REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Mansa Municipal Council
Citizen Engagement Strategy

With a Focus on Output Based Budgeting and Project Implementation Management

Zambia Devolution support program

2025

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Citizen engagement (CE) is a cornerstone of democratic governance and participatory development. It ensures that people's voices are reflected in decisions that affect their welfare, thereby strengthening accountability and fostering trust between citizens and local authorities. In Zambia, decentralization has given local authorities greater responsibility for service delivery, economic development, and participatory budgeting. Within this framework, citizens are no longer viewed merely as recipients of services but as active partners in governance.

The Mansa Municipal Council (MMC), operating under the Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019, recognizes the constitutional right of citizens to participate in governance processes. In alignment with Article 45 of the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act No. 2 of 2016, which emphasizes inclusive governance, the Council acknowledges citizen engagement as both a legal and moral obligation.

The CES has been developed to institutionalize citizen participation across all stages of the budget and project cycle processes, ensuring that public resources are utilized effectively, and development outcomes reflect community priorities. The document further aligns with the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) and the Zambia Devolution Support Programme (ZDSP), both of which emphasize people-centered governance and fiscal transparency at the local level.

This Strategy, therefore, serves as a guiding document for the Council's commitment to:

- Empower citizens with the knowledge and tools to contribute meaningfully to planning and budgeting processes;
- Improve the quality of decisions made through participatory consultations;
- Strengthen trust, collaboration, and mutual accountability between the Council and the residents of Mansa District.

By institutionalizing citizen engagement, Mansa Municipal Council aims to deepen democracy, foster local ownership of development programmes, and ensure equitable distribution of resources across communities.

1.2 Current Citizen Engagement Efforts by Mansa Municipal Council

Mansa Municipal Council has made considerable strides in promoting citizen participation in its planning, budgeting, and project implementation processes. Several participatory mechanisms have been established in recent years, including:

- **Ward Development Committees (WDCs):** The primary community structures responsible for articulating local priorities during the budget formulation process.
- **Town Hall Meetings and Budget Hearings:** Platforms for citizens to review proposed budgets, discuss project allocations, and provide feedback.
- **Community Radio Engagements:** Used to communicate council activities, project updates, and public announcements.
- **Public Notices and Suggestion Boxes:** Installed at the Civic Centre and Ward offices to enhance transparency and feedback mechanisms.
- **Stakeholder Forums:** Periodically held with business associations, civil society groups, and traditional authorities to discuss socio-economic issues.

Advantages and Benefits of Existing CE Efforts

- Enhanced transparency in the allocation and use of public resources.
- Greater inclusivity in decision-making, particularly through WDC representation.
- Improved collaboration between the Council, traditional leaders, and community-based organizations.
- Strengthened awareness among citizens of Council roles and responsibilities.

Disadvantages and Gaps Identified

- Limited inclusion of vulnerable groups such as women, youths, and persons with disabilities in consultations.
- Inconsistent feedback and follow-up on community contributions after budget hearings.
- Insufficient awareness of the budget and project implementation cycles.
- Weak integration of digital and modern communication tools in public engagement.

Contribution of the CES

This Strategy will address the identified gaps by:

- Expanding the participation base to include marginalized and vulnerable populations.
- Institutionalizing communication and feedback loops to ensure two-way engagement.
- Integrating technology-driven solutions for real-time updates and transparency.
- Creating structured frameworks that guide engagement throughout the entire fiscal cycle.

2. VISION, AIM, AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Vision

To create an inclusive, transparent, and participatory local governance environment that empowers citizens to influence decision-making, planning, and implementation of development initiatives in Mansa District by 2028.

The CES will be implemented over a three-year period (2025–2028), with each year having an annual implementation plan (AIP). Lessons learned from annual reviews will be incorporated into subsequent plans, and a comprehensive review will be conducted in 2028 to inform future strategies.

2.2 Aim

The main aim of the Citizen Engagement Strategy is to provide a structured framework that ensures consistent, meaningful, and inclusive citizen participation in all phases of the Council's budget and project cycle. This will enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in public financial management and decision-making processes.

2.3 Objectives

The CES commits to addressing the existing challenges by pursuing the following objectives:

1. Increase awareness and understanding of the Council's budget and project cycle among citizens.
2. Enhance inclusivity by promoting participation from all social groups, particularly women, youths, and persons with disabilities.

3. Strengthen mechanisms for citizen monitoring and feedback on project implementation and budget utilization.
4. Promote transparency and trust through consistent dissemination of information on budgets, projects, and expenditures.
5. Institutionalize participatory decision-making across all governance levels within the Council.

3. APPROACHES AND METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

Citizen engagement in Mansa Municipal Council will adopt participatory, transparent, and inclusive approaches. The methods will be adaptable to various social, cultural, and economic contexts to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.

A. Citizen Participation in Key Decision-Making and Budget Cycle Processes

The Council will ensure that citizens are actively involved from the formulation stage to evaluation. Key initiatives include:

- Presenting draft budgets to stakeholders early for review and feedback on allocations and priorities.
- Conducting pre-budget consultations at the ward level through WDCs, involving women, youths, and traditional leaders.
- Organizing annual Town Hall meetings to discuss the proposed and approved budgets.
- Ensuring that all engagement sessions are accessible to persons with disabilities through interpreters and inclusive communication methods.

B. Citizen Monitoring of Budget and Project Implementation

- Involving community representatives in monitoring and evaluation teams.
- Publishing project implementation updates and progress reports quarterly.
- Using technology (Council website, social media, SMS alerts) for real-time project updates.
- Developing and operationalizing a **Citizen Feedback Portal** for submission of complaints, queries, and compliments.

- Conducting community feedback forums after each budget cycle to discuss progress and challenges.

These approaches will foster mutual accountability, improve service delivery, and enhance trust between the Council and citizens.

4. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The implementation of the Citizen Engagement Strategy (CES) will be undertaken in a phased and systematic manner to ensure effective integration into the Council's governance framework and alignment with the **annual budget calendar**. The phased approach will allow for gradual strengthening of institutional capacities, increased citizen participation, and effective monitoring of results. Each phase will build upon lessons learned from previous cycles to enhance the quality and inclusivity of citizen engagement in the Council's decision-making and service delivery processes.

The CES implementation will follow four key action areas as outlined below:

1. Assessment of Current Citizen Engagement Practices and Institutional Capacity

The first phase will focus on conducting a comprehensive assessment of existing citizen engagement mechanisms within the Council. This will include evaluating current participatory structures such as **Ward Development Committees (WDCs)**, **Community Welfare Assistance Committees (CWACs)**, **Neighborhood Health Committees (NHCs)**, and other civic platforms. The assessment will identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improving engagement throughout the **budget and project cycle**.

This phase will also assess the institutional capacity of Council departments to facilitate meaningful participation covering aspects such as human resources, communication infrastructure, technological tools, and existing feedback mechanisms. The results of the assessment will inform the development of targeted interventions and capacity-building initiatives.

2. Identification of Engagement Opportunities Across the Budget Cycle

Building upon the assessment findings, the second phase will identify strategic points of engagement for citizens during the **budget preparation, approval, execution, and evaluation stages**. These

engagement opportunities will be mapped against the annual planning calendar to ensure synchronization with Council activities.

Key activities will include:

- Organizing **community consultations and budget hearings** to solicit inputs on proposed projects and spending priorities;
- Establishing mechanisms for continuous communication between the Council and citizens through meetings, reports, and digital platforms;
- Ensuring inclusive participation by vulnerable and marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities; and
- Institutionalizing feedback loops to communicate decisions made based on citizen input.

This phase will promote transparency, accountability, and a sense of shared ownership of development initiatives.

3. Development of Stakeholder Engagement and Communication Plans

In this phase, the Council will formalize its engagement framework by developing a comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Plan and a Communication Plan. These will define how different actors including community leaders, civil society organizations, private sector representatives, traditional authorities, and the media will participate in CES implementation.

The Stakeholder Engagement Plan will outline the roles, responsibilities, and timelines for each stakeholder group, while the Communication Plan will specify the information dissemination channels, feedback mechanisms, and grievance redress systems. Emphasis will be placed on ensuring two-way communication and building long-term relationships between the Council and citizens.

Furthermore, these plans will integrate capacity-building activities for both council staff and community structures to enhance facilitation, dialogue, and participatory planning skills.

4. Periodic Monitoring, Evaluation, and Revision of Citizen Engagement Activities

The final phase will involve establishing a robust **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)** framework to track progress in CES implementation. Periodic reviews will be conducted to assess whether the set objectives are being achieved, identify lessons learned, and make necessary adjustments.

Monitoring indicators will focus on areas such as:

- Levels of citizen participation across wards;
- Inclusivity of marginalized groups in decision-making;
- Timeliness and transparency of information shared; and
- Effectiveness of feedback and grievance handling mechanisms.

Regular progress reports will be prepared and shared with stakeholders to ensure accountability. Annual reviews will incorporate feedback from citizens and partner institutions to inform revisions of the CES and enhance its effectiveness.

To ensure sustainability, feedback from each year's implementation will feed into the next cycle, and a **comprehensive CES review report** will be produced at the beginning of the third year. This will allow the Council to institutionalize best practices and adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities in citizen engagement.

Key Stakeholders

Stakeholders to be engaged include:

- Local citizens
- Ward Development Committees (WDCs)
- Traditional and community leaders
- Community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Civil society organizations (CSOs)
- Faith-based organizations (FBOs)
- Government line ministries and agencies
- Youth and women's groups

- Persons with disabilities
- Private sector and business community
- Academic institutions
- Media houses

Table 1: Proposed Stakeholder Engagement Plan Summary

Budget Stage	Key Activities	Stakeholders Involved	Timeline
Preparation for Budget Formulation	WDC consultations, project proposal collection, town hall discussions, submission of stakeholder reports to MLGRD	WDCs, traditional leaders, CSOs, citizens	Q1–Q2 annually
Budget Approval	Public review of draft budget, feedback dissemination, publication of final budget summary	Council, media, public	Q3 annually
Budget Execution & Monitoring	Project monitoring, financial tracking, feedback sessions, performance reporting	WDCs, CWACs, businesses, citizens	Q3–Q4 annually
Budget Evaluation & Review	Outcome assessment, gender-sensitive review, feedback consolidation	Council, citizens, PLGOs	End of FY

5. COMMUNICATION PLAN

Effective communication is a cornerstone of successful citizen engagement. The communication plan aims to ensure that citizens, stakeholders, and partners are well-informed, actively involved, and able to provide meaningful feedback on the implementation of the Citizen Engagement Strategy (CES). Through structured and transparent communication channels, the Council seeks to promote inclusivity, accountability, and trust between local authorities and the public.

The communication plan will utilize a combination of traditional, digital, and community-based communication methods to reach diverse audiences across Mansa District, ensuring that information dissemination is accessible, timely, and participatory.

Objectives of the Communication Plan

The objectives of this communication plan are as follows:

- To increase awareness and understanding of the Citizen Engagement Strategy (CES), its purpose, and benefits among community members, civic organizations, and development partners.
- To publicize key information, including consultation meeting schedules, council decisions, approved budgets, and progress reports related to development projects.
- To establish and operationalize a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) to allow citizens to raise concerns, lodge complaints, and provide feedback on Council operations in a structured and timely manner.
- To enhance transparency and accountability by ensuring that Council activities, financial updates, and performance indicators are communicated regularly to the public.
- To strengthen stakeholder relationships by maintaining two-way communication and ensuring that feedback from citizens informs future Council planning and decision-making processes.

Communication Strategies and Approaches

To achieve the above objectives, the Council will adopt multiple strategies tailored to the needs and capacities of different stakeholder groups. These strategies will include:

1. **Public Information Dissemination**
    - Use of notice boards at the Council offices and ward centres to display announcements, meeting schedules, and project progress updates.
    - Dissemination of information through local radio programs and community announcements to reach wider audiences, including those in rural areas.
    - Publication of newsletters, brochures, and press releases highlighting CES activities and outcomes.
2. **Digital and Interactive Communication Platforms**
    - Regular updates on the Council's official website and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp groups) to share documents, event details, and public feedback summaries.

- Development of a digital feedback form and online complaint submission platform linked to the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM).
- Utilization of SMS alerts or community WhatsApp broadcast lists to notify residents of upcoming consultations, budget hearings, and public events.

3. **Direct Citizen Engagement Forums**
   - Conducting Town Hall meetings, focus group discussions, and ward-level consultations to facilitate direct dialogue between Council representatives and community members.
   - Encouraging active participation of Ward Development Committees (WDCs), traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and business associations in information-sharing sessions.
   - Ensuring communication materials are translated into local languages to enhance inclusivity and comprehension among all community groups.
4. **Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM)**
   - The GRM will serve as a structured system for receiving, recording, and responding to citizen concerns, complaints, and suggestions.
   - Citizens will be able to lodge grievances through multiple entry points: suggestion boxes, community meetings, a dedicated phone hotline, or digital submissions.
   - The Council's Public Relations Office will oversee the GRM, ensuring timely resolution of complaints and feedback to affected individuals or groups.
   - Periodic summaries of grievances and actions taken will be publicly shared to reinforce transparency and accountability.

Table 2: Communication Plan Summary

Deliverable / Activity	Target Stakeholders	Frequency	Proposed Timeline / Date	Responsible Office	Communication Method	Comments
Public announcement of CES and its objectives	General public, WDCs, traditional leaders, CSOs	Quarterly	Q1 FY 2025	Public Relations Office	Radio programs, public meetings, Council website	Include local radio and social media campaigns
Dissemination of Council	Business community, civic	Monthly	Throughout FY 2025	Administration & PR Unit	Notice boards, website, circulars	To improve transparen

meeting schedules and minutes	groups, citizens					cy in governance
Publication of project progress reports	WDCs, development partners, community members	Quarterly	FY 2025–2026	Planning Department	Reports, newsletters, radio, social media	Linked to LED and ZDSP reporting
Grievance collection and feedback sharing	Citizens, CSOs, affected groups	Continuous	FY 2025 onwards	PR Office & Customer Service Desk	Suggestion boxes, hotline, online forms	Reports to be consolidated bi-annually
Community sensitization on CES and GRM	Traditional leaders, women and youth groups, PWDs	Bi-annually	FY 2025–2027	PR Office & Gender Desk	Outreach campaigns, local radio, posters	Encourage inclusion and accessibility
Press briefings and stakeholder updates	Media, development partners, government department	As required	FY 2025–2027	Town Clerk & PRO	Press conferences, media statements	Reinforce inter-institutional collaboration

Expected Outcomes of the Communication Plan

- Increased public awareness and participation in Council activities.
- Strengthened feedback and accountability mechanisms.
- Improved transparency in budget and project implementation processes.
- Enhanced trust and collaboration between the Council and citizens.
- Greater visibility of Council efforts under the Citizen Engagement Strategy.

6. BUDGET (FOR CES IMPLEMENTATION)

The successful implementation of the Citizen Engagement Strategy (CES) will require the deliberate allocation of adequate financial and material resources by the Council. The Council recognizes that without sufficient funding, the vision of inclusive, transparent, and participatory governance cannot be fully realized. Therefore, resources will be earmarked annually within the Council's operational

and development budgets to facilitate the smooth execution of CES activities across all stages of the budget and project cycles.

The CES budget will be integrated under the Governance, Administration, and Public Relations budget lines. However, where feasible, the Council will also leverage cooperating partner support under the Zambia Devolution Support Programme (ZDSP) framework, as well as explore additional partnerships with civil society organizations, private sector actors, and community-based structures to supplement financial gaps.

The allocated funds will specifically cater for, but not be limited to, the following priority areas:

1. **Public Consultations and Outreach Activities**
    - Facilitation of community meetings, town hall engagements, and focus group discussions across wards to ensure broad-based citizen participation.
    - Logistical arrangements such as transport, venue hire, refreshments, and interpretation services for inclusive participation, including persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups.
2. **Production and Dissemination of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) Materials**
    - Printing and distribution of simplified budget summaries, posters, leaflets, and newsletters to enhance citizen understanding of the budget and project implementation processes.
    - Use of radio programs, community notice boards, and social media platforms for timely dissemination of information and updates.
3. **Capacity Building and Training for Key Stakeholders**
    - Training of Ward Development Committees (WDCs), community leaders, and civic groups on participatory budgeting, monitoring, and feedback mechanisms.
    - Strengthening the technical and facilitation skills of council officers responsible for community engagement, communication, and public relations.
4. **Digital Tools and Platforms for Citizen Engagement and Feedback Collection**
    - Development and maintenance of digital interfaces, including a Council website portal and mobile platforms, to enable citizens to submit views, monitor projects, and access public information in real time.

- Procurement of ICT equipment and internet connectivity to support data collection and reporting during engagement processes.

5. **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Activities**
    - Conducting periodic monitoring and evaluation exercises to assess the effectiveness of CES implementation and inform continuous improvement.
    - Production and publication of citizen feedback reports and annual CES performance reviews for public disclosure.
6. **Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) Operations**
    - Establishment and operationalization of feedback desks at ward and district levels to document and resolve citizen concerns.
    - Provision for training staff on grievance handling and ethical communication with the public.
7. **Cross-Cutting Activities**
    - Promotion of gender equity, inclusivity, and environmental sustainability in all citizen engagement activities.
    - Resource mobilization initiatives aimed at strengthening partnerships and securing long-term sustainability of the CES framework.

In addition, the Council will ensure that the **annual CES implementation budget** aligns with the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and local development priorities. A costed implementation matrix will be developed to guide expenditure tracking and accountability.

The Council remains committed to prudent financial management, ensuring that all CES funds are used efficiently, transparently, and in accordance with established public financial management guidelines. Periodic financial reports will be shared with key stakeholders, including Ward Development Committees, cooperating partners, and the general public, to reinforce accountability and trust

7. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND REPORTING

The CES will be monitored through structured performance indicators to ensure accountability and track progress. Quarterly and annual reports will be produced by the Council's Planning Department in collaboration with the Public Relations Office.

Monitoring activities will include:

- Regular review of CE activities and participation statistics.
- Documentation of citizen feedback and grievances.
- Public dissemination of monitoring findings through local platforms.

The Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) will ensure continuous two-way communication by allowing citizens to raise concerns regarding service delivery, project delays, or transparency. Evaluation will focus on the impact of engagement on decision-making, project implementation, and community satisfaction.

8. CONCLUSION

The development of this Citizen Engagement Strategy (CES) reflects Mansa Municipal Council's recognition of the critical role that citizens play in democratic governance and effective public service delivery. The CES formalizes processes that were previously fragmented, ensuring that all citizen engagement activities are structured, inclusive, and outcome-oriented. The Strategy reinforces the Council's unwavering commitment to inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. Through its implementation, Mansa Municipal Council will strengthen civic participation, promote equitable resource distribution, and foster trust between the Council and the people of Mansa District. This CES will therefore serve as a blueprint for collaborative governance, where citizens and local authorities work hand-in-hand to achieve sustainable development outcomes in line with Zambia's Vision 2030 and the Eighth National Development Plan.