

Influence of the Level of Citizen Participation on Governance of Projects in County Governments in Kenya

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Abstract: The level of citizen participation in decision making processes tends to be low. The citizens are often also very little informed about what is being discussed and decided, even though it is supposed to be in the public interest. That has even been the case in the most fundamental expression of the socio-political contract between state authorities and citizens. This paper describes the influence of the level of citizen participation on governance of projects. It is based on the study of the level citizen participation in local governance of projects carried out in Elgeiyo Marakwet and Nandi Counties in Kenya. This study was anchored with the theory of New Public Management (NPM) where it emphasized on a situation that is more transparent, responsible and predictable, and therefore, prompts advance good governance at the local levels. A qualitative research method was the most suitable approach of collecting and analyzing the data. The study found out that citizens were still at the level of tokenism as their power have not been felt though their voices have been heard. When citizen participation is increased sometimes seen as a way to increase the efficacy of regulation, improve the provision of public goods and services, and boost outcomes in areas such as health and education that overlap the boundaries between citizens and their governments. Local government is a platform that all citizens can participate in local issues efficiently and effectively. Their participation is considered as an important factor for the success and prosperity of local government.

Keywords: Citizen Participation, level of participation, tokenism, power, local governance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1980s, citizen participation in administrative decision-making have been focused on. For example, in the beginning of participatory government, the argument was that participation in government improved public service delivery and increased the trust of citizens in government. However, the outcomes of citizen participation depended on the characteristics of participation mechanisms, the target organization especially its capacity, structure, and commitment to the process; and environmental characteristics such as the size of the community and the forms of government involved. UN (2008), argued that meaningful participation was dependent on various sociopolitical and

administrative factors. These factors included the existence of a democratic and decentralized government structure, policy provisions, the availability of and access to information, participation mechanisms, staff responsiveness, capacity building programs, political commitments, and other related factors.

More recently, a study conducted in the United States, found that participation was an important factor for strengthening democratic governance (Yang and Pandey 2011). The authors found that effective participation depended on Local government characteristics and citizen characteristics. Local government characteristics included a number of factors such as the presence of elected representatives, transformational leadership and the structures of the target organization. While characteristics of citizens included the competence and representativeness of the citizens involved. These factors were considered important in determining the effectiveness of participation. Moreover, Fung (2006) and Yang and Pandey (2011) found that the level of representativeness of citizens was critical in ensuring inclusive and democratic participation. Higher levels of representativeness promoted increased access to, and influence over the Local government decision-making. Citizens' representativeness also increased the confidence of citizens in asserting their rights (Osmani, 2007). John (2009) and McKenna (2011) found that the degree of knowledge and skills of the participants often determined the process and the outcomes of participation. A particular level of competence was needed to understand the often complex discussions and the dynamics involved in participation. The objective of this paper is to access influence of the level of citizen participation on governance of projects in county governments in Kenya.

Arnstein's Ladder of Participation suggest that there are three main stages for citizens' participation, further, up the ladder are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision making power. Citizens can enter into a Partnership, Delegated Power or Control that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. At the topmost citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats.

The next level is of tokenism that allows the vulnerable to be heard and to have a voice. When they are proffered by power holders as the total extent of participation, citizens may indeed hear and be heard though they lack the power to ensure that their views would be heeded by the powerful hence no assurance of changing the status quo. The least in the ladder are manipulation and therapy where it describes levels of non-participation that have been contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. The theory of NPM guided the study to drive public administration to the entryway of the local stakeholders and utilize local knowledge to make more compelling and supportable development.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive research survey design so as to formulate the important principles of knowledge and solution to significant problems. The target population were from North Rift counties; Nandi and Elgeiyo Marakwet counties. These were citizens, employees of various projects and county officials of various projects in the Counties. Multistage sampling was used. The sample size was 400 respondents, in determining the sample size, the study adopted the formula and procedure for categorical data using Fishers formula. The study utilized both primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained from the field by use of a questionnaire and an interview schedule. The secondary data were obtained from the library books, journals and previous similar studies available online. Primary sources of data included citizens filling questionnaires, key informant interviews to identify information dissemination frameworks in the target counties. These included elected public officials and civil society representatives from the target counties. In data analysis, to answer the objective, the study used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20) to run the frequencies and generate the tables and figures. Secondary data included a review of the Constitution and the

legal framework put in place by the Government of Kenya, and National Taxpayers Association (NTA) annual report on citizen report card to facilitate effective public participation and information dissemination framework at both levels of government. It also included a review of several documents developed by the county governments.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participation could be seen in the level of consultation or decision making in all phases of a project cycle, from needs assessment, to appraisal, to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. While these participation projects could be funded by the state participation within them as related to broader issues of politics or governance, but as a way of encouraging action outside the public sphere. Moreover, the focus was often on direct participation of primary stakeholders and indirect participation through elected representatives. Citizens were involved through participation on different levels as indicated on citizen participation ladder, those who reported to have participated were high during identification of projects (58%), while formulation of projects were (17%) who participated, legislation of the projects were (5%) who participated (22%) participated in the implementation of the projects and only 7% participated in the evaluation of the projects. During the participation (41%) of the respondents were able to suggest the projects, (19%) approved the projects, (16%) were employed to work on the project, (15%) were able to name the location of the project, (10%) were in the decision making in the two counties as shown in table 1. Although there was a substantial number in participation, citizens were still at the level of tokenism as their power have not been felt but their voices have been heard. Titter and McCallum (2006) critique Arnstein's Ladder of Participation suggesting it is insufficient to describe participation as a linear progression ranging from nonparticipation to citizen control

Table 1: Citizen Participation on project

Participation Process		Percentage
Stage participated	Identification	58
	Formulation	17
	Legislation	5
	Implementation	22
	Evaluation	7
Role played	Suggest a project	41
	Name the place of the project	15
	Approved the project	19
	Employed to build	16
	Correct the parts not done well	6
	Among the decision makers	10
Was your opinion taken into consideration?	Yes	76
	No	24

Participation is useful for educating the public, especially regarding government development programs. It potentially influences social or personal changes amongst community members to incorporate diverse public interests and thus accord people with the right to participate in decisions that would affect their lives (Marzuki 2015). During the various participations, respondents registered low participation in all activities barazas seem to have been attended by (48.6%) compared to the other activities, women and youth groups were participated by (24.3%), focus group discussion participated by (16.9%), County appraisals (6.3%) and road show (11.5%) as shown in figure 1. This Low turnout according to the leaders interviewed was because of lack of enough resources to facilitate such meetings. These findings were in agreement with studies which claim that these informal forums include gatherings like barazas where

members of the community gather to air their views and concerns which in most cases do not go beyond the baraza forums. This has resulted in members of the community not taking such forums seriously and in most cases escaping their attendance justifying their absence in such forums as for why attends when nothing can be done. This has resulted in a feeling of alienation, lack of trust in the local authority and generally very low citizen participation in Local Governance. Mwanzia et al, (2010) explain that participation is a method, a process, and outcome of development, research and empowerment. They explain that participatory methods are important to get information from the marginalized because most policy-makers are unaware of the needs of the rural poor as most of them live in the urban centers and do not share the social circumstances, or class origins of those they profess to help.

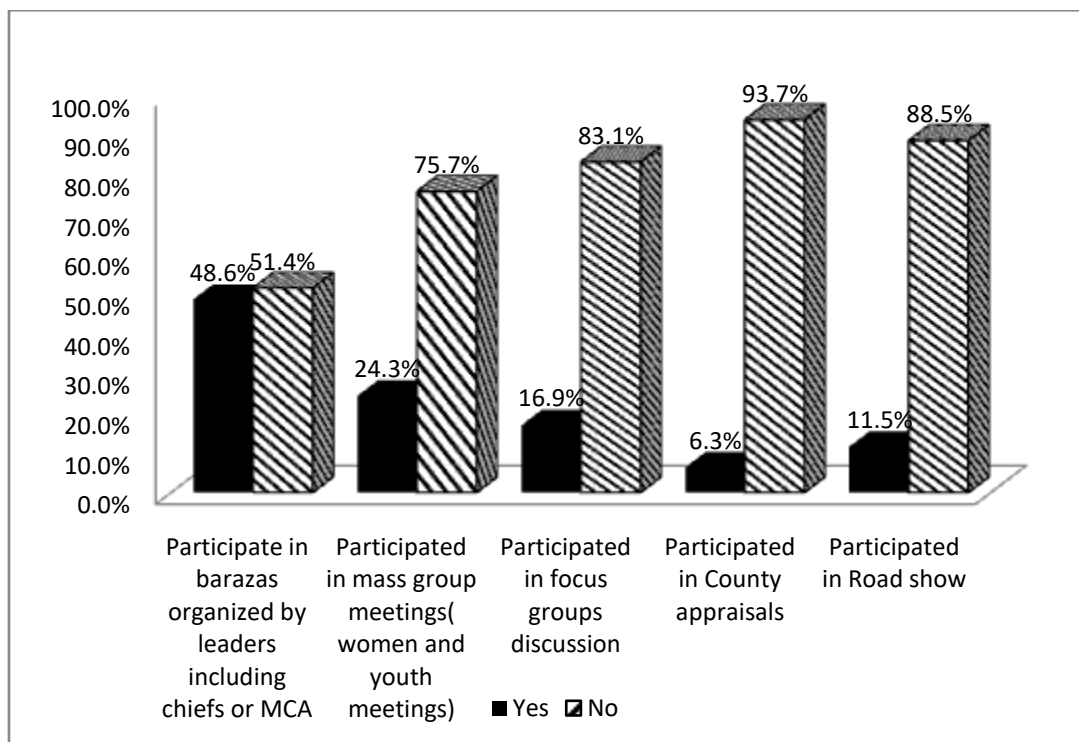


Figure 1: Various participation

IV. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

This study contributes to the knowledge and practice that the Rule of Law when prevailed and fundamental human rights respected, then it establishes a workable, grassroots democracy which would control the excesses of poverty and inefficient leadership and rebuild the economic and political institutions in a way that would prove beneficial to the county governments. Further, in promoting citizen's participation in decision-making at all levels up to the level of citizen power, especially grassroots participation ensures a bottom-up approach to governance.

V. CONCLUSION

The level of participation to citizens were still low, few could reached the level of decision making as they lack power. The moves from government towards civil society, and from social and project participation towards governance offer new spaces in which the concept of participation may also be expanded to one of citizenship. This is one which involves linking participation in the political, community and social spheres. It also offers new opportunities to share the methods for strengthening participation across boundaries so that, for instance, those who have been promoting participation maybe able to link them to the

new governance agenda. The political participation involved the interactions of the individual which often focus more on mechanisms of indirect participation. It expresses itself in individual and collective actions that include mainly voting, campaigning, contacting, group action and protest all oriented towards influencing their preventatives in government, rather than active and direct participation in the process of governance.

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