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STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN KENYAN COUNTY GOVERNMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The study was on stakeholder engagement strategy on service delivery in Kenyan county governments. Descriptive survey design using structured and semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data. Nine county governments in Kenya were chosen purposively for the study's sample size. Two hundred and nineteen respondents were selected using a random sampling procedure, and their responses were compiled. The study's primary variables were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, and their statistical relationships were examined using regression and correlation analysis. The results of the study revealed a statistically significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and service delivery.

***Key words**: Stakeholder engagement, County government, service delivery*

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INTRODUCTION

Stakeholder engagement (SE) entails collaborating, interacting, and strengthening ties with stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2013; Godenhjelm & Johanson, 2018), ensuring the partners participate in the decision-making process throughout the project (Kimutai & Kwambai, 2018). Collaboration, involvement, and negotiation are the three primary stages of stakeholder management strategies.

Any project's success depends entirely on the stakeholders' contribution, particularly the identification method, the degree of stakeholder engagement, and participation in executing the project's activities necessary for successful outcomes (Karim et al., 2020). At the local level, the stakeholders comprise all the organizations responsible for executing the initiative and the individuals to whom the project benefits. It is also necessary for the parties to be active in the decision-making phase to prevent disputes.

Involvement requires information and consultation to improve stakeholder awareness of the initiative, although participation includes a higher degree of interaction to minimize future stakeholder disputes (Nguyen et al., 2018). SE suggests that stakeholders have been enabled to share their opinions, impact project decisions, and realize what is being agreed upon (Ayuso et al., 2011). The main objective of engagement is to establish an inclusive decision-making process, with more substantial input from stakeholders and subsequent decision-making (Cascetta et al., 2015).

From the perspective of public resource management, stakeholder engagement more often refers to the role of stakeholders in preparation or decision-making to bring their expertise and principles with the more technical knowledge and intent of a specific project (Kurnia, 2021).

The stakeholders' engagement practices include joint partnerships, conversations, and relationships that produce quality service delivery (Alade, 2013; De Schepper et al., 2014). Kajoba (2016) recommended that adopting a stakeholder engagement approach is a significant organizational transition that requires ongoing management commitment and understanding over its long-term existence (Salvioni & Almici, 2020). Maintaining current stakeholders and clients is more critical than attracting new ones since happy stakeholders would introduce new stakeholders on their own (Fiore et al., 2020).

Stakeholder engagement is considered the most comprehensive management mechanism in decision-making because it is believed to be more flexible and holistic than top-down, tactical approaches (Wagenet & Pfeffer 2007, Butler & Adamowski 2015, Decker et al. 2015). Many scholars found that the case of stakeholder involvement and confidence in decision-making scenarios is likely to lead to stronger governance and accountability (e.g., Koontz & Thomas 2006, Wagenet & Pfeffer 2007). Other researchers have observed that stakeholder involvement is intuitively unstable in information (Freeman 1999, Jones & Wicks 1999; Noland & Phillips 2010).

Stakeholder commitments impact how the organization develops innovative brands and builds strong supply chains that give the firm a competitive edge (Sloan, 2009). D'Angella and Go (2009) added that the route's competitive advantage and the stakeholders would be strengthened through partnership. SE allows for a strong understanding of how stakeholders are engaged in the work. If stakeholders' requirements are violated, even previously happy stakeholders can turn pessimistic (Luoma-Aho, 2015).

The current study will concentrate on the information, involvement, and consultation of three stakeholder engagement approaches. The analysis postulates that they will have stronger ties with service delivery so these methods would be picked. There is minimal evidence empirically examining developed countries' relationship between stakeholder engagement and service delivery. Existing findings have mostly been taken from programs in developing countries and cannot be generalized in local contexts due to numerous structural, legislative, and cultural considerations.

Statement of the Problem

The inception of a new constitution in 2010 brought about inherent changes in Kenya's governance structure. This constitution advocated for adopting devolved governance, which took effect after the 2013 general election. Thus, the reborn of devolved governance presented opportunities to bring the locals' essential services closer through proper stakeholder management strategies.

Stakeholder management strategies are essential for improving an organization's service delivery. Stakeholder management strategies are vital for improving an organization's service delivery. Therefore, it helps promote, support, contribute, inculcate the best practices, and watch various organization stakeholders (Karim, 2017).

Available literature has shown that effective stakeholder management strategies aim to meet multiple organizational goals. Pedrini and Ferri (2019) found stakeholder management strategies useful for corporate finance success. Similarly, Oppong et al. (2017) found that stakeholder management strategies' performance enhances corporate sustainability. In all operations, stakeholder management strategies are essential for all organizational structures. Studies have also shown that stakeholder management strategies of devolved governance increase service quality (Balunywa et al., 2014; Karama et al., 2019). According to Wagana (2017), the existing literature relates to the partnership between service delivery and stakeholder management strategies (Olatona & Olomola, 2015; Sow & Razafimahefa, 2015).

In Kenya, county governments have made substantial strides in establishing regional stakeholders. Various stakeholders are active in decision-making, enhancing the adoption of various planning projects by County Governments and mitigating stakeholders' opposition (Ipsos, 2019). Contrary, this is not expressed in the provision of facilities. Tanui (2015) lamented that many county governments continue to perform dismally off citizens' expectations despite the numerous opportunities presented through devolved governance.

Transparency International (2019) states that over 55% of people were unhappy with Kenya's county government's service delivery. Inadequate service delivery faced by many county governments is marked by significant misappropriation of money, uneven resource allocation, and nepotism in work awards, culminating in continuing protests and strikes around the country. According to Research (Ipsos, 2019), 36% of the citizens surveyed believed that corruption has increased at county levels, hindering service delivery quality. Implying the public's lack of trust, county governments must provide high-quality service delivery. Nevertheless, most residents (49%) accepted that their government success in the county had increased.

The current research assesses stakeholder management strategies as a source of different socio-economic results, including substantial service delivery results. Previous studies (Lewis, 2017; Wagana, 2017; Nayak & Samanta, 2014; Wampum, 2014; Nyaga & Nzulwa, 2017) found that although there has been a remarkable improvement in stakeholder management strategies in county governments' decision-making processes, anecdote evidence suggests that there have been no commensurate changes in public service delivery. The study intends to analyze stakeholder management strategies' influence on county governments' service delivery in Kenya in light of the above contradictory findings.

Research Objective

To find out the influence of stakeholder engagement strategy on service delivery in Kenyan county governments.

Research Hypothesis

The study sought to test the following research hypothesis:

- $\mathbf{H_{02}}$: Stakeholder engagement strategy has no significant influence on service delivery in Kenyan county governments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Agency Theory

Agency theory dates back to 1973 when Ross and Barry undertook to explore the principal agency relationship in corporate governance (Kiplimo & Amisi, 2018). The theory is commonly known as the principal-agent theory in the business world. In his study, Kayode (2013) adopted the Agency Hypothesis, exploring the association between the agent (service provider) and the principal (service beneficiary). He noticed that the two characters are driven by legitimate self-interest; thus, all desires must be met.

Arwoti (2012) concluded that the guiding force behind the "principal agency hypothesis is the interaction between the principal agent and its impact on Demand-Side services" (Nyaga & Nzulwa, 2017). The theory looks at leadership in the public sector as agents tasked with providing public services to the principal, who are the citizens in a particular country. Public administration is faced with ethical issues that necessitate them to acquire appropriate ethics for efficient service delivery through various mechanisms that neutralize tension and conflicts (Van Slyke, 2007). Agency theory applies to the governance of the county. The principle of the Agency relates to the leadership of the county governments as it describes the partnership between the representatives (county assembly) and the administrators (county executives) (Galgalo, 2017. Stakeholders are served in the delegated units by the county legislature wing, the speaker, and the MCAs. The governor, chosen by a vote, leads the county executives on behalf of the county legislatures, responsible for the delegated government's technical and management tasks. (Nyaga & Nzulwa, 2017).

The county executives commit the public resources they deem appropriate. By contrast, MCAs serve taxpayers and users of public services (Ehaji, 2019). The executive should ensure that the projects undertaken are ethically done in line with agency theory creeds. Therefore, the executive (bureaucrats) and the county assembly members (representatives of the people) must cooperate reasonably to ensure effective service delivery is achieved.

The theory is controversial because it is primarily relevant to the consumer side of public service delivery,' which comes from the reality that customers, decision-makers, and front-line suppliers have conflicting interests, exacerbated by the fact that several key-agent problems upshot in the supply chain) (Lwanga, 2018). Political leaders, both the MCAs' principal representatives and the executive, may have divergent opinions overruled by self-interests since they have powers in county government management affairs. Thus, the agency problem arises, crippling service delivery quality through delayed decision-making.

Another agency problem arises since the county executives (agents) are unwilling to accept their decisions without any pertinent interests in the county affairs. The agency theory presents the service delivery and stakeholder management strategies leadership at devolved governance in the same regard. The theory further agitates for proper governance rules set up and incentives to align management's conduct with towing on delivering quality services as per stakeholders' desires (Wampum, 2014).

The scholars have critiqued the theory as one-sided since it negatively points to the agent's behavior as egocentric and ignores professionalism, loyalty, and pride aspects of the agent in alignment with the principal's objectives (Asiimwe, 2015). Critiques argue that self-interests lead not all the agents to value stakeholders' interests for effective service delivery as stipulated in the constitution.

Another criticism of the theory ignores the principals' opportunistic behaviors (MCAs) in the devolved units. The bureaucrats and the legislative wing may act collaboratively through collusion for personal gains, affecting service delivery negatively (Rigii et al., 2019). The overall quality of service delivery connotes the kind of relationship that exists between the two parties.

The relevance of this theory in the current study is in the element of the principal's power in public opinion to dictate the way service delivery is done. Transparency in stakeholders' actions and the management of stakeholders' interests in the decision-making phase are under the legislation. Interest management of stakeholders is a critical factor in balancing the self-interest of those entitled to function on their behalf to ensure that it is consistent with the effective distribution of services to the public (principal) as envisioned in the constitution.

Stakeholder Engagement and Service Delivery

Ayuso et al. (2011) conducted a study about how interaction with different stakeholders promotes long-term innovation in an organization. The study results showed that the company's long-term innovation strategy was focused on knowledge obtained from experience with diverse stakeholder groups. In their study, Schraeder and Self (2010) highlighted four main possible advantages of engaging primary stakeholders, such as workers, consumers, and shareholders, in forming a vision. When employees are interested in establishing and defining their vision, they will embrace any improvements relevant to it. The organization's planning process is often significantly improved when staff, consumers, and investors are involved; stakeholder engagement facilitates restoration, particularly following a time of economic uncertainty.

Adams and Velarde (2020) quoted Epp (2013), who studied stakeholder participation's influence on corporate success expectations. There is a consensus in the literature that various parties' involvement is a central prerequisite of good governance. It was proposed that improved stakeholder participation might add to the company's productivity and success. Njogu's (2016) study intended to assess stakeholder participation's effect on the Automotive Control Project's success. This study applied a descriptive research survey design that enabled data collection to address the research objective. The focus group used for analysis was motorcar firms, petroleum manufacturing companies, environmental protection organizations, the Ministry of Energy, and NEMA. The findings indicate that stakeholder engagement substantially affected the Success Automotive Pollution Control Project.

Kimutai & Kwambai (2018) sought to assess stakeholders' engagement in the efficacy of Kenyan public universities. The research used the design of a descriptive survey. The research's target population was all employees involved in systemic reform, actively and implicitly affected by the new management structures. Questionnaires have been used as methods for gathering data. Data were analyzed by using descriptive frequencies and percentages. Correlation analysis was used to evaluate the effects of stakeholder engagement on public universities' operational performance. There was a healthy and constructive relationship between stakeholder engagement and long-term sustainability at the University of Eldoret. The result revealed that stakeholder engagement remains and should still be an essential ingredient in decision-making procedures in cross-functional and university divisions, leading to better efficiency.

METHODOLOGY

Research design acts as a framework that bridges researcher questions and implementation. (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Research designs provide a guideline on how data was collected and analyzed economically (Waithaka, 2013). Therefore, a research design is a roadmap to the whole research exercise, from data collection stages to data analysis and interpretation.

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Such a type of research design provides insight into situational happenings and how they happened. Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) opined that descriptive survey research design aims to find out and describe things as they are, observe, and analyze the findings to draw a conclusive result. Such a research design naturally portrays people's profiles, situations, and events. The data for the study focused on forty-seven (47) Kenyan county governments as the unit of analysis. The unit of observation was county government officials' namely: Governors, county executive committee, and members of the county assembly.

Similarly, sampling is the process of selecting many individuals for a sample so that the individuals reflect the larger population from which they were drawn without bias. The optimal size of the sample ought to vary between 10% and 30% (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012; Serekan, 2009). We chose the nine counties using a purposive selection technique. The purposive sample technique was ideal since it assisted in regional balancing for drawing inferences, as it represented 47 counties in Kenya.

The nine county governments comprised 20% of all Kenyan county governments, which is an ideal sample size. The previous study by Wagana (2017) used 17.02% as an appropriate sample size. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data to conclude the study objectives. The data collected was tested for the assumption of various analytical models upon which the most appropriate model was adapted.

FINDINGS

For data description and hypothesis testing, the acquired data was examined using IBM SPSS.

Correlation analysis

A Pearson correlation was run to determine the relationship between stakeholder engagement (SE) and service delivery at the county governments. The findings revealed that stakeholder engagement was statistically significant ($r_{xy} = 0.477$, $n = 176$, $p = 0.000<0.05$) with service delivery. The findings were consistent with that of (Njogu (2016; Kimutai & Kwambai, 2018) who found that stakeholder engagement influences organizational performance. Stakeholders engagement especially in community based projects is vital to avoid citizen riots who feel that they are not adequately involved in decision making of service delivery (Kiplimo & Amisi, 2018).

Regression analysis

The study further carried out regression analysis to establish the statistical significance relationship between the independent variables that is, stakeholder's engagement on the dependent variable service delivery.

Regression Analysis on Stakeholder Engagement and Service Delivery

Regression analysis was run to determine the statistical significance relationship between stakeholder engagement and service delivery (dependent variable). The study hypothesized that;

H_{02}: Stakeholder engagement strategy has no significant influence on service delivery in Kenyan county governments.

The linear regression model was fitted as;

$SD= \beta 0 + \beta 2X2 + \varepsilon$--Equation i

Where SD is service delivery, β coefficients, X2 stakeholder's engagement and ε error term.

Table 1: Model Summary on Stakeholder Engagement and Service Delivery

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.477[a]	.228	.223	.44620

a. Predictors: (Constant), SE
b. Dependent Variable: SD

From the findings on table 1, stakeholder's engagement had an R squared of 0.228 which implies that 22.8% variations in service delivery at the counties is explained by stakeholder's engagement strategy. However, the model failed to explain 77.2% variations in service delivery. This implies that the remaining 77.2% could be explained by other stakeholder management strategies that were not included in the model. The correlation coefficient of 0.477 implies that stakeholder's engagement strategy had a positive statistical linear relationship with service delivery at the counties. The findings were consistent with that of (Njogu (2016; Kimutai & Kwambai, 2018) who found out that stakeholder engagement influences organizational performance.

Table 2: ANOVA Statistics (Stakeholders Engagement and Service Delivery)

Model	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	10.216	10.216	51.313	.000[b]
Residual	34.643	.199		
Total	44.859			

a. Dependent Variable: SD

b. Predictors: (Constant), Seng

The findings on the ANOVA as shown in Table 2 indicates that (F (176) = 51.313, p=0.00 <0.05). The results imply that the fitted model summary was statistically significant. The findings reveal that stakeholder engagement was statistically significant in explaining service delivery in Kenyan counties. Therefore, at p <0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis (Ho_2) was rejected thus the alternative hypothesis (Ha_2) which states that "There is a statistically significant relationship between stakeholder's engagement and service delivery in Kenyan counties" was accepted. Thus, there is a positive statistically significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and service delivery in Kenyan counties. The findings were consistent with that of (Njogu (2016; Kimutai & Kwambai, 2018) who found out that stakeholder engagement influences organizational performance.

Table 3: Regression Coefficients (Stakeholder Engagement and Service Delivery)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	Collinearity Statistics VIF
(Constant)	.393		
SE	.091	.477	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: SD

From the regression coefficients as shown on Table 3, the findings revealed that there was a positive statistically significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and service delivery as supported by a beta coefficient of .649 and a p=0.000<0.05. The results imply that a unit increase in stakeholder's engagement holding other factors constant increased the service delivery in Kenyan counties by 0.649 units.

Further in support to the findings, $_{t\ cal}$= 7.163> $_{t\ critical}$ =1.96 at a 95 percent confidence level the null hypothesis was rejected and alternative hypothesis was accepted.

The linear regression fitted equation is:

SD= 1.319 + 0.649 X2+ 0.091---ii

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the engagement of stakeholders through collaboration, consultation and negotiation would help counties achieve effective service delivery. Stakeholder engagement is crucial to avoid misunderstandings and frustrations between the citizens and the county government.

The study recommended that stakeholder engagement be effectively done to avoid battles in providing public services to the citizens. The executive must, at all levels of project undertaking, involve citizen representatives and community heads to avoid resistance from the citizens. Therefore, the study recommends that county executives strengthen their relationships with various stakeholders by properly engaging multiple stakeholders.

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