

Effectiveness of Public Awareness Strategies on Public Participation in Implementation of Devolved Projects in Kakamega County

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Abstract: Public awareness is one of the cardinal requirements for public participation. Under the County Governments Act, 2011, counties are required to use effective communication tools to create awareness on devolution and governance, promote citizens understanding for purposes of peace and national cohesion, and undertake advocacy on core development issues such as agriculture, education, health, security, economics, and sustainable environment among others. The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of public awareness strategies on public participation in the implementation of devolved projects in Kakamega County. The specific objective was to investigate how governance administrative structure administration influences citizens' participation in the implementation of devolved projects in Kakamega County. The study used Descriptive method, which enabled collection of quantitative data. The study population comprised residents of Kakamega County, with a representative sample broken down into 600 participants from six sub counties. Validity of the instrument was measured using factor analysis while test-retest was used to measure reliability. SPSS version 22 was used to analyze quantitative data. The study results indicated that participants felt that there was no proper governance structures put in place to help them participate in devolved government projects. To ensure effective public participation in devolved projects, Kakamega County should set up a desk at every sub county, ward, and village offices with people who can engage the public and keep them informed of all the planned projects. Therefore, the ineffectiveness of the current public awareness strategies calls for the adoption of strategic public awareness techniques to increase public participation in devolved projects.

Keywords: Public Awareness Strategies, Public Participation, Implementation of Devolved Projects, governance administrative structure, Kakamega County.

I. INTRODUCTION

Public awareness is one of the cardinal requirements for public participation. Under the County Governments Act, 2011, counties are required to use effective communication tools to create awareness on devolution and governance, promote citizens understanding for purposes of peace and national cohesion, undertake advocacy on core development issues such as agriculture, education, health, security, economics, sustainable environment, among others; and promotion of the freedom of the media (KSG, 2015). Under Section 95(1), counties are required to facilitate public communication and access to information in the form of media with the widest public outreach in the county, which may include television stations; information communication technology centres; websites; community radio stations; public meetings; and traditional media. Additional requirements under Section 96 include the duty of designating an office for purposes of enabling access to information; and, subject to national legislation on access to information, enact legislation on access to information. Further, counties are required to create avenues for promoting effective participation of marginalized and minority groups in public and political life (KSG, 2015).

Sithole (2005) defines public participation as a democratic process of engaging people in thinking, deciding, planning and playing an active part in the development and operation of services that affect their lives. It is a two-way communication and collaborative problem solving with the goal of achieving better and more acceptable decisions. One key emphasis in

the Kenyan constitution is the need for the two levels of governments to continuously engage its citizens in any decision making process. The spirit of public participation runs throughout the constitution. It seeks and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision. This can be in relation to individuals, governments, institutions, companies or any other entities that affect public interests. The principle of public participation holds that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.

The last 10 years have seen great changes across the world in the ways in which public awareness is conducted, stemming from developments in information and communications technology. The development of the Internet and the World Wide Web has enabled information providers to make much more information available, in new forms, and has enabled users to gain access to a much broader range of information, from a wide variety of official and unofficial sources (Kotwal, 2008). The more recent development and adoption of online social networks and microblogging facilitate fast information sharing within both closed and open user groups, accelerating the spread of information. The integration of these communication applications with audio, image and video applications has greatly enriched sharable content. The proliferation of mobile phones and more recently of smart phones has made the Internet and social networking applications much more readily available to many more people, on the move as well as from fixed locations, intensifying public awareness.

Over the years, Kenya has progressively shifted from a centralized to a decentralized form of governance. This paradigm shift was precipitated by the shortfalls that are often characteristic of highly centralized systems. The shortfalls include administrative bureaucracies and inefficiencies, misappropriation of public resources and the marginalization of local communities in development processes. Consequently, in the late 1990s, the government began the devolvement of specific funds and decision making authority to the districts, local authority and constituency levels (Gitegi & Iravo, 2016). The promulgation of the New Constitution in August 2010 provides a strong legal foundation for the enhancement of participatory governance through devolved structures at county level.

Full public participation is necessary to rebuild trust between the government and people and to improve policy formation and implementation. Full participation is closely related to awareness since information enables participation, and participation adds to the information available to policymakers, thus enhancing the quality of policy outcomes (IEA, 2015). Today, citizens can use a new range of media platforms to share information on what projects benefit them best, increasing public awareness. Opinions can be shared among the public with ease, and stories that emerge in new media can become important issues in traditional media, amplifying the debate in the public sphere. There are important distinctions between the approach to information provision through traditional media and those that are effective in the new media environment. Traditional media mechanisms for environmental information based around print media, broadcasting and even formal consultation, have generally been hierarchical. They have enabled policymakers at every level of government to deliver messages to citizens and communities, but offered little scope for the interaction or feedback that might help policy makers learn from citizens (Baswony, 2014). New media, by contrast, particularly social media, such as online social networks and microblogging sites, are networked rather than hierarchical, and highly interactive, enabling users to exchange views and contribute their own content, including multimedia content, to discussions in real or near-real time, thus blurring the boundaries between awareness and participation.

The County Government Act 2012 (CGA), Public Finance Management Act 2012 (PFMA), and Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011) all include measures on public participation for county governments to implement. They require public participation in many aspects of national and county government, including: developing new legislation, setting national and county planning and budget priorities, reviewing public sector performance and expenditures, and submitting grievances (IEA, 2015). Public participation is required throughout all stages of the planning and budget cycle. County governments are required to create structures, mechanisms and guidelines for public participation and establish mechanisms for wide public communication and access to information, and submit an annual report on citizen participation to the county assembly. Non-state actors are also recognized as having an important role in implementation and oversight (CGA Section 87), and in ensuring public participation in county planning processes (CGA Section 104). Still, despite Constitutional provisions on transparency numerous people report difficulty in obtaining even basic government documents.

Public participation contributes to better decisions because decision-makers have more complete information – in the form of additional facts, values, and perspectives obtained through public input – to bring to bear on the decision process (CRECO, 2014). However, information is essential for citizens' action. It enables people to know what is happening both around them and elsewhere in other jurisdictions, to compare actual outcomes with what was planned or pledged and to

learn lessons from their own experiences and from what others have done. There is a need for governments, both central and local, to develop community resource centres, accessible bulletin boards, paper-based or digital centres, and suggestion boxes at the district and sub-county levels to ensure a regular flow of information and feedback between community members and service providers (Gitegi & Iravo, 2016).

A. Statement of the Problem

Allowing participation in the decision making process from the early stage of related planning procedure encourages citizens' input in the planning process and present the views of the entire community on specific issues to ensure the proposed plan will mirror their aspirations (Pande, 2008). In a broader sense, appropriate public participation is a key towards strategic development given that the proposed development will be structured based on the stakeholders' demands and needs, which include the benefits for future generations (Sithole, 2005). However, at the heart of this matter rests the issue of conditions that might constrain achieving appropriate public participation. Public participation efficiency and effectiveness might be compromised by the difficulties faced by the public when it comes to accessing information early enough before the implementation of the projects (Lubale, 2012). In Kakamega County, the devolved government always uses roadshow announcements and government administrative system (Sub County and ward administrators' announcements in funeral gatherings) as the main communication strategies for public awareness. However, these are not effective methods to sensitize the public on the crucial projects the government is planning to initiate. For example, the roadshow announcements will only reach those people by the roadside at that particular moment when the announcement is being made. This locks out many people from participating in the planning of the projects. As for the announcements made during funeral gatherings, many people miss out on what the government is planning because funerals are only attended by a handful of relatives, friends, and neighbours. As a result, most of the projects initiated by the county stall, because their implementation was not based on the majority's interests. Hinged on this background, the researcher sought to investigate the effectiveness of public awareness strategies on public participation in the implementation of devolved projects in Kakamega County.

B. Research Objective

To study sought to investigate how different age group perceive how governance structures influence public participation in the implementation of devolved projects in Kakamega County.

C. Research hypothesis

The study sought to test the following null hypothesis; age does not have a significant influence on how the public view the use of governance structures on public participation in the implementation of devolved projects in Kakamega County.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Review

The study was guided by Transactional Model of Communication. From the interpersonal communication field of study, Barnlund in 1970 first proposed the transactional model of communication (Botan, 2017). Barnlund believed that in the transactional model, interpersonal communication was a dynamic process in which the two participants are simultaneously sending and receiving messages. The organization should promote a message influence approach to strategic communication that focuses on benefitting the public. The transactional model calls for the right audience, right message, right time, and right place (Botan, 2017). The message and advancing its goals are paramount. Communication strategy must reach intended audiences through [a] customized message that is relevant to those audiences. The model provides a useful intellectual framework for strategic communication practice. Transactional model of communication espouses the importance of developing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and key publics. Both the organization and publics influence the other, and communication activities link the parties (Botan, 2017).

According to this model, successful communication entails crafting a message that resonated with the intended audience, sending it through a medium relevant to the audience, with intended effect, and at the optimum time. Following this formula, communicators expect that the intended audience would receive the message, understand it as intended, and adopt desired attitudes and behaviors according to the desired effect. This approach is called the message influence model because messages are seen as vehicles that carry information from a source to a receiver (Botan, 2017). The purpose of the message is to influence the receiver to understand the information in the same way as the source, if not persuade him or her to change attitudes or act in a particular way.

The transactional model of communication views communication as an intricate process that evolves from participants joining into a relationship that is more than the sum of its parts (Botan, 2017). Communication is much more than a conveyor belt on which messages are sent back and forth, arriving at the other end in the same form as the message was sent. According to Barnlund, “As human beings, we have an extraordinary repertoire of communication skills centering on our unique capacity to engage in the mutual creation of meaning when we communicate with another person” (Botan, 2017).

The transactional approach to strategic communication considers the process from the perspective of both the message source and receiver. This view promotes the importance of actively building relationships through dialogue with key publics. This model considers the concept of dialogue as part of strategic communication. Dialogue is defined as the multi-faceted exchange of ideas to promote understanding and build relationships. Effective communication requires dialogue, which involves active listening, engagement, and mutual understanding. Trust is engendered through dialogue, leading to the cultivation of relationships over time. The model recognizes that a win-win by both the organization and its publics is desirable (Botan, 2017).

B. Conceptual Framework

According to Tromp (2012), a concept is an abstract or general idea inferred or derived from specific instances. A conceptual framework is a set of broad ideas and principles taken from relevant fields of enquiry and used to structure a subsequent presentation. The goal of a conceptual framework is to categorize and describe concepts relevant to the study and map relationships among them. In study, the independent variable was governance structure and it was conceptualized using policies on awareness and officers competence. Dependent variable was level of public participation and it was determined using active involvement and project ownership.

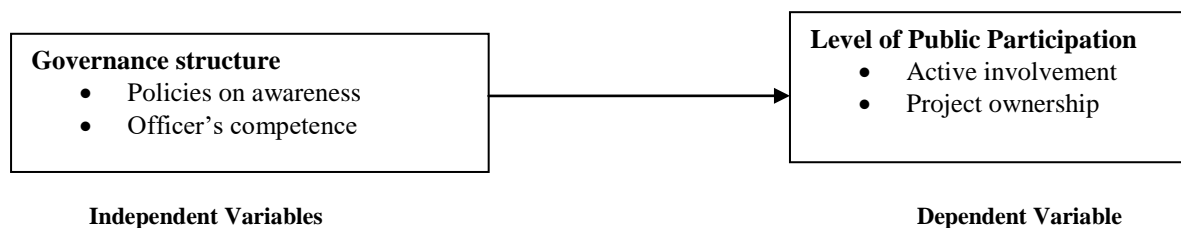


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

C. Government Administrative Structure

Although many counties have put in place some of the infrastructure required to enhance public participation, there are differing levels of success in their actual implementation. In its study of public participation in four counties (Makueni, Isiolo, Kisumu and Turkana) the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) notes, for example, that Kisumu County has established processes and platforms for effective public participation, which include decentralized structures to the Ward and Sub-County levels and appointment of the administrators. The existence of these platforms has enabled citizens to attend public forums on development projects at these two levels. However, when it comes to mobilization by MCAs of citizens to participate in meetings, a bias was noted against citizens who hold contrary opinions. This weakness undermines public participation.

In regard to Turkana County, it was noted that it had generally succeeded in providing infrastructure for public participation. It has a Public Participation Act in place and has established the offices of Sub-County and Ward Administrators. However, the report noted that the county has not effectively involved citizens in legislative processes. The county is also yet to establish the offices of the Village Administrators and Village Councils due to lack of a policy to define their operations.

The IEA (2015) study further show that Isiolo County was found to have established offices of Sub-County and Ward administrators. However, as compared to the other counties that were studied, the offices were neither well established nor well equipped to handle their functions including facilitating public participation. It was established that most of the Sub-County and Ward Administrators lack physical office space and facilitation such as motorbikes and vehicles. The budgeting process for Isiolo County (FY2013/2014) was also found to be inadequate in terms of public participation. Whereas the County held public consultations at ward level moderated by the Executive and MCAs, the public was not given an opportunity to propose projects. They were instead presented with a list of predetermined projects. Their role in this context was limited to giving opinions about the proposed projects. These shortcomings mirror those noted in past participatory frameworks such as the Budget Day under the previous system of Local Authorities and the LASDAP.

Makueni was found to have some of the best infrastructure of facilitating citizen participation. Its civic education infrastructure was found to be especially well-developed with an elaborate structure operating under the office of the County Executive Committee member in charge of devolution and public service (IEA, 2015). The Public Participation Office is run by the Public Participation Coordinator who works through six SCECs. In turn, these coordinators work with the WPPF at the ward level. In management of projects, the county was found to have established and entrenched a PCMs approach that enables citizens to not only take part in decision-making and implementation but also to provide oversight in the process. However, the county was found not to have put in place the CBEF, which undermined the participation of citizens in budgetary matters.

In their study, Odhiambo and Opiyo (2017) found out that in Taita Taveta County, the sub-county and ward administrations were found to be at the core of public participation, especially mobilization of citizens. The various departments such as finance, were found to use the administrators as an entry point, especially at the ward level when conducting public participation forums and meetings. They were also involved directly in some of the mechanisms of participation including the VTMC where the ward administrator is the secretary. This direct involvement was found to accord them opportunity to understand the county dynamics better, hence making them effective in their roles of facilitating public participation.

Even though the sub-county and ward administrations in Taita Taveta County were found to be well-established, in some cases the county departments still preferred to carry out their own public participation functions including mobilization (Odhiambo & Opiyo, 2017). In addition, it was also found that some level of tension exists between the administrators and MCAs when it comes to citizen mobilization. The politicians preferred to use their own local networks to mobilise citizens whenever they have forums. MCAs were found to be involved in forums that discuss bills before they are enacted into law and budget forums before the budget is passed by the Assembly.

D. Research Gaps

From the above literature, no study has looked at the public awareness strategies used in public participation programs. Most of the local studies just focused on public participation across various counties but failed to comprehensively look at the various awareness strategies that can be used to effectively involve the citizens in the planning and implementation of county projects. This study covered this gap. Apart from that, most of the reviewed studies suffer from sample size and design inadequacies. While a majority of the studies cover vast counties, the sample sizes used do not represent the opinions of the larger populations. Besides, the designs used in most of the previous studies are simple and fail to incorporate complex methodologies that could have thoroughly presented better analyses.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study was a descriptive study that is analyzed through quantitative methods. The descriptive approach was used to describe variables rather than to test a predicted relationship between variables. Kakamega County has a population of 1,660,651 and an area of 3,033.8 km² (Kakamega First County Integrated Development Plan, 2013). In total, there are 12 sub counties. The researcher administered interviews across Likuyani, Khwisero, Matungu, Lurambi, Shinyalu, and Mumias East sub counties. These sub counties were selected because they represent the diverse demographics of the Kakamega county citizens. This study examined Kakamega county residents who are eligible voters, that is 18 years and above. A probability sampling method random sampling was selected. This gave all the participants an equal chance to participate in the research. This was necessary because the population of Kakamega County is to a larger extent homogenous. Through this method, the researcher identified 600 participants who took part in completing the questionnaire. The researcher used convenience sampling to select the key participants.

Data was collected from Primary sources (primary data) by the administration of questionnaires to the target population. Content validity was determined by discussing the instrument with experienced scholars. On the other hand, construct validity was tested using factor analysis before verifying it using confirmatory factor. External validity was realized by means of reflecting on the generalizability of the conclusions. Also, the quality of the reasoning and the conclusions were controlled by means of submitting the research project in conference contributions. First, the data collected was organized and reviewed to ensure consistency. The International Business Machines (IBM) Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 22) was used to analyze data. Figures and tables were used to present results. Paired sample t-test was done to test the four hypotheses. The paired sample t-test was used because it is effective in assessing whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other. By using the paired sample t-test, the study was able to statistically conclude whether the public awareness strategies used in public participation in Kakamega County are effective or not effective.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study targeted a sample size of 138 respondents out of which 110 filled and returned the questionnaires giving a response rate of 79.7%. 28 questionnaires were not obtained from the respondents, a 20.3% response failure. Level of public participation yield an alpha of 0.722 and governance structure of 0.787. Therefore, the Cronbach values were greater than 0.7. According to Creswell (2014), Cronbach correlation coefficients greater or equal to 0.7 are acceptable.

A one-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to investigate the effect governance structures on citizens' participation in the implementation of devolved projects in Kakamega County. Participants were grouped into four categories as per their age groups (18-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65). Generally, participants felt that there were no proper governance structures put in place to help them participate in government projects. There was a statistically significant difference (0.01) in scores between the 18-35 group and the 56-65 group. Using Tukey HSD test to carry out post-hoc comparisons, the researcher found mean score for the young respondents (18-35, M=37.3429, SD=6.29914) to be significantly different from the older respondents (56-65, M=43.4651, SD=8.19683). The p value for the ANOVA was 0.01, which is lower than the p=0.05 significance value. Therefore, the findings support H02 which stated that, younger citizens believe the use of governance structures do have significant influence on citizens' participation in the implementation of devolved projects in Kakamega county than older participants (table 1).

Table 1: ANOVA results for effect of Governance Structures on Citizen's Participation in the Implementation of Devolved Projects in Kakamega County

Age	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df	Std. Err	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min.	Max.	F	Sig.
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound				
18-35	234	32.33	5.68	1	0.66	24.55	37.98	12	39	1.44	
36-45	146	37.34	6.30	1	0.83	26.69	38.99	14	44	1.27	
46-55	116	43.47	8.20	1	0.73	39.02	45.91	8	43	2.91	
56-65	84	42.72	7.93	1	0.68	31.93	39.09	9	38	1.98	0.01*
Total	580										

* Statistically significant p<0.05

A one-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to investigate the effect governance structures on citizens' participation in the implementation of devolved projects in Kakamega County. By looking at age as a demographic variable, the researcher sought to fill in the gap that was left by the IEA (2015), which sought to review the status of public participation, and county information dissemination frameworks in Isiolo, Kisumu, Makueni, and Turkana Counties without considering age. Participants were grouped into four categories as per their age groups (18-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65). There was a statistically significant difference (0.01) in scores between the 18-35 group and the 56-65 group. Using Tukey HSD test to carry out post-hoc comparisons, the researcher found mean score for the young respondents (18-35, M=37.3429, SD=6.29914) to be significantly different from the older respondents (56-65, M=43.4651, SD=8.19683). Therefore, the findings support H02 which stated that, younger citizens believe the use of governance structures do have significant influence on citizens' participation in the implementation of devolved projects in Kakamega county. Although the sample was made up of different age groups, 40.34% (234) of the respondents fall in the 18-35 years' age bracket. Individuals with 56-65 years were only 14.48% (84). The differences in terms of age can be said to stem from the higher illiteracy levels among the older participants than the young participants. In an earlier study, the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) noted that Kisumu County has established processes and platforms for effective public participation, which include decentralized structures to the Ward and Sub-County levels and appointment of the administrators. Turkana County had also generally succeeded in providing infrastructure for public participation. The IEA (2015) study further show that Isiolo County was found to have established offices of Sub-County and Ward administrators. The current findings show that Kakamega County does not have the proper sub county, ward, and community level structures that can increase citizens' participation in devolved projects. Instead, most announcements are normally made during funerals, which locks out many people.

IEA (2015) also found that Makueni had some of the best infrastructure of facilitating citizen participation. Its civic education infrastructure was found to be especially well-developed with an elaborate structure operating under the office of the County Executive Committee member in charge of devolution and public service. Although respondents in this study felt that government administrative structures were crucial in increasing public participation, they stated that such programs like civic education were not available in Kakamega County.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study found that participants felt that there was no proper governance structures put in place to help them participate in devolved government projects. There was a statistically significant difference (0.01) in scores between the younger respondents and the older respondents. Therefore, younger citizens believe the use of governance structures do have significant influence on citizens' participation in the implementation of devolved projects in Kakamega County than older participants. Unlike other counties like Kisumu and Turkana, Kakamega County lacks proper governance structures that can help citizens to participate in devolved government projects. The County government of Kakamega should set up a desk at every sub county, ward, and village offices with people who can engage the public and keep them informed of all the planned projects. Through such forums, the public can request for audience with the respective County Executive Committee members under whose portfolio the projects fall and offer their suggestions and opinions. The government should also come up with new strategies on how to conduct on-ground road shows. The strategies should involve using vehicles that can penetrate the most interior roads to reach as many people as possible. Instead of just making announcements on the major roads and market centres, the vehicles should traverse through the villages to make maximum impact.

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