4 Trend 4: New ways of engaging citizens and residents

This chapter introduces the trend on new ways of engaging citizens and residents. It highlights the drive for increased engagement with citizens and residence as a way to enhance representation, participation and openness. The chapter future provides practical examples and global case studies to demonstrate the ways in which governments are using sophisticated techniques to connect and collaborate with the public and enhance public decision-making power. Initiatives include permanent citizens' councils, AI localism approaches, reimagining communities and physical and virtual community spaces, and leveraging technology to build public trust.

Engagement with citizens and residents is on the rise as governments work to enhance representation, participation and openness. However, confidence remains low among citizens regarding their influence on the design and delivery of public policies and services, especially among young people (OECD, 2020[1]). To remedy this situation, governments are using sophisticated techniques to connect and collaborate with the public. These include forming permanent citizens' councils, promoting Citizen Science and AI localism approaches, reimagining communities and leveraging technological innovations to build public trust, and collectively transforming both the physical and the virtual environment.

> "We commit to strengthening participation, combating undue influence on government policies and improving and promoting inclusion in civic and democratic processes and decision making, as well as within the civil service, including women, youth and other underrepresented groups in society."
>
> - 42 national adherents to the OECD Declaration on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy.

Empowering voices

The OECD (OECD, 2022[2]) has determined that enhancing representation, participation and openness in public life is one of the most important governance challenges. As with enhancing transparency (see Trend 1), governments have been working on stronger engagement with their citizens and residents for a number of years as part of their Open Government agendas. OECD work has previously covered a "deliberative wave" in this area that has been gaining momentum since 2010, and has built a database of 574 innovative approaches (e.g. civic lotteries, citizens' assemblies and juries). OECD work has also explored government efforts to empower young people to participate in public and political life within OECD countries (OECD, 2020[1]) and across public administrations in the Middle East and North Africa (OECD, 2022[3]).

OPSI and the MBRCGI have also discussed innovative approaches to engaging the public and surfacing insights for cross-border innovation, including large-scale democratic processes, as well as efforts to build open, matrixed governments where all actors have a say and can participate in governance. OECD work shows that these efforts can pay off, as cities with strong stakeholder engagement lead others by about 4 percentage points in terms of resident satisfaction (OECD, 2021[4]). Similarly, OECD analysis has found that where young people are involved in the policy cycle to a greater extent, they expressed higher satisfaction with government performance in key policy and service areas (OECD, 2020[1]).

However, concrete evidence shows that more needs to be done. Half of the respondents to OECD's Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (OECD, 2022[5]) of 22 OECD countries stated that the political system does not let them have a say in government decision making (Figure 4.1), and less than a third are confident that the government would use inputs given in a public consultation (Figure 4.2). These perceptions persist regardless of OECD (OECD, 2021[6]) findings that in most cases, at least half of participant' recommendations are accepted by public authorities. Young people in particular tend to report lower trust in government (OECD, 2022[5]). Governments must do better, both at giving all people a voice and in responding to those voices to make their people feel heard (OECD, 2022[2]).

Figure 4.1. Respondents report that the political system does not let them have a say

Source: https://oe.cd/trust (2021). Data available at https://stat.link/8alv9m.
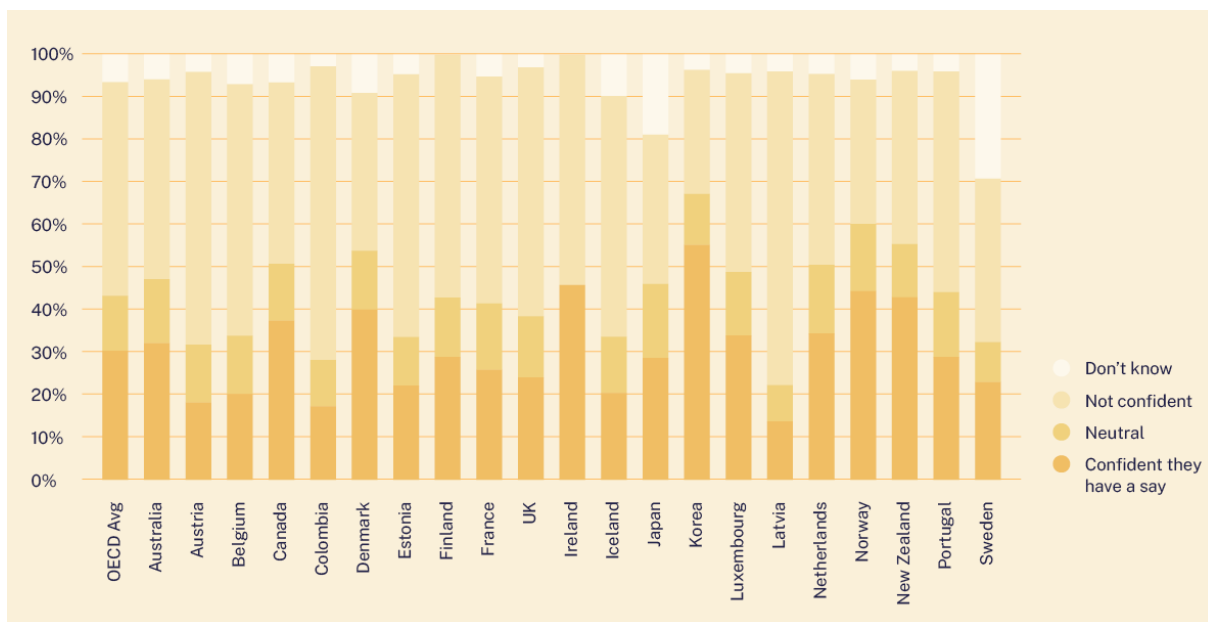
Figure 4.2. Few think that the government would adopt views expressed in a public consultation

Source: https://oe.cd/trust (2021). Data available at https://stat.link/6ihn02.
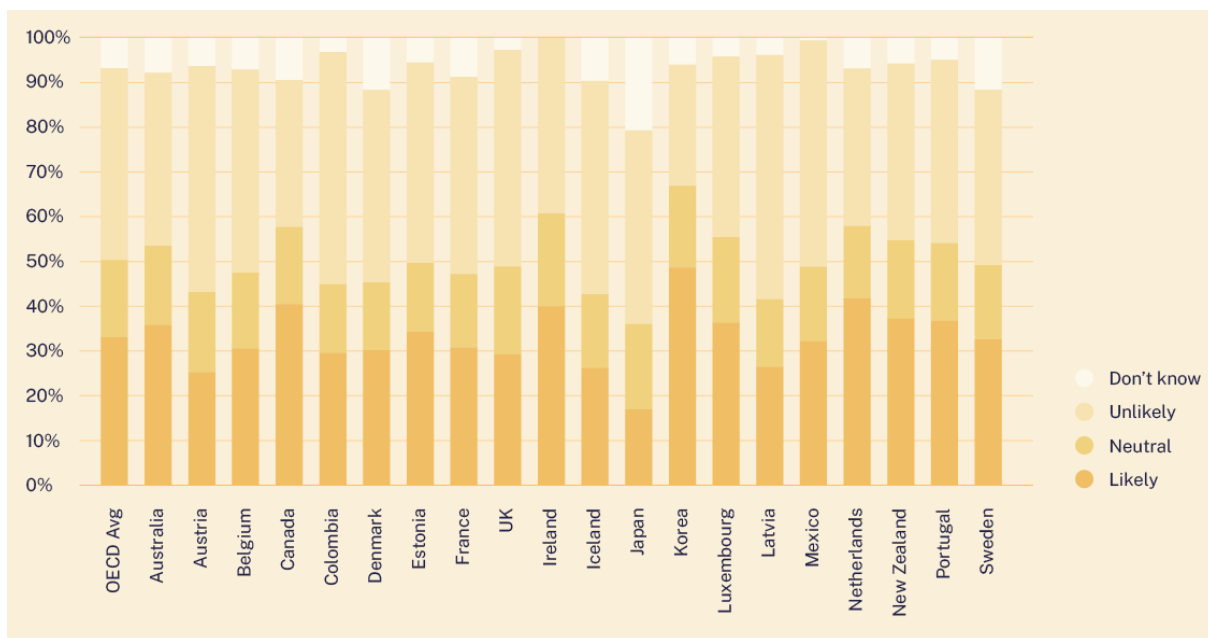
This situation calls for a move towards a more diffused and shared conception of democratic governance, including a more inclusive role for public institutions and officials tasked with ensuring that the polices and services they design and implement are more representative of society, at all levels of government (OECD, 2022[2]).

To help achieve this transformation, in November 2022, 42 countries adopted the OECD [Action Plan](#) on Enhancing Representation, Participation and Openness in Public Life as part of a broader OECD [Declaration on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy](#) (Box 4.1).

Box 4.1. OECD Action Plan on Enhancing Representation, Participation and Openness in Public Life

In late November 2022, 42 countries around the world adopted the [Declaration on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy](#), including the action plan which includes key areas on:

- **Creating opportunities for inclusive public participation and deliberation**
  - Identifying opportunities, areas and levels of government where participative and deliberative processes can be established.
  - Encouraging the involvement of citizens and stakeholders in such a way as to ensure that their contributions have more transparent and measurable impacts.
  - Designing citizen participation and deliberation processes in a way that breaks down barriers to participation and encourages people to take part.
  - Fostering a culture of, and building capacities for, participation and deliberation in the civil service and in society at large.
- **Strengthening democratic representation**
  - Making executives and elected bodies more diverse and representative of the population by facilitating better representation of women, young people and other under-represented groups.
  - Delivering on the promise of more inclusive policies by developing explicit provisions to support the integration of the needs of underrepresented groups into policy making.

Source: https://oe.cd/participation-action-plan (as excerpted by OPSI).

OPSI and the MBRCGI uncovered many innovative initiatives where governments are engaging with their citizens and residents in new ways and activating them as change agents, including by using sophisticated techniques to connect and collaborate with them. This marks an important shift and prompts a fundamental questioning of the role citizens should play in public decision making and how public institutions, parliaments and governments can better represent them. More specifically, this raises the question of whether in a more representative, participatory and deliberative democracy, there can be evolution in the two-way relationship between people and their governments (OECD, 2022[2]).

Many of these initiatives align with discussions covered by OPSI and the MBRCGI in previous years, which although perhaps no longer at the leading edge, remain innovative and have an important impact. Examples here include:

- [Participa.Gov.Pt](#). The Portuguese Public Administration's one-stop-shop platform where citizens can present their proposals and decide through their votes on relevant initiatives for their lives.
- [Territorial Dialogue Initiative](#). A stakeholder dialogue methodology which generates spaces for collaborative co-creation in order to design public policy proposals to address local challenges in Colombia.
- [Civic Laboratories.](#) Spaces for participatory budgeting in Bogotá, Colombia.
- [365 Online Gwanak-gu Office](#). An online platform for direct democracy in Korea.

Some initiatives are more novel in the **approach**, **scale** or **focus areas** in which they engage citizens and residents. For instance,

- Our Europe, Our Future is a vast consultation of 95 000 young people in France and Germany carried out within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Similarly, My France 2022 allowed 1 million French people to express their priorities and to engage in a direct conversation with the candidates in the run-up to the presidential election. A number of other large, transnational efforts can be found in the OPSI-MBRCGI report *Surfacing Insights and Experimenting Across Borders*.

- Police departments are working with GuardianScore to allows community members to rate their interactions with officers. In Mexico City, Prebases promotes citizen engagement in high-impact public procurements. Lastly, in the United States, the Expert & Citizen Assessment of Science & Technology (ECAST) Participatory Technology Assessment is bringing public perspectives to bear on critical government science and technology decisions.

- Bordeaux, France is developing blended indicators on rising urban heat by creating tools to collect information from citizens on their physical sensations related to thermal comfort. This enables the generation of comfort maps to guide important decisions (e.g. planting trees, adding fountains, etc.).

One of the most notable ways in which governments have been evolving is a move towards *permanent* forms of deliberative democracy that create spaces for everyday people to exercise their civic rights and duties beyond voting. These permanent citizens' councils and other initiatives function alongside parliament, bringing people into the heart of public decisions in an ongoing way, as a complement to representative democratic institutions. These new institutions are not a replacement, but a complement to the existing democratic architecture, making it richer and more inclusive (OECD, 2021[7]). The OECD report Eight Ways to Institutionalise Deliberative Democracy outlines different eight models used by governments (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3. Eight ways to institutionalise deliberative democracy

Source: https://oe.cd/8-ways-delibwave.

OPSI and the MBRCGI have also identified a number of innovative efforts that take citizen engagement to new levels and serve to evolve upon and more strongly integrate participation. One of the most compelling examples is Brussels' Deliberative Committees, discussed in-depth in the case study presented later in this trend. Additional examples include a permanent citizens' assembly in Ostbelgien, the German-Speaking Community of Belgium, and Bogotá's Itinerant Citizens Assembly, which formalises a series of sequential assemblies, with each occurring at different stages of the policy cycle (OECD, 2021[7]). In Türkiye, the government has piloted a comprehensive effort integrating Participation Task Forces with three initial municipalities, where elected and appointed officials work together with citizens and residents

on developing participatory policy proposals, supported by a team of trainers who provide initial training on participatory processes and serve as ongoing coaches.

Some of the most innovative initiatives, though, come from using new methods and technologies to better connect elected leaders with their constituents, and engage with citizens and residents about their opinions and feelings. Deliberatura – Council to the Street in Buenaventura, Colombia turns some aspects of engagement exercises on its head. In one of the country's most impoverished cities that has faced years of corruption, the initiative brings the city's institutions out to listen and respond to citizens in public sessions. During these events, the leaders receive an institutional response and generate commitments that benefit the citizens. Deliberatura has been held seven times in different neighbourhoods of Buenaventura, and the City Council is expected to adopt this practice and institutionalise it through a municipal agreement.

Governments and their partners are also leveraging innovative technologies to engage with the public. As discussed in depth in recent OECD work on Transforming Public Governance for Digital Democracy (OECD, 2022[8]), digitalisation has opened up new channels for citizen empowerment, political participation and government transparency, enhancing people's civil liberties and political rights. Such efforts help bring together Public Interest Tech, Civic Tech and GovTech movements in ways that support democratic governance and seek to build public trust, which OPSI and the other teams in the OECD Open and Innovative Government Division (OIG) call **Democratic Technology** (**DemTech**)**.** Two efforts identified by OPSI-MBRCGI work illustrate different yet powerful ways in which DemTech is starting to be used.

Box 4.2. DemTech Efforts

In late November 2022, 42 countries around the world adopted the Declaration on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy, including the action plan which includes key areas on:

iMatr Democratic Technology (Canada)

Democratic Technology brings governments and citizens into the 21st century. It empowers real time engagement on daily issues between people and politicians in a seamless and transparent way. Using geolocation or an address entry, real verified users are shown their government representatives on their smartphones enabling direct one-to-one messaging on important events. Collected anonymised data enables evidence-based decision making for the public and governments.

Crea.Visions

Crea.Visions is an online, game-based, large-scale portfolio that enables the public to co-create with AI powerful and thought-provoking visions of utopias and dystopias. Its goal is to raise awareness about the climate change challenge and the importance of reaching the SDGs. This innovation was developed based on the strong belief that crowdsourcing concerns and solutions from the general public on both global and local complex socio-scientific problems could function as a cornerstone in participatory democracy for the digital age.

Stanford Online Deliberation Platform

The Online Deliberation Platform is a video discussion platform designed to facilitate a structured and equitable conversation with better opportunities for participants to speak up. The platform's design is based on the Deliberative Polling methodology which makes it possible to massively scale deliberation, allowing unlimited number of participants to deliberate in small groups together simultaneously. The platform presents many interesting features but the main one is the presence of an automated moderator that allows participants to form speaking queues, discuss in small groups with timed agendas and participate equally, ensuring inclusion.

Source: https://oe.cd/participation-action-plan (as excerpted by OPSI).

Governments at all levels will need to invest continuously in such efforts to build public trust. While national governments have been setting the overall tone and direction, such as adhering to the aforementioned OECD Declaration (Box 4.1), the majority of the implemented initiatives exist at the local level (OECD, 2021[6]), as can be seen in the examples presented throughout this section. OECD research shows that public servants and local governments are perceived as more trustworthy (OECD, 2022[5]), reinforcing the need to embed skills and expertise at local levels, with public servants as the face of the public sector. A growing body of relevant tools and resources exist to help bring about these skills and capacities, as listed below. In addition, the OECD is developing an Action Plan on Digital Democracy, to be published next year. This will support concrete actions to put in place the technology underpinning many of the approaches outlined in this section, while also mitigating the associated risks.

- The OECD's *Good Practice Principles on Deliberative Processes* provide guidance to public servants on ensuring high quality, impactful and trustworthy processes.
- The OECD's *Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes* further operationalise these principles and help ensure that high standards can be met.
- OPSI's Toolkit Navigator includes dozens of practical resources for bringing new perspectives and stakeholders into the policy process.
- The OECD's recently issued *Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes* walks interested public servants through ten key steps (Figure 4.4).
- The OECD *Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People* provides guidance and policy principles for governments to strengthen the trust of young people in government and their relationships with public institutions.

Figure 4.4. Ten steps to plan and implement a citizen participation process

1. Identifying the problem to solve and the moment for participation
2. Defining the expected results
3. Identifying the relevant group of people to involve and recruiting participants
4. Choosing the participation method
5. Choosing the right digital tools
6. Communicating about the process
7. Implementing a participatory process
8. Using citizen input and participation process
9. Evaluating the participation process
10. Cultivating a culture of participation

Source: https://oe.cd/citizen-participation-guidelines.

Finally, while OPSI and the MBRCGI identified many efforts promoting new forms of engagement, there were significantly fewer initiatives aimed at enhancing public sector responsiveness, with forthcoming OECD work identifying weaknesses in this area (OECD, forthcoming-d, *Understanding and Tackling the Territorial Divides in Trust in Government*). OECD Trust Survey data of a number of countries (e.g. Finland and Norway) has found that responsiveness may be an even stronger driver of trust than participation. Indeed, responsiveness is central to engagement efforts as a means to convince citizens and residents that their participation has made a difference. The forthcoming OECD report sheds additional light on this topic.

Case Study: Deliberative Committees (Belgium)

"With the deliberative commissions, we want to revitalise democracy, and do it together with the citizens. We want to involve them more in the decision-making process and encourage the participation of people who might not have spontaneously expressed themselves when talking about political projects."

Rachid Madrane, President of the Brussels Regional Parliament (extracted from the opening session of the deliberative committee on biodiversity in the city).

In order to bridge the gap between representatives and represented, the Brussels Parliament decided to open its doors to all the inhabitants of the Brussels-Capital Region. To achieve this, the Parliament incorporated a system of direct participation for the region's residents into the formal rules of procedure. These were the Deliberative Committees (*commissions délibératives* in French). The committees comprise 15 members of the Brussels Regional Parliament and 45 residents chosen by lottery, and are responsible for drawing up recommendations on a given topic, to which the Parliament must respond.

Problem

Citizens and the public should be able to see, contribute to and evaluate public policy making, with stakeholder participation constituting an essential element of open government. Informing and involving citizens in the development of policy solutions can improve decision-making outcomes and increase their legitimacy, as shown by the OECD's 2022 Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes. In particular, deliberative processes can provide optimal solutions to problems that involve ethical questions, are complex and long-term in nature, and extend beyond the electoral cycle. Recognising the potential of citizen participation, the Brussel-Capital Region realised it needed to move beyond ad-hoc, one-off participation projects that take place close, but not inside, Parliament, with which it already had experience.

An innovative solution

At the start of the 2019-2024 legislature, the Brussels Parliament decided to open its doors to all inhabitants of the Brussels-Capital Region by establishing the Deliberative Committees. Several experts in citizen participation assisted in defining the details of this new process, and the first Committee was formed in April 2021 and now forms part of the assembly's regular and permanent operation. The Committees, which consist of 45 residents chosen by lottery and 15 regional parliamentarians, have created a new space for

dialogue aimed at elaborating, together and on an equal footing, recommendations on a particular theme. The topic addressed by each deliberative committee is either proposed by a citizen via democratie.brussels and supported by a minimum of 1 000 Brussels residents over the age of 16, or put forward by one or more political groups. Figure 4.5 shows see the entire process from proposal of a recommendation through to acceptance by Parliament.

Figure 4.5. The process of Deliberative Committees
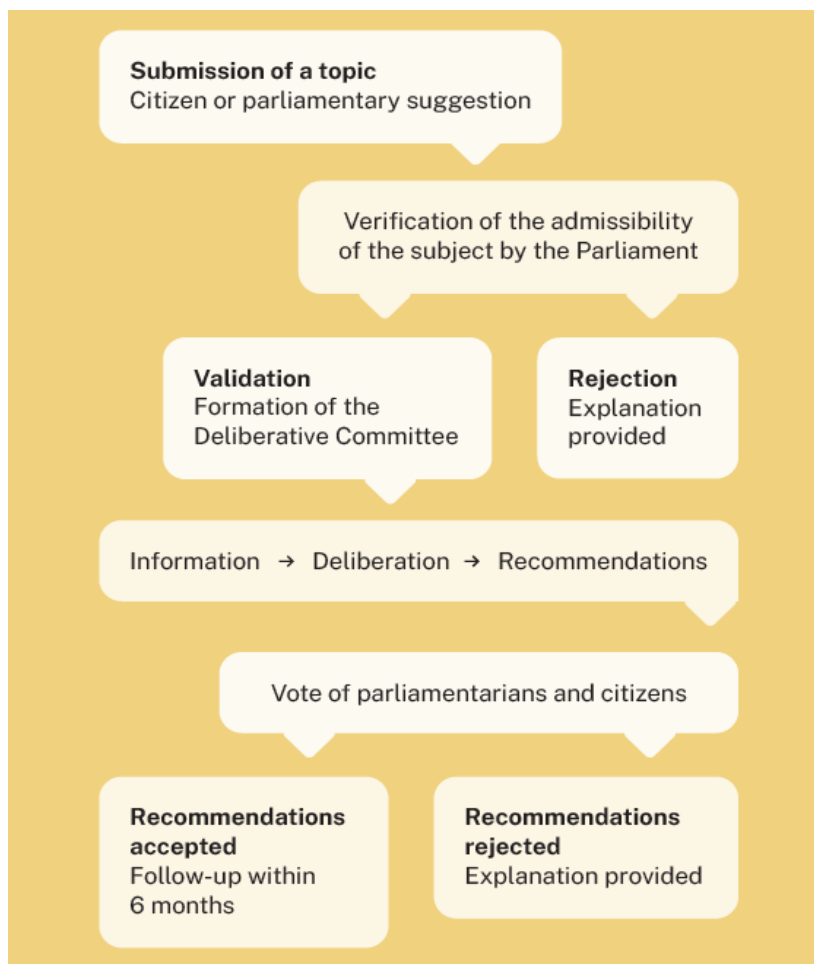
Source: https://democratie.brussels/pages/cd_schema.

To set up a deliberative committee, an initial random draw is made of 10 000 people over 16 years of age residing in the Region. A letter is then sent inviting them to register by completing a form in which they are asked to specify their gender, age, place of residence, language and level of education. Based on these answers, a second draw is made to obtain a sample of 45 people representative of the diversity of the Brussels population. In addition, 15 parliamentarians are invited to participate in the work of the committee on level footing with the residents. These are members of the existing parliamentary committee working on the topic of the deliberative committee in question. The deliberative committees are also supervised by a support committee (comprising experts in citizen participation and specialists in the topic under discussion) and are facilitated by an external operator selected mostly on the basis of their ability to manage mixed assemblies. The operation of a deliberative committee can be divided into four successive phases:

- The **information phase** aims at informing the participants about both the deliberative process and the topic under discussion. In this phase, participants receive information on the topic from experts that can be academics, members of the public administration or parties involved in the issue. Inclusivity and plurality inform the selection of experts.

- The **deliberation phase** aims at generating proposals for recommendations. During this phase, alternating discussions in plenary and small groups and the work of the facilitator ensure the active participation of all members of the committee.

- The **recommendation phase** aims at improving these proposals and generating recommendations by all participants.

- The **presentation phase** is the phase where the committee discusses and debates whether to approve the report on its work containing the recommendations. If approved, the report is presented in the relative parliamentary committee where the recommendations are discussed. If the recommendations fall under the competencies of another committee, they are sent there for discussion.

In total, each deliberative committee meets around five times, often for a whole day, over a period of approximately two months. The presence of the 15 parliamentarians helps to secure parliamentary buy-in and ensures that the recommendations adopted are followed up in Parliament, where discussions are recorded and available on YouTube. After six to nine months, the parliamentarians members of the committee present and discuss a report with all participants in the deliberative committee, which is then published online under open access. This transparency strengthens public support for the process and also ensures that the recommendations are useful.

The good functioning of the Deliberative Committees is the result of co-operation between many actors outside Parliament's regular services:

- The **support committee** that is made up of experts in citizen participation and the topic in question, and ensures that the various phases of the process run smoothly.

- A **facilitator** is a professional procured to work with the Committee, who leads the debates and ensures inclusion of all participants in the deliberative committees.

- The **governance committee** is composed of representatives of the support committee, the facilitator and two citizens, and is responsible for evaluating each session.

Inclusion is the guiding principle of the process – from the drawing of lots to the follow-up discussion. Efforts to ensure inclusion include a telephone assistance service, the presence of a person dedicated to the wellbeing of each person, the availability of childcare facilities, the setting up of a buddy system, simultaneous translation in the two official languages (French and Dutch) and translation of the main documents into the five other most widely spoken languages (Arabic, English, German, Italian and Spanish).

Novelty

Considered by the press and experts to be a world first, the process is innovative in that it establishes a structural mechanism of participatory democracy that directly involves parliamentarians and citizens selected by lottery. It is formally embedded in the Parliament's rules of procedure and is effectively part of the functioning of the Parliament. Citizens are chosen by lot and parliamentarians are now regularly brought together to debate with them on an equal footing.

Results and impact

Three Deliberative Committees have been set up in the Brussels Regional Parliament to date, and have given 135 citizens and residents of the Region, with a wide range of profiles, the opportunity to engage in direct participation. The three committees discussed and produced recommendations about 5G in Brussels, biodiversity in the city and homelessness. The recommendations adopted each time were followed up by the Parliament, and in 69% of cases, were accepted and became the subject of parliamentary discussion. Discussions in the parliamentary committees indicate that when the recommendations were not taken up, this was due to one of three reasons: 1) they did not fall under the powers of the Region, 2) similar policies already existed or were being discussed, or 3) different policies providing the same results already existed. In addition, the open mechanism by which parliamentarians report back to the committee allowed citizens to know why recommendations were not implemented and to discuss the matter.

Implementation of this innovation has given the citizens selected direct contact with parliamentarians. It has also enabled them to better understand decision-making mechanisms, take into account the interests involved and institutional realities, and grasp the distribution of competencies between levels of power, and more.

Challenges and lessons learned

Evaluation of the work of the deliberative committees is carried out by the governance committee, the support committee, and, through a survey, by all participants in the committee at the end of each meeting. Two major challenges emerged from these evaluations. First, the process or some of phases of the activity of deliberative committees were not always well understood by citizens. This issue was resolved quickly by giving more room for explanations during the committee meetings, organising preparatory sessions for citizens, favouring small group discussions rather than plenary sessions and including both kinds of discussion in the process. The second challenge concerned the role of the 15 parliamentarians, who joined the committee with experience in discussing political issues in assemblies. This presented a risk that their contributions would hinder or overtake the participation of citizen and residents. Although great efforts have been made to address this problem, such as holding preparatory meetings, paying attention to the equal involvement of participants, and ensuring a 3:1 ratio of residents, the issue still affects the project and, for this reason, is currently being analysed as part of an evaluation, due to be completed shortly.

Figure 4.6. Plenary session of a deliberative committee

Source: Deliberative Committees project team.

The ongoing experience of this innovation has provided some valuable lessons for the project team:

- Implementation of such a process cannot be improvised and requires time.
- Definition of the modalities of application requires numerous meetings with experts and consultation with the political groups and administrative services of the Parliament, which must all take ownership of the process.
- The smooth running of deliberative committees also requires the allocation of substantial resources, both financial – the total cost of one committee is around EUR 100 000 – and human – since conducting this project confronts the services with new tasks often performed at unusual times. For instance, meetings were held in the evening and on weekends to enable the greatest number of people to participate.
- Finally, as this is an unprecedented process, it is by its very nature perfectible and therefore requires a permanent evaluation in which all stakeholders must be involved.

Replicability

The problem of the growing gap between elected representatives and citizens is not unique to the Brussels Region, and the process is already inspiring other assemblies. The formal inclusion of citizen participation in the parliamentary process is now being discussed in another Belgian regional assembly, the Parliament of Wallonia, but has not yet been implemented. A proposal to introduce a similar mechanism in the Belgian federal parliament is currently under discussion in the House of Representatives. In order to ensure the success of these processes at different levels, the project team has emphasised the importance of establishing a network of all officials involved.

With respect to the replication of this innovation internationally, it is important to note that embedding the process within the legal framework for formal parliamentary decision making constitutes its greatest novelty and strength. However, this decision suggests that the project emerged from a context with strong high-level political agreement on the importance of engaging directly with citizens, which is not always the case of participatory initiatives.

Re-imagining communities, physically and virtually

In addition to implementing innovative and new ways to elicit perspectives from citizens and residents and connect them with their representatives, governments and their partners are devising novel approaches to engage the public in the tangible re-envisioning, and in some cases re-building, of physical and virtual spaces. In addition, innovative cross-cutting approaches are helping governments to engage with their people in these activities and to convert their ideas into realities.

Re-building and strengthening communities

Many of the efforts identified through this work involve rebuilding communities after shock. The impacts of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine have reverberated across the globe, causing both economic and societal shocks. Of course, no one feels the consequences more acutely than the people of Ukraine. However, despite the challenging circumstances, innovative efforts are emerging to help the public sector rebuild its communities for the future (Box 4.3).

Box 4.3. ReStart Ukraine

ReStart Ukraine is an open collective aimed at exploring the best ways to restore afflicted urban and rural areas in a post-war scenario. The project intends to provide a practical base for regions and municipalities to better plan for recovery according to available research, data and expertise. The initiative's approach involves data collection and analysis, the mapping of risks and uncertainties, consideration of three scales of recovery (state, region and city), and combining local and global expertise to reimagine the future. To date, ReStart Ukraine has worked with more than 300 volunteers from civil society, institutional partners and representatives of the public sector (mostly at the local level).

ReStart Ukraine aims to provide a co-created toolbox to empower municipalities across the country to reconcile the urgency of reconstructing with an understanding of what has changed, and to conduct recovery from a more inclusive perspective. The first pilot was tested in the Municipality of Chernihiv, where ReStart Ukraine tailored its framework and gathered quantitative evidence to create the basis for discussions on reconstruction. The experience highlighted the potential of participatory, co-created and future-oriented mechanisms that enable dialogue between a wide range of stakeholders to assess the crisis and imagine the recovery.

Source: https://restartukraine.io, OPSI interview with founder Alexander Shevchenko, 23 November 2022.

Update Germany (*Update Deutschland*) is another example of ground-up efforts to engage with the public in order to collectively re-envision and re-build communities – this time recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative perhaps represents the most mature and integrated evolution of COVID-19 response hackathons, which became a global sensation in 2020, as discussed in the OPSI-MBRCGI report on *Innovative COVID-19 Responses*. In building upon the German hackathon #WirVsVirus and shifting from response to recovery, Update Germany is creating a nationwide laboratory for revisioning the future with citizens and partners from all federal levels. Hundreds of solutions are being tested in parallel and implemented with the help of collaboratives. Current community issues being addressed include

loneliness, lack of digitalisation and social inequality. The initiative aims to gather a plethora of diverse participants to identify issues and then find new solutions or further develop existing approaches.

With origins not tied to crises, the city of Bogotá, which has made commendable efforts to become citizen and resident-centred, has also put in place processes for mutual co-design of public neighbourhoods and physical spaces. In Montreal, Canada, CityStudio Montreal connects city staff expertise with student creativity to tackle complex urban issues by prototyping and co-creating innovative solutions (OECD, 2021[4]). In Bologna, Italy, the Civic Imagination Office, developed within Fondazione Innovazione Urbana – the organisation that led the project Ethical Deliveries discussed in Trend 3 – oversees six District Labs where city officials and residents collaborate on projects to tackle challenges facing the city (OECD, 2021[4]).

Many relevant participatory efforts fall under the umbrella of Citizen Science, where the public participates voluntarily in the scientific process to address real-world problems. The term and related efforts have been around for some time, but recent projects have reached new levels of institutionalisation, scale and potential for impact, Examples include the creation of the EU Citizens Science Platform and work by the World Bank on using citizen science to "help unlock the full value of data for development" (Fu, Hammer and Anderson, 2022[9]). A number of specific projects under this umbrella include the following:

1. The EC-funded Distributed Network for Odour Sensing Empowerment and Sustainability (D-Noses) enables citizens to share any information related to odour pollution, a cause of physical ailments, anxiety, stress and respiratory problems. D-Noses enables the mapping of affected communities and the development of regulations on odour pollution.

2. The City of Helsinki invited residents to collect data while bicycling to help the local government identify roads that need maintenance. The initiative earned participating riders an average of EUR 2 per kilometre.

Interestingly, as part of this broader umbrella related to citizen science, the strongest and most granular focus is **trees**. Especially at the local level, governments are collaborating with citizens and residents to enhance tree canopies to address issues ranging from urban heat to combating climate change. These initiatives include:

- **#FreetownTheTreeTown**, an initiative in Sierra Leone covered in a case study later in this trend.

- **Trees as Infrastructure (TreesAI)**, a cloud-based platform, built to address declining tree stocks and support the expansion of urban forests, built by London nonprofit Dark Matter Labs. One of their first pilots with the City of Glasgow involves building a portfolio of "urban Nature-based Solutions (uNbS)". In addition, as part of a comprehensive operations model, TreesAI leverages "citizen sensing", enabling citizens to participate in forest maintenance practices (TreesAI, 2021).

- **NYC Street Trees**, a project bringing bring together thousands of citizen volunteers for "TreesCount!", the largest participatory urban forestry project in the United States. TreesCount! conducts a Tree Census of the nearly 700 000 trees which populate the NYC Street Tree Map, the world's most accurate and detailed map of a city's street trees. The initiative allows residents to explore the city's urban forest, learn about the species, and conduct and record their own tree care activity and stewardship actions.

- **Giessdenkiez** ("Giess" meaning "to water" and Kiez being a district in Berlin), an open source application by CityLab Berlin for fighting urban heat island effects. Giessdenkiez maps 750 000 trees and their care requirements, allowing residents to adopt and care for individual stands. The platform has over 2 000 users.

- The **Smart Forests Atlas**, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) is a living archive and virtual field site exploring how digital technologies are transforming forests. It draws on and extends practices of "digital gardening" by serving as a space for cultivating ideas publicly and sharing multimedia content.

Participatory efforts for communities and physical spaces need to be nurtured, with guidance and repeatable mechanisms put in place. As is common with early public sector innovation efforts, many of the examples discussed in this section represent ad-hoc projects or efforts that have not yet demonstrated their staying power. In some countries, governments are putting in place measures to help ensure continuity and sustainability of engagement over time. A good example of a topic-tailored approach here is the United Kingdom's PropTech Engagement Fund (Box 4.4).

Box 4.4. PropTech Engagement Fund (United Kingdom)

Historically, many local authorities report that less than 1% of their population engage with local planning. The PropTech (Property Technology) Engagement Fund was launched in 2021 to work with local authorities on accelerating the adoption of digital citizen engagement tools and transforming community involvement in placemaking. The Fund is the largest UK Government programme in the field of PropTech, and is a leader on working with industry, tech startups and local governments to increase the diversity and positivity of placemaking conversations and to fast-track new digital policy and local housing delivery.

To date, 41 projects have transformed the landscape of citizen engagement by empowering local planning authorities to use digital tools to radically increase the quantity and quality of engagement within and beyond planning. Two funding rounds, informed by user research, were launched in year one with a focus on estate regeneration, sustainability and acceleration of housing delivery.

Following funding from the PropTech Engagement Fund, the Cotswolds region reported that 6 532 people visited their project's consultation platform, equivalent to approximately 7% of their population. Leicester City Council likewise saw an "unbelievable response", with over 1 200 visitors despite digital poverty in the area. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council received nearly 2 000 individual respondents with 10% identifying as having accessibility needs. Many of the Round 2 projects are still ongoing with only interim results available, but the testimonials are positive.

Source: https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/proptech-engagement-fund.

Taking a broader approach, the Government of Lithuania's Create Lithuania Programme has developed a 2022 Guide to Civic Participation in Public Space Projects to help guide engagement efforts for the co-imagining of physical spaces (Figure 4.7). This step-by-step resource for municipalities offers guidance in conducting these processes from start to finish. The guide has brought together international best practices and the views of 27 multi-disciplinary representatives (e.g. architects, urbanists, park experts, municipality representatives, active citizens, community leaders and lawyers). It is now being implemented in a number of municipalities around the country, with hundreds of public servants trained. Among other things, the guide helps public servants structure thinking and engagement around uncovering three levels:

1. **What do we have?** (objective data, analysis, historical urban and natural context)
2. **What does society want?** (societal problems, needs, habits, goals and experiences)
3. **What do we offer?** "Vision = what we have + what we want, in a way that benefits people, nature and the economy."

Figure 4.7. Applying the Guide in Lithuania

Source: https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/public-space-dialogue.

In an effort to bridge the physical and the virtual, the residents of Tallinn are using an augmented reality (AR) mobile application (Avalinn AR) to contribute to urban development, and co-creating urban solutions for the Pollinator Highway (Putukaväil) – a species-rich linear park and movement corridor. As stated on Tallinn's municipal website, "in the future, the Pollinator Highway will become a vibrant city-wide linear park, a public space offering new green mobility connections and various opportunities for activities". The app includes information and allows users to visualise and interact with different possible solutions for the corridor. Users can like, dislike and comment on different proposals, as well as add their own contributions (see here) (Figure 4.8). The city is now considering the use of similar approaches for other projects (User Centric Cities, 2022). Nearby, efforts in Helsinki, Finland are using participatory planning to co-design the summer use of streets using AI.

Figure 4.8. The Pollinator Highway in AR

Source: https://bgreen-handbook.eu/case-study/digital-participation-in-tallinn-avalinn.

Another initiative using an immersive approach, but drawing on lessons from the private sector of potential value for governments, is Minecraft's 2022 AI Settlement Generation Challenge. This predictive virtual tool shows how technology may influence governments in the design of physical spaces in the future. The 2019 OPSI-MBRCGI Global Trends report first covered how Minecraft can be used for community-driven planning of public spaces with the Block by Block initiative. In leveraging increasingly powerful and accessible generative AI – where Machine Learning models create something entirely new, as with DALL-E – the competition "asks participants to build an AI that can generate realistic towns or villages in previously unseen locations". The resulting techniques may then be used by real-world city planners (Heaven, 2020[10]). The goal is to create techniques that can generate settlements that are adaptive, functional, aesthetically pleasing and narratively interesting.

Re-envisioning digital to align with collective values

Trend 1 discussed the importance of algorithmic accountability in the public sector as a means to ensure that AI systems increasingly playing a role in government decision making are transparent and fair. However, what if in addition the public could play a role in elaborating the policies that apply these algorithms in their community? The WeBuildAI participatory framework helps to show governments how such an approach could take shape (Box 4.5).

> **Box 4.5. WeBuildAI**
>
> WeBuildAI is a collaborative participative framework that allows individuals to create algorithmic policy for their communities. The framework's central premise is to allow stakeholders to build a computational model that reflects their perspectives and have those models act on their account to generate algorithmic policy.
>
> In order to evaluate fairness and efficiency trade-offs, the WeBuildAI framework was applied to a matching algorithm that runs an on-demand food donation transportation service. Through a series of studies in which their views were explored, the service's stakeholders – donors, volunteers, beneficiary organisations and nonprofit employees – successfully used the framework to build the algorithm.
>
> The framework enabled participants to create models that they believed to accurately represent their beliefs. Participatory algorithm design also enhanced procedural fairness and algorithmic distributive results, increased algorithmic awareness among participants and assisted in identifying discrepancies in human decision-making in the governing organisation. As such, WeBuildAI highlighted the viability, promises and challenges of including the community in algorithm creation.
>
> Source: https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3359283.

Efforts like WeBuildAI are part of a growing trend of more participatory approaches around data and AI, which have often lacked community engagement. To remedy this problem, researchers at Monash University in Australia have developed and tested "a participatory methodology to identify approaches to empowering community engagement in data governance" (Sharp et al., 2022[11]), with a view to empowering citizens and residents to engage in complex issues.

Also operating in this field, but with a scope extending beyond algorithms, the virtual Service Canada Labs invites the public to explore digital services in progress and to test experimental ideas with public servants in order to create inclusive services that meet the needs of all Canadians. Uniquely, it presents early work and encourages people of diverse backgrounds to participate in user research by trying new technologies and providing anonymous feedback, allowing for the building of open dialogue. Projects include services around having a child, and a virtual assistant designed to help users apply for benefits.

By zooming in from national AI strategies, these approaches help to strengthen participatory aspects of AI Localism, "the actions taken by local decision-makers to address the use of AI within a city or community", often emerging "because of gaps left by incomplete state, national or global governance frameworks" (Verhulst and Sloane, 2020[12]). Bringing these concepts together helps to align the tangible implementation of algorithms and AI systems with the values of the community and its people. NYU's GovLab maintains a repository of projects applying AI Localism principles, including many focused on participation and engagement. In addition, a number of principles can help local governments take a systems approach to AI localism and build an associated framework. These include: "principles provide a North Star for governance", "public engagement provides a social license", "innovate in how transparency is provided" and "use procurement to shape responsible AI markets", among others (Verhulst, 2022[13]). The support of the London Office of Technology Innovation (LOTI) for the co-creation of a Data Charter with residents of Camden represents a good example of this approach.

A number of grassroots efforts have also taken shape yielding valuable insights for governments. One interesting example identified by OPSI and the MBRCGI is the non-profit Promising Trouble, "an experiment in redistributing power: sharing knowledge, capabilities, and connectivity to build community-driven alternatives to Big Tech and platform power". As stated on the Promising Trouble website, "rather than relying on innovation to trickle down from governments or big business, we believe it's possible for

communities to shape and change technology so it works better for everyone." Core activities include the creation of a Community Tech Fellowship for building "community intelligence" using digital means to tackle complex "wicked problems", and the development of a Digital Policy Lab for UK charities that work with refugees.

Efforts are just starting to emerge in this space and will continue to strengthen in the near-term, giving the public a voice in shaping digital approaches and virtual spaces.

Cross-cutting approaches and resources

Governments and their partners have developed a number of initiatives and frameworks to help leverage the ideas of citizens and residents in ways that can accelerate human-centred change in systemic and cross-cutting ways to transform both the physical and the virtual environment. An excellent example is the Framework for Open Civic Design produced by researchers in the United States, which seeks to move beyond one-size-fits-all models by recognising challenges faced by citizens in participation. The Framework aims to provide "accessible, flexible, and meaningful ways to engage" that bring together the fields of public participation, crowdsourcing and design thinking (Reynante, Dow and Mahyar, 2021[14]). Also in the United States, the government's Federal Crowdsourcing and Citizen Science Toolkit provides a five-step process for carrying out projects.

An example of a more applied initiative within a national government is France's Citizen Initiative Accelerator, which is helping to manifest citizen ideas as reality (Box 4.6).

Box 4.6. Citizen Initiative Accelerator (France)

Launched by President Emmanuel Macron at the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Summit in 2021, the Citizen Initiative Accelerator (AIC) supports citizen-led projects that serve the public good. After being screened by public administration representatives and a panel of citizens, the selected projects benefit from six-month, tailor-made support, co-ordinated by one referral person in the administration, to accelerate their development. This unique programme promotes new modes of co-operation between the state and civil society in order to achieve what has been called "augmented public service delivery".

The AIC is one of a cohort of selected initiatives entering the acceleration phase in April 2022, and is therefore experimental, both in terms of its objectives and its operation. Its success in regularly welcoming new project promotions and expanding the number of projects implies structuring and running the programme from start to finish. This requires planning and the provision of adequate resources. For this, the mobilisation of referral persons in the administrations is essential. Indeed, this process will only be sustainable if the project is recognised and valued.

In order to ensure that the winning projects continue to develop their activities beyond the six-month support period, feedback sessions with each project and the involved partners are being set up. Furthermore, a community will be created around the AIC to bring together winning projects, administrative referents and all actors in the ecosystem. Finally, a monitoring and evaluation system is being set up in partnership with social and political science researchers, and will be active in the first half of 2023. This will add a reflective and evaluative dimension to the system and ensure that project impacts are properly measured and recognised.

Source: https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/citizen-initiative-accelerator.

Many additional relevant resources can be found on OPSI's Toolkit Navigator, which catalogues hundreds of toolkits and resources, including in relevant areas of open government.

Case Study: #FreetownTheTreeTown (Freetown, Sierra Leone)

In Freetown, heavy rains coupled with deforestation have resulted in devastating landslides, including a disastrous one in 2017 which claimed nearly 1 000 lives. In 2020, the Freetown City Council decided to address this risk by launching #FreetownTheTreeTown, an initiative that aims to increase the city's green space and vegetation cover. With the involvement of the local community, the city aimed at planting, growing and tracking 1 million trees and restoring 3 000 hectares of land, sequestering approximately 69 000 tonnes of CO_2. The initiative uses innovative, disruptive, low-cost digital technology for tree-tracking. It also creates new jobs for women and young people in green sectors as every tree has been assigned a unique identification code that can be transformed into "impact tokens" and sold as carbon offsets.

Problem

Each year, more than 100 000 people in search of employment move to Freetown, and the urban fringes continue to push deeper into the steep forest expanses outside the city. This trend worsens the alarming levels of deforestation in Sierra Leone, one of the countries most in danger from climate change. As a result of these phenomena, an equivalent of 12% of total canopy in the area has been lost per year between 2011 and 2018. Loss of tree canopy directly affects catchment areas for water reserves and, in combination with heavy rains, also exacerbates the risks of landslides, flooding and coastal erosion. Furthermore, loss of tree and vegetation cover also threatens biodiversity.

The challenges posed by current environmental challenges are exacerbated by people's reluctance to invest in public goods. Even at the community level, the costs of environmental problems are diffused across the whole community, and no one wants to invest the necessary time and resources to solve them. Unless citizens and residents develop ownership of these problems, deforestation and global warming will worsen and, areas such as Sierra Leone could become inhabitable.
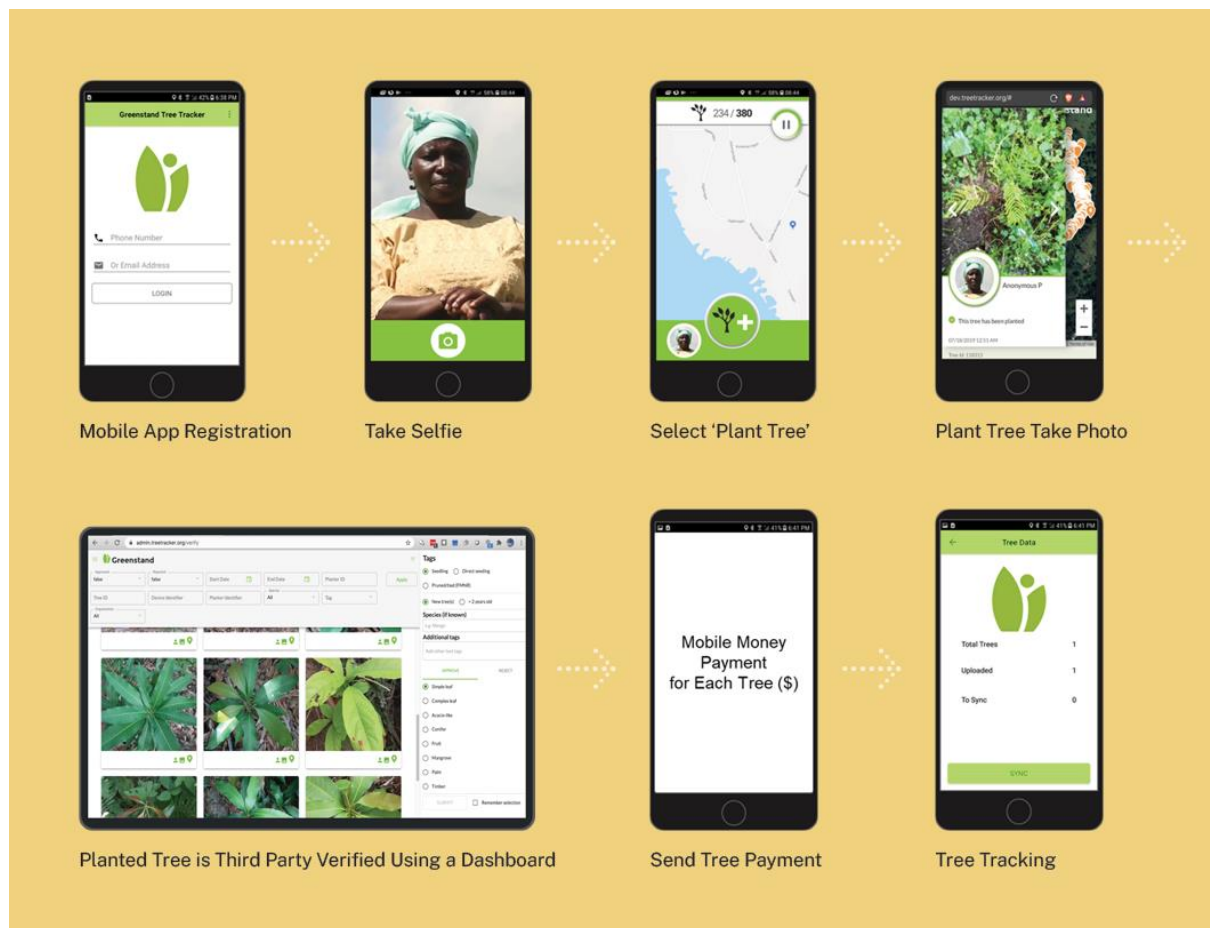
An innovative solution

Against a backdrop of rapid urbanisation and alarming deforestation, the Freetown City Council evolved a plan to plant and grow 1 million trees by 2022 – an effort that would increase the city's vegetation cover by 50%. After over 400 meetings organised to engage citizens and encourage them to voice their needs, the City Council developed #FreetownTheTreeTown. Recognising that addressing deforestation was a priority and that developing ownership was essential to combat this threat, the innovative project harnesses digital and disruptive technology to create employment opportunities, providing eco-friendly alternatives to working in dangerous and environmentally damaging industries like mining. Furthermore, by incentivising people to plant trees, it also helps establish long-term climate resilience for the community. For instance, the campaign provides ecosystem benefits including reduced heat stress, improved air and water quality, and reduced flooding and landslide risks.

Freetown City Council has partnered with Environmental Foundation for Africa (EFA), the NGO responsible for implementing the tree planting. The Freetown City Council and EFA are working closely with neighbouring Western Area Rural District Council, and with Greenstand, a nonprofit that develops open-source technology to manage environmental goods and services. Thanks to this collaboration and funding from the World Bank, the TreeTracker app was developed. The app allows members of the community of Freetown to register as planters of trees. After planting a tree in a location decided collectively, members can create a unique geotagged record, or ID, for each new tree, which is verified with a photo. Growers

revisit each tree they "own" periodically, to water and maintain them, and document the plant's survival. In return for their efforts, they receive micropayments.

Thanks to this model (Figure 4.9), citizens and residents of Freetown have implemented community ownership across the entire tree-growing project chain. To secure the sustainability of the project, even in the absence of external funding, tree IDs can be turned into "impact tokens", making members of the community of Freetown the owners of specific trees. This allows participants to buy and sell trees to other participants as well as to external actors as carbon offsets. Doing so allows firms to compensate their own CO_2 emissions while financing tree planters who earn a living by participating in this project.

Figure 4.9. How #FreetownTheTreeTown works

Source: https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainablecities/freetownthetreetown-campaign-using-digital-tools-encourage-tree-cultivation.

Novelty

The #FreetownTheTreeTown project is a unique tree-planting initiative that actively involves citizens and residents in mitigating deforestation. Communities are not only involved in planting but also in growing and maintaining the trees. The main innovation of this project is its business model which makes it possible to reward citizens for their investment of time and effort in planting tree, overcoming the free-riding problem that generally affects projects that tackle climate change, and making the initiative sustainable without public funding.

Results and impact

Since 2020, Freetown has planted more than 560 000 trees in climate-vulnerable areas, covering 578 hectares of urban land and benefiting 300+ communities. The initiative has created over 1 200 jobs especially for marginalised, vulnerable and underemployed women and young people, 80% of which went to young people, including 44% to women. The project has also sold more than 5 000 tree "impact tokens", and the revenue of these will provide financing to plant and grow an additional 5 000 trees during the next phase.

This innovation is effectively raising community awareness of the importance of reforestation for reducing climate-related disasters. The city recognises that 1 million trees will not meet the challenge of deforestation and climate breakdown in the city, and plans to plant an additional 4 million trees over the next ten years using the #FreetownTheTreeTown community-growing approach. These trees will be cultivated along major and secondary roads, around key water sources and other critical infrastructure, and within communities, neighbourhoods and public spaces. In particular, 50 000 mangrove trees will be planted to restore damaged coastal wetlands.

Challenges and lessons learned

The main challenges that affected the project have been acts of vandalism such as stealing and burning of trees, the illegal encroachment of land where tree were planted, and other natural conditions. Although the project is structured as a campaign, and great efforts have been made to communicate its importance and to support cultural change, these acts of violence still take place. To counter them, the project team identified one powerful solution: community engagement. Engaging with people, talking with them and investing time in the field has produced results. When acts of vandalism and burning take place in areas where people are highly involved in the project and are motivated, the damaged trees are rapidly restored. The project team acknowledges that such acts of violence are persistent, but explains that community engagement can help prevent them and decrease their impact. Furthermore, to protect trees from fires, the project team has developed fire breaks which are placed around trees after the area surrounding them has been cleared. This solution ensures that fires have a lower probability of damaging trees.

Replicability

This project is a particularly interesting innovation whose replication, in particular in the context of developing countries, would be highly beneficial. Although its success has been due in part to the financial investments of the Freetown City Council, the World Bank and the partnership with EFA, its business model has the potential to make the project financially sustainable and independent. Further evidence will be available in 2023, when funding from the World Bank ends.

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