

ROLE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE DEVOLVED SYSTEM OF COUNTY GOVERNMENTS: A CASE STUDY OF MAKUENI COUNTY

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Abstract: This study analyzed the social economic benefits of public participation based on the substantive quality of decisions made, resolving conflicts among competing interests, building trust in institutions of governance and educating and informing the public within Makeni County. Cross-sectional primary data was collected using structured questionnaires from a representative sample of 120 respondents across Makeni County. Both qualitative and quantitative aspects were acquired: secondary data from publications was used to augment data collected by the use of structured questionnaires. Three theories of public participation namely; citizenship and rights based perspective and the communicative action theory. Data collected during the study was entered into a database, coded and analyzed. Descriptive, Bivariate and multivariate analysis were also performed using SPSS and other Microsoft packages such as excel. After analysis, the information was presented using tables, graphs and charts since they allowed easy comparison. Finally, the study came up with policy recommendations out of the research carried out.

Keywords: Governance, Participation, Devolved System, Service Delivery.

1. INTRODUCTION

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 (Booher 2004). Public participation implies that the public's contribution will influence the decision which is a way of empowerment and a vital part of democratic governance. It is a process which offers individuals an opportunity to influence public decisions and has long been a component of the democratic decision-making process.

There have been many shifts in understanding of the concept of participation with the recent revival of public participation, partially reflected by a changing rationale for participation within the United Nations system' (John, 2009). The United Nations identifies community participation as synonymous with community development. The International Labour Organization (ILO) emphasizes that community participation should play a key role in the provision of basic needs and as a means for increasing efficiency and self- reliance.

This research project explored the potentially wide-ranging benefits of enhanced community participation to the citizenry and the Government, with the broadening of the public participation procedure towards a more collaborative one in which scientific and technical data were centered on the interests of the different actors, it assessed the underlying link of public participation to enhanced democracy and decision-making processes and the overall effect of public involvement to sustainable development. It evaluated the effects of public participation based on the criteria of achieving four social goals: The goal of incorporating public values into decisions which is fundamental to democracy and has been the driving

force behind challenges to a more managerial, expert-led model of decision making process, The second goal of increasing the substantive quality of decisions which recognizes the public as a valuable source of knowledge and ideas for making decisions, The third goal is the resolving conflict among competing interests, the fourth goal of building trust in institutions and the fifth goal of educating and informing the public. The project studied the achievements made in realizing the above goals among Citizens and County government employees in Makueni County.

Statement of the Problem:

Public participation in governance and public service delivery is progressively pursued in a bid to improve the performance of governments. Certainly, improving delivery of public services continues to be a key objective that has occupied the agenda of public administrators and researchers. Confronted with constraints and shortfalls of centralized service delivery especially at the local level, governments have turned to decentralized mechanisms of service delivery (Bardhan, 2002; Ahmad., 2005; Robinson, 2007). Devolution in governance has involved the transfer of administrative, fiscal and political powers and functions of the central government to devolved unit.

The appropriate role of the public in public administration and governance has been an active and ongoing area of inquiry, experimentation, revolution, and controversy. Since the mid-1990s, debates about the need to directly engage the public in processes of policy development and decision-making have emerged in response to the perceived crisis of democracy, which questioned the normative and functional adequacy of democratic institutions and of the rights and responsibilities of citizens (McBride, 2005). Proponents of this discourse have constantly argued that traditional representative democracy has become dysfunctional and unable to respond adequately to declining public participation in political processes and therefore service delivery. This dilemma begs for verification of benefits accruing from public participation as a model of improving efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in the devolved units.

A look into the Makueni County Public Participation Reports of 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 shows that there is need for the public to embrace public participation to enhance improved service delivery. Within the wards, in the past, there has been poor presentation despite the public advertisements and notices, with some wards recording as few as 16 members during public participation forums.

(Devas and Grant, 2003) examined the direct impact of participation on decentralized service delivery outcomes especially in the developing countries. (Lubaale, Agevi, Ngari, 2007; Syagga& Associates, 2007; Oyugi&Kibua, 2008; Cifuentas, 2008) Studied different aspects of citizens' participation in the broader aspect of local government reforms, however, these studies have not expressly sought to establish the benefits of public participation on the quality of decision making in devolved system of governance and to the extent to which these decisions achieve the overarching goals of public participation. This study sought to fill this gap by looking into the benefits of public participation on the service delivery in the devolved system of government with specific reference to Makueni County in Kenya more so due to the current prevailing problems in the county as stated earlier.

Objective:

To assess the extent to which incorporating public views into decision making improves the quality of service delivery within Makueni County.

The communicative action theory:

Communicative Action is a theory which aims to explain human rationality as the necessary outcome of successful communication. This theory can be traced to the German Philosopher and Sociologist, Jürgen Habermas. The theory of communicative action is mainly concerned with quality of dialogue by creating a rational basis for constructing ends and means in a democratic society. This is an approach that Watson (2002) describes as integrating scientific and interpretive/social learning perspectives. Aiming at extending and protecting democracy, Habermas defines the process of his concept of communicative rationality as a communication that is 'oriented to achieving, sustaining and renewing consensus – and, indeed, a consensus that rests on the inter-subjective recognition validity claims that can be criticized'. He speaks about the notion of communicative rationality, which is intrinsically 'dialogical', primarily concerned with inter-subjective relation, and aimed at reaching understanding in social action. In practice, however, communicative rationality has visibly distinguishing features, which entail paying attention to participation and learning, particularly through the reconciliation of different perspectives.

The theory of Communicative Action has influenced thinking about the way in which planning and policy-making should happen. It emphasizes on collective decision-making with the participation of all those who will be affected by the decision or their representatives, and decision-making through arguments offered by and to participants who are committed to the values of rationality and impartiality (Jones, 2002).

This theory supports the idea of involving citizens and their organizations more directly in processes of making policies that address their needs and shape their future (Mantysalo 2005), it also focuses on the quality of the involvement which enables citizens to engage directly in processes of addressing their problems and making their demands directly to state bodies, this is believed to improve understanding and contribute to the quality and implementation of public policies which was the basis of this study.

Citizenship and rights-based perspectives:

According to (Muetzelfeldt, 2000) citizenship has recently become an influential concept in urban development and political debates in many parts of the world and that citizenship remains a mechanism by which people make claims on space and place. The rights-based interpretation of citizenship views the process of building citizenship as the assertion and recognition of rights and as a process of transformation of practices rooted in the society as a whole. This understanding integrates concerns with socio-economic, political and civil rights. While these rights have long been viewed as developmental concerns, the rights-based view of citizenship adds an element of accountability and culpability; an ethical/moral dimension (Kabeer, 2005).

An important element of the rights-based understanding of citizenship transcends a central reference in the concept of citizenship: the demand for access, inclusion, membership and belonging to a given political system.

Molyneux and Lazer (2003) argue that this approach offers a more successful approach to people centered development, including participation and empowerment through the emphasis on peoples own agency. Here the emphasis on peoples own choice and capabilities are brought center stage. This approach seeks to change the relationship between citizen and state, to secure outcomes that are more developmental. The beauty of this approach is that it shows how to focus on a rights and claims that might enable the priorities, views and perceptions of the poor to be translated into real outcomes. This approach leads to policies that enhance social justice, which in turn, reduce social risk and strengthen long-term livelihood security and the realization of social and economic rights.

Nevertheless, the rights-based perspective offers a useful framework for people living in devolved units of governance who should be entitled not only to access services and opportunities, but also to participate in shaping the future of their region in a way that asserts their status as inhabitants of the country.

Arnstein's ladder of participation Theory:

Perhaps the seminal theoretical work on the subject of community participation was by Arnstein. The particular importance of Arnstein's work stems from the explicit recognition that there are different levels of Participation.

The bottom rungs of the ladder are (1) Manipulation and (2) Therapy. These two rungs describe levels of "non-participation" that have been contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. Their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable power holders to "educate" or "cure" the participants.

Rungs 3 and 4 progress to levels of "tokenism" that allow the have-nots to hear and to have a voice: (3) Informing and (4) Consultation. When they are proffered by power holders as the total extent of participation, citizens may indeed hear and be heard. But under these conditions they lack the power to insure that their views will be heeded by the powerful. When participation is restricted to these levels, there is no follow-through, no "muscle," hence no assurance of changing the status quo.

Rung (5) Placation is simply a higher level tokenism because the ground rules allow have-nots to advise, but retain for the power holders the continued right to decide. Further up the ladder are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making clout. Citizens can enter into rung (6) Partnership that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders.

At the topmost rungs, (7) Delegated Power and (8) Citizen Control, have-not citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power. Obviously, the eight-rung ladder is a simplification, but it helps to illustrate the

point that so many have missed - that there are significant gradations of citizen participation. Knowing these gradations makes it possible to cut through the hyperbole to understand the increasingly strident demands for participation from the have-nots as well as the gamut of confusing responses from the power holders. This theory presents a theoretical context of citizens, through to consultation, and to what is now viewed as genuine participation, i.e. the levels of partnership and citizen control. In Arnstein's framework, each of the steps represents a very broad category, within which there are likely to be a wide range of experiences. Since Arnstein, increasingly complex theories of participation have been advanced and new terminology added. In particular, there has been a shift towards understanding participation in terms of the empowerment of individuals and communities. This has stemmed from the growing prominence of the idea of the citizen as consumer, where choice among alternatives is seen as a means of access to power. Under this model, people are expected to be responsible for themselves and should, therefore, be active in public service decision-making.

Arnstein's ladder of participation has been modified also to a ladder of citizen power, which is more elaborate than Arnstein's ladder, with a further, more qualitative breakdown of some of the different levels.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

This study used descriptive research design. Kothari, 2004, defines descriptive research studies as those studies which are concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or of a group, or phenomena. This design was chosen due to its flexibility in terms of data collection and analysis, also due to its depth and breadths of the study variables, and that the data collected by the survey would attempt to provide descriptive information. It is an outcome evaluation assessment whether public participation program has produced the intended program benefits to service delivery such as influence on public policy or improved participant learning. It assessed these benefits in terms of goals when the output of the public participation exercise is received by the sponsors, or when the recommendations have been tabled and there has been discussion of the recommendations by decision makers and put into implementation planning and eventual implementation.

Target Population:

The population for the study was Kenyan citizens who reside in Makueni County as well as County Government staff who are the designers and implementers of outcomes of public participation and have resided in the county for at least six months prior to the study. The study will cover the four constituencies in Makueni county namely; Mbooni; Kilome; Kaiti; Makueni; Kibwezi West; Kibwezi East constituencies. Respondents will include both members of the public and county officials. In addition, respondents must be above the age of 18 and below the age of 70 years.

Sampling frame:

During the study, the researcher focused on residents of Makueni County. As such, participants in the study included government employees in the county as well as community members who had lived in the region for at least six months prior to the study. The researcher would access the respondents as they went about their normal business particularly in public places such as sports ground and local administrative offices. In addition, the researcher would visit the county government offices in Makueni to access active government workers. The accessible population was classified according to occupations that are predominant in the area. During the study, the researcher would restrict the processes of data collection to places accessible to the public since private firms mainly require formal access permit. The following is an estimation of the accessible population.

Studying the entire population of Makueni County would have been a difficult and tiring process. As a result, the researcher applied probability sampling to reduce cost and time as well as obtain a sample that represented the population characteristics fairly. The chief aim of sampling was to make inferences about unknown parameters from a measurable sample statistics (Krishnaswami (2002). Makueni County is classified into four constituencies and 20 wards. To obtain the sample, the researcher used stratified probability sampling. The constituency boundaries were used as the stratifying factor forming four heterogeneous strata. Proportional allocation was applied to identify the number of respondents from each stratum. The necessary sample (NS) was determined as follows.

$$NS = \frac{z \cdot \text{score} \cdot \text{std deviation}}{\text{margin error}}$$

$$= \frac{z^2 * p(1-p) / e^2}{1 + \left(\frac{z^2 * p(1-p)}{e^2 * N} \right)}$$

Where, $z = (1.96)$
 $e = (5\%)$
 $p = 0.5$
 $N = 528,054$

$$= \frac{(1.96^2 * 0.5(1-0.5)) / 0.05^2}{1 + \left(\frac{1.96^2 * 0.5(1-0.5)}{0.05^2 * 528054} \right)}$$

=384 respondents

constituency	Population	Stratum Size Notation N_i	Stratum Sample size
Mbooni;	190,512	N_1	139
Kilome	124,672	N_2	91
Kaiti	99,515	N_3	72
Kibwezi West	145,500	N_4	75
Kibwezi East	120,160	N_5	84
Makueni	113,335	N_6	82

Figure 1: Stratum sample sizes

h = the number of strata ($h=4$)

N_k = number of people in stratum h

N_i = number of people sampled from stratum h , $i=1,2,3,\dots,k$

N = the total number of units in the population i.e. $N_1+N_2+\dots+N_h$

Proportional sample allocation

$n_1/N_1 = n_2/N_2 = \dots = n_k/N_k = C$, C is a constant

$n_i/N_i = C$

$n_i = CN_i$

$\sum_{i=1}^k n_i = C \sum_{i=1}^k N_i$

$n = CN$, Therefore $C = n/N$

$n_i/N_i = n/N$

$n_i = n/N * N_i$

$n = 384$ (Sample size)

$N = 528054$ (Total population Under Study)

Data collection Instruments:

In-depth interviews and semi-structured questionnaires were used to gather primary data during the study. On the other hand, online journals, company record, related books and reports were used to gather secondary data. Since the study was conducted in a non-professional environment, the researcher personally interviewed the respondents and filled in the responses in the questionnaire. Since the study acknowledged the use of both quantitative and qualitative study design, it was possible to include closed and open questions in the questionnaires. The questions covered data and information relating to benefits of public participation based on the criteria of achieving four social goals of; increasing the substantive quality of decisions within the County; resolving conflict among competing interests; building trust in institutions and educating and informing the public.

Data Collection Procedure:

After the research proposal was approved, the researcher commenced data collection. Approval of the proposal allowed the researcher carry out the study in the selected area. The first step towards data collection was to prepare and gather all data collection tools such as questionnaires and recording materials. This would be followed by a pre-visit to Makueni country prior to the actual study to conduct a pilot study. Conducting a pilot study allowed the researcher to familiarize with the target population and location of the study. The main purpose of this visit was to pre-test the data collection tools before conducting the actual study. During the pilot study, the researcher confirmed the willingness of the respondents to participate in the research. In addition, the researcher checked the level of precision of the questions based on how the respondents interpret them. The results from the pilot study were positive. As such, the researcher commenced actual data collection as intended. The researcher began by explaining the purpose of the intended research and pledged assured the respondents that their identities would be concealed. The researcher, thereafter, progressed to ask the questions while filling in the responses on the questionnaires.

Pilot testing:

A pilot study was used to test the feasibility of the study and also check the adequacy of the research instruments. The pilot study checked on any unforeseen problems respondents may encounter while interacting with research instruments and improvement of the instruments. It assisted in ascertaining the accuracy and consistency of the research instruments before embarking on the actual data collection. During the pilot study, the researcher selected 14 respondents; two County government employee and twelve public members within the county. This represents 10% of the sample size. The purpose of pre-testing the questionnaire was to test wording, sequencing, questionnaire layout, and fieldwork arrangement.

Reliability of Research Instruments:

Reliability measures the extent of the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha will be used to measure the internal consistency of the research questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1 with higher values indicating higher reliability among the indicators (Hair *et al.*, 2007). The closer Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0 the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale. The minimum value recommended for the Cronbach's coefficient is 0.7. The researcher used SPSS to compute the cronbach's alpha. for this study, the value of the Cronbach's alpha was 0.838 implying that there is high internal consistency in the scale. Table 3.1 shows the value of the Cronbach's scale for the scale.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.838	.830	23

Reliability of Questionnaire

Validity of Research Instruments:

Validity is the degree to which a measure accurately represents what it is supposed to (Hair *et al.*, 2007). Validity determines the extent to which a scale measures a variable of interest. Since all the constructs are comprehensively addressed through the review of the relevant literature, I presume the questions are valid and capture the aspirations of the study.

Data analysis:

Kothari (2004) asserts that, the data, after collection, has to be processed and analyzed in accordance with the outline laid down for the purpose at the time of developing the research plan. This is essential for a scientific study and for ensuring that we have all relevant data for making contemplated comparisons and analysis. The term analysis refers to the computation of certain measures along with searching for patterns of relationship that exist among data-groups. The mass of data collected will be coded, summarized into frequency tables, and analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative technique was used to conduct content analysis especially from the qualitative data collected from the questionnaires.

Data Presentation:

Data was presented using frequency distribution tables, graphs, and pie charts.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Incorporation of public views in Decision Making:

During the study, the researcher investigated the extent to which public views influenced decision making in Makueni County. The questions covered aspects such as the readiness to propose a project, involvement in decision making and the rate of incorporating public inspired projects. First, the researcher sought to find out whether the respondents had part in county decision making regarding public projects. Majority of the participants (147) said they had never taken part in making decisions pertaining county projects. As part of the public participation program, citizens are expected to suggest projects that they consider a priority in their locality. On the question of whether or not participants had proposed any project during the public forums, majority of the respondents (223) said they have never suggested a project. Lastly, on the question of whether the projects suggested by members of the public had been incorporated, most respondents (239) said they were not aware of the details. Clearly, the rate at which citizens are involved in decision making in the county is very low. As a result, there is a high likelihood that the decisions made do not represent the interests of the members of the public. In addition, citizens do not have access to information on the progress of the projects they suggested or proposed.

Public participation refers to the involvement of those affected by a decision in the decision-making process. It encompasses a range of public involvement, from simply informing people about what government is doing to delegating decisions to the public. Broad public participation is a cornerstone of responsible democratic governance and a fundamental prerequisite to achieve sustainable development. 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. This research explored the potentially wide-ranging benefits of enhanced community participation to the citizenry and the Government, with the broadening of the public participation procedure towards a more collaborative one in which scientific and technical data were centered on the interests of the different actors, it assessed the underlying link of public participation to enhanced democracy and decision-making processes and the overall effect of public involvement to sustainable development. It evaluated the effects of public participation based on the criteria of achieving four social goals namely: incorporating public values into decisions; increasing the substantive quality of decisions; resolving conflict among competing interests and building trust in institutions. From the study results, it was clear that increasing public participation helps enhance service delivery.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of problems were noted during the study regarding public participations and service delivery. Following the findings from the study, the researcher made some recommendations aimed at increasing public participation regarding service delivery in the county.

The county government should invest on ways of increasing information availability to the residents. Information is essential for citizens' action. It enables people to know what is happening both around them and elsewhere and hence take appropriate action. In some cases, citizens fail to exercise their civic duties due to lack of information or because they do not understand their roles in ensuring successful service delivery. Residents should be sensitized on the importance of participating in government forums and giving their input so that they can be served better.

Administrators should utilize different institutions such as churches, administrative offices and public events to inform residents on the essence of public participation.

Conduct regular consultative meetings with village elders and leaders on better ways of reaching the public. This will aid in developing a communication system that is favors the lifestyle and needs of Makueni county residents.

Adopt better and far reaching communication infrastructure. Information sources, resources, ICT equipment and internet connections should be established, strengthened and updated to contain current and relevant information. They should also be accessible, easy to use and updated.

Conduct regular public forums during which technical documents and information such as budgets and laws can be translated or broken down for the locals.

Design mechanisms of incorporating and adopting projects suggested by the locals in order to encourage more public participation.

The locals should be enlightened on the relevance of public participation. Public education campaigns should be undertaken to ensure that citizens are aware of their right to participate in decision-making processes.

Administrators should invest on research to ensure continued improvement of public service delivery. In addition, data gathered during public forums should be recorded and stored for future reference.

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