an important role in budget formulation and decision-making processes. However, the slight gender gap may suggest the need for more deliberate strategies to enhance female representation and inclusivity. This is critical to ensuring that youth participation in CDF processes reflects equitable gender involvement, a factor that influences both inclusiveness and effectiveness of decision-making.

4.1.3 Occupation of Respondents

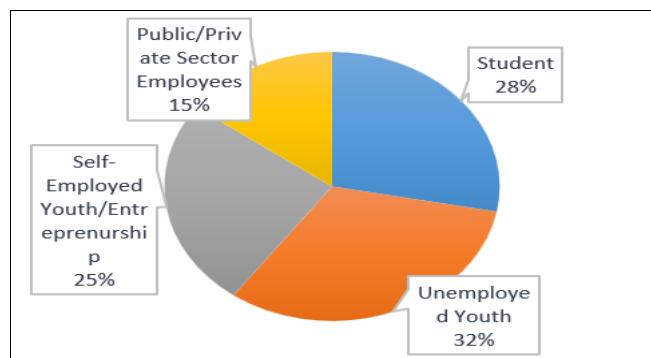


Fig 3: Occupation

The data shows that unemployed youth (32%) and students (28%) form the largest proportion of respondents. This indicates that the CDF committees provide an important platform for young people who may lack stable economic opportunities to engage in governance and resource allocation. The presence of self-employed/entrepreneurs (25%) and employed youth (15%) highlights diversity, suggesting that participation is not restricted by occupation. The results imply that CDF committees act as inclusive spaces for youths across various socio-economic

backgrounds, contributing to fair representation in budget processes. This diversity strengthens the credibility of youth participation and supports the research objective of evaluating inclusiveness and effectiveness.

4.1.4 Level of Involvement in CDF Committees

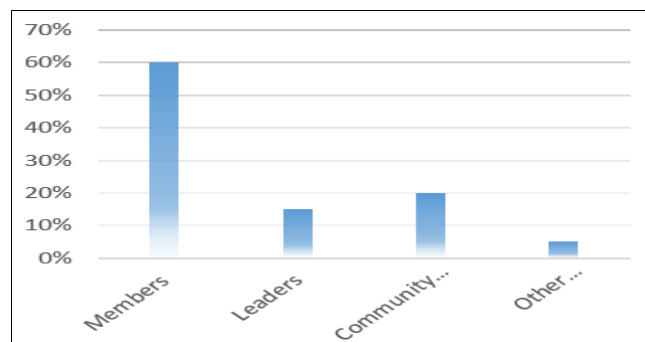


Fig 4: Involvement in CDF Committees

The majority of respondents are members (60%) of CDF committees, while 20% serve as community representatives, and 15% hold leadership positions. A smaller fraction (5%) engage as observers or volunteers. This distribution indicates that most youth are engaged at the membership level, where they contribute to discussions and project identification, while relatively fewer occupy decision-making leadership roles. The limited leadership involvement could suggest structural barriers to upward mobility within the committees. Therefore, while youth are present in large numbers, their influence may be constrained unless deliberate mechanisms are introduced to empower more youths to occupy leadership roles. This connects directly to the study’s objective of examining both the level and effectiveness of youth participation.

4.1.5 Years of Involvement in CDF Committees

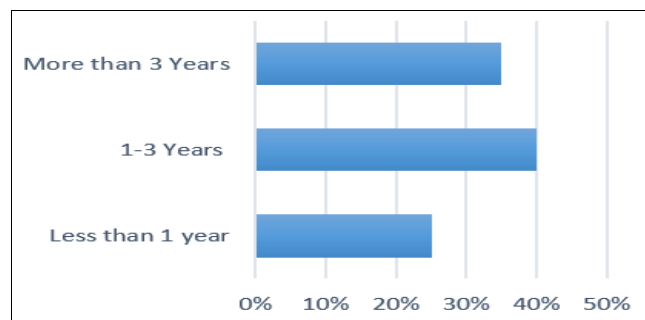


Fig 5: Year of Involvement in CDF Committees

Findings indicate that the majority of respondents (40%) have between 1–3 years of experience in CDF committees, while 35% have more than 3 years of involvement. Only 25% are relatively new with less than one year of engagement. This demonstrates that most respondents have substantial experience and knowledge of the CDF processes, which strengthens the reliability of their insights. The combination of seasoned members and newcomers ensures a balance of continuity and fresh perspectives. This suggests that the CDF committees maintain some degree of sustainability in youth engagement, which is essential for long-term effectiveness in budget formulation and resource allocation.

4.2 Level of Youth Participation in Budget Formulation

4.2.1 How would you describe the level of youth participation in the budget formulation process?

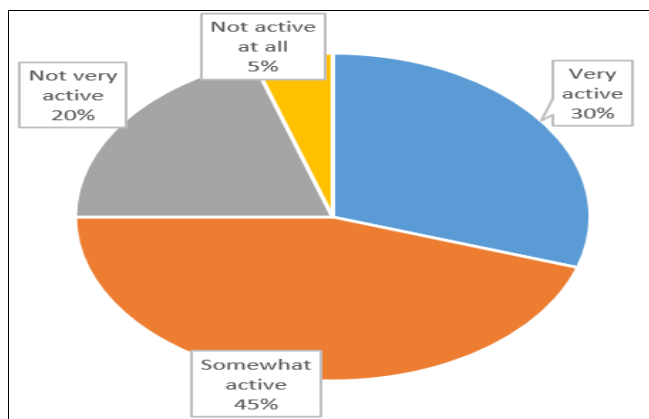


Fig 6: Youth participation in the budget formulation process

The results show that 30% of respondents describe youth participation as very active, while the largest group (45%) perceive it as somewhat active. This suggests that although youth are participating, their involvement is not yet optimal, with 25% reporting low or no activity. The findings imply that youth voices are present in the budget formulation process but may not always carry strong influence or consistent engagement. This is critical to the study’s objective of assessing effectiveness, as “somewhat active” participation could point to consultative rather than decisive involvement. Meaningful participation may require stronger empowerment and greater inclusivity mechanisms to enhance youth impact in CDF committees.

4.2.2 How often are youth involved in decision-making processes for CDF resource allocation?

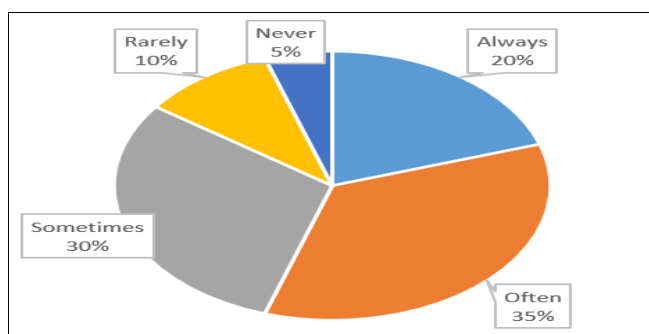


Fig 7: Youth involvement in decision-making processes for CDF resource allocation

The findings reveal that 55% of respondents (Always 20%, Often 35%) acknowledge frequent involvement of youth in decision-making, while 30% report occasional participation, and 15% indicate rare or no involvement. This demonstrates that while there is a significant level of youth engagement, the consistency of their participation varies. The results suggest that youth are not uniformly included in every decision-making step, which may weaken the inclusiveness of the process. In terms of the study’s objectives, this uneven involvement highlights gaps in institutionalizing youth voices in CDF committees. Strengthening participation structures could ensure more consistent representation of youth in resource allocation decisions.

4.2.3 What is the primary factor that influences youth participation in the budget formulation process?

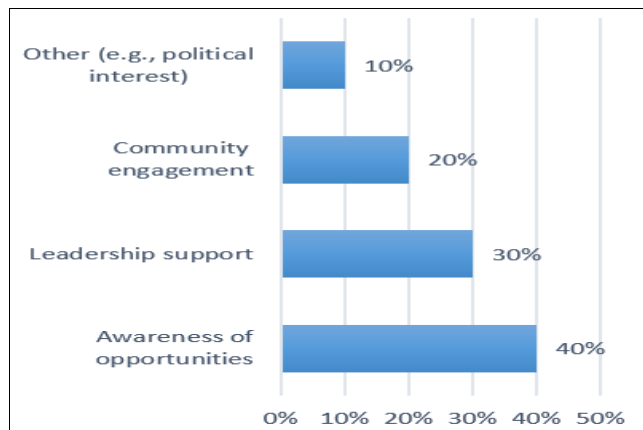


Fig 8: Factor influencing youth participation in the budget formulation process

Awareness of opportunities emerges as the most significant factor (40%) influencing youth participation, followed by leadership support (30%). This underscores the importance of access to information and knowledge of existing opportunities for youths to engage in governance processes. Without awareness, even well-structured participation frameworks risk underutilization. The role of leadership support (30%) also points to the influence of leaders in encouraging or discouraging youth involvement. Community engagement (20%) and other factors (10%) are less influential but still relevant. These findings align with the study’s objectives by showing that participation effectiveness depends heavily on transparency, information sharing, and mentorship. Therefore, enhancing communication and leadership inclusivity could significantly boost youth involvement.

4.2.4 How would you rate the effectiveness of current youth participation structures in the CDF Committee?

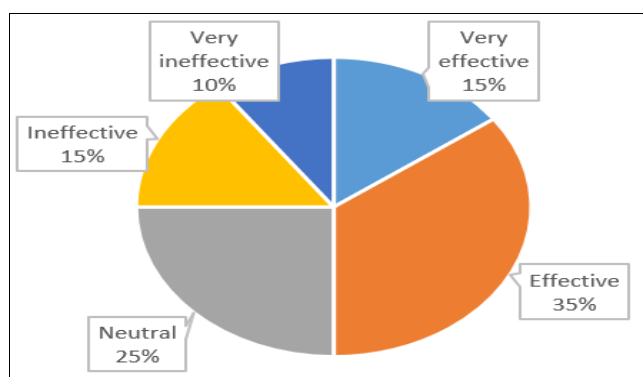


Fig 9: Effectiveness of current youth participation structures in the CDF Committee

The responses suggest that half of the respondents (15% very effective, 35% effective) consider existing participation structures effective. However, 25% remain neutral, and another 25% (ineffective/very ineffective) view the structures negatively. This mixed perception indicates that while the frameworks allow for some youth input, they may lack sufficient authority, inclusivity, or responsiveness to youth priorities. The findings point to an institutional

challenge: effectiveness is acknowledged, but not universally trusted. This reflects one of the research objectives-evaluating the effectiveness of participation mechanisms and suggests that improvements in structure, inclusivity, and feedback mechanisms could enhance overall youth trust and engagement.

4.2.5 Which initiative would most likely increase youth participation in the budget formulation process?

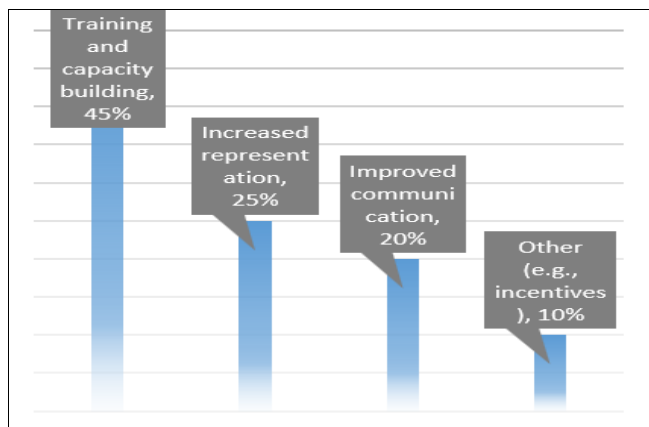


Fig 10: Initiatives most likely to increase youth participation in the budget formulation process

The majority of respondents (45%) believe training and capacity building would most increase youth participation, followed by increased representation (25%). This highlights the demand for equipping youth with knowledge and skills that can empower them to contribute effectively in technical budget processes. Improved communication (20%) and other initiatives (10%) are also noted but seen as secondary. The findings underscore the need for deliberate empowerment strategies, such as workshops, mentorship, and technical training, to ensure that youth can move from being passive participants to active decision-makers. In line with the study’s objectives, this result suggests that capacity building is central to strengthening both the level and effectiveness of youth participation in Lusaka’s CDF committees.

4.3 Influence of Youth Participation on Resource Allocation

4.3.1 To what extent does youth participation influence the allocation of CDF resources?

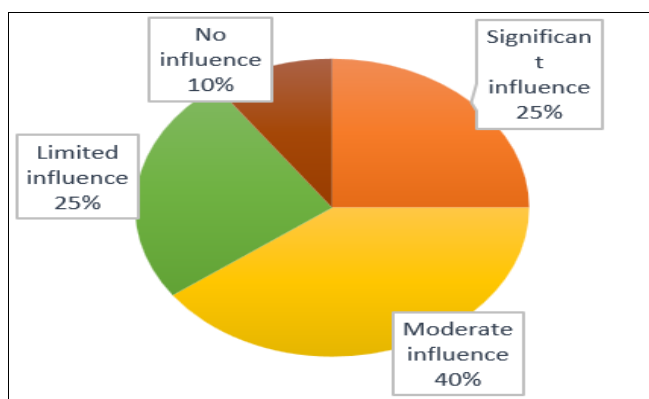


Fig 11: Extent of youth participation in influencing the allocation of CDF resources

The findings show that 65% of respondents (25% significant, 40% moderate) believe youth have a meaningful influence on CDF resource allocation, while 35% perceive limited or no influence. This indicates that although youth participation does affect decisions, the extent of their influence is often moderate rather than decisive. In terms of the research objective, this suggests that youth participation has potential but may be constrained by structural or political limitations. To strengthen inclusiveness, youth voices need to move from advisory roles to decision-making authority within CDF processes.

4.3.2 What percentage of CDF resources is typically allocated to youth-prioritized projects?

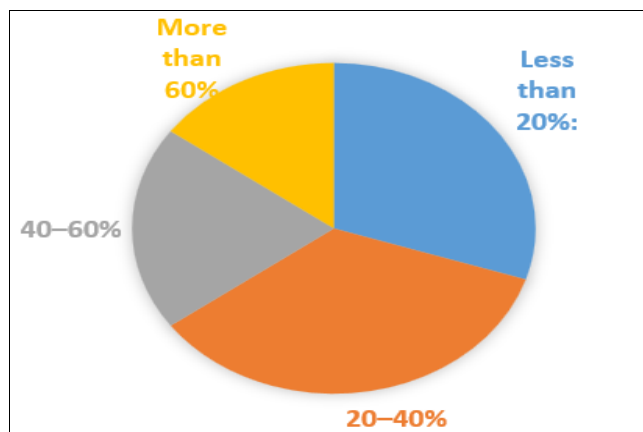


Fig 12: Percentage of CDF Resources allocated to youth prioritized Projects

The majority of respondents (65%) indicate that less than 40% of resources are allocated to youth-prioritized projects, with only 15% suggesting allocations above 60%. This highlights a resource gap, where youth priorities, though considered, are not consistently funded at substantial levels. The findings emphasize that youth participation in budget discussions does not always translate into financial prioritization. In line with the study objectives, this points to the need for stronger advocacy mechanisms to ensure youth voices are backed by tangible resource allocation. Without adequate funding, youth participation risks becoming symbolic rather than impactful.

4.3.3 How does the CDF Committee ensure that youth-prioritized projects are considered in the budget allocation process?

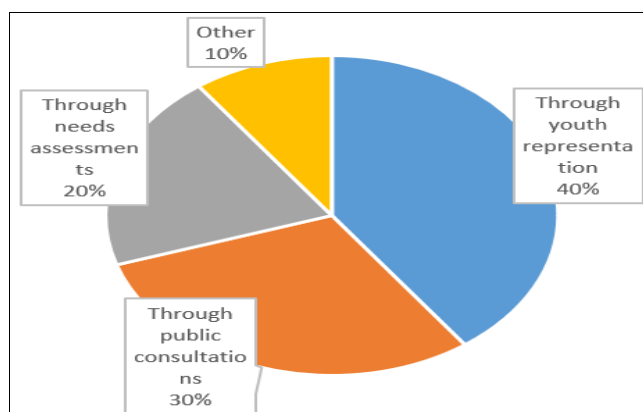


Fig 13: CDF Committee prioritized projects

Youth representation (40%) emerges as the primary channel for integrating youth priorities into CDF allocations, followed by public consultations (30%). Needs assessments (20%) and other mechanisms (10%) are less commonly relied upon. This suggests that the presence of youth in decision-making bodies plays a central role in advocating for their priorities. However, reliance on representation alone may exclude broader segments of youth who are not directly part of committees. From the perspective of the research objective, these findings stress the importance of combining formal representation with wider consultation and data-driven needs assessments to ensure that youth priorities are consistently reflected in allocations.

4.3.4 What is the primary benefit of involving youth in the CDF resource allocation process?

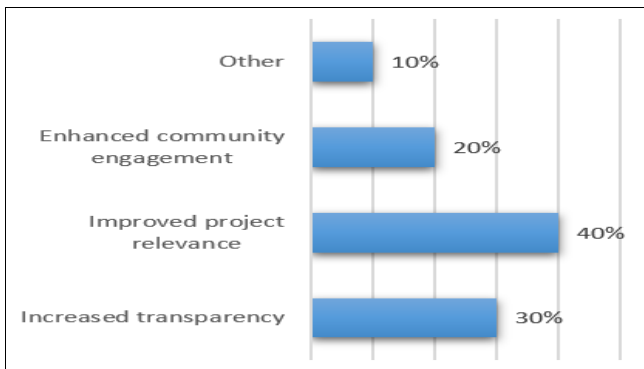


Fig 14: Benefit of involving youth in the CDF resource allocation process

The greatest perceived benefit of youth involvement is improved project relevance (40%), followed by increased transparency (30%). This indicates that youth participation is valued for aligning CDF projects more closely with community needs, especially those affecting younger demographics. Enhanced community engagement (20%) and other benefits (10%) are also recognized. These findings align with the research objectives by showing that youth involvement enhances not just inclusiveness but also the quality and legitimacy of projects. However, the relatively lower recognition of transparency (30%) suggests that youth participation is still more associated with project outcomes than with accountability reforms.

4.3.5 How would you rate the impact of youth participation on the effectiveness of CDF projects?

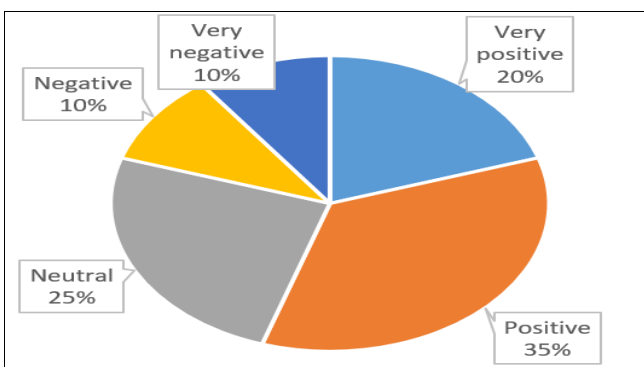


Fig 15: Impact of youth participation on the effectiveness of CDF projects

A majority of respondents (55%) rate the impact of youth participation as positive or very positive, while 25% remain neutral and 20% perceive negative effects. This shows that youth involvement is generally seen as enhancing the effectiveness of CDF projects, though not without challenges. The neutral responses suggest that some projects may not directly reflect youth input or that their contributions are overshadowed by other actors. The negative perceptions (20%) could point to issues such as politicization, inadequate capacity, or conflicts in priority-setting. In relation to the study’s objectives, this highlights that while youth participation has the potential to strengthen project effectiveness, its impact is inconsistent and requires stronger institutional support to realize its full benefits.

4.4 Youth Perceptions on Effectiveness and Inclusiveness

4.4.1 How would you rate the overall effectiveness of youth participation in the CDF budget process?

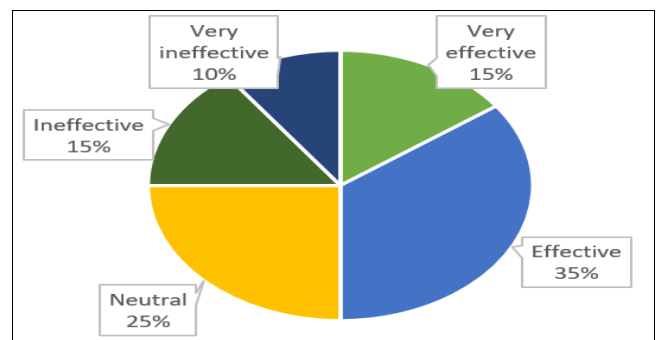


Fig 16: Effectiveness of youth participation in the CDF budget process

Half of the respondents (50%) rated youth participation as effective or very effective, while 25% remained neutral, and 25% viewed it as ineffective or very ineffective. This mixed perception suggests that although some progress has been made in including youth, the effectiveness of their participation remains uneven. The neutrality of 25% may indicate uncertainty or limited personal experience in the budget process. From the perspective of the study objectives, these findings highlight the need to strengthen institutional structures to ensure that youth involvement consistently translates into effective participation rather than symbolic inclusion.

4.4.2 How inclusive is the CDF budget process for youth?

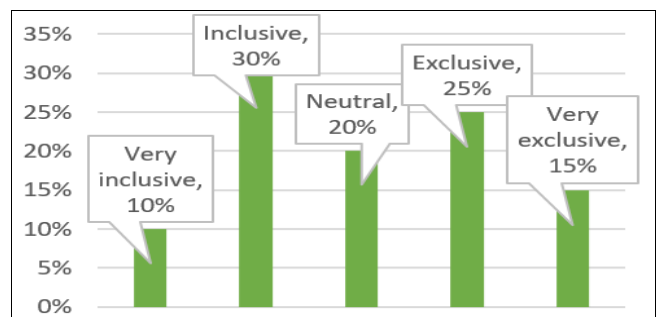


Fig 17: Inclusivity of CDF budget process for youth

Only 40% of respondents viewed the process as inclusive or very inclusive, while a significant 40% perceived it as exclusive or very exclusive, and 20% remained neutral. This

indicates a clear divide in youth perceptions, where some feel genuinely included, while others experience exclusion from key decision-making. These findings reveal that while youth participation structures exist, inclusiveness is inconsistent and may depend on political, social, or leadership factors. Aligned with the study objectives, this points to a need for mechanisms that expand inclusiveness beyond select individuals, ensuring broader youth representation across wards.

4.4.3 What factor most contributes to the success of youth participation in the CDF budget process?

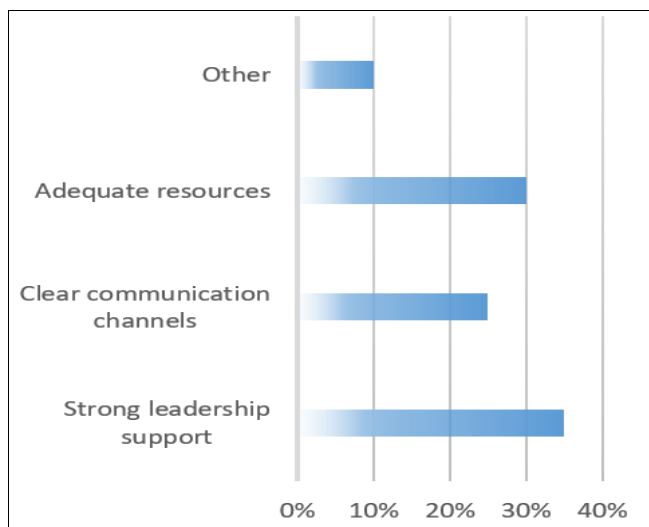


Fig 18: Factors contributing to the success of youth participation in the CDF budget process

Strong leadership support (35%) and adequate resources (30%) emerged as the most significant factors contributing to successful youth participation, followed by clear communication channels (25%). This reflects the importance of both political will and material support in enabling meaningful youth involvement. Without leadership backing, youth may lack influence; without resources, their participation may be tokenistic. In relation to the research objectives, this underscores that successful youth engagement requires a supportive institutional environment complemented by practical resources and communication frameworks.

4.4.4 How would you rate the level of satisfaction among youth with the CDF budget process?

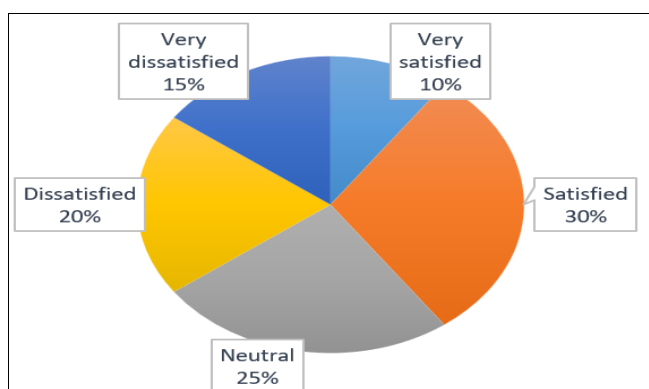


Fig 19: Level of satisfaction among youth in the CDF budget process

Only 40% of respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied, while 35% expressed dissatisfaction and 25% were neutral. This suggests that many youths are not fully content with the current budget process, likely due to limited influence or inconsistencies in inclusiveness. The findings point to a gap between participation opportunities and actual impact, where being present in committees does not always equate to meaningful influence. Linked to the study objectives, these results show that youth satisfaction is closely tied to the transparency of processes and the alignment of resource allocation with youth priorities.

4.4.5 What mechanism would most improve the inclusiveness of the CDF budget process for youth?

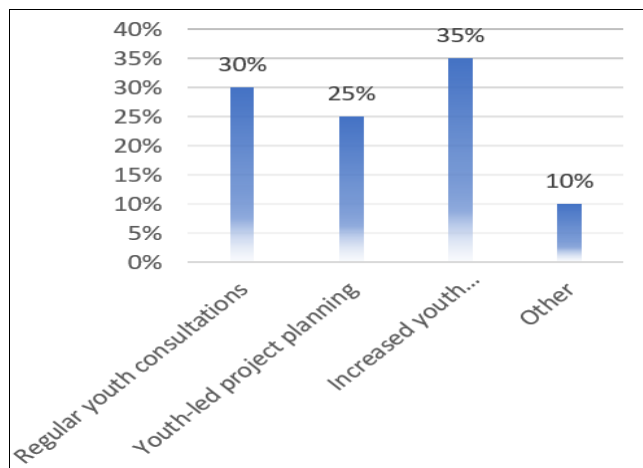


Fig 20: Mechanism for the improvement of inclusive CDF budget process

Increased youth representation (35%) and regular youth consultations (30%) were identified as the most effective mechanisms for improving inclusiveness, with youth-led project planning (25%) also seen as important. This indicates that while representation is key, ongoing consultation processes are equally critical to ensure inclusiveness is not limited to a few individuals. The findings suggest that inclusiveness requires both structural (representation) and procedural (consultations, project planning) reforms. In line with the objectives, this highlights that inclusiveness must move beyond nominal involvement to active participation that shapes decision-making and resource allocation.

4.5 Discussion of Results

The study examined youth participation in the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) budget formulation processes in Lusaka, focusing on inclusiveness, decision-making power, and effectiveness of engagement. The findings revealed significant progress in youth inclusion but also exposed persistent gaps in influence and empowerment. Demographically, 58% of respondents were male and 42% female, indicating that youth participation is not male-dominated but relatively balanced. However, despite this inclusivity, gender-based structural and cultural barriers may still limit women’s influence. Ensuring gender-sensitive approaches in participatory budgeting remains essential for equitable representation. In terms of age, most respondents (65%) were between 21–30 years, followed by 20% aged 31–35, and 15% below 20. This shows that young,

energetic, and civically aware individuals dominate CDF activities, though their limited experience can affect confidence and decision-making capacity, underscoring the need for mentorship and training programs.

Educationally, 70% had tertiary qualifications while 30% completed secondary school, suggesting that the youth involved possess adequate academic preparation to understand budgeting processes. Yet, their influence on final allocations remains constrained, reflecting a disconnection between knowledge and authority. Regarding inclusiveness, 62% agreed that youth were given opportunities to participate in discussions, while 38% felt excluded. This indicates moderate inclusivity, though tokenism, poor information flow, and senior dominance still limit meaningful engagement.

Decision-making power was more problematic, as only 40% of respondents felt they had real influence on final budget outcomes, while 60% reported that their contributions were ignored or overruled. This demonstrates that youth inclusion often remains symbolic rather than substantive, weakening the spirit of participatory governance. Similarly, 55% indicated that youth-proposed projects were included in final budgets, while 45% said their ideas were dismissed. Adoption of youth projects correlated with greater ownership and satisfaction, whereas rejection led to disillusionment and apathy.

Key challenges identified included inadequate information access (52%), dominance by senior committee members (48%), and limited logistical support (46%). These structural barriers constrain effective youth participation and perpetuate power imbalances within CDF structures.

In conclusion, the findings highlight a paradox: while youth are increasingly included in CDF budgeting frameworks, their engagement remains limited in depth and influence. Achieving meaningful participation requires more than representation; it calls for empowerment, transparency, and institutional reforms that translate youth voices into tangible policy outcomes. Without such reforms, participatory budgeting risks remaining a procedural exercise rather than a transformative governance tool.

5. Conclusion

The study examined youth participation in the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) budget formulation processes in Lusaka, revealing that while youth inclusion has improved, it often remains consultative rather than genuinely participatory. The demographic results showed near gender balance, with most participants aged 21–30 and possessing tertiary education, reflecting a capable yet underutilized group. Despite this, 38% of respondents felt excluded, and only 40% believed they had real influence in decision-making, highlighting the tokenistic nature of youth involvement. Although 62% acknowledged opportunities to contribute, structural and procedural barriers—such as dominance by senior officials and limited information access—continue to undermine youth empowerment. Moreover, only 55% of youth-proposed projects were incorporated into final budgets, leaving nearly half disregarded. These findings demonstrate that for participatory budgeting to be truly inclusive, it must move beyond representation toward genuine empowerment, transparency, and institutional accountability that values youth input in decision-making.

6. Acknowledgement

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my mother, Leah Phiri, for her unwavering support and prayers throughout this journey. I am also deeply thankful to my father, Mr. George Khumkani Kaira, for his constant help and encouragement.

My brothers, Isaac Kaira and Lars, have been a tremendous source of support and motivation, and I appreciate their belief in me. I am especially grateful to my friend, Priscah Mambwe, who encouraged me during moments of self-doubt.

I would like to thank my colleague, Japhet Phiri, and my supervisor, Mrs. Josephine Kunda, for their understanding and lenience in allowing me time off work to focus on my school commitments.

Additionally, I want to acknowledge my dear friends, Olive Nampindi, Chipu Mudenda, and Andrew Zambara, for their unwavering belief in me throughout this journey. Lastly, my family at large has been a constant source of love and support, for which I am truly grateful. Thank you all for being an integral part of my journey.

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