NEXUS BETWEEN CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND PERFOMANCE OF COUNTY ASSEMBLIES IN KENYA

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**Abstract**

Public participation in many organizations has been widely advocated by both theorists and practitioners as being essential for the effectiveness of organizations. County assemblies in Kenya are required by law to implement specific mandates within their realm, namely legislation, representation and oversight. Though citizen participation is essential for implementation of this mandate, the extent of its practice and its relationship with performance has received little empirical investigation particularly in devolved units of government in Kenya. We examined the nexus between citizen participation and performance of County assemblies in Kenya through a descriptive census survey of 46 counties (one county was used to pretest the data collection instruments) where 98 respondents out of the target 138 comprising Speakers, Clerks and Deputy Clerks of the County Assemblies in Kenya were surveyed using a structured questionnaire for data collection. While the status of practice of citizen participation was assessed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between citizen participation and performance with t-test being used to determine the significance of individual correlation coefficients. There was moderate citizen participation (M = 3.72, SD = 0.77). This level of participation was low because the threshold should have been at least 4.00. Similarly, the performance of county assemblies was also below the optimal level (M = 3.36, SD = 66). Further, there was strong correlation between citizen participation and performance of county assemblies (r = .448, p<.001); and with and attributes of performance (legislation, oversight and representation). 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). It is recommended that citizen participation be improved because it is strongly positively related with performance of County assemblies. Lastly, citizens should be sensitized more to be able to actively participate in the governance of the counties by rendering their voice in all the affairs of governance while county assembly should improve their performance ta achieve a score of at least 4 on a scale of 1 to 5.

***Key words:*** *Citizen Participation, Performance, County assemblies,*

# **Introduction**

Gay (2013), recognized citizen participation as a process which provides private individuals an opportunity to influence public decisions and has long been a component of the democratic decision-making process. The roots of citizen participation can be traced to ancient Greece and Colonial New England. Before the 1960s, governmental processes and procedures were designed to facilitate "external" participation. Citizen participation was institutionalized in the mid-1960s with President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs (Cogan S., 2015). According Mize, (1972) Public involvement ensures that citizens have a direct voice in public decisions. The terms "citizen" and "public," and "involvement" and "participation" are often used interchangeably.

Generally, both are used to indicate a process through which citizens have a voice in public policy decisions, both have distinctively different meanings and convey little insight into the process they seek to describe. Mize reveals that the term "citizen participation" and its relationship to public decision-making has evolved without a general consensus regarding either its meaning or its consequences. Citizen participation in governance and public service delivery is increasingly pursued in a bid to improve the performance of governments. Indeed, improving delivery of public services continues to be a key objective that has occupied the agenda of public administrators.

According to Azfar, (1999) decentralization involves ‘the transfer of administrative, fiscal and political powers and functions of the central government to lower-level governments.The number of countries adopting it, and the magnitude of implementation has made decentralization a key global trend in public administration and management in the last three decades (Schaik 2001).

In the year 2001 Ukraine created an opportunity through a conference for citizens to share on some issues and challenges encountered through the citizen participation exercise. The conference had a group of participants from the seventeen Countries in Central and Eastern Europe. On the other hand in 1951 Finland became the first nation to implement the modern framework of citizen participation legislation.The South Africa constitution just like Kenya have entrenched devolution system of decentralizing powers to the grassroots. South Africa has a unitary system of government with three tier system of government which are dependent of each other while equally cooperating with each other.

 The system includes the national government at the top, nine provincial governments in the middle and 284 local governments. The South Africa constitution provides for the revenue sharing among the three levels of the government (Rao, 2003). According to Kaur, (2014) in the European Union (EU) people only participate during the elections of the legislators for the EU Legislative Assembly or during the referendum on any given issue. The East Africa Community (EAC) is composed of six countries namely; Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and recently South Sudan. The EAC recognizes a country that lacks citizen participation through the civil society organizations hence making the private sector responsible for the collapse of the former community in 1977.

The Kenya’s Constitution which was promulgated in the year 2010 provides for the devolved system of government whereby the 47 County Governments were established under one national government. The two levels of government are required by law and more particularly by the Constitution of Kenya (CoK) to involve the citizens in making key decisions which affect them.The Constitution necessitates that stakeholder participation be done at all legislative stages, namely; the Senate, the national Assembly and the County Assemblies. The CoK under Article 196 (1(a) provides that county assembly shall carry their businesses in an open method and hold its sessions and those of its boards in public. Subsection 1 (b) thereof further provides that County assemblies shall assist in the citizen participation process during law-making and other processes of the county assemblies and their boards. County Assemblies commit to work closely with the county executives arms to ensure the success of devolution, pass legislation that facilitates service delivery to Kenyan citizens, relentlessly and objectively perform oversight to ensure quality service delivery during the devolved government.

## **Citizen participation**

The rationale for public participation is that it is widely believed that by involving the citizens in the decision-making process, it promotes openness and accountability of political decision makers. As a result, county governments are likely to be responsive to the citizens’ demands hence, more responsive in-service delivery to people (Rajesh Tandon & MohiniKak, 2007). In strict sense, citizen participation is the key determinant to the accomplishment of devolution and good governance at the county level. This is only attainable if the citizens have an understanding of devolution and a realistic idea of how duty bearers (elected/appointed leaders) should perform. It is only then that the citizen will be able to hold their county government to account. The Constitution of Kenya 2010, in Article 1 states that all sovereign power is vested to the people of Kenya (KIPPRA, 2016). This supremacy can be articulated through direct participation or indirectly through elected representatives (UNDP (2016).

## **Performance of legislative organizations in general and of County assemblies in particular**

According Oso and Onen, (2005), the concept of the organizational performance is the comparison of an organization's goals and objectives with its actual performance in three distinct areas, financial performance, market performance, and shareholder value. Financial performance refers to an organization's results with regard to return on investment and return on assets. The market performance refers to a company's ability to make and distribute their outputs in the most cost-effective way and to set a price that returns a reasonable amount to suppliers. In addition, organizational performance refers to the ability of a company to meet the demands and expectations of consumers regarding the good or service produced.

Some organizations also measure market performance with regard to how great a share of the market they possess relative to their competitors, and some measure their ability to achieve social responsibility (or stewardship of the environment and responsibility to the community). For the county assemblies, which are in nature parliamentary institutions, 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 established that all clerks and county speakers were all fully involved in implementing change management and changes introduced by the new constitution at county assembly level. The cross survey revealed that change management was implemented at 54.5%. The study concluded that county assembly and the County Assembly Service Board (CASB) are involved in management of the overall change process at the county assembly. The study recommended that county assemblies must find ways of operating by developing new competencies as competencies are easily eroded by technology, environmental changes and globalization. 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 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 localized. Devolution has catapulted and catalysed the development of counties that were previously marginalized, 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 representatives (MCAs) and policy implementers and provide a platform for petitioning/lobbying for their most pressing needs and the implementation of services (Mcloughlin,2014).

In a study on “Evidence based law making legislature: challenges and opportunities for effective and efficient making processes”, Oronje (2017) established that there is weak capacity in law making and evidence utilization, lack of specific county level data for county decision making, poor relations between county assembly and county governments executive and lack of implementation laws. The challenge of weak capacity in law making, conducting legislative research and effective utilization of evidence. At county assembly level it was observed that there is huge capacity gap in knowledge and skills in law making among members of the county assembly and this meant many bills are being drafted by the county assembly staff because members of the county assembly have no capacity to prepare them. The staff have been found to lack capacity in conducting legislative research and in evidence use and this has greatly affected the quality of bills drafted (UNDP, 2017). Further, Omowele, Mrewa and Silvosa (2018) in a study on “political economy analysis of devolution in Kenya” established that Elgeyo Marakwet County Assembly passed equalisation fund law using the same formula as the one used at national level where budget is allocated to specific services such as roads in one year and water in the following year per ward. They also established that County assemblies of Nairobi, Makueni, Laikipia, Busia, Wajir and Elgeyo Marakwet had passed and institutionalized public participation laws in their respective counties.

A review of extant literature suggests that studies have been conducted in organizations on citizen participation vis-a-vis organizational performance through the studies were few on citizen participation in government organisations, particularly the county assembles in Kenya. In particular, there was scarce empirical literature on this phenomenon in government context. It was thus imperative to assess the extent and effect of the citizen participation on the performance of the legislative institutions such as the county assemblies in Kenya Consequently, we endeavored to first, determine the practice of citizen participation and secondly, its relationship between the citizen participation and performance of the 47 county assemblies in Kenya. Given the positive effects of citizen participation that has been documented in previous studies, an understanding of the extent to which it was being practised, and how it related with performance of county assemblies with regard to their mandate of legislation, representation and oversight is crucial to guide the functioning of these assembles.

# **Theory and hypothesis**

This study was underpinned by the social learning theory (Bandura, 1963) and the Civic voluntarism theory (Verba & Nie, 1972).

**Social Learning Theory**

In the year 1963 Albert Bandura developed the social learning theory and argued that learning occurs through modeling, imitation or observation; thus it can be attributed to response on environmental stimuli (Harinie, 2017). Miller and Dunn, (2010) noted that social learning theory is a theory of [learning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning) process and [social behavior](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_behavior) which stipulates and postulates that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others. It states that [learning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning) is a [cognitive process](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_process) that takes place in a [social context](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_context) and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction (Wang, 2008). Drawing from the SLT and applying it to the context of County Assemblies, the environmental stimuli for the county assemblies in Kenya are the citizens who are the electorate and whose input can improve the performance of these counties. Through sharing and reflection of experiences, values, ideas and experiences, the electorates are able to solve particular issues such as utilization of public funds and transparency; hence enabling the stakeholders such as county and national governments to reach agreements and or make appropriate decisions on various issues which fall within the purview of legislation, representation and oversight. The social learning theory is important in this study because it explains the roles of the citizens towards governance issues aimed at to improving the performance of county assemblies in Kenya. Such participation has the potential to improve delivery of services to the citizens by the concerned assemblies.

**Civic voluntarism theory**

The civic voluntarism theory is anchored upon the civic education and its influence on the citizens’ involvement in the development of their localities. This theory was pioneered in the United States by Norman Nie and Sidney Verba in 1972, it helps in understanding citizen participation after or before acquisition of civic knowledge. Subsequently, it has been used to explain 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.

Lack of citizens’ participation can be brought about by lack of capacity to do task, and limited opportunities. Lack of citizen participation springs from the feeling of being left out among the citizens in the various activities that the government carries out. The theory applies in this context as it explains the importance of citizen participation towards improving performance in the government set up and especially the county assemblies.

**Hypothesis**

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

The main hypothesis tested was that:

*H01: There is no relationship between citizen participation and performance of County Assemblies in Kenya*;

Consistent with the main hypothesis the three related sub hypotheses as follows:

*H01a: There is no significant relationship between citizen participation and legislation by County assemblies in Kenya*

*H02b: There is no significant relationship between citizen participation and oversight by County assemblies in Kenya*

*H03c: There is no significant relationship between citizen participation and representation by County assemblies in Kenya.*

# **Methodology**

Research philosophy represents the researcher’s guiding assumptions about the nature of the worldview (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Creswell et al., 2003; Saunders et al., 2008). The positivist research paradigm was used in this study because the study was carried out on observable social entities which were the 46 County assemblies while data collected from the respondents using questionnaires was based on reality and quantifiable observation. In line with the paradigm that was chosen, descriptive design was applied in this study because it involved collection of information that demonstrated relationships and described the world as it exists without manipulation of the variables. According to Mugenda (2013) a research design aims at improving the ability of the research in conceptualizing an operational plan in order to be able to embark on the various techniques available. The units of study were 46 County Assemblies in Kenya with a target population was 138 respondents comprising speaker, clerks and deputy clerks – three respondents from each county. One county which was used to pretest the data collection instruments was excluded from the survey.

A sample is simply a subset of the population (Ellis, 2010). The study adopted census as a sampling design because the researcher targeted the 46 County assemblies’ speakers, 46 clerks and the 46 deputy clerks in Kenya totaling to 138 respondents which was a manageable number. 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 Supervisors. The data obtained was tested and pre-tested to address any insufficiencies that may have arisen arose before the actual analysis of the overall findings.

Quantitative data has quantifiable information that can be used for statistical analysis and decisions can be made based on the mathematical derivations. Data collected was analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis to test the influence of independent variable on dependent variable. SPSS was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics comprising frequencies and percentages was applied to summarize the results. The study adhered to appropriate research procedures and all sources of information were acknowledged much far as possible. Full confidentiality was maintained especially when dealing with questionnaires and the identity of the respondents was kept secret.

# **Results and Discussion**

In this section we present the results of analysis. The results are in two parts. The first part comprises the descriptive results while the second part is the correlation results which show the strength and direction of the relationship between citizen participation and performance of county assemblies.

## **Citizen participation**

The status of citizen participation is presented in Table 1 where respondents indicated the extent to which citizens participated in various activities of the County assemblies. The extent of agreement with statements regarding the citizen participation in county affairs were anchored on five point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly agree).

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 | 97 | 1 | 5 | 3.41 | 0.987 |
| Citizens make suggestions on how to improve on the planning of the ward projects | 97 | 1 | 5 | 3.66 | 0.956 |
| Citizens bring out their views on how to improve on the implementation of the ward projects | 96 | 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 | 96 | 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 the Table1 implies that that there was moderate citizen participation (M = 3.72, SD = 0.773). This level of participation was low because the threshold should have been 4.00. The implication is that citizens need to be sensitized 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 relative low 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 participate more in project implementation at the ward levels and also provide feedback which can be used to improve governance and service delivery by the county assemblies.

## **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.

*Table 2. Relationship between citizen participation and performance of the county assemblies*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Construct** | **M** | **SD** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| 1. Citizen Participation | 3.72 | 0.77 | ***0.771*** |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Legislation | 3.57 | 0.70 | .517\*\* | ***0.725*** |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | <0.001 |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Oversight | 3.67 | 0.57 | .465\*\* | .559\*\* | ***0.902*** |  |  |
|  |  |  | <0.001 | <0.001 |  |  |  |
| 4. Representation | 3.69 | 0.76 | .404\*\* | .418\*\* | .527\*\* | ***0.775*** |  |
|  |  |  | <0.001 | <0.001 | <0.001 |  |  |
| 5. Performance of County assemblies | 3.36 | 0.66 | .448\*\* | .470\*\* | .489\*\* | .667\*\* | ***0.756*** |
|  |  |  | <0.001 | <0.001 | <0.001 | <0.001 |  |
|   |  |  | 98 | 98 | 98 | 98 | 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 2, the reliability test results for the study constructs are presented in the leading diagonal and indicated that the instrument was reliable. As seen from the reliability figures, all the constructs in the study: citizen participation (**α = 0.771**), legislation (**α =** **0.725**), representation (**α =** **0.775**) and oversight (**α =0.902**) had reliability alphas above 0.7 (**α >** **0.7 for all constructs)** as recommended by scholars.

**Summary of Status of citizen participation and performance**

There was moderate citizen participation in the governance of the count assembles (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).

**Relationship between citizen participation and performance**

The correlation results suggest that there was 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 are in agreement with Lamb’s (2011) findings in his study on analysis on voluntary citizen participation in community economic development in Canada that posits that there is a significant correlation between citizen participation and organization performance.

# **Conclusion and applied implications**

Citizen participation and performance of County assemblies were moderately rated (3.00 <M < 4.00) thus necessitating some improvement. There was a significant positive relationship between citizen participation and both the overall performance (r = .448, p<.001) 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.

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. Needless to emphasize, it is in the interest of elected members to have a satisfied citizenry because this has implications for reelection; and this depends on how satisfactorily they perform their functions (legislation, representation and oversight) in the eyes of the citizens. Consequently, citizens should be sensitized more to be able to actively participate in the governance of the counties by rendering their voice in all the affairs of governance while county assembly should improve their performance ta achieve a score of at least 4 on a scale of 1 to 5.

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