

Citizen-Centred Governance

The Bottom-Up Approach

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AAPAM CONFERENCE • 24 SEPTEMBER
2026



Opening Reflections...

“The public sector of tomorrow will be judged not only by what it delivers, but by how well it listens, learns and adapts.”

“Africa does not need governments that merely speak to citizens; it needs governments that listen to citizens, learn from them, and act with them.”

Questions for thought...

- ☐ How would citizens redesign one public service today?
- ☐ What information would they need before making that choice?
- ☐ Where can they influence the decision?
- ☐ What happens after they provide feedback?
- ☐ Can citizens see what changed because they participated?

The Governance Paradigm Is Changing

“From governing **FOR** citizens to governing **WITH** citizens.”

**Government
knows**

**Government
consults**

**Government
listens**

**Government
co-designs**

**Government
+ citizens
co-create**

What Is Citizen-Centred Governance?

- ❑ Public institutions organize policies, decisions, services and accountability around citizens' needs, experiences, rights and expectations.
- ❑ Core attributes: accessibility, transparency, participation, responsiveness, accountability and adaptability.
- ❑ Citizens are not only beneficiaries; they are sources of evidence, ideas, monitoring and public intelligence.
- ❑ Citizen-centred governance embraces a 'Bottom-up Approach' model of decision-making in service delivery.

The Limits Of a Purely Top-down Model

Government decides → Citizens receive → Problems emerge → Citizens complain → Government reacts

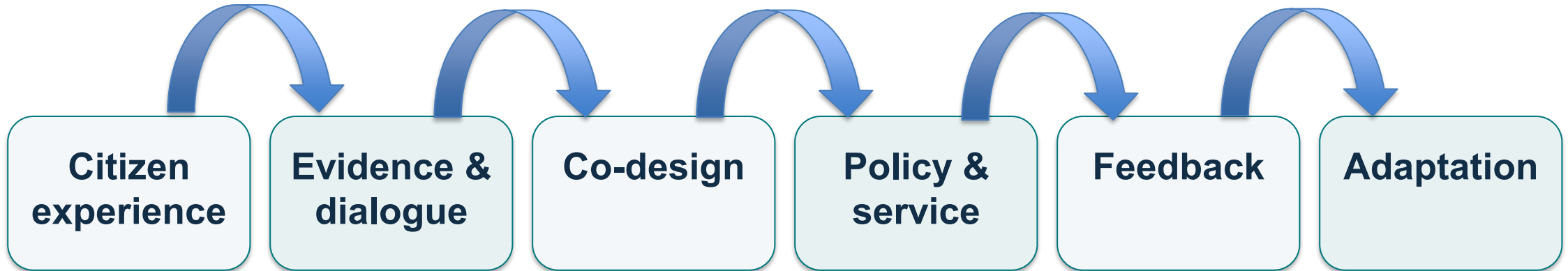
versus

Government informs → Citizens participate → Government listens → Evidence is analyzed → Joint action → Feedback → Government learns → Policy adapts

❑ **And so....**

❑ “The greatest weakness of a purely top-down system is not that government makes decisions; *it is that government may make decisions without knowing enough about the people whose lives those decisions affect.*”

The Bottom-Up Approach



“Citizens are not merely recipients of public value; they are producers of public intelligence.”

Why Citizen-Centred Governance Is Anticipatory

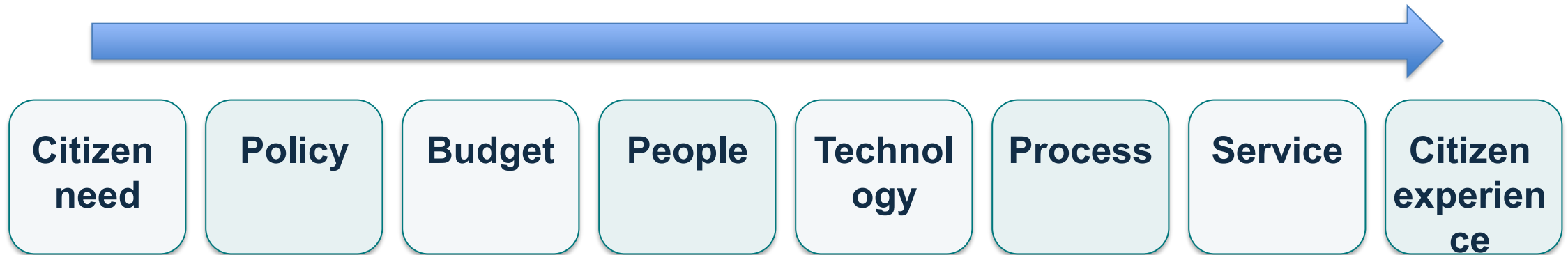
Reactive government

- ☐ Waits for complaints
- ☐ Responds to visible crises
- ☐ Treats issues as isolated incidents
- ☐ Acts after dissatisfaction

Anticipatory government

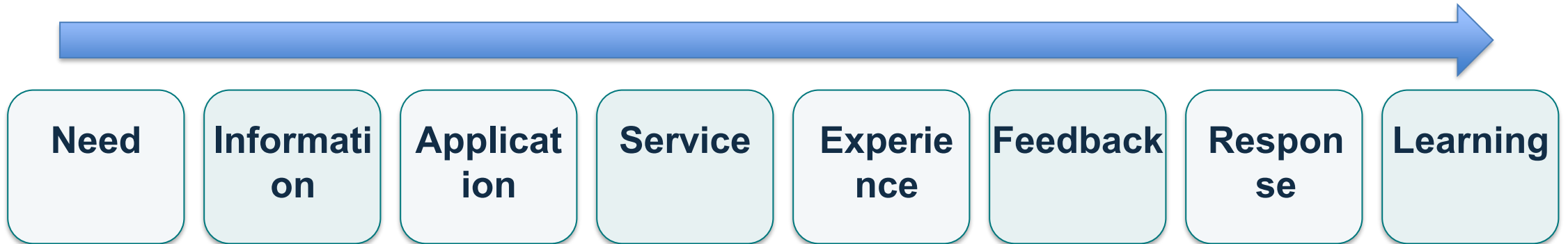
- ☐ Detects weak signals
- ☐ Analyses patterns
- ☐ Engages affected communities early
- ☐ Intervenes before problems escalate

Systems Thinking: See the Whole Citizen Experience



“When the same complaint returns repeatedly, stop treating it as a complaint and start treating it as a systems problem.”

Map the Citizen Journey



“Where in this journey does your institution listen and where should it listen?”

PILLAR ONE

Open Governance

Information is the infrastructure of meaningful participation.

Kenya's Constitutional & Legal Foundation

- ❑ Constitution, Article 10: participation of the people, transparency and accountability among national values and principles of governance.
- ❑ Article 35: citizens' right of access to information held by the State.
- ❑ Access to Information Act, 2016: framework for access and proactive disclosure, subject to lawful exemptions.
- ❑ Access to Information Regulations, 2023: reinforce proactive disclosure and accessible/machine-readable information.

From Reactive Disclosure to Proactive Disclosure

Reactive disclosure

- ☐ Citizen requests information
- ☐ Institution processes request
- ☐ Information is released
- ☐ Citizen acts on it

Proactive disclosure

- ☐ Institution anticipates information needs
- ☐ Information is published routinely
- ☐ Data is accessible and usable

“Publicize before citizens have to demand.”

Information ≠ Transparency

Available

Accessible

**Understa
ndable**

Timely

Reliable

Usable

Relevant

“Transparency is not the volume of information released; it is the extent to which citizens can understand and use it.”

Digital Technology as an Enabler of Open Governance

Information

- ❑ Open-data portals
- ❑ Digital dashboards
- ❑ Websites & social media
- ❑ SMS / mobile notifications

Participation & accountability

- ❑ Online consultations
- ❑ E-petitions & surveys
- ❑ Virtual town halls
- ❑ Project / expenditure tracking
- ❑ Digital complaints systems

Digital-First vs Citizen-Centred

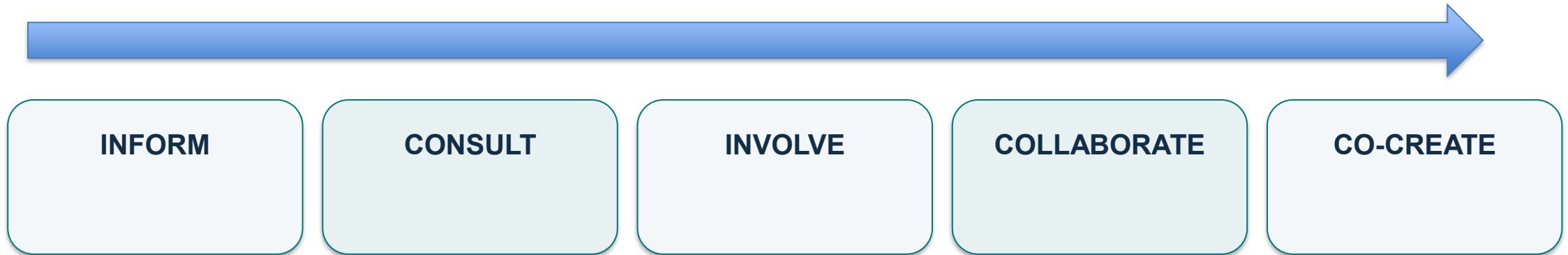
- ❑ Digital channels can exclude citizens with limited connectivity, affordability, accessibility or digital literacy.
- ❑ Maintain multiple channels: digital + physical + telephone + community-based mechanisms.
- ❑ Design for persons with disabilities, marginalized communities and different language needs.
- ❑ Technology should therefore amplify participation and not become a new barrier.

PILLAR TWO

Institutionalizing Citizen Engagement

Participation must become an institutional capability and not an occasional event.

The Participation Continuum



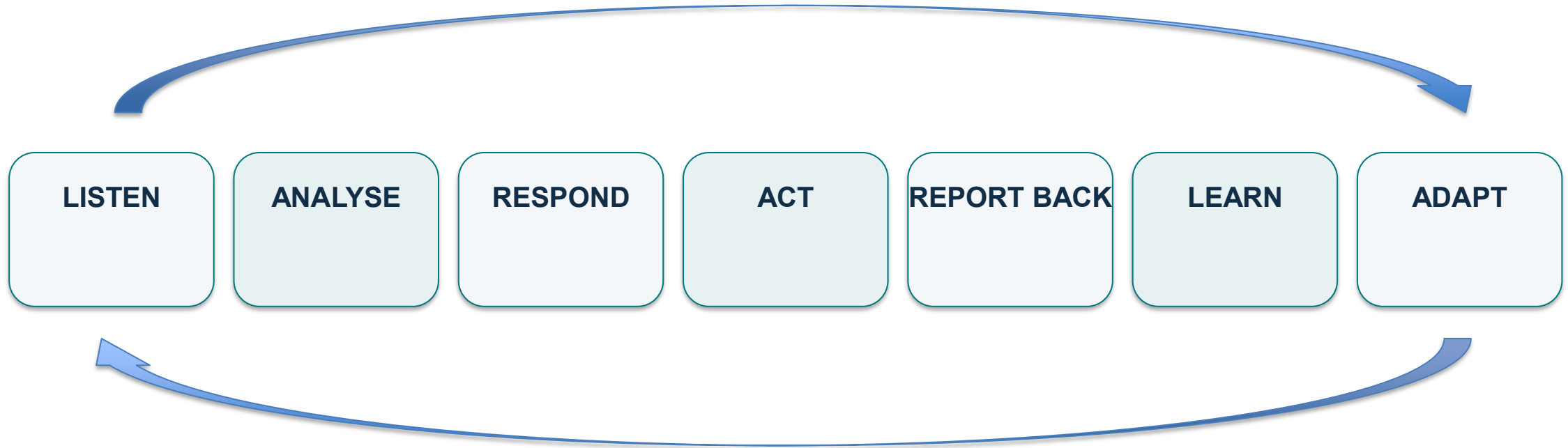
“The real question is not whether citizens were consulted, but whether their participation influenced the outcome.”

Kenya: Participation as an Institutional Function

- ❑ County Governments Act, 2012 provides principles including timely access to information, access to policy/decision processes, inclusion and redress.
- ❑ Section 91 recognizes participation platforms including ICT-based platforms, town halls, budget fora and citizen fora.

The opportunity here is that we move from compliance-oriented participation to continuous citizen intelligence.

Close the Feedback Loop

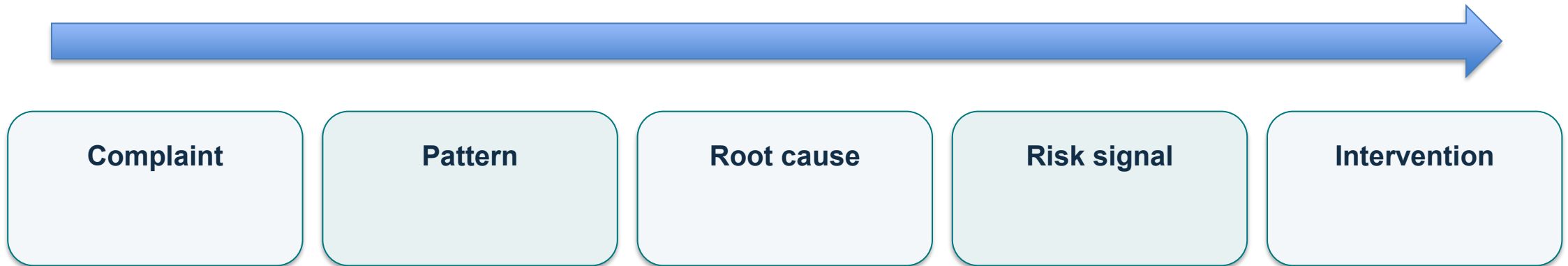


“Participation without feedback is consultation without closure.”

Build a Citizen Voice Management System

- ❑ Multiple channels: physical, telephone, SMS, web, mobile, social media and community engagement.
- ❑ Centralized recording and categorization of feedback.
- ❑ Clear escalation pathways and response standards.
- ❑ Trend analysis to identify systemic issues and emerging risks.
- ❑ *Closure*: citizens receive an outcome or explanation.

From Complaint Management to Anticipatory Management



“A complaint is not merely a problem to be resolved; it is a signal about how the system is performing.”

AI, Data Analytics & the Citizen Voice

What technology can help do

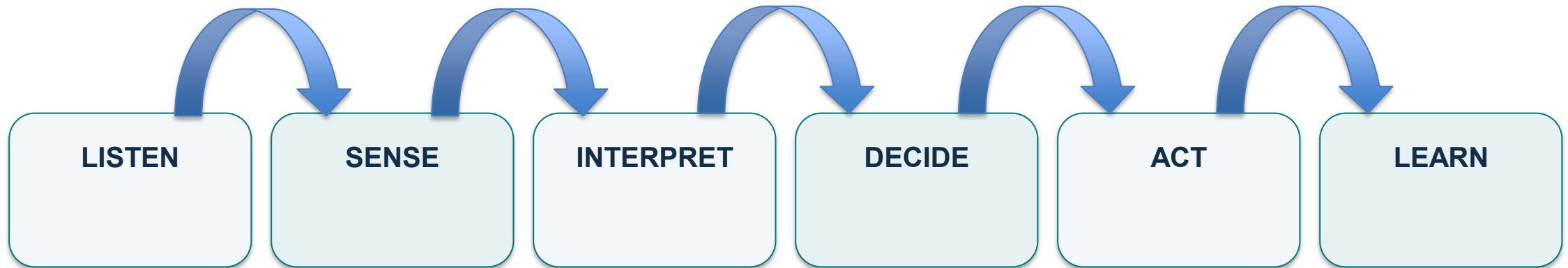
- ☐ Classify feedback
- ☐ Analyze large volumes
- ☐ Identify recurring issues
- ☐ Detect geographic/trend hotspots
- ☐ Summarize consultations
- ☐ Surface emerging signals

What leadership must protect

- ☐ Human oversight
- ☐ Privacy
- ☐ Fairness
- ☐ Transparency
- ☐ Accountability
- ☐ Democratic judgement

“Technology could digitize a bad government process; leadership must transform it.”

Leadership: From Command & Control to Listen, Learn & Lead



The citizen-centred leader is a listener, systems thinker, data user, convenor, innovator, communicator and trust builder.

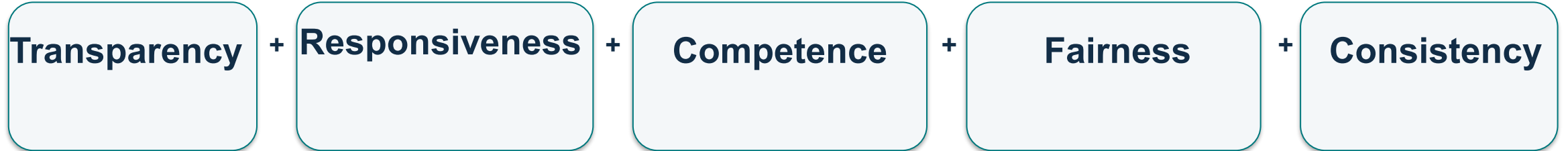
The 7-L Model of Citizen for Centred Leadership in Governance

1–4: Build the listening system 5–7: Convert voice into change

- ❑ LEARN — understand lived experience
- ❑ LISTEN — create structured voice channels
- ❑ LIBERATE INFORMATION — proactive disclosure
- ❑ LINK — connect voice to decision-makers

- ❑ LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY — broaden & analyze
- ❑ LEAD CHANGE — convert intelligence into reform
- ❑ LOOP BACK — show citizens what changed

Citizen Trust Is an Institutional Outcome



“Trust grows when citizens see that speaking to government can actually change government.”

Common Failure Modes

Participation failures

- ❑ Participation theatre
- ❑ Information dumping
- ❑ Tokenism
- ❑ Digital exclusion

Feedback failures

- ❑ Feedback black holes
- ❑ Data without action
- ❑ No response standards
- ❑ Leadership resistance to criticism

Five Tests of Meaningful Engagement- the 5-Rs test

REACH

RELEVANCE

**REPRESENTA
TION**

**RESPONSIV
ENESS**

RESULTS

“What changed because citizens participated?”

Always Measure What Matters

Access & participation

- ☐ % information proactively disclosed
- ☐ Information response time
- ☐ Participation diversity
- ☐ Coverage of engagement

Responsiveness & influence

- ☐ Feedback response rate
- ☐ Resolution time
- ☐ Citizen satisfaction
- ☐ % recommendations acted upon
- ☐ Trust / service outcomes

A Practical 90-Day Action Plan

Days 1–30 | LISTEN

- ☐ Map stakeholders
- ☐ Audit engagement channels
- ☐ Analyze complaints
- ☐ Identify information gaps
- ☐ Map citizen journeys

Days 31–90 | DESIGN + ACT

- ☐ Set feedback standards
- ☐ Build digital/omnichannel channels
- ☐ Create dashboard
- ☐ Resolve recurring issues
- ☐ Publicize 'You Said & We Did'
- ☐ Institutionalize review

The African Public Administration Opportunity

- ❑ Rapid urbanization and youthful populations are changing citizen expectations.
- ❑ Digital transformation is changing how citizens access information and organize.
- ❑ Fiscal pressures require governments to learn faster and target resources better.
- ❑ Climate, demographic and socio-economic uncertainty increase the value of early signals.

African public institutions therefore need stronger capabilities to listen, anticipate, adapt and co-create.

The Contextual Public Servant of the Future

Empathy

Ethics

Listening

**Data
literacy**

**AI
literacy**

**Systems
thinking**

**Collab
oration**

**Anticipa
tion**

“Leadership is increasingly less about having all the answers and more about creating systems capable of hearing the right questions.”

Case Study: Makueni County, Kenya – Institutionalizing The Citizen Voice

The Approach

- ❑ Makueni has institutionalised citizen participation in *planning, budgeting, project implementation and oversight*.
- ❑ Participation cascades from *village* → *cluster* → *ward* → *sub-county* → *county*.
- ❑ Citizens identify priorities and provide feedback on development interventions.
- ❑ The county has established structures for *public participation, civic education, grievance redress and citizen feedback*.
- ❑ *Makueni Engage* uses digital technology to facilitate proposals, feedback, grievances and citizen participation.

Lesson for AAPAM

“The Makueni experience demonstrates that citizen participation becomes transformative when it is institutionalised, informed by accessible information, supported by technology and connected to actual government decisions.”

Case Study: Bosaso, Somalia — Digital Citizen-centred Governance

The Innovation:

Benderqasim provides a digital channel through which citizens can propose projects, discuss priorities and vote on issues affecting their city.

The Approach: Citizen voice → Digital participation → Priority setting → Municipal decision-making

Features

- ☐ Introduced in **2024**
- ☐ Operational citizen-engagement platform by **2025**
- ☐ Project proposals
- ☐ Online discussion
- ☐ Citizen voting
- ☐ Inclusion of IDPs and displacement-affected communities
- ☐ Planned offline outreach to complement digital engagement

Lesson for AAPM: *“Digital technology becomes citizen-centred governance when it gives citizens a meaningful pathway from voice to decision.”*

Six Takeaways for Public Sector Leaders

- ❑ Information is the foundation of meaningful participation.
- ❑ Participation without feedback is incomplete governance.
- ❑ Citizen feedback is a source of strategic intelligence.
- ❑ Digital technology should amplify not replace citizen participation.
- ❑ Systems thinking helps government move from symptoms to root causes.
- ❑ Anticipatory governance begins with institutionalised listening.

FROM GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE TO GOVERNMENT WITH THE PEOPLE

“The quality of governance is ultimately experienced not in government offices, but in the lives of citizens.”

Thank you
Dr. Fredrick Mukabi
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Selected References & Further Reading

- ❑ Constitution of Kenya (2010), Articles 10, 35 and 37.
- ❑ Access to Information Act, No. 31 of 2016.
- ❑ Access to Information Regulations, 2023.
- ❑ County Governments Act, No. 17 of 2012, Parts VIII–IX.
- ❑ Open Government Partnership. Kenya Action Plan 2023–2027.
- ❑ OECD (2022). OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes.
- ❑ OECD. Open Government / citizen participation resources.