

EFFECTS OF COUNTY PUBLIC PARTICIPATION FORUMS ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN NAROK COUNTY, KENYA

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International Academic Journal of Arts and Humanities (IAJAH) | ISSN 2520-4688

Received: 19th June 2023

Published: 25th June 2023

Full Length Research

Available Online at: https://iajournals.org/articles/iajah_v1_i3_211_225.pdf

Citation: Nkirrimpa, K. L., Muna, W. (2023). Effects of county public participation forums on service delivery in Narok County, Kenya. *International Academic Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 1(3), 211-225.

ABSTRACT

Service delivery within counties depends heavily on citizen participation through county public participation, effective resource mobilization, and local leaders' accountability. However, there are not enough mechanisms in place to enable citizens to fully participate in the development agenda and resource allocation. Additionally, there are currently no mechanisms in place by the county government to make public expenditure data accessible. However, the current study sought to determine the effect of county public participation forums on service delivery in Narok County, Kenya. The study objectives was to explore the effect of stakeholders' engagement on service delivery in Narok County. The research was anchored by Public Choice Theory. A descriptive research design was utilized. The survey targeted 550 people who have participated at least three county forums as per record. The study sampled 84 respondents using stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaires were utilized to gather data from the sampled participants. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively and inferentially. Descriptive statistics like percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviations. The research findings were displayed by charts and tables. The findings revealed that resource mobilization, stakeholders' engagement and access to

information affect the service delivery as the P-value was 0.003 which is below the level of significance 0.05. Further, the results established that R was 0.824, adjusted R square was 0.663 and R squared was 0.679. Adjusted R square of 0.663 infers that 66.3% of service delivery in Narok county, Kenya are explained by the independent variables (resource mobilization, stakeholders' engagement and access to information) of the study. The study concluded that revenue given to the county government of Narok is insufficient to support county government services and stakeholders' engagement in county public participation forums enhance accountability and transparency on service delivery. The study recommends that Narok County Government should encourage citizen participation in policy creation, implementation, and all stages of project planning and execution. This would necessitate citizen capacity building through training to ensure citizens have sufficient understanding on how to create policies that will enable successful public engagement and good governance.

Key words: Public Participation Forums, Stakeholders' Engagement and Service Delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Public participation is a two-way information exchange between the general public and their county government. Public participation is based on the concept of participatory government. This kind of governance seeks to improve public participation in legislative and executive actions (Carreira, Machado, & Vasconcelos, 2016). The 1960s saw the rise of public engagement after Arnstein (1969) wrote a piece on the role of power in decision-making. Before that, a select few powerful people or community leaders made significant choices without consulting the general population.

Public participation is required by the constitution for both the national legislature and the provincial legislatures of South Africa (Muriu, 2013). In 2008, report from public participation practices in South Africa provides a comprehensive description of the various strategies the South African government employs to ensure public participations. One of South Africa's procedures is the Izimbizo technique, where all administration authorities and political pioneers meet transparently to talk about arrangements and administration conveyance issues. Additionally, the Municipal Structures Act of 1998 mandates local public participation and establishes ward committees, which are comprised of the ward representative and the ward's residents. Additionally, South Africa regularly holds Citizen Forums and Surveys of Citizen Satisfaction to gather opinions and expectations from the public regarding the provision of services.

Public participation in public financial management is mandated by the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA), which was passed in 2012 and calls for the creation of the county fiscal strategy papers, national budget policy statement, division of revenue bills, budget estimates, and county allocation revenue bills. A venue for public involvement in county planning and budget creation is provided through the county budget and economic forum. According to Nyaranga, Hao, and Hongo (2019), the county administration is required by the county government act of 2012 to assist the construction of mechanisms and institutions for public engagement, including budget formulation and validation.

County-level budgeting begins with the integrated development planning process, which includes medium-term planning and establishing the county's financial and economic priorities. The publication of guidelines that must be followed by all county government organizations kicks off the budget planning process. After that, estimates of the costs and revenues incurred by the county government are made. Following this, the county adopts its fiscal strategy paper and then creates its estimates for the county government, which are due by the end of April each year. The estimates are sent to the county assembly for review before being approved by the county executive committee for finances. This covers both the appropriations bill and the budget estimate. The appropriation law and other laws necessary for the budget's implementation are enacted by the

county assembly following its approval, at which point the implementation process begins (Ngoyoni, 2021).

It was discovered that Narok County had implemented some of the necessary tools for public participation. A functioning County Budget and Economic Forum (CBEF) is one of these. The Public Participation Act, the primary statute necessary to regulate public engagement, was also discovered to have been passed (Kimutai & Aluvi, 2018). Decentralizing forums from the county administration to the lower units through sub-counties and wards promoted citizen engagement. Ward administrators in particular were found to be crucial in connecting individuals to various County activities and serving as significant channels for mobilizing and informing citizens about what is going on in the County. The citizens of Narok interact with the legislative and executive branches of government through the recognized channels, such as petitions. Citizens were primarily invited to the forums through County notice boards, informal invitations from organized groups and opinion leaders, radio, websites, short messaging (SMS), WhatsApp, and word-of-mouth by County officials and leaders.

Statement of the Problem

Citizen participation in governance and the provision of public services is actively pursued in an effort to improve government performance. Positively, improving the arrangement of public administrations stays a significant objective on the plan of public overseers and researchers. Decentralized service delivery strategies have emerged as a response to the drawbacks and limitations of centralized service delivery, particularly at the local level. Devolved units have received administrative, fiscal, and political authority and responsibilities from the federal government (Kivuva, 2010).

Devolved governance in Kenya was predicted to enhance county service delivery based on the favorable expectations of public participation. In many counties, nevertheless, this has not been the case. The majority of counties' service delivery has not significantly improved (TI, 2018); county governments exhibit high levels of corruption and public funds embezzlement (EACC, 2020); and citizen participation is still low and limited to merely expressing opinions during public forums rather than actively participating in decision-making as required by the Constitution (Marzuki, 2015).

Public participation has been perhaps of the most antagonistic issue in the devolution cycle, the region government has done very little to advance it, and many cases have been brought under the steady gaze of courts to challenge public cooperation in arrangements, regulation, spending plans, improvement ventures, and reprimand, in addition to other things. This is despite the benefits of public participation, the focus on institutional equity, and its inclusion in the constitution. Additionally, residents have voiced complaints about not being given the opportunity to publicly

weigh in on matters affecting their county government, which has a negative impact on the services provided. While there is a lot of momentum in Kenya toward improving public participation, there is a disconnect between the legal requirements and how they are actually implemented. County governments are unsure if they have achieved the necessary level of participation because there are no established standards or norms. Therefore, the study set out to determine the effect of stakeholders' engagement on service delivery in Narok County, Kenya.

Objective of the Study

To determine the effect of stakeholders' engagement on service delivery in Narok County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Public Choice Theory created by Duncan Black in 1986. This idea states that people, particularly politicians, bureaucrats, and other public officials, make decisions based on their own interests (Hill, 1999). According to Blankart and Koester (2006), this theory was applied in politics to demonstrate the link between people's egotism and the ways in which it influences the decisions politicians make.

Empirical Review

Service Delivery

Service delivery to the public is a crucial role for the government (Bategeka, Iravo, Namusonge, & Mulyungi, 2021). Citizens now have the right to demand quick, easily accessible, high-quality services that satisfy their needs and are reasonably priced (Malemane & Nel-Sanders, 2021). This is especially true of the government, which is the main provider of essential public services. Additionally, providing economical, high-quality services contributes to improving the perception of government (Omuse, Were & Kweingoti, 2022).

Devolution has been characterized as a style of administration where residents have the ability to take part in direction and arranging and where legislatures can convey excellent administrations to their populace (Masiya, Davids and Mangai, 2019). Local government is the most easily accessible provider of services to the general public (Masuku & Jili, 2019). In Kenya, region states supplanted neighborhood legislatures. However, the idea has not changed. They connect with individuals the most intently while offering types of assistance.

The constitution of Kenya requires region states to offer a great many labor and products. Part Two of the Fourth Schedule to the Constitution lists a number of county functions, including roads and transportation, agriculture, and other services. However, the problem has been that despite giving counties more control over services, service performance has remained appalling (Rosen & Painter, 2019). Similar to this, devolved administrations have not performed very well. Low public goodwill, widespread corruption, and bad citizen-government interactions in the counties have been characteristics of this (Garcia-Zamor, 2019).

However, efficient and effective service delivery is essential for devolution to be successful (Osborne, 2020). Effective service delivery will be achieved by guaranteeing that variables connected with administration quality, like reliability, responsiveness, openness, and value, are reliably kept up with. Alongside considering specialist co-ops responsible to people in general for the type of administrations gave, it is additionally important to guarantee that administrations gave fulfill the necessities of the populace. This will guarantee citizen satisfaction, lower delivery costs, and an improvement in the county governments' reputation

Stakeholder Engagement and service delivery

An individual or party that is knowledgeable about, has the power to affect, or is otherwise impacted by a proposed service is referred to as a stakeholder in the delivery of public services. Potential service providers, service consumers, the community where services will be provided, service specialists, and anybody else impacted by a policy decision can all be stakeholders (Government of Western Australia, 2015).

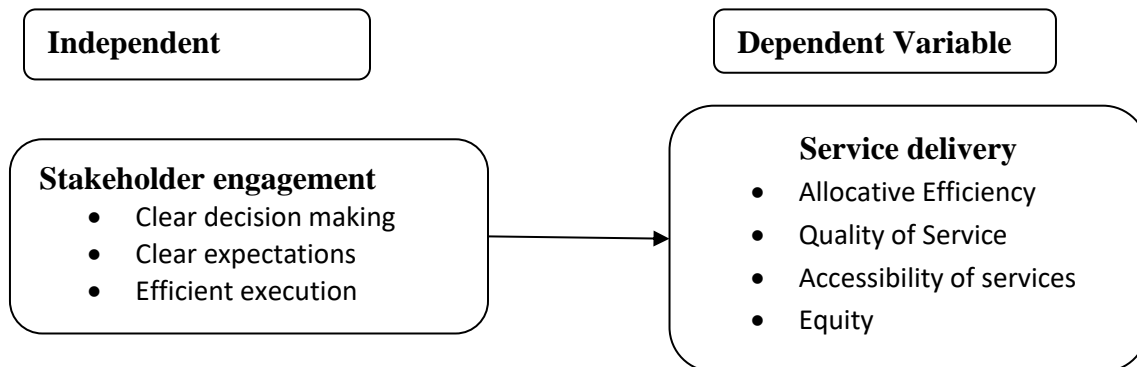
Malemane and Nel-Sanders (2021) contend that there are two ways in which stakeholder management strategy and involvement are important to a company. One is to create a plan, and the other is to figure out how to put that plan into action to address people's issues. Stakeholder involvement therefore starts with problem identification rather than implementation.

Waddington et al. (2019) say that a good organization should allow for many different points of view and interests, as decision-making will become a one-man show without them. Simon Herbert argues that decision-making in an organization is a matter of definition, the formation of alternatives, alternative evaluations, and the selection of a solution in his evaluation of the behavioral approach literature. The idea that problem identification and recognition are the first steps in the decision-making process is one that Simon Herbert incorporates into the public information access variable. According to research conducted by Shussa in 2017, residents have used a variety of channels to communicate with their local administrations. According to the study, 35% of respondents went to a public baraza, 35% chose to visit the county government offices for information, and 12% had never taken part in a county management issue.

Saw violent riots in many of South Africa's municipalities in 2014. The lack of public involvement in matters that affected them, the bad relationship between local officials and the community, and dissatisfaction with service delivery were all factors in the protests (Seithloho, 2014). In addition, Seithloho asserts that the government's failure to anticipate public unrest is to blame for these demonstrations. The study encourages bridging the gap between the government and the governed, and claims in its conclusion that citizen engagement is the only approach now available for doing so. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating the public in decision-making processes. The only way to enhance service delivery and increase public happiness is through citizen participation. Thus, public choice theory discourages the concentration of power in the hands of a select few and affirms that citizens can exercise their authority to rein in public officials' excesses through channels established by the constitution. One such opportunity made available by the constitution is public engagement.

Thus, public participation is pertinent to public decision hypothesis since it underlines the need to make diverts for public support in choices that might influence them or in which they might have an interest and the need to advance participatory administration for of getting control over the abundances of chosen authorities.

Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive design since it helps in describing “what exists” in a given time. The design helps the study obtain the information as regards to the effects of County Public Participation forums on Service Delivery in Narok County. Narok County, as per the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census has a total population of 1,157,873 people, would be the site of the study. The Great Rift Valley's southernmost region is where the Narok County is located. The location of Narok is between 0° 50' and 1° 50' South and 35° 28' and 36° 25' East. Along with six other counties; Nakuru, Bomet, Kisii, Nyamira, Kajiado, and Migori County the county shares borders with the Republic of Tanzania.

The population targeted for this survey involve employees of Narok County Government and all the publics over 18 years. As per population 2019 census Narok County has a population of 1,157,873. The available populaces are those occupants and workers of Narok County who have taken part in province discussion for something like three financial years since the execution of degenerated government. From the County Treasury records, a total of 550 have participated in at least three County Forums. The participants were chosen from the accessible population. This is because they have sufficient knowledge and experience in budget making and service delivery which this study seeks to investigate.

A questionnaire with both open and closed-ended inquires having a Likert scale were utilized to collect primary data and be structured in accordance with the study's objectives. Likert scales are beneficial because they quickly offer and gather data, are easy to evaluate, are more expansive, and demonstrate the strength of a person's perceptions to questions. Secondary data was gathered from government publications, organizational reports, libraries, journal articles, magazines and the internet.

The gathered data were cleaned, coded, and analyzed in a descriptive manner; the outcomes were then exhibited using frequency tables, figures, and charts. Themes were utilized to analyze the qualitative data. Cross tabulation between the variables of the study were also done to corroborate the quantitative results.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A total of 84 surveys were given to the selected participants by the researcher. However, 80 questionnaires were returned incompletely. This resulted in a response rate of 95.2 percent, which is considered adequate for the study. This response rate accurately reflected the entire population. On the participant's gender, 57.5% of the participants were male while 42.5% were female. On age distribution, 6.25% of participants were between the 18 and 25 years; 15.0% were between the 26 and 35 years; 27.5% were between 36 and 45 years; 40.0% were between the 46 and 55 years; and 11.25% were over 55 years. On the level of education, 15.0% of the participants had attained diploma level, 45% had attained bachelor's degree, 30% had attained master degree, while 10% had master's degree. According to the outcomes, all of the participants possessed the necessary expertise to provide thoughtful responses to the study, which made the study's conclusions reliable. On working experience, 20% of participants had worked for the county government for less than three years, 24% for between four and seven years, and 56% for more than ten years.

Stakeholders' Engagement

The second objective aimed to explore the impact of stakeholders' engagement on service delivery. The participants were inquired to specify their level of agreement with each parameter related to

impact of stakeholders' engagement on service delivery on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for effect of stakeholders' engagement on service delivery

Statements	n	Mean	Std Dev	CoV
The county government regularly shares information with the public relating to projects being implemented and service delivery	80	3.55	1.65	0.12
The citizens are happy with their engagement during public participation forums	80	3.13	1.41	0.14
The residents of Narok County are able to participate in discussions and make a contribution during the public participation forums	80	3.25	1.48	0.16
The government occasionally organizes public hearings for citizens to articulate their preferences and disappointments	80	2.38	0.57	0.11
Feedback from the public on important matters of the county are taken into consideration	80	2.37	0.58	0.13

The results exhibited in Table 1 uncovered that most of participants agreed that county government routinely informs the public on the progress of projects and the provision of services (mean = 3.55; standard deviation = 1.65). The Kenya County Budget Transparency Survey (2021) report, which found that national and county governments must actively disclose budget information on all important choices throughout the budget cycle and within the legal deadlines, supports the findings. The county governments serve a variety of purposes, including facilitating communication between county governments, exchanging data on how well the counties perform their duties, assisting in the capacity building of governors, and taking into account reports from other intergovernmental forums on issues of county and national interest.

The results displayed in Table 1 uncovered that most participants agreed that residents are satisfied with public participation forums within the county (mean = 3.13; standard deviation = 1.41). As a method of government in Kenya, the inclusion of citizens in the decisions made by the government while creating and carrying out their budgets is no longer debatable. The results are corroborated by research by Malemane and Nel-Sanders (2021), who found that citizens need timely access to correct information on budget decisions in order for involvement to be meaningful and successful. Majority of respondents agreed that citizens of Narok County are able to take part in debates and contribute during the public participation forums, according to the data (mean = 3.25; standard deviation = 1.48). Public participation information remains the least published. Many countries have struggled to respond to individuals' relevant demands at the grassroots level due to a lack of a robust public engagement strategy in strategy making and administration conveyance plan (Kathryn, 2016). It is not new for resources and authority to be concentrated at the center of governance.

As per the results, a significant portion of participants disagreed that occasionally, the government arranges public hearings for residents to express their disappointments and preferences (mean =2.38; standard deviation = 0.57). Government performance is being improved by pursuing citizen participation in governance and the provision of public services. Indeed, enhancing the provision of public services remains a major goal on the agenda of public administrators. Town meetings or public hearings, according to Muriu (2013), can be utilized to give citizens a direct platform where they can express their preferences, disappointments, and other suggestions on enhancing service delivery.

The results showed that most respondents disagreed that public comments on significant county issues are taken into account (mean = 2.37; standard deviation = 0.58). Through feedback, community involvement demonstrates the value of government and public decision-making bodies by encouraging them to listen. Additionally, counties will do better if there are more opportunities for public input and if information about how the comments influenced choices is published (Seithloho, 2014).

Service Delivery

In this case, the survey aimed to explore the service delivery at Narok county government. The participants were inquired to specify their agreement level with each parameter related to service delivery on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree). The findings were exhibited in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for service delivery

Statements	n	Min	Max	Mean	Std Dev
The public participation in county forums increased reception of government initiatives/projects	80	1.00	5.00	3.64	1.68
County public participation forums enhance accountability with the county	80	1.00	5.00	3.57	1.73
Citizen participation in county forums improves citizen-government interaction	80	1.00	5.00	3.34	1.77
The public participation in decision making enhance efficiency utilization of national resources	80	1.00	5.00	3.41	1.81
The involvement of citizens in public forums and meeting increases awareness of government program	80	1.00	5.00	3.62	1.66

Source: Survey Data (2023)

The findings displayed in Table 2 uncovered that most participants noted that public participation in county forums increased reception of government initiatives/projects (mean = 3.64; standard deviation = 1.68). Many national government projects across the country have been achieved due

to increased public participation level in public affairs among Kenyans. The results are corroborated by a study by Omuse, Were, and Kweingoti (2022), which found that citizens may contribute to governance and service delivery through public involvement.

The findings also established that most of participants agreed that county public participation forums enhance accountability with the county (mean = 3.57; standard deviation = 1.73). This concurs with results of a survey by Masuku and Jili (2019) who revealed that by streamlining and distributing budget-related papers for quick response and community scrutiny, citizen participation in budget management processes enhances accountability. Meaningful participation improves the public's receptivity to government decision-making, raises citizens' knowledge and awareness of complex policy issues, and helps decision-makers come to better conclusions, which in turn raises the standard of the public services the government provides and strengthens the public's sense of integrity.

Citizen participation in county forums improves citizen-government interaction (mean = 3.34; standard deviation = 1.77). The main determinant of the success of devolution and the attainment of good governance at the county level is meaningful public participation. According to Masiya, David, and Mangai (2019), a few examples of how public participation improves transparency of interaction in the public domain include social/participatory budgeting, procurement transparency, opening the budget process to citizen participation, and oversight committees.

Also, the outcomes revealed that most participants agreed that public participation in decision making enhance efficiency utilization of national resources (mean = 3.41; standard deviation =1.81). In order to minimize resource loss and identify, address, and mitigate potential environmental risks associated with various projects, public participation is required. As per Osborne (2020) public interest is a vital part of regular assets the board. It gives people the opportunity to voice their opinions on important laws and policies enacted by the government that affect their communities' environmental conditions.

As per outcomes displayed in Table 2 most participants agreed that involvement of citizens in public forums and meeting increases awareness of government program (mean = 3.62; standard deviation = 1.66). These findings are corroborated by research by Rosen and Painter (2019), who found that accountability in local government institutions, is established by public participation, which makes local government more receptive to citizen needs and more efficient in providing services, which reduces poverty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on results, the research concludes that

The county government of Narok receives insufficient funds to support county government functions. National and county governments must communicate budget information on all critical choices proactively and within legal timelines throughout the budget cycle. Fiscal decentralization is essential for development but the county governments are misusing resources hence becoming a burden to run various institutions in the county government such as health.

The study concluded that stakeholders' engagement in county public participation forums enhance accountability and transparency. The county government of Narok offers a system for communication between county governments, exchange of data on the performance of counties in carrying out their duties, facilitation of governor capacity building, and consideration of reports from national and other county governments.

The county public participation forums in Narok County was affected by access to information. The public had access to information about public involvement, and they learned about their participation rights and how to take part in devolved county governance. This in turn helps to raise knowledge among the locals about a variety of problems, such as the Acts governing public participation, ways they can take part in devolved governance, and ways to improve their capacity to participate. As a result, there was effective public involvement in county government activities, which was reflected in initiatives that were developed in response to the demands the county government thought were necessary.

Recommendations

The research recommends that;

- i. The Narok County Government should encourage citizen participation in policy creation, implementation, and all stages of project planning and execution. This would necessitate citizen capacity building through training to ensure citizens have sufficient understanding on how to create policies that will enable successful public engagement and good governance.
- ii. The Narok County government should establish an ICT-Resource Center where individuals can quickly obtain information on a variety of public participation topics. Citizens should be taught how to access information, particularly on the internet. Furthermore, the county should guarantee that information is disseminated in a simplified language through outlets that are easily accessible to many people, such as local vernacular radio stations.

- iii. The involvement of stakeholders and the public participation forum has a good impact on service delivery; thus, the government should create laws and regulations that encourage efficient participation and involve the public and other stakeholders in the budgeting process.

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