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Effect of Public Participation on Public Policy Implementation in Meru County Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

With regard to socioeconomic development indices including economic growth rates, unemployment rates, regional and worldwide rankings for corruption, and levels of poverty, Kenya's strong policy framework falls short. It seems that there is a lag between the creation of policies and their execution due to a lack of coordination. This study sought to explore the effects of public participation on public policy implementation in the County government of Meru. The study was anchored under principle-agent theory to explain the relationship of the variables. A descriptive research design was adopted and the target population comprised of 153 employees in the Meru County government department of planning. The study utilized census technique with respect to the unit of analysis. Questionnaires were utilized as the main data collection instruments and were pretested during a pilot study for validity and reliability. The researcher used drop and pick method to administer the questionnaire to the respondents. The collected data was upgraded into quantitative form to enable analysis via SPSS. The study generated descriptive statistics inclusive of mean as well as standard deviation and inferential statistics that included both correlation analysis as well as multiple linear regression. A unit advancement in public participation affects policy implementation by a 0.573 factor. The study established a linear positive association between Public Participation and Public Policy Implementation.

Key words: public participation, public policy, implementation, principal agent theory

INTRODUCTION

Implementation of public policy refers to the process by which government objectives and answers to ongoing societal problems are brought into reality. Public or private organizations are entrusted with the responsibility of developing policies that solve challenges that people are facing (Holzer, Gabrielyan, & Yang, 2018). This is done with the end goal of closing development gaps, combating poverty, and eventually justifying the existence of governments. According to Lipsky (2010), street bureaucrats are essential for putting organizational or governmental ideas into effect because they have direct connection to the individuals whose lives will be affected by these decisions.

According to Ojha, Ghimire, Nightingale, Khatri, and Dhungana (2016), there are two ways to put policies into practice: the top-down method, in which the elite make decisions from the top and then use the civil service to put them into practice on the ground without much input from the general public, and the bottom-up method, in which the public deliberates, discusses, debates, and chooses solutions to issues that directly affect them.

The participation of world-regional stakeholders in questions of public policy and governance is receiving an increasing amount of attention on a global scale. This issue has emerged as a dynamic focus of academic and political agendas in recent years, particularly in light of the ongoing evolution of the procedures by which social policies are formulated and implemented. According to Riggirozzi (2015), there has been a rise in interest about the engagement of global and regional stakeholders in the development and execution of public policy.

Because it does not have a codified constitution, the British state is notable when seen in the perspective of Europe as a whole. The prevalence of common law in the United Kingdom, in combination with the lack of a centralized legislative body, has led to the formation of policies in a way that is more ad hoc and continuing. In nations with a richer heritage of civil law or a written constitution, policy-making is often more organized and controlled. This stands in contrast to the situation in countries like the United States. Riggirozzi (2015) contends that since the United Kingdom does not have a written constitution, the country's constitutional arrangements are made up of a mix of written and unwritten sources. These sources include legislation, case law, conventions, and customs, among other things.

Even though the United Kingdom does not have a written constitution, this does not imply that the state does not have any legal or institutional frameworks in place. This is a crucial point to keep in mind. Instead, it gives the impression that the constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom are exceptional and distinct from those of other nations. This system has perks and drawbacks, both of which are still being discussed in scholarly and political spheres (Lipsky, 2010).

In Nigeria, the constitution mandates that federal supremacy be given precedence above any other consideration in the process of formulating new policies. According to the constitution, the federal government is required to take the lead and maintain control over the planning process at all stages, beginning with the formulation of an idea and continuing through its implementation and evaluation (Dahida & Maidoki, 2013). The National Economic Council, which is overseen by the Vice President, is the body that is responsible for making decisions under this strategy. It is the job of this body to provide the President of Nigeria with advice on economic matters affecting the country and to coordinate economic planning activities among the several states that make up the federation.

Over the course of the last several years, many initiatives to solve these difficulties in Nigeria's policy-making process have been attempted. One of these initiatives is being undertaken by the federal government in the form of the formulation of a National Policy on Open Government Partnership (OGP). The Open Government Project (OGP) is an international initiative with the goal of increasing political transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. According to Oyeyemi (2019), the introduction of the OGP in Nigeria has increased transparency and accountability in the decision-making process. This has been accomplished by providing citizens with access to information and data held by the government.

The National Planning Office takes into consideration the feedback of a variety of the National Planning Commission's ministries and departments while developing national planning policies. These inputs are essential to the formulation of policy, and they contribute to the process of ensuring that policies are in accordance with the overarching goals of the government. According to Agbese (2017), the process of formulating public policy in Ghana is a convoluted one that is participated in by a wide variety of actors and stakeholders. These players consist of the government's executive branch, legislature, and judiciary, as well as groups from civil society and the commercial sector. Participation of these players in the policy-making process helps to guarantee that the resulting policies are sensitive to the requirements of the general populace.

In South Africa, the constitution mandates that the federal government has supremacy over all other levels of government; nonetheless, the process of formulating policies has been fraught with difficulties. According to Ojo (2022), these difficulties may be traced back to a failure on the part of the many stakeholders involved in the policy-making process to effectively coordinate and collaborate with one another. Additionally, the policy-making process has been criticized for its lack of openness and accountability, which has led to a lack of confidence among the population. This lack of trust has led to the policy-making process being condemned.

The Ministry of Devolution and Planning in Kenya is responsible for coordinating the creation of County Development Plans, National Development Plans, and Sessional Papers. Additionally, this ministry provides broad policy direction. The Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) has been tasked with the responsibility of improving public policy making for the purpose of achieving national development goals (Mauti et al., 2019). This will be accomplished by conducting economic forecasting, policy analysis and research, as well as developing medium- and long-term strategic perspectives for economic and social development.

According to Mugo and Oleche (2015), all counties, ministries, and government agencies in Kenya have planning units that report to the Directorate of Economic Planning. This is done in order to coordinate economic development, planning, policy creation, and budgeting. The challenges that are confronted by public policies in Kenya, on the other hand, are not limited to the issues that these policies aim to address; rather, they are present not only during the formulation but also the actual implementation of these policies.

According to Konyango (2018), the execution of public policy has important effects since it influences the day-to-day lives and the general welfare of society, and it may either lead to peace or to chaos. Governance practices that impair the successful execution of public policy are consequently cause for worry since they have the potential to impact the people' ability to provide for themselves. Once policy choices have defined goals and objectives and funding have been committed, then implementation may commence (Meter & Horn, quoted in Kahara, Yegon & Okibo, 2014). The process of implementation entails turning policy into action by concretizing the strategy in the form of programs so that it may be put into effect.

The purpose of this research is to determine the factors that contribute to the failure of policy implementation in the population that is the focus of this study, as well as how the information gathered from this study can be used to enhance policy implementation, which in turn will lead to an improvement in the quality of life for the residents.

The self-interest of the people would be realized, and the public interest would be served, to a significant degree, in a scenario that is considered ideal. The fulfillment of the aspirations of individual citizens, apart from and independent of the interests of other citizens, is the public interest. When we talk about "public interest," we're referring to situations in which the objectives of the populace are achieved and in which laws, rules, and policies are developed, put into place, and used for the advantage of the public.

Statement of the Problem

According to Bellei and Munoz (2021), the successful implementation of policies is not wholly dependent on the passage of policies themselves. According to Grindle (2017), difficulties with the implementation of policies arise when the targeted beneficiaries do not get the outcomes that were intended for them. According to Singh (2021), a number of variables that directly impact the efficiency of governmental policy in Africa include corruption, economic stagnation, inequality, and poverty. The research sought to investigate how well public policy is carried out in Meru County, specifically the study determined thee effect of public participation on the public policy implementation in the county. It is vital to conduct this research because, despite the fact that there are policies in place in Meru County, it is unclear how well those policies are being implemented, and there is a need to address the gaps in governance that are preventing those policies from being successfully implemented. Concerns with the Kenyan government's openness have been voiced in relation to allegations of corruption, the freezing of government initiatives in local communities, and the initiation of

projects without the involvement of the general public (transparency international 2022). With a score of 32 out of 100 on the corruption perception index, Kenya came in at position 123 out of 180 overall.

Research Objective

The study sough to determine the effect of public participation on public policy implementation in Meru County Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical literature review

This study was based on the principal agent theory, The academics Barry Mitnick and Stephen Ross devised the principal agent theory in the 1970s to explain the challenges that often arise when one person or organization, the "agent," is seeking to represent another person or group, the "principal." When carrying out their study, academics are encouraged by this concept (Page, 2013) to take into account the points of view of policymakers. Because the purposes of the system's authorizers and implementers are in conflict with one another, the system presupposes the presence of a hierarchical structure and knowledge gaps. Disputes of this kind may occur between governments and the administrative entities that control such governments, between higher-ups and lower-ups within the same organization, and between government authorities and private firms. Clear, top-down policy directives may help alleviate certain informational disparities (Greenwood, 2016), but this alone is not enough to achieve incentive or interest alignment (Ansell & Torfing 2022).

The idea suggests that the interests of authorizers and implementers are not aligned, and as a consequence, authorizers are necessary to develop incentives and monitor implementers in order to incentivize implementers to execute the instructions given by authorizers. However, the uneven distribution of information that gives certain actors an advantage makes monitoring difficult. According to Koliba, Meek, Zia, and Mills (2018), contrasting orientations for the policy might result in an extra conflict between the objectives of authorizers and implementers and the information sources used by each group. This takes place when implementers are responsible for answering to more than one principle. Because of this, implementers are given the discretion to pursue their own interests within the limitations of the policy directives, incentive schemes, and monitoring that are forced upon them by authorizers. This is a direct result of the fact that implementers are given this leeway. According to Koliba et al. (2018), an agency loss is the amount by which returns to residual claimants, or the owners, are less than they would be if the principals, or the owners, exercised direct control over the organization. In other words, an agency loss is the amount by which returns to residual claimants, or the owners, are less than what they would be. In agency theory, the owners take on the role of principals, while the managers assume the role of agents for their respective departments. An agency loss occurs when the returns received by the owners of the firm are lower than the returns that they would get if they directly exercised control over the operations of the company. Incentives for managers that financially pay them for promoting shareholder interests are merely one of the tools that may be used to offset agency loss, as defined by Agency theory (Ali, 2020). According to Ali, 2020, the theory also identifies a number of other instruments. Plans that allow senior executives to purchase shares, often at a discount, are a popular example of this sort of plan. They serve the purpose of aligning the financial interests of the executives with those of the shareholders by bringing the executives' financial interests into line with those of the shareholders. Similar programs employ delayed compensation to incentivise executives to concentrate on the long-term performance of the firm and to dissuade them from making any hasty choices that can lower the value of the company in the immediate future. The fact that people responsible for executing public policy should answer to the government as the policy agent is the reason why the main agent hypothesis is pertinent to the inquiry that is now being conducted. As a result, the direction that writers of policies provide to those who put them into effect need to be systematic, consistent, and permanent.

Empirical Literature

Public Participation and public policy implementation

After conducting a random impact assessment in Indonesia, Gaduh, Pradhan, Priebe, and Susanti (2022) discovered that specific methods used to fortify school committees may boost academic performance. Grants that improve communication between the school committee and the village council have been shown to raise test results for both boys and girls in Indonesia by 0.17 and 0.11 standard deviations, respectively. Indonesian exam results improved by 0.22 standard deviations after instituting both this connection and having committee members democratically chosen to provide participation of previously excluded groups. Thus, community involvement may have an impact on results for the greater good, but in the case of school committees, efficacy is considerably increased by interacting with stakeholders outside of the committee via elections and linkages. As opposed to the findings of Finan, Olken, and Pande (2017), it was discovered that educating Ugandans about the poor state of local health service delivery and organizing meetings between the public and healthcare professionals to come up with "action plans" significantly reduced provider absenteeism, increased utilization, and enhanced health.

Communities were granted funding to engage extra teachers on temporary contracts in Kenya, where community monitoring went even further (Duflo et al. 2013). These local educators resembled the para-teachers that India's VECs are formally in charge of in certain aspects. However, in the Kenyan program, it was evident that the school committees and the NGO that was in charge of the project had control over the contract and the funding for the instructors. These extra instructors outperformed normal teachers by being more present and scoring higher on tests. The school committees' training greatly enhanced the outcomes.

Wacera (2016) investigated how Kenyan county governments' budget-making and execution processes were affected by public engagement. The purpose of the research was to ascertain the relationship between the dependent variable, Budget Implementation, and the independent variables, Citizen Participation and Funds Availability. Findings showed that Ol'Kalou, the headquarters, was home to the majority of inhabitants who attended public participation forums, followed by Ol' Ojoro Orok Sub County. This was explained by the large population gap. Males between the ages of 23 and 32 made up the majority of respondents who said they had participated in one or more public forums. Additionally, the majority of responders that participate in public forums have completed at least secondary school. However, many expressed displeasures with the manner in which public engagement was carried out, claiming that their opinions were seldom taken into account. The report advised that the government implement civic education programs nationwide so that the populace is aware of its rights as citizens and that public involvement is the most powerful form of governance

Methodology of the study

The study adopted a mixed research approach that combined both qualitative and quantitative research methods in a single study. This approach allowed researchers to gather both numerical and descriptive data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), mixed research approach involves the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, methods, and perspectives in a single study.

Research Design

In this study, a descriptive research design was applied, as it allowed for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data to describe the nature and characteristics of governance attributes that affected public policy implementation in Meru County, Kenya. A descriptive research design was well-suited for identifying patterns and relationships between variables or conditions, which helped to inform policy recommendations and interventions.

Target Population

The population of this study consisted of 153 employees in the Meru County government department of planning. Senior management 32, middle management 59 and lower management 62. The choice of the target population was informed by the fact that this was the department charged with the responsibility of implementing most of the public policies.

Sample size

The unit of analysis for this study was the public sector, and a census technique was adopted to gather data. The use of a census approach was justified as it ensured the collection of unbiased data representing all individuals' opinions in the study population on the problem under investigation (Nzoka & Orodho, 2014).

Data Analysis Techniques and Procedures

Response Rate

One hundred and fifty-three questionnaires were distributed, out of which one hundred and thirty-six were completed and returned, indicating a response rate of 88.9% and a non-response rate of 11.1%.

Table 1: Response Rate

Response rate	Sample size	Percentage (%)
Returned questionnaires	136	88.9
Un-returned questionnaires	17	11.1
Total	153	100

Gender Distribution of Informants

The gender distribution based on the provided indicators revealed that 57.4% of the participants were male, while 42.6% were female. This balanced representation of both sexes, Cooper and Schindler (2006) highlighted the preference for male dominance in formal and informal research studies. However, Ngechu (2004) emphasized the significant role women play in the informal sector, underscoring the importance of both genders in research studies. This underscores the value of considering diverse gender perspectives in research.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Informant

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	78	57.4
	Female	58	42.6
	Total	136	100.0

Age Distribution of Informants

The age of the informants, was also encouraging as, it shows that the majority 57(41.9%) of the target group were between 31 - 40 years, while 27(19.9%) of the respondents were between 20 – 30 years who were assumed to be new employees in the county government. The study also established that those

respondents between 41 – 50 years constituted of 17.6% of the participant and 14.7% were between 51 – 60 years while only 5.9% of the study participants were above 60 years which is the retiring age for civil servant in Kenya. The study considered respondents from all the age brackets. However, the study was likely to give good results in the data presentations, as the majority of respondents were between the years of 31-50 years, which conquers with the current trends growth in Kenya as per the Population Analysis report (2019), which anticipated the population of Kenya growth to increase by 12%, within the age bracket of 21-50 years. Therefore, the finding of this study reflects the current trend of the Kenya population indices.

Table 3: Age Distribution

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	20 - 30 years	27	19.9
	31 - 40 years	57	41.9
	41 - 50 years	24	17.6
	51 - 60 years	20	14.7
	61 years and above	8	5.9
	Total	136	100.0

Informants' level of Education

Knowledge of understanding on how to read the questionnaire and be able to answer the questionnaire correctly cannot be under rated, thus the education levels of the informants were taken into considerations.
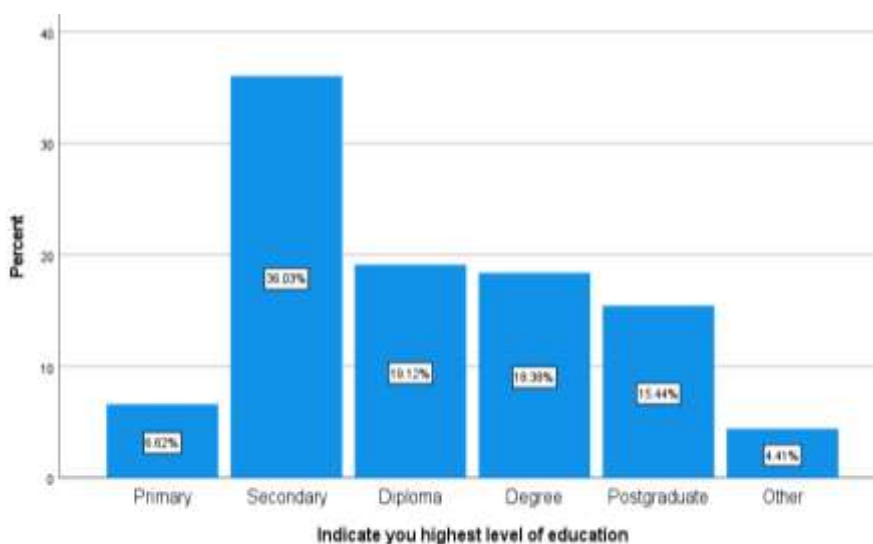

Figure 1: Level of Education

From the results in Figure 2, 36.03% of the informants were having secondary certificate as their highest education certificate, 19.12% of the respondents had diploma while 18.38% of the respondents indicated that they had degree as their highest academic qualification. The study also established that 15.44% of the respondents had attained postgraduate education while 4.41% of the respondents had other form of certification and 6.62% had primary certificate as their highest education level. This was an encouraging level of percentages ratings in education levels of the informants who were able to understand what the researcher required of them in the collection of data in healthcare delivery services, thus this provided adequate results findings for the research study as indicated by Figure 1.

Information on Public Policy Implementation

The survey participants were inquired about their organization's adherence to public policies. A significant portion (68.38%) of the respondents affirmed that their organization indeed implements public policies, whereas 31.62% expressed dissent regarding their county's adherence to such policies. Among those who acknowledged their organization's commitment to public policies, the majority indicated a strict adherence to their organization's rules and regulations. The figure below illustrates these research findings.
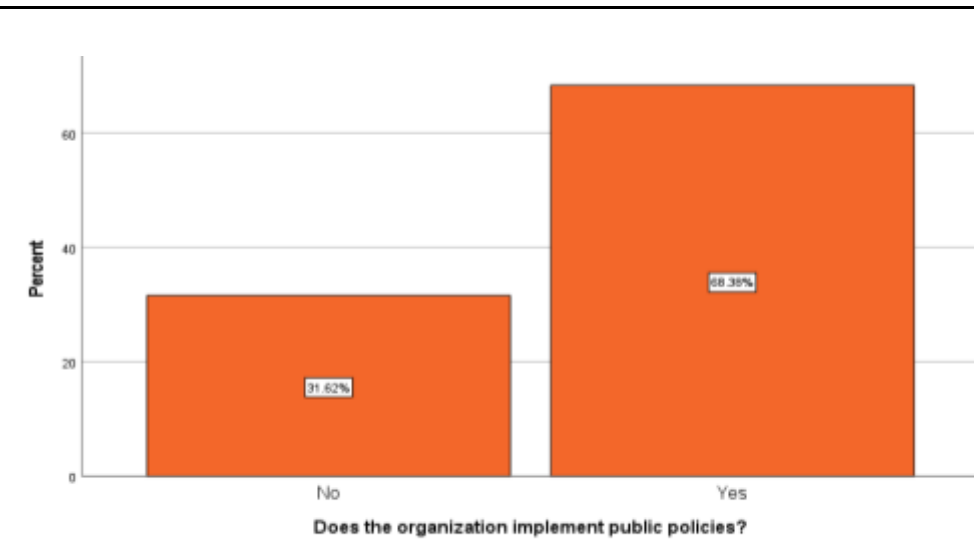
Figure 2: Implementation of Public Policy by Organization

The respondents were also asked to rate the performance of their organization during the last Performance Contracting (PC) as per the Evaluation done by the PC Board. The finding shows that many organizations are rated fairly in terms of performance.

Table 4: Public Policy Implementation Descriptive Statistics

Ratings	Percentage
Excellent	11.8
Very Good	11.8
Good	29.4
Fair	35.3
Poor	11.8
Total	**100.0**

The respondents were questioned about whether their county adheres to the regulations set by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission concerning Gender and Regional balance. The results indicate that a significant portion, specifically 76.32%, reported non-compliance, while 23.7% indicated compliance. These findings underscore a clear violation of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission's requirements.

Among those who affirmed compliance, many mentioned adherences to constitutional rules and other stipulations as their basis. Conversely, among those who reported non-compliance, the majority of organizations attributed it to issues such as nepotism, tribalism, and a lack of willingness to uphold the constitution. Additionally, some respondents noted a willingness to consider gender and regional balance, but they highlighted challenges related to certain professions being underrepresented among marginalized communities, making it challenging to achieve regional balance. Similar obstacles were noted regarding gender imbalance.

The survey participants were also requested to assess the monitoring and evaluation of policy execution within their respective organizations.

Table 5: Public Policy Implementation Descriptive Statistics

Statement	Least common	Fairly common	Moderately Common	Very common	most common	Mean	Std. Deviation
M&E 1	41.1%	27.7%	10.3%	16.3%	4.6%	3.56	1.371
M&E 2	12.5%	14.9%	19.4%	21.1%	32.1%	2.89	1.472
M&E 3	16.9%	15.0%	17.7%	34.0%	17.4%	3.26	1.307
M&E 4	34.3%	22.5%	18.6%	12.5%	13.2%	3.23	1.412

Results in Table 5 indicate the extent to which County effectively implements policies as planned, 41.1% of respondents rated it as the least common, 27.7% considered it fairly common, 10.3% found it moderately common, 16.3% identified it as very common, and 4.6% regarded it as the most common. When it comes to organizations that do not adhere to policy implementation as intended, 16.9% perceived it as the least common, 14.9% as fairly common, 19.4% as moderately common, 21.1% as very common, and 32.1% as the most common. In cases where County somewhat adheres to policy implementation plans, 12.5% indicated it as the least common, 15.0% as fairly common, 17.7% as moderately common, 34.0% as very common, and 17.4% as the most common.

Correlations Analysis

Table 6: Correlation Analysis

		Policy implementation	Public participation
Policy Implementation	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	136	
Public Participation	Pearson Correlation	0.547	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	
	N	136	136

The results presented in the Table 6 indicate a positive and significant correlation between independent variables (public participation r=0.547, p-value=0.001) and the implementation of public policy.

Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression model was used to test the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Table 7: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.854[a]	.729	.722	1.029

a. Predictors: (Constant) public participation

The results indicate that the overall model was satisfactory as it is supported by coefficient of determination also known as the R-square of 0.729. This means that public participation items explain 72.9% of the variations in the dependent variable (public policy implementation in Meru County).

Table 8: Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.916	0.717		6.586	0.000
	Public participation	0.573	0.085	0.617	1.363	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: public policy implementation

Regression of coefficients results in the Table 8 shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between Public Policy Implementation (dependent variable) and Public Participation (explanatory variables). From the finding, the overall model obtained is expressed as:

$Y=1.916+0.573X_1$

Where; Y = public policy implementation, X1=Public Participation

This result shows that a change in either of the variables will definitely lead to a positive change in public policy implementation. The regression equation shows that without public participation, public policy implementation will increase by a factor of 1.916 units. With a unit advancement in public participation affect policy implementation by a 0.573 factor.

Summary of the Results

The second objective of the study was to examine the effect of public participation on public policy implementation in Meru County. From the descriptive statistics and data analysis a majority (75.74%) agreed that their county involves public participation in the implementation of policy. A majority of (74%) also disagreed that their county has programs for building capacity of stakeholders.41.1% of the participants stated that public input is not included in policy decisions rating it as least common. The fact that the county does not involve public participation and neither build their capacity in policy process is contrary to Article 174 of the Kenyan Constitution which states the objects of devolution as "to give powers of self-governance to the people and enhance the participation of the people in the exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions affecting them; to recognize the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development.

The study adopted the Pearson moment's correlation coefficients and the result indicates that the variables Public Policy Implementation had a strong positive association with Public Participation in policy process as indicated by a correlation coefficient of 0.596. This implies that there was a linear positive association between Public Participation and Public Policy Implementation. Thus, an increase in public participation would result in a linear increase in implementation of policy.

Conclusions

Public participation is the third important factor that affects effective public policy implementation in the public sector. The optimal model of the study shows that increasing levels of public participation by a unit would increase the levels of effective implementation of public policy by 0.189. This shows that public participation has a positive influence on effective public policy implementation. According to the study findings, public participation factors such as engaged civil society, public input in policy decisions and building capacity of stakeholders to a large extent affect effective policy implementation in public sector in Kenya.

Recommendations

the study recommends that the government should ensure that there is an engaged civil society which encourages public input into decision making on government plans and budgeting and build capacity of stakeholders for effective participation in the policy process. The government ought to adhere to the provisions of Kenya Constitution 2010 whose object for public participation is to give powers of self-governance to the people and enhance the participation of the people in the exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions affecting them; and to recognize the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development (Government of Kenya, 2010).

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