

## **INFLUENCE OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN BUDGET PLANNING ON DEVOLVED GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS IN MOMBASA COUNTY, KENYA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Public participation was at the heart of the Kenya constitution 2010, which demanded that public participation should be employed in all county governments that were established under the constitution. It was incumbent upon each devolved unit to develop a public participation policy to encourage and guide how the citizenry were involved in planning and implementation of public projects. In Kenya, the primary objectives of public participation in decentralized governance systems were to enlighten, involve, confer, cooperate, and enable the populace through various channels, such as elections or civil society initiatives that solicited public opinion throughout the policy-making process. Public bureaucracy, on the other hand, had a culture that discouraged public participation and instead favored traditional means of exchanging information, such as public hearings, which were frequently one-sided and unfocused on fixing problems. Therefore, through genuine public engagement, it was necessary to change that mentality and guarantee that citizens were partners in the governing process rather than only clients. This study aimed to ascertain how citizen involvement affected budget planning in devolved governance systems; second, to ascertain how citizen awareness affected budgeting and devolved governance and to explore the influence of monitoring and evaluation in budget planning on the performance of devolved governance systems in Mombasa county, Kenya. Stakeholder theory served as the study's foundation. The study used a descriptive research design. The aim of the

study was the Mombasa County population of 378,422 households, and the Yamane method was used to choose 400 families as a sample. To improve the validity and reliability of research instruments, a pilot study was carried out. The primary research instrument for gathering both quantitative and qualitative data for the study was a self-administered questionnaire. SPSS version 26 was used to analyze the quantitative data both descriptively and inferentially. The results were shown as frequency tables, means, and standard deviations. Themes were used to analyze qualitative data, which were then presented narratively. To carry out the study, the investigator obtained a research authorization letter from Graduate School, Kenyatta University, as well as a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). The study concludes that citizen engagement positively affect the performance of devolved governance systems in Mombasa County, Kenya. The study recommended that policymakers and governance leaders in Mombasa County should prioritize the promotion of citizen engagement in the budgeting process. This can be achieved through the establishment of citizen engagement forums, public meetings, and town hall meetings where citizens can discuss and provide input on budget proposals.

**Keywords:** Public Participation, Budgeting and Performance Of Devolved Governance Systems

## **INTRODUCTION**

Public participation plays a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness and accountability of devolved governance systems worldwide. In the United States, the concept of citizen engagement in budgeting processes has gained significant attention as a means to enhance transparency and responsiveness in local government decision-making (Koss & Kalambokidis, 2018). Studies have highlighted the positive impact of public participation on budget allocations and service delivery outcomes, emphasizing the importance of involving citizens in decision-making to ensure the alignment of fiscal priorities with community needs and preferences (Hood & Dixon, 2020).

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, efforts to promote public participation in devolved governance structures have been central to advancing democratic values and enhancing the quality of public services (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). Citizen involvement in budgeting processes has been linked to improved governance performance indicators such as accountability, efficiency, and service quality, underscoring the need for inclusive and transparent decision-making mechanisms at the local level (Newbigging & Ridley, 2019).

In Pakistan, public participation in budgeting and governance has emerged as a critical component of promoting democratic governance and citizen empowerment (Yazdani & Bano, 2017). Despite challenges related to institutional capacity and political dynamics, initiatives to engage citizens in budget formulation and performance evaluation have shown potential for enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of devolved governance systems in addressing community needs and fostering social inclusion (Yaqoob & Usman, 2018).

In Nigeria, the integration of public participation into budgeting practices and governance performance assessments has been a key priority in efforts to enhance transparency, accountability, and public trust in decentralized decision-making processes (Dauda et al., 2016). Research has highlighted the transformative potential of citizen engagement in driving policy reforms, improving service delivery outcomes, and strengthening the governance capacity of local authorities in responding to diverse community interests and concerns (Omole & Adebayo, 2020).

In South Africa, public participation has been regarded as a fundamental pillar of democratic governance, essential for fostering citizen ownership of development processes and promoting social justice (Maphunye & Mashile, 2014). Empirical studies have underscored the link between effective citizen engagement in budgeting and governance and positive governance performance outcomes, including increased accountability, efficiency gains, and improved service delivery for marginalized communities (Bekink & Corbett, 2018).

Public participation is widely recognized as a fundamental element of democratic governance, essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen empowerment in decision-making processes at the local level (Hossain, 2013). In the context of devolved governance systems, citizen involvement in budgeting processes has been increasingly emphasized as a

means to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery and resource allocation (Oates, 2019).

According to Sun, et al., (2021), devolution is a form of decentralization which transfers power, resources, management and administrative functions from national government to sub-national government/counties. This transfer of functions from central government to lower units of government aims to bring services closer to people. The services offered by these sub-nationals affect people and hence need to engage the people through public participation. This is important because public participation increases ownership, makes people feel the views are respected, ensures swift and quality implementation as well as increasing the level of transparency and accountability (Ngigi & Busolo, 2019).

Oloo (2018) defines devolution as the transfer of authority from the 47 legally elected county governments to the Central Government, which is centered in Nairobi, during the 2010 CoK's first general election. Every county has set up an executive and legislative branch of government. The 2010 constitution, which gave devolution a whole new meaning, is thought to have envisioned this as the most significant form of decentralization in Kenya. Issues related to governance thus underwent a paradigm change.

Kenya's government underwent a sea change when its 47 devolved governments were established. Under this new paradigm, the people will now be expected to have a significant say in determining how future choices that would impact them will be made. File No. 7 of the KNA (2017) cites Article 10 of the constitution, which supports this position, and Article 174 (c), which highlights the inclusion of the public's perspective. According to Ngundo (2014), national legislation governing counties, metropolitan areas, and cities may need to incorporate these requests for public participation in governance concerns. According to Okech (2016), these devolved authorities are able to enact laws, but only within the parameters of the current legislative framework.

Public participation is required in the devolved system of government to draft new legislation, set budget priorities, ensure that public-sector performance and expenditures are reviewed, and file grievances, as per the County Government Act (Government of Kenya, 2012a), and Urban Areas and Cities Act (Government of Kenya, 2011), and Public Finance Management Act (Government of Kenya, 2012b) (Waikenda, 2019). Furthermore, according to Cheruiyot (2018), county governments are responsible for making sure the public is informed about opportunities for public participation, putting in place the necessary procedures, structures, and guidelines, and reporting annually to the County Assembly on citizen participation.

The importance of public participation in influencing policy decisions, setting development objectives, and holding local authorities responsible for their actions is becoming increasingly apparent as Kenya's devolution process progresses (Nyamweya, 2017). Engaging citizens in county budgeting processes and public service delivery has emerged as a key strategy for promoting inclusive governance practices and empowering communities to actively participate in local development initiatives (Mbote & Onditi, 2020). Understanding the dynamics of

devolved governance systems in Kenya is essential for informing policy reforms, enhancing institutional capacity, and advancing democratic principles at the grassroots level (Oketch, 2019).

Mombasa County is among the 47 counties created through the new constitution in August 2010 in Kenya. Mombasa County is located on the southeastern coast of Kenya, bordered by the Indian Ocean to the east. It is the second-largest city in Kenya and serves as an important economic hub, with a strategic location that has historically made it a key center for trade, tourism, and transportation. The county covers an area of approximately 229.7 square kilometers and has a diverse population comprising various ethnic groups, including the Swahili people who are indigenous to the region.

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 emphasizes the importance of public participation, making it a fundamental principle in county governance. Specifically, the County Governments Act of 2012 outlines the legal framework for public involvement in decision-making processes, which has been pivotal in shaping how policies and budgets are formulated at the county level (Nation, 2024).

The concept of public involvement suggests that before making a decision, agencies should confer with groups, individuals, and governmental bodies who may be impacted or interested. In order to make decisions that are better and more acceptable, public engagement entails reciprocal communication and cooperative problem solving (Finch, 2015). By creating a shared awareness of the local situation, priorities, and programs, involvement helps close the gap between the general public, private sector, civil society, and local government (Moseti, 2010). Thus, encouraging common understanding, accountability, and openness in governance as well as fostering a sense of ownership over development decisions, initiatives, and programs would be the goals of public participation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Public participation is widely recognized as a fundamental element of democratic governance, crucial for ensuring transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in decision-making processes (Campbell & Marshall, 2020). However, in the context of devolved governance systems such as Mombasa County, Kenya, challenges persist in effectively integrating citizen engagement into budgeting practices and governance performance evaluations. Despite the legal mandates and institutional mechanisms that exist to promote public participation in local governance (Afrane, 2018), studies indicate a gap between the rhetoric of participation and its practical implementation on the ground (Odhiambo, 2019). This raises concerns about the extent to which citizen voices are truly being heard and influencing budgetary decisions and service delivery outcomes within the county (Mukolwe & Liundi, 2017).

The problem revolves around the lack of meaningful engagement of the public in the budgeting processes of Mombasa County, which hinders the alignment of fiscal priorities with community needs and preferences. Empirical research suggests that while participatory mechanisms may exist on paper, there are significant obstacles to citizens' effective participation, including

limited awareness, institutional capacity constraints, power differentials, and elite capture of decision-making spaces (Kinyanjui & Owino, 2016). As a result, the budget allocations and expenditure patterns in the county may not fully reflect the diverse perspectives, priorities, and interests of the local population, leading to potential inefficiencies, inequities, and service delivery gaps (Nyamwange & Karani, 2018).

Moreover, the problem extends to the performance evaluation of devolved governance systems in Mombasa County, where the impact of public participation on governance outcomes remains underexplored. While theoretical frameworks posit that citizen engagement may enhance the accountability, effectiveness, and legitimacy of local governments (Chege & Kamau, 2021), empirical evidence on the ground is scant regarding the actual effects of participatory practices on governance performance indicators such as service quality, responsiveness to community needs, or financial management efficiency (Mwakanyamale & Wangongo, 2019). This gap in knowledge poses challenges for assessing the overall effectiveness and impact of public participation initiatives on the functioning and outcomes of devolved governance systems in Mombasa County. By addressing the gaps in knowledge and understanding of how public participation interfaces with fiscal decision-making and governance outcomes. The research aims to provide insights for enhancing the effectiveness, accountability, and responsiveness of local governance systems in promoting sustainable development and citizen well-being within the county.

### **Objective of the Study**

To determine the influence of citizen engagement in budget planning on devolved governance systems in Mombasa County, Kenya

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The study delved deep into theoretical 'schools' informing the line of thought before identifying a number of empirical studies as carried out by previous scholars. It also presents the conceptual framework which clearly shows how the variables of the study have been operationalized.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on Stakeholder Theory developed by R. Edward Freeman in his 1984 book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*, is a framework that emphasizes the importance of considering all stakeholders in the decision-making processes of an organization. This theory posits that organizations should create value not only for shareholders but for all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and others who can affect or be affected by the organization's actions. Devolution in Kenya, established under the Constitution of 2010, aims to enhance local governance by bringing decision-making closer to the people. This framework necessitates active involvement from various stakeholders; residents, businesses, civil society organizations, and local authorities in budgeting and planning activities to ensure that governance is inclusive, transparent, and accountable (World Bank, 2015).

The public participation becomes a critical mechanism for involving diverse groups in the decision-making process. By engaging stakeholders, county governments may ensure that the budgeting process reflects the community's needs and priorities, leading to more effective and efficient public service delivery. Indeed, all residents of a county, employees, political leadership and the executive needs to work together in identifying, prioritizing and budgeting for projects to be implemented in the devolved systems of government as enshrined in the constitution that established the 47 devolved units of government in Kenya. This role should be well served through the Mombasa county public participation policy as viewed from the lens of the ST. This theory therefore guided in examining the levels of citizen involvement in public participation and the outcomes of such involvement.

Public participation ensures that the needs and preferences of the community are considered in the budgeting process, thereby leading to more responsive and accountable governance. This participatory approach can help in identifying and prioritizing local issues, ensuring that budget allocations reflect the actual needs of the community, and improving the overall performance of devolved units (Opiyo, 2017). By actively involving citizens in the budgeting process, county governments in Kenya can foster greater trust and cooperation, ultimately enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance. This inclusive approach is critical in addressing the challenges associated with public participation, such as low civic engagement and the perceived irrelevance of public forums, which have been noted in studies on Mombasa County.

### **Empirical Literature Review**

A study in America by Smith (2017) have shown that active citizen involvement in budget planning can lead to increased accountability and transparency in government spending. The study utilized exploration research design. The findings revealed that initiatives such as participatory budgeting have empowered residents to directly influence how public funds are allocated, resulting in improved service delivery and enhanced trust in local government. However, challenges remain in ensuring broad-based participation, particularly among marginalized communities who may face barriers to engagement. The study was done in America while the current study was conducted in Kenya.

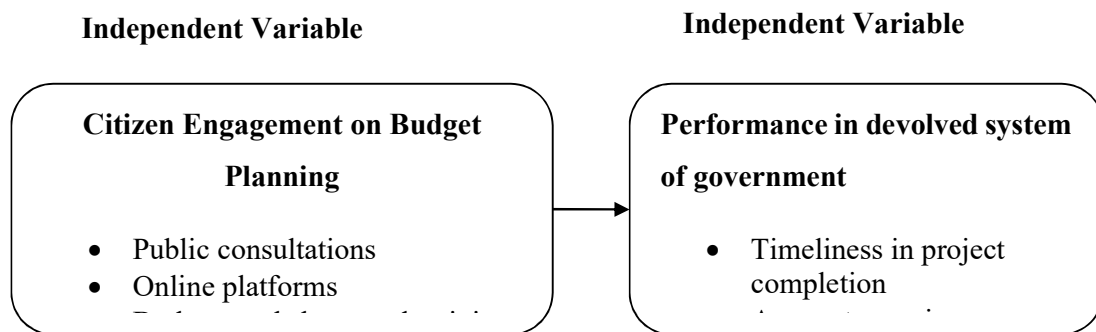
In Pakistan, Ahmed (2018) revealed that citizen engagement in budget planning within devolved systems of government has been a topic of growing interest and debate. The study utilized cross-sectional research design. Research indicates that while there have been efforts to decentralize budgetary decision-making to local governments; challenges persist in effectively engaging citizens in the process. Studies have highlighted the need for greater transparency and accountability in budget allocations at the local level, as well as the importance of building capacity among citizens to participate meaningfully in budget planning (Khan & Ali, 2020). Additionally, factors such as political dynamics and resource constraints have been identified as influencing the extent to which citizen input is integrated into budget decisions.

A study in Tanzania by Mkono (2016) on citizen engagement in budget planning. The study utilized descriptive research design. The study explored the role of community-driven



development initiatives in promoting grassroots involvement in budget allocation processes. Findings revealed that when citizens are actively engaged in identifying local priorities and monitoring public expenditures, there is a potential for improved service delivery and social accountability. However, challenges related to information asymmetry and limited civic education have been identified as hindering effective citizen participation in budget planning. In Kenya, a study by Ombaka and Owino (2017) on impact of citizen engagement on budget planning of the devolved system of government. The study utilized explanatory research design. The study aimed at promoting transparency and accountability in public financial management. The study highlighted the impact of initiatives such as public forums and citizen scorecards in empowering citizens to hold local governments accountable for budgetary decisions. Research also points to the importance of building partnerships between civil society organizations and local governments to strengthen citizen engagement in budget planning processes. However, challenges related to limited civic awareness, bureaucratic hurdles, and political interference have been identified as barriers to meaningful citizen participation in budget allocations.

### **Conceptual Framework**



*Source; Researcher (2024)*

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A descriptive survey design was used in this investigation. The fundamental goal of survey research is to statistically characterize and explain the variability of specific demographic variables (Damasceno, 2020). The population for this study was 378,422 households within the 6 sub counties of Mombasa county (Bamburi, Majengo, Likoni & Changamwe). Further, the study also target the stakeholders involved in implementation of public participation. This figure was obtained from the Kenya national census of 2019 (KNBS, 2019). A representative sample of 400 respondents was selected scientifically using the Taro Yamane formula, devised by Yamane in 1967, to ensure representativeness and statistical reliability.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

This study used only primary data; this refers to all data collected on a source which had not been subjected to processing or any other manipulation (Creswell, 2013). This data was



collected from households in Mombasa County. The study used a structured self-administered questionnaire as its main study instrument to collect quantitative data from 400 household heads and 12 stakeholders in Mombasa County. Questionnaires collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Collected data were sorted out, coded and summarized for easy analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Qualitative data was organized according to the objectives that guided the studied. Themes were formed on the bases of analysis. A descriptive and inferential analysis of quantitative data would have been conducted used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS v. 26). The frequency tables, percentages, meant, and standard deviation was among the descriptive statistics. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to carried out inferential statistics

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

Of the 412 targeted respondents who were served with the questionnaires, 375 completed and returned them. This represents a 91.0% response rate, which is considered adequate for the research. From the data collected, 206 (54.9%) of the respondents were male while 169 (45.1%) were female. Data on level of education indicated that 13.0% had completed primary education, 29.6% had secondary education, 24.3% held diploma certificates, 20.8% possessed a bachelor's degree, and 12.3% had attained a postgraduate level of education. This distribution indicates a diverse educational background among participants, which can significantly impact the effectiveness of public participation in the budgeting and performance of devolved governance systems.

### **Citizen Engagement in Budget Planning and Performance Devolved Governance**

Several statements on the influence of citizen engagement in budget planning on performance of devolved governance systems were identified by the researcher. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with each statement in regard to citizen engagement and how it has influenced the performance of devolved governance systems. A scale of 1-5 where 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly agree was used. The findings are as shown in Table 1

*Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Citizen Engagement*

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev</b>
Level of public education on county budgeting is high in Mombasa county.	3.59	0.645
I am aware of my rights as a resident of Mombasa county.	3.64	0.671
I am aware of county government projects.	3.43	0.632
My participation in county budgeting is a right.	3.56	0.639
My participation in budgeting ensures success.	3.41	0.635
I always feel free to express my opinion.	3.47	0.643

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**Average scores**

**3.52**

**0.644**

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*Source: Field Data (2024)*

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics regarding citizen engagement in relation to county budgeting in Mombasa County, Kenya. The responses indicate a generally positive perception among residents concerning their involvement in budgeting processes, although areas for enhancement remain apparent. The average mean scores, which range from 3.41 to 3.64 on a scale likely reflecting a degree of agreement, suggest that while citizens recognize their role and rights, gaps in overall awareness and participation exist.

The findings show that respondents agreed with the statement that “I am aware of my rights as a resident of Mombasa County” with mean score of 3.64 and standard deviation of 0.671. This indicates that a majority of respondents believe they have a reasonable understanding of their civic rights. The awareness of rights is particularly crucial as it can empower citizens to make informed decisions and actively participate in governance. According to Wanyama (2021), understanding personal rights fosters a culture of accountability and governance, enabling citizens to navigate the complexities of local government more effectively.

Moreover, the statement regarding the “Level of public education on county budgeting is high in Mombasa County” received a mean score of 3.59. This score suggests that participants generally feel adequately informed about budgeting issues. Beck and D'Agostino (2019) emphasize the importance of public education in enhancing civic engagement, noting that well-informed citizens are more likely to participate in governance processes. However, the standard deviation of 0.645 indicates that perceptions of educational effectiveness vary widely among respondents. This discrepancy suggests that there may still be significant segments of the population who do not feel sufficiently educated about county budgeting, which could lead to inequitable participation in the decision-making process.

The awareness of county government projects is also reflected in the statement "I am aware of county government projects," which has a mean score of 3.43 and a standard deviation of 0.632. This moderate score suggests that while many residents are aware of ongoing projects, there is still a significant portion of the population that may not be fully informed. Effective communication about county projects is necessary to enhance transparency and foster greater public participation in decision-making processes (Shah & Shah, 2023).

An interesting finding emerges in responses to the statement “My participation in budgeting is a right,” with a mean score of 3.56. This finding reflects a general belief among residents that they have a legitimate claim to participate in budgetary processes, aligning with the principles of participatory governance. According to Muriuki (2020), when citizens perceive participation as a right, they are more likely to engage actively. However, the subsequent statement, “My participation in budgeting ensures success”, resulted in a lower mean score of 3.41. This suggests a degree of skepticism about the impact of public engagement on actual governance outcomes. Researchers like Karanja (2021) argue that while citizen participation is vital, it often remains underutilized, mainly due to structural limitations or a lack of effective communication channels between the government and the populace.

Furthermore, the statement “I always feel free to express my opinion” received a mean of 3.47, indicating a moderate level of comfort among residents in voicing their views. However, the standard deviation of 0.643 again reveals differing experiences among citizens. This variability

points to possible societal or institutional barriers that could suppress open discourse, which is crucial for successful public participation (Njeru, 2020). Enhancing avenues for feedback and ensuring that citizens feel their contributions are valued could help create an environment conducive to open dialogue.

Further, the study established that county has established several mechanisms to ensure citizen engagement in the budgeting process. The county holds regular town hall meetings, where residents can voice their concerns and suggestions regarding budget allocations. Additionally, they have implemented an online platform that allows citizens to submit their feedback directly. Citizen inputs have been instrumental in shaping the budget priorities. For instance, in the last fiscal year, feedback from residents led us to allocate more funds to water and sanitation projects, which were identified as critical needs. This kind of direct input helps us align our resources with the actual needs of the community, making our budget more responsive and effective.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that public participation significantly affect the performance of devolved governance systems in Mombasa County, Kenya. The study concludes that citizen engagement, citizen awareness, monitoring and evaluation positively affect the performance of devolved governance systems in Mombasa County, Kenya. First, through active citizen engagement, local authorities can leverage the collective wisdom and inputs of the community to make informed decisions that align with the needs and aspirations of the residents. Through involving citizens in the budget planning process, the county government enhanced transparency, accountability, and legitimacy, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and responsive governance system.

### **Recommendation**

The policymakers and governance leaders in Mombasa County should prioritize the promotion of citizen engagement in the budgeting process. This can be achieved through the establishment of citizen engagement forums, public meetings, and town hall meetings where citizens can discuss and provide input on budget proposals. Additionally, online platforms and social media can be leveraged to facilitate citizen engagement and ensure that all citizens have an opportunity to participate.

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