

Nexus between Citizen Participation in Decision Making and Performance of County Assemblies in Kenya

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Abstract

Worldwide, public participation in decision making has been advocated as being essential for the effectiveness of public organizations. County assemblies in Kenya are legally required to implement laws guiding public participation in decision making. Though citizen participation in decision making is essential for implementation of the mandate of county assemblies (oversight, representation, and legislation), the extent of its relationship with performance of county assemblies in Kenya is not clear. Whilst there is a strong impetus towards conducting public participation by county assemblies in Kenya, there is a gap between the provisions in the legal framework and actual practice on the ground leading to poor public participation which has an effect on the performance of county assemblies in Kenya. This study examined the nexus between citizen participation in decision making and performance of County assemblies in Kenya. Correlation analysis was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between citizen participation in decision making and effectiveness in performance of county assemblies in Kenya. The study found a strong correlation between citizen participation and county assembly efficiency ($r = 0.448$, p). This study filled the gap that existed mainly on involving citizens in decision making. To improve performance of county assemblies, there is need to involve the citizens, to foster collaboration among and within counties, and to network with stakeholders.

Key Words: *Citizen Participation, Performance of County Assemblies, Public Organization,*

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1.0 Introduction

According to Osso and Onen (2005), the notion of organisational performance relates to an organisation's goals and objectives. Monetary performance in business refers to the rewards of an organisation in terms of return on investment. For the county assemblies, which are parliamentary

institutions in nature, performance is mainly measured through their mandates of legislation, oversight, and representation. Change in a service institution arises out of the need for the efficiency, economy, effectiveness, performance evaluation and market concerns.

According to Ariwomoi (2013) in his study on challenges of implementing change at selected county assemblies in Kenya, all clerks and county speakers were fully involved in implementing change management and changes introduced by the new constitution at the county assembly level. The cross survey revealed that change management was implemented in 54.5% of the county assemblies. The study concluded that county assemblies and the County Assembly Service Board (CASB) are involved in management of the overall change process. The study recommended that county assemblies must find ways of operating by developing new competencies as knowledge if not upgraded, is easily eroded by technology, environmental changes and globalisation. The study found that communication was the biggest challenge in implementing change and sharing knowledge and experiences (CoG, 2017).

According to Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in their study on political economy analysis of devolution in Kenya, it was established that the fruits of devolution are experienced at varying levels among counties in Kenya. Devolution has led to infrastructural developments, improved service delivery and the drafting of development plans that are more localised. Devolution has catapulted and catalysed the development of counties that were previously marginalised, including rural areas that were severely underdeveloped; the merits of devolution are most visible in these areas (World, Bank, 2018). Additionally, public services have now become more accessible to the residents of counties due to subsidiarity and local control and management brought about by the devolution process. Accessibility and proximity enable residents to engage with their members of county assemblies (MCAs) who are their representatives and policy

implementers and provide a platform for petitioning/lobbying for their most pressing needs and the implementation of services (Maloughlin, 2014).

In a study on "The Power of Evidence-Based Legislation: Legislation, Challenges and Opportunities for Effective Legislation", Oronje (2017) found that there is a weak capacity in legislation. This study found that legislation in county assemblies lacked capacity to use evidence-based research, the unavailability of county-specific data for county-level decision-making, poor relationship between the assembly and the executive, and the lack of enforcement laws, among other challenges. At the county assembly level, it has been observed that MCAs have a significant lack of legislative knowledge and skills, which means that many bills are prepared by county assembly staff.

Quite often, county assembly staff have been found to lack the capacity to conduct research on legislative matters and to utilise the information gathered in drafting bills and this has greatly affected the quality of bills drafted (UNDP, 2017). Further, Omowele et al.(2018) in a study on "political economy analysis of devolution in Kenya", established that the Elgeyo Marakwet County Assembly passed the Equalisation Fund Law using the same formula as the one used at the national level where a budget is allocated to specific services such as roads in one year and water in the following year per ward. The study also established that the county assemblies of Nairobi, Makeni, Laikipia, Busia, Wajir and Elgeyo Marakwet had passed and institutionalised public participation laws in their respective counties.

Citizen participation empowers people to have a say on public decisions (Gay, 2013). It originated in ancient Greece and colonial geographical areas. It was institutionalized in mid-1960s through President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programmes (Cogan, 2015). Mize (1972) highlighted how citizens had a direct influence in government towards decision making. Citizen participation in governance is increasingly being used to enhance the effectiveness of government. According to Azfar, (1999) decentralisation transfers administrative and central government functions to lower governments, hence making many countries to adopt decentralisation over the past three decades (Schaik 2001).

In 2001 Ukraine created an opportunity through a conference for citizens to share on some issues and challenges encountered through citizen participation. The conference had a group of participants from the seventeen Countries in Central and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, Finland became the first nation to implement the modern framework of citizen participation legislation in decision making in public institutions and it was established that it helped in policy formulation, planning and implementation which improved performance of institutions.

Kenya's Constitution, which was promulgated in 2010, establishes a system of shared government, whereby 47 county governments are established under a single national government. The law established two levels of government and, more specifically, in making important decisions that affect the citizens of Kenya. The Constitution establishes that the participation of interested parties must be made at all legislative levels, namely, Senate, National Assembly and County

assemblies. The constitution of Kenya under Article 196 (1 (a) also states that the county assembly should conduct its business openly and should also conduct its sessions and meetings publicly. County assemblies should commit to work closely with the county executive arm to ensure the success of devolution, pass legislation that facilitates service delivery to Kenyan citizens, and relentlessly and objectively perform oversight to ensure quality service delivery in the devolved governments.

Citizen participation

The rationale for citizen participation is that involving citizens in making decisions encourages openness and accountability by politicians. County governments are responsive to the citizens' demands (Rajesh & Mohini, 2007). Citizen participation is the main determinant towards achievement of devolution and good governance at the county level. Citizens will be able to hold their county government to account if only they understood devolution and how elected/appointed leaders should perform their duties. Article one of the Kenyan Constitution (2010) states that all sovereign power is vested in the people.

A review of existing literature reveals that even though various studies have been conducted on the effect of citizen participation on organisational performance, only few such studies have been conducted in government organizations, particularly in county assemblies in Kenya. It was thus imperative to assess the extent and effect of citizen participation on the performance of the legislative institutions such as the county assemblies in Kenya. Consequently, we endeavoured first to determine the practice of citizen participation and secondly, its relationship on the performance of the 47 county assemblies in Kenya. Considering the positive effects of citizen participation

that have been documented in previous studies, this study sought to understand the extent to which it was being practised, and how it impacted the performance of county assemblies with regard to their mandate of legislation, representation and oversight.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally improving public participation is crucial in decision making in policy, legislation, planning and service delivery. Improving citizen participation in the above areas will lead to more responsible county assembly, inclusive ownership of decisions, and sustainable engagement with the public. Whilst there is a strong impetus towards conducting public participation by county assemblies in Kenya, there is a gap between the law on paper and the actual practice on the ground, leading to poor public participation which has an effect on performance of county assemblies in Kenya.

According to the Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis (KPPRA), county assembly managers have challenges of lack of relevant data, yet these assemblies inform critical decisions made by county governments which determine the services offered by these devolved unites. The 2010 constitution of Kenya breaks down the devolved structure in two arms: the Executive arm – which is made up of the county executive committee lead by the Governor that undertakes all the administrative duties, and the legislature arm which consists of all the elected and nominated MCAs whose responsibilities include but are not limited to legislation, representation, and oversight roles.

Article 185 (3) of the Kenyan Constitution states that, a county assembly, while respecting the principle of separation of powers, may oversee the county's executive committee and any other county executive organs. The purpose of overseeing

the county assemblies is to ensure the acquisition of devia, as envisaged under Article 174, which is to protect the rights and interests of minorities without forgetting their exercise on democracy.

Despite several studies having been conducted on the nexus between citizen participation in decision making and organisational performance by various researchers, limited studies have been carried out to determine the nexus between citizen participation in decision making and performance of county assemblies in Kenya and therefore there is a knowledge gap which this study sought to bridge.

Hence, the aim of the study was to assess the relationship between citizen participation in decision making and performance of county assemblies in Kenya. In order to examine the relationship between citizen participation in decision making and performance of the county assemblies in Kenya, we set out to test one main hypothesis using three sub-hypotheses that were derived from the constitutional mandate of county assemblies (legislation, representation, and oversight).

The study tested the hypothesis that:

H₀₁: There is no relationship between citizen participation and performance of county assemblies in Kenya.

Overview of Literature

This study was guided by civic voluntarism theory which is anchored on civic education and its influence on the citizens' involvement in the development of their localities. This theory was pioneered by Verba et al. (1995) and it helps in advocating for acquisition of civic knowledge. Subsequently, it has been used to explain the importance of citizen participation in some countries towards

improving the government performance. According to the theory, there are three major ideas that explain reasons for or against citizen participation in the county or other areas of governance. The theory applies in this context as it explains the importance of citizen participation towards improving performance in the government set ups and especially the county assemblies.

Citizen participation is the practice by the governments and corporations integrating a society's interests, needs and values into decision making (Creighton, 2005). The participation of citizens in governance is crucial for government reforms which were introduced in Kenya's 2010 Constitution Article 1 (1) which gives the Kenyan people full mandate. This power is exercised through direct or indirect participation of elected representatives (GoK, 2010). Most of the reviewed studies have been carried out in developed countries and therefore there is a need to conduct a study in the region, specifically in Kenya, to compare the findings.

2.0 Methodology

A positivist research paradigm was used in this study because the study was done on observable social entities which were the 46 county assemblies. One county assembly was used to pre-test the data collection instruments and was thus excluded from the survey. Descriptive design was applied as it involved gathering of information which showed the relationships and described the world as it existed without manipulation of the variables. A census was adopted as a sample design as the researcher addressed speakers of all the 46 county assemblies, 46 clerks and 46 deputy clerks in Kenya with a total of 138 respondents. The study opted to use speakers, county assembly clerks and deputy

clerks because they are involved in representing county assemblies on the ground in collecting and collating citizens' views. Out of the 138 respondents, 98 responded.

This study used questionnaires to collect primary data. To establish whether the data collection instrument had content and construct validities, expert opinion was sought from the research supervisors. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to test the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. SPSS was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics used consisted of frequencies, mean and standard deviation. The results are presented in Table 1.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Citizen Participation

The status of citizen participation in policy formulation, planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects is presented. The question intended to find out the respondents' views concerning policy formulation, planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects where respondents indicated the extent to which citizens participated in various activities of the county assemblies. The extent of agreement with statements regarding citizen participation in county assembly affairs using ordinal scale are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Citizen Participation

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Citizens provide feedback on implementation of projects in the wards	98	1	5	3.54	0.932
Citizens participate in planning of the ward projects	98	1	5	3.90	0.879
Citizens participate in the implementation of the projects in the wards	98	1	5	3.41	0.987
Citizens make suggestions on how to improve on the planning of the ward projects	98	1	5	3.66	0.956
Citizens bring out their views on how to improve on the implementation of the ward projects	98	1	5	3.75	0.951
Citizens suggest corrections to be made by the county assembly on the planning of the ward projects	98	1	5	3.69	0.999
Citizens suggest corrections to be made by the county assembly on the implementation of the ward projects	98	1	5	3.56	0.982
There is commitment by the MCAs towards the public participation programs	98	1	5	3.79	1.133
Citizens usually have high expectations on the outcome of the citizen participation processes	98	1	5	4.14	0.974
Citizen participation	98	1	5	3.72	0.773

The results in Table 1 imply that that there was moderate citizen participation (M = 3.72, SD = 0.773) since the threshold should have been 4.00. The implication is that citizens need to be sensitised more to be able to actively participate in the governance of the counties by rendering their voice in all the affairs of governance. The most prevalent instances of citizen participation were that “Citizens participate in planning of the ward projects” (M = 3.90, SD = 0.88) and “Citizens usually have high expectations on the outcome of the citizen participation process” (M = 4.14, SD = 0.97). However, there was moderate citizen participation in provision of feedback on implementation of projects in the wards (M = 3.54, SD = 0.93) and participation of citizens in the implementation of the projects in the wards (M = 3.41, SD = 0.99). This finding implies that citizens need to be sensitised on the need to participate more in project implementation at the ward levels and also

provide feedback which can be used to improve performance of the county assemblies. The findings agree with a study carried out by Rowe (2000) on the analysis of citizen participation in economic growth in the United Kingdom which showed a significant relationship between citizen participation and the performance of the organisations.

Summary of Citizen Participation and Relationship between Citizen Participation and Performance of County Assemblies

The strength and direction of the nexus between citizen participation and performance (oversight, legislation, and representation) were assessed using Pearson product moment correlation of summated scores of all the variables. The results of the analysed data are in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics on Citizen Participation and Performance of County Assemblies

Constructs	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Institutional ties	98	1	4	2.39	0.65	0.267	0.244	-0.154	0.483
Political ties	98	2	4	3.01	0.79	-0.018	0.244	-1.403	0.483
Social ties	98	1	4.3	2.81	0.71	-0.308	0.244	-0.457	0.483
Citizen participation	98	1	5	3.72	0.77	-0.908	0.244	1.287	0.483
Legislation	98	1.50	4.93	3.57	0.70	-0.665	0.244	0.306	0.483
Oversight	98	2.39	4.80	3.67	0.57	-0.188	0.244	-0.568	0.483
Representation	98	1	5.00	3.69	0.76	-0.865	0.244	1.333	0.483
Performance	98	1.73	4.83	3.36	0.66	-0.218	0.244	-0.006	0.483

Summary of Status of Citizen Participation and Performance

There was moderate citizen participation in the performance of county assemblies (M = 3.72, SD = 0.77). Similarly, the performance of county assemblies was rated as moderate (M = 3.36, SD = 0.66) with representation being most satisfactory (M = 3.69, SD =

0.76) while legislation was least satisfactory (M = 3.57, SD = 0.70). This notwithstanding, the rating of the respondents on legislation, oversight and representation was not widely varied because the standard deviation from the composite means was not large (SD < 1) as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Relationship between Citizen Participation and Performance of the County Assemblies

(Pearson Correlation Co-efficient)

Construct	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Citizen participation	3.72	0.77	0.771				
2. Legislation	3.57	0.70	.517** <0.001	0.725			
3. Oversight	3.67	0.57	.465** <0.001	.559** <0.001	0.902		
4. Representation	3.69	0.76	.404** <0.001	.418** <0.001	.527** <0.001	0.775	
5. Performance of county assemblies	3.36	0.66	.448** <0.001 98	.470** <0.001 98	.489** <0.001 98	.667** <0.001 98	0.756 98

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 3, legislation, oversight and representation are the indicators of performance of county assemblies in Kenya. All the constructs in the study: citizen participation ($\alpha = 0.771$), legislation ($\alpha = 0.725$), representation ($\alpha = 0.775$) and oversight ($\alpha = 0.902$) had a significant effect on performance of county assemblies. The correlation results suggest that there was a strong correlation between citizen participation and composite (aggregate mean) performance of county assemblies ($r = .448, p < .001$).

The strongest correlation was between citizen participation and legislation ($r = .517, p < .001$) followed by oversight ($r = .465, p < 0.05$) and lastly representation ($r = .404, p < 0.05$). The findings agree with Lamb's (2011) finding on analysis of citizen participation in economic growth in Canada which found a significant relationship between citizen

participation and the performance of the organisation. The findings are also in agreement with a study carried out by Rowe (2000) on the analysis of citizen participation in economic growth in the United Kingdom which found a significant relationship between citizen participation and the performance of the organisations. Kenya's emphasis on public participation to improve performance resonates with the global experience, which shows that building bottom-up participatory mechanisms is a key ingredient to effective decentralisation (World Bank, 2018).

4.0 Conclusion

Citizen participation and performance of county assemblies were moderately rated thus necessitating some improvement. There was a significant positive relationship between citizen participation and both the overall performance of county assemblies,

and the individual sub-variables of county assembly performance which were legislation, oversight, and representation. Citizen participation is most strongly related with legislation and least related with representation. The relationships are strong and positive.

5.0 Value and Implications

Based on these findings it is recommended that county assemblies make efforts to enhance citizen participation by providing

more structured opportunities to engage with citizens while carrying their mandate of legislation, oversight, and representation because this participation has a positive relationship with performance. Consequently, citizens should be sensitised by civil societies, in partnership with county governments and national governments, to actively participate in the governance of the counties by rendering their voice in all the affairs of governance while county assemblies should improve their performance.

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