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SUB-COUNTY, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*While there is strong impetus by the Government of Kenya to involve the citizens at the grass root level in county development projects, the County Governments in Kenya seem not to abide by these rules as public participation is still very low and poorly done. The aim of this study was to explore the influence of citizen participation with respect to the performance of county development projects in Malava Sub-County, Kakamega County. This study adopted the stakeholder theory and sampled respondents comprising of project committee members and community members. The study observed that information sharing had a significant effect on performance of development projects and recommended that management of public service institutions, especially in counties should maintain a moderate level of resource sharing with its members and make prudent decisions by sharing relevant information with stakeholders in order for initiated projects to remain viable and successful.*

**Key Words;** *Information sharing, Communication*

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## INTRODUCTION

Citizen Participation is a process that provides private individuals an opportunity to influence public decisions and has long been a component of the democratic decision-making process (Mirriam Felix, 2016). Participatory development is also defined as a process through which stakeholders can influence and share control over development initiatives, and over the decisions and resources that affect them (Bank A. D., 2016). According to (Holdar & Zakharchenko, 2016), citizen participation is a community-based process, where citizens organize themselves and their goals at the grassroots level and work together through non-governmental community organizations to influence the decision-making process. Citizens get most involved in this process when the issue at stake relates directly to them. Furthermore, citizen participation occurs when all the stakeholders cooperate to implement changes.

The process of information sharing incorporates two major aspects that is, giving information to others, and receiving information that has been provided by the information giver (Savolainen, Reijo, 2017). The sharing of information is either carried out by officials involved in specific development projects, or it can take place by means of information products or services offered by governmental authorities to provide local access to information for these communities (Meyer, 2019).

When Citizen Participation can also allow the incorporation of local knowledge, skills and resources in the design of interventions, it can ensure project/program responsiveness to people's needs, and can enhance the goal of sustainability and assist breaking the mentality of dependency (Mubita, Libati, & Mulonda, 2017). Also, since most of the problems in societies are rooted in systemic maladjustments in the social structure and social institutions, the local people themselves have to participate in their development for sustainability (Auya & Oino, 2016).

The major challenge of citizen involvement in Uganda was inappropriate allocation of public

resources between the diverse population groups. This called for the decentralization of public resources to the lower levels of governance in what seemed semi-autonomous public/ local authorities. The most important point to note is that the powers of the regions were not entrenched in the constitution, the above-mentioned countries in East Africa have been the major contributors to devolution and citizen involvement in governance in Kenya where the country has drawn lessons on how to make devolution and citizen participation successful (TFD, 2011).

In Kenya, the first independence constitution gave enormous powers to the local authorities by instituting strong decentralized systems of governance that offered legislative powers, financial capacity and executive authority to the local governments to operate independently (Oloo and Kanyinga, 2016).

Omolo (2010) argues that when county governments make annual budgets, leaders always indicated in their reports that the members of the public were involved in the entire planning process to the execution of projects when in real sense they were not.

### Statement of the Problem

While there is strong impetus by the government of Kenya to involve the citizens at the grass root level in county development projects, unfortunately, the County Governments in Kenya seem not to abide by these rules and public engagement is still very low and is poorly done (LGRP, 2018). A close scrutiny of projects at the Malava Sub County in the financial years (2016/17-2018-2019) by InfoTrack (2019) revealed that most of the projects listed for implementation had not undergone citizen participation in decision making. The auditor-general's report (2015) on County Government of Kakamega averred that project implementation at Kakamega County was not implemented in accordance with the law as some projects went beyond the stipulated period within which they were expected to be completed. According to this report, projects in the sectors of health, roads,

physical infrastructure, and education stalled due to political wrangles amongst politicians, unclear structures and lack of oversight from members of the general public. This is the case in most County governments in Kenya. According to through a Baseline Survey on County Governance and Conflict Mapping by (Development & Commission, 2016), showed that the counties in Kenya under survey have not established a compliant and operational County Budget and Economic Forum, further decentralization (sub-counties, wards and villages) had not been finalized in some counties, the Citizen Participation policy or law was still non-existent in some counties and the county governments did not have an operational civic education programmatic therefore means that sustained public participation and project implementation, pose numerous problems to planners and social service providers, especially in developing countries. In addition, project beneficiaries are still not fully participating in the identification, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of projects that are meant to improve their lot (Blackman H., 2016). In another baseline survey by Development & Commission (2014), County Governments have cited poor mobilization strategies, short notices, and late information sharing as setbacks to effective citizen participation. The problem of lack of effective citizen participation has resulted to unsustainable and unsuccessful county development projects and initiatives thus, a major hindrance to service delivery. According to Holdar & Zakharchenko (2016) unsatisfactory citizen participation can be due to lack of cooperation between stakeholders, lack of media attention to local issues, unrealistic levels of expectation, focusing on minute issues rather than broad issues, limited access to information and lack of knowledge about rights and responsibilities. To this end therefore, the researcher deemed it necessary to carry out a study to investigate the extent of relationship between citizen participation and performance of county development projects in Kenya.

### **Objective of the study**

The objective of this study was to establish the influence of community information sharing on performance of development projects in Malava Sub-County, Kenya. The study tested the following research hypothesis:

- H<sub>01</sub>: Community information sharing does not have a significant influence on the performance of development projects in Malava Sub-County, Kenya

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Theoretical Review**

This study was guided by the Ladder Theory of Citizen Participation, which was introduced by Sherry Arnstein in 1969. This theory will be the anchor theory for the current study. The rationale behind the ladder was to conceptualize how participation works in development. Often termed as "Arnstein's ladder", she defines citizen participation as the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. Arnstein identified a number of rungs in the participation ladder, indicating that either people are manipulated or they participate actively in a project. The ladder of participation is applicable to community participation in various stages of the project cycle.

Theyyan (2015) however, highlights that Arnstein's theory is limited in various ways According to, citizen power is not distributed as neatly as the divisions used suggest and instead of eight rungs, the real world of people and programs might require as many as 150 to cover the range of actual citizen involvement levels.

Collins & Ison (2016) As well cite the roles and responsibilities of the individuals, communities and authorities involved in participation. Arnstein's ladder suggests that the roles and responsibilities change only in relation to changing levels of power; in the dynamic of citizens taking control and

authorities ceding it. This they note overlooks the more complex set of relationships which exist in many ongoing participatory situations where roles are less easy to define and responsibilities emerge during, and as a consequence of, the participatory process itself.

### **Empirical Literature**

The process of information sharing incorporates two major aspects that is, giving information to others, and receiving information that has been provided by the information giver (Savolainen, Reijo, 2017). Development projects that aim to improve people's livelihoods focus on the introduction of appropriate information and techniques (know-how) that can be implemented to address social and economic problems. The sharing of information is either carried out by officials involved in specific development projects, or it can take place by means of information products or services offered by governmental authorities to provide local access to information for these communities (Meyer, 2019).

In the Kenyan context, access to information for Kenyan citizens is guaranteed by Article 35 of the Kenyan Constitution 2010. On communication, Section 93 of the County Government Act provides that public communication and access to information shall be integrated in all development activities while observing professionalism, media ethics and standards. Information that is provided by the public should be verified as the official and authentic document for public consumption. Section 96 of the County Government Act also provides that the county should provide access to information its stakeholders. The county should have designated offices for providing access to information and any county legislation on access to information should mirror national legislation (Governors, 2016). Public communication or information sharing in the Counties aims at creating awareness on Devolution and Governance, promoting citizen understanding for purposes of peace and cohesion and undertaking advocacy on core development issues at the County level.

Strategic communication is critical and should be incorporated in all county policies, legislative and development agendas. Without proper access to information, the public cannot hold their leaders accountable in the spirit of the Constitution. Article 35 of the Kenyan Constitution 2010 safeguards the public access to information. The access to information law is important to provide a legal framework for the dynamic provision of information to the public.

Sara and Katz (1997) carried out a study that investigated the extent to which information sharing affected sustainability projects. The study was conducted among 125 communities in 10 rural water projects across six countries in Europe. Data was collected using direct observation and project inspection, focus group discussion and house hold interviews. Hypothesis that stated "at the community level sharing project information is better than concealing it. This indicated that demand responsiveness which also associated with community choice is positively associated with indicators of project sustainability. While this study covered 10 projects that were spread in six different countries, a similar study using interview guide, focus group discussions and household questionnaires was imperative to fill the gap in knowledge on whether similar results would be achieved in a scope of 10 community water projects in one county.

Spellissy (2016) did a study on information sharing and partneship for project success in the government of Nigeria. The study found that partnership between localized indigenous knowledge and expert knowledge used to develop a new knowledge that helps in making project design, implementation and evaluations. To foster reciprocal information sharing, interactions between an organization and a project's beneficiaries need to convey respect and be characterized by mutual exchanges of ideas and knowledge. Collaborative interactions are considered interactions in which the outside organization conveys respect for the beneficiaries'

perspective, beliefs, culture, and knowledge and listens to the beneficiaries, which yields collaborative efforts to include new insights or solutions into a project. Interactions where the organization lacks respect and disregards local knowledge or needs are not considered collaborative. Interactions that are characterized by the organization discussing predetermined solutions or ideas are also not considered collaborative because these projects excluded the input of the beneficiaries (Spellissy, 2016).

A study by Mbuna (2018) on determinants of project success in governments, a case of Rwanda Government showed that information sharing is essential in influencing performance of a project. The study employed the use of descriptive research design with a sample of 124 respondents. The study findings showed a positive correlation among the study variables. Comparatively, low success rates of projects are as a result of lack of reciprocal information sharing. This is characterized by two-directional flows where there are mutual exchanges of information and ideas, interaction, dialog, sharing, consensual decision-making and action-taking. Participatory communication is the foundation of this process. Empowering people around the globe to express themselves, develop their human potential, and begin to seize opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty and become a person valuable to the self and the community, has been the ultimate outcome of the participation process. Keeping in mind the ethnography and cultural aspects contribution of indigenous based knowledge in planning, implementation of projects and decision making is a necessary part in public participation.

A study by Plan Kenya (2014) noted in its evaluation that the sustainability of community development projects in Homa Bay Town Sub- County was poor, with one of the leading causes being weak participation by stakeholders especially in sharing project information with them. The evaluation in Homa Bay Town Sub- County did not pay attention to the levels of participation and how it affects

project sustainability, this is important because according to Pretty (1995) opined a relationship between the two variables. Plan Kenya acknowledges that the levels of participation of its stakeholders in Homa Bay Town Sub- County remains unknown, and attempts have been made to establish this through qualitative approaches with little success. According to Scions (2007), weak sustainability of projects is a challenge to organization competitiveness and effectiveness in fundraising from donors. He noted that project sustainability is of great interest to donors. Another study by Plan Kenya (2015) notes that there was increased competition for funds among NGOs in Homa Bay Town Sub- County and therefore need to demonstrate competitiveness through sustainability of projects. Sponsorship funds have dwindled and Plan Kenya is currently downsizing through a restructuring process. This was a huge investment whose expenditure would only be justifiable if the projects are able to generate benefits to the primary beneficiary long after the project closes. The researcher did not identify any study that assesses the level of participation and how it affects project sustainability.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a survey research design. The target population for this study was 1,626 and this comprised 126 project management committee members and 1,500 community members from the selected area. The study sampled 321 respondents from a study population of 1,626 residents.

The study employed the simple random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. The data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Descriptive Results for Information Sharing**

Respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement on seven statements related to community information sharing. Table 1 showed the relevant results.

From the above analysis most respondents agreed that information on county government projects was easily at a mean of 3.19 while only a few respondents agreed that they were aware of county projects around them at a mean of 20.6 per cent.

Most of the respondents (mean of 3.05) were largely neutral about the fact that counties do actually share information with its stakeholders on its projects.

**Table 1: Descriptive Results for Information Sharing**

Statement	Likert Ratings					Mean	Std Dev
	1	2	3	4	5		
Information on planned, initiated and completed projects by the County Government in the Sub County is easily accessible.	16.0 %	11.4 %	31.7 %	19.6 %	21.2 %	3.19	1.33
Community members are aware of where to access information on County Government initiated projects.	14.7 %	14.4 %	31.0 %	19.3 %	20.6 %	3.17	1.31
Information on County Government initiated projects is accessible on the County Government website, offices at Sub County and Ward levels.	17.3 %	13.4 %	28.8 %	18.6 %	21.9 %	3.14	1.37
Community members have active feedback and reporting channels between the projects' management teams and County Government.	14.4 %	16.0 %	32.4 %	20.6 %	16.7 %	3.09	1.27
Feedback and reporting channels between the project's management teams and County Government are adequate, clear and effective	12.7 %	14.7 %	31.7 %	19.3 %	21.6 %	3.22	1.29
Sharing information with the community influences/affects the performance of the County Government initiated projects.	16.7 %	13.4 %	34.3 %	19.6 %	16.0 %	3.05	1.28
<b>Mean</b>						<b>3.14</b>	<b>1.30</b>

**Inferential Results for Information Sharing and Performance of Development Projects**

The main objective of the study was to determine the effect of information sharing on performance of development projects in Malava Sub County. The findings of this objective tested the first null

research hypothesis that posits: H01: information sharing has no significant effect on performance of development projects in Malava Sub County. This was achieved using both Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis at 0.05 significance level. The results are presented in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Correlation between information sharing and performance**

Correlation	Performance	Information sharing
<b>Performance</b>	1.0000	.947
<b>Information sharing</b>	.947	1.0000

From Table 2 above, there was significant positive relationship between information sharing and performance of development projects in Malava Sub County as shown by  $R=0.947$ ,  $P=0.000$ . This implies that an increase in information sharing would results to increase in performance of development projects. This finding agrees with Taqi, Ajmal and Pervez (2016) who showed that

openness to public information would have a positive and significant effect on development.

Regression analysis was conducted to find the proportion of the dependent variable (performance of development projects) which can be predicted by the independent variable (information sharing). Table 3 below showed the analysis results.

**Table 3: Regression Results for Information sharing**

R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig.
.947	0.896	0.886	.2588	0.000

From table 3 above, the value of R square was 0.896 this shows that information sharing explains 89.6% of variance in performance of development projects in Malava Sub County. P value=0.000 shows that it's significant at 99% confidence level hence the model is feasible. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The study failed to accept the null hypothesis that information sharing has no effect on the performance.

The study recommended that management of public institutions, especially in counties should make prudent decisions by sharing relevant information with stakeholders in order for initiated projects to remain viable and successful. This would allow prospective customers to learn more about the services provided by the counties and invite more meaningful participation in them. It is important that management should intensify their efforts to rely on stakeholder intelligence as a means to build success around community based projects.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results information sharing has a significant influence on the performance of development projects. An improvement on the information shared will lead to a significant improvement on performance. Therefore, information sharing was found to be a good predictor of performance of development Projects.

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