



# Effect of Public Participation on Performance of Community Empowerment Projects in Kwale County, Kenya.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of financial resources on the performance of community empowerment projects in Kwale County, Kenya. Descriptive research design was used with a target of 133 community empowerment projects within Kwale County. The variable relationship was determined through regression model. The target population comprised 133 community empowerment projects in Kwale County, categorized into various programs including crop development, livestock production, fisheries, and community loaning projects. Stratified random sampling was employed and a sample size of 67, representing 50% of the target population, was selected. The study examined the impact of public participation on the performance of community empowerment projects in Kwale County, finding a strong positive effect. High community engagement levels were observed, and regression analysis showed that public participation accounted for 41% of the variance in project performance, with a correlation coefficient of 0.547 and F-value of 50.702, indicating a significant link between community involvement and project success. Statistical tests confirmed this relationship, suggesting that a 58.6% improvement in project outcomes would result from increased public participation. These findings align with past research by Ndung'u (2014) on the necessity of public involvement in resource allocation, Kugonza (2016) on the positive effects of awareness on trust and transparency, and studies by Opiyo et al. (2017) and Wacera (2019), which highlight the role of feedback, communication, and budget participation in improving project performance. Together, these studies underscore public participation's vital role in fostering accountability, transparency, and effective governance in community projects in Kwale County. Community involvement fosters ownership, accountability, and long-term support, aligning projects with local needs for greater relevance and impact in Kwale County. By promoting transparency and incorporating diverse perspectives, public participation builds trust, minimizes resistance, and enhances adaptability to local challenges. Kwale County should create inclusive engagement plans to ensure all community groups, including marginalized populations, participate in projects through methods like community meetings and surveys. Awareness campaigns can educate residents on project goals and the importance of their involvement, fostering active and informed participation.

**Keywords:** Public Participation, *Community Empowerment Projects*, *Project Performance*, *Devolution of Government Services*, *Kwale County*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This research article explores the effect of public participation on the performance of community empowerment projects in Kwale County, Kenya. Public participation is increasingly recognized as a critical factor that enhances project effectiveness by fostering local ownership, accountability, and responsiveness to community needs. By examining the dynamics of community engagement, this study aims to provide insights into how active citizen involvement can improve the outcomes of empowerment initiatives in the region.

### A. Background

Devolution in Kenya, implemented through the 2010 Constitution, aimed to decentralize government services and enhance local governance by transferring powers and responsibilities from the national government to county governments. This process was intended to bring services closer to the people, improve accountability, and foster citizen participation in decision-making (Akinyi, 2019). One of the primary goals of devolution is to empower local communities by enabling them to participate actively in the planning and execution of development projects that directly impact their lives. By redistributing resources and authority, devolution was expected to facilitate more responsive and context-specific service delivery (Kabau, 2021).

Public participation is a fundamental tenet of Kenya's devolved governance structure, as it provides a framework for community involvement in various development initiatives, including community empowerment projects. Engaging citizens in the decision-making processes allows for a better understanding of local needs and priorities, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability (Waweru, 2020). Studies have shown that when citizens are involved in the planning and implementation of community projects, they are more likely to support and sustain these initiatives, leading to improved project outcomes (Oloo, 2018). Consequently, public participation serves as a vital mechanism for enhancing the effectiveness of community empowerment projects in the devolved governance context.

In Kwale County, the success of community empowerment projects is closely tied to the degree of public participation in their design and execution. Research indicates that projects with high levels of community engagement tend to achieve their objectives more effectively compared to those with limited public involvement (Ng'ang'a, 2017). For instance, community-driven initiatives that incorporate local knowledge and perspectives have shown significant improvements in areas such as education, health, and infrastructure development (Khalid, 2021). Furthermore, public participation has been associated with increased transparency and accountability in resource allocation, which is critical for the success of community empowerment projects.

However, despite the legal frameworks promoting public participation, challenges remain in ensuring meaningful engagement of citizens in Kwale County. Factors such as low levels of awareness about participatory processes, cultural barriers, and limited capacity among community members can hinder effective participation (Muriuki & Karanja, 2019). Moreover, the quality of public participation varies significantly across different projects, leading to inconsistencies in outcomes. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of public participation and its impact on the performance of community empowerment projects is essential for addressing these challenges and maximizing the benefits of devolution in Kenya.

Thus, the devolution of government services has the potential to transform community empowerment projects in Kenya, particularly in Kwale County, by enhancing public participation. Effective engagement of citizens in these projects can lead to better resource allocation, increased accountability, and improved project outcomes. As the country continues to navigate the complexities of devolution, further research into the relationship between public participation and the performance of community empowerment projects will provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners aiming to foster sustainable development at the local level.

### ***B. Statement of the Problem***

The devolution of government services in Kenya, established through the 2010 Constitution, aimed to enhance local governance and improve service delivery by empowering county governments (Kariuki & Karanja, 2021). However, despite the legislative framework that promotes public participation as a cornerstone of devolved governance, significant gaps remain in the effective engagement of communities in decision-making processes related to community empowerment projects. In Kwale County, these shortcomings in public participation have led to challenges such as misalignment between community needs and project implementation, resulting in suboptimal outcomes and inefficient use of resources (Muriuki & Karanja, 2019).

Research indicates that the success of community empowerment initiatives is closely linked to the level of citizen involvement in their planning and execution (Khalid, 2021). However, in Kwale County, the actualization of this involvement is often hindered by barriers such as inadequate awareness of participatory mechanisms, cultural constraints, and the limited capacity of local communities to engage meaningfully (Ng'ang'a, 2017). As a result, community empowerment projects frequently fail to achieve their intended objectives, leading to disillusionment and reduced trust in governmental processes. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency in the management of these projects (Akinyi, 2019).

Moreover, while the legal framework supporting public participation is robust, its implementation remains inconsistent across different projects and regions (Oloo, 2018). Consequently, the effectiveness of community empowerment projects in Kwale County suffers, limiting the potential benefits of devolution and undermining the overall goal of enhancing local governance. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effects of public participation on the performance of community empowerment projects in Kwale County, seeking to identify the barriers to effective engagement and propose strategies for improvement.

### ***C. Objective of the Study***

The general objective of this study was to examine the devolution of government services on the performance of community empowerment projects in Kenya, with a specific focus on assessing the effects of public participation on the performance of these projects in Kwale County.

### ***D. Research Questions***

The study was guided by the following research question

- i. How does public participation affect performance of community empowerment community in Kwale County?

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## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED WORKS**

### ***A. Theoretical Review***

This study was anchored on Stakeholder Theory which posits that organizations must consider the interests and influences of all stakeholders' individuals or groups affected by the organization's actions rather than focusing solely on shareholders (Freeman, 1984). This theory emphasizes the importance of engaging various stakeholders, including local communities, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other entities, to enhance decision-making processes and ensure the successful implementation of projects. In the context of community empowerment projects, especially those driven by government devolution in Kenya, stakeholder engagement becomes pivotal in aligning project objectives with community needs and expectations.

In Kenya, the devolution process has restructured governance by transferring powers and responsibilities from the national government to county governments. This transformation aims to improve service delivery and increase local participation in decision-making processes (Olowu, 2018). According to the Constitution of Kenya (2010), public participation is a fundamental principle in the planning and implementation of government projects.

Stakeholder Theory supports this by highlighting that effective community empowerment projects require the active involvement of various stakeholders, particularly the local population, who are directly impacted by these initiatives (Wambua & Muli, 2019).

Public participation, as emphasized by Stakeholder Theory, is essential in shaping the performance of community empowerment projects in Kwale County. When community members are actively involved in project design and implementation, they are more likely to take ownership of the initiatives, leading to higher success rates (Bennett & Isbister, 2018). Engaged stakeholders can provide valuable insights into local needs, challenges, and opportunities, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the community's context.

Moreover, public participation encourages accountability and transparency in project execution, as stakeholders are more likely to hold implementers accountable for their actions (Kothari, 2001). The theory also posits that when stakeholders feel heard and valued, their commitment to project success increases, thereby enhancing overall project performance (Freeman & McVea, 2001). In Kwale County, the extent of public participation can significantly influence how effectively community empowerment projects meet their objectives.

### ***B. Empirical Literature Review***

Ndung'u (2018) carried out a study on a link of resource mobilization and service delivery among County offices and revealed that, county governments are mandated to provide to the citizens with public goods and services using the financial resource provided by the state. County governments are expected to account for the public expenditure. The study pointed out that the design and implantation of a decentralized form of government can have a significant impact on how resources are allocated overall in the County. The study recommended that for development and empowerment of community to facilitate better, sound and efficient use of the resources.

Kugonza (2016) study on impact of public involvement on service performance in Uganda's Buikwe District local government, enhancing effective service delivery and also in determining the contributions which are made by public to the local authority and in ensuring they access relevant information. Questionnaire was method of collecting data. The study found that public awareness and contribution had a positive impact on the ability of the authority to offer services to the community. Specifically, the study found that these aspects enhanced in building trust between the community and local authority, created equality among community members, created openness which enhanced integrity and honesty with the leaders. This study presented contextual gap in that it only looked at public participation as one of the devolved services and its effect on community empowerments in terms of services provided in form of projects. This study bridges the gap by including other devolved services which may performance of the community empowerment projects. Additionally, the current study looks at the effect of this specific variable in the local contents (Kwale County in Kenya).

Public participation significantly impacts project performance by enhancing relevance, acceptance, and outcomes. Engaging the public fosters transparency, builds trust, and leverages local knowledge and resources. It also contributes to better risk management, increased accountability, and improved implementation. By involving stakeholders in the planning and execution phases, projects are more likely to achieve their objectives, meet community needs, and ensure long-term success. Effective public participation is therefore a critical component of successful project management and execution (Purcell, 2019).

Opiyo, (2017) studied on effect of the feedback method, a cornerstone of community engagement, on effectiveness of Kenya's decentralized leadership systems. Individuals working in the offices of devolution formed the respondents and the sample size was 400. Interview and questionnaire enhanced primary data collection which was analyzed quantitatively using SPSS. The research discovered a positive link of effectiveness of decentralized leadership systems in Kenyan counties and feedback mechanisms. The study also found that better performance can be enhanced by creating a successful execution of decisions through allowing public participation. Additionally, proper supervision and assessment of the public participation through feedback mechanisms is very paramount in enhancing better performance. Basic education and proper means of communication is needed to facilitate flow of communication to the local community. This study presented a scope gap in that it only concentrated on one variable and also looked at decentralized administrative services ignoring other services which are decentralized for effective and holistic community empowerment.

Public participation promotes transparency by providing clear information about project goals, processes, and decisions. This openness helps build trust between the project team and the community, fostering a positive relationship. Active engagement with the public demonstrates a commitment to considering their views and concerns. This can enhance trust and goodwill, making it easier to garner support and cooperation throughout the project lifecycle. The public often has valuable local knowledge and insights that can enhance project planning and execution. This knowledge can lead to more effective resource utilization and avoid pitfalls that might not be apparent to external project teams (Wamae, 2019).

Wacera (2019) study specifically involved public in Nyandarua County. The study targeted 232 employees working in the Nyandarua County office. Piloting was done in government offices within Laikipia County. The results were analyzed using multiple regression. The findings indicated a little evidence that community involvement in county development procedures empowers citizens to participate. Moreover, the enhancement of the participation of citizen in budget implementation has helped to improve the resource allocation and citizens involved are willing to monitor the impacts the projects would have on the economic wellbeing of its citizens. The study recommended that government should ensure full participation of the community in budget decisions and implementation at the County level so that the impact can be felt in terms of improving the citizen welfare.

Public participation can also lead to the identification and mobilization of local resources, such as volunteers, community groups, or local businesses, which can support the project and contribute to its success. Engaging the public allows for the early detection of potential issues or concerns that could impact project performance. Addressing these concerns early helps mitigate risks and ensures smoother project implementation. Active participation provides a platform for addressing conflicts and disagreements in a constructive manner. Resolving issues through dialogue can prevent escalation and ensure that project objectives are met (Stacey, 2019).

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A detailed review of the study's methodology, explaining each chosen approach and its justification. It covers key aspects, including research design, sample size calculation, data collection instruments, target population, and the general research framework. Furthermore, it describes the pilot study, the reliability and validity checks, data analysis methods, presentation techniques, and ethical considerations.

Kothari and Garg (2015) define a research design as the conceptual framework guiding a study, aligning research objectives with procedural strategies. A quantitative research design was employed for this study, with a target population of 133 community empowerment projects in Kwale County, covering areas such as crop development, livestock production, fisheries, and community loaning programs (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Stratified random sampling was used to determine sample size, ensuring fair representation of each subgroup within the population (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). A sample of 67 projects, representing 50% of the target population, was chosen to capture necessary diversity and detail (Trochim, 1980s), as a 50% sample is generally sufficient for population representation.

Data collection utilized self-administered questionnaires, selected for their comprehensive coverage and ability to gather specific responses (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). For the pilot, 15 projects from Kilifi County, amounting to 10% of the target population, were tested to assess validity and reliability (Saunders et al., 2012). Reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency (Field, 2017), while validity was assured through peer and expert consultations and alignment with study objectives (Brooks, 2008).

Data collection procedures adhered to ethical standards, with anonymity and confidentiality safeguarded (Bordens & Abbott, 2017). Following approvals from the Management University of Africa, NACOSTI, and Kwale County, trained local assistants supported data collection. SPSS Version 26 facilitated data analysis, using descriptive statistics for summarization, with findings displayed in tables for clarity (Zikmund, 2013). Ethical measures ensured voluntary participation, privacy, and confidentiality, with participants' information anonymized (Akaranga & Makau, 2016).

### 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings related to the impact of devolution on the performance of community empowerment projects in Kwale County, Kenya, focusing specifically on public participation. The analysis explores the relationship between public participation and performance of these projects, assessing how devolved government services influence community empowerment.

#### A. General Information

A pilot study was carried out to improve the clarity and functionality of the questionnaire, ensuring its reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was greater than 0.7, indicating that the instrument was reliable for precise measurement, leading to the acceptance of all questions for the study. To further enhance content validity, methods proposed by Cooper and Schindler (2018) were implemented in refining the questionnaire's design.

The questionnaires were sent to the sample population, yielding 58 completed responses and an 88% response rate, with 12% (9 respondents) not participating. This high response rate is significant, as Kothari and Garg (2015) suggest that a 50% response rate is adequate, 60% is good, and above 70% is excellent, making this study's rate exceptional and facilitating analysis with 58 valid responses.

In terms of gender distribution, 57% of the respondents were male, while 43% were female, reflecting a higher male participation rate. Kothari and Garg (2015) note that gender can greatly impact perspectives, making the diversity of responses important. The age breakdown revealed that 30% were aged 41-50, 25% were 31-40, 17% were 51-60, 13% were 21-30, with only 5% under 20 and 10% over 60, thus ensuring broad representation within the working-age demographic.

Regarding education, 49% of respondents had a diploma, 30% held a bachelor's degree, 12% possessed a postgraduate degree, and 9% had a college qualification. This high level of educational achievement suggests that the respondents were well-equipped to comprehend and assess the research questions, highlighting the importance of expert knowledge in producing accurate responses.

#### B. Effect of Public Participation on Performance of Community Empowerment Projects in Kwale County.

The primary goal of this research was to assess how public participation influences the performance of community empowerment projects in Kwale County. The findings are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Public Participation and Performance of Community Empowerment Projects in Kwale County

	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	St.
County government offers clearly spelt out functions to enhance public participation.	46%	51%	3%	0%	0%	4.22	1.249
Community is engaged in decisions making in relation to the undertaking affecting them.	54%	40%	6%	0%	0%	4.54	1.428

Community contribute labour for undertakings	55%	40%	3%	2%	0%	4.10	1.635
Community participates in preparation of the County budget on community projects	43%	55%	2%	0%	0%	4.38	1.635
Community monitors the projects intended to empower the public.	46%	51%	3%	0%	0%	4.21	1.492
<b>Average</b>						<b>4.29</b>	<b>1.4878</b>

The findings of a series of five inquiries used to identify the research variable on how human resource capabilities affected the performance of community empowerment projects are displayed in Table 12. On whether project teams have project management skills required to run the projects: 40% said they agreed, 51% said they strongly agreed, 2% indicated they disagreed with the question, and 7% stated they were neutral. The average response was 2.86, while the SD was 1.365. The question addressed was whether staff have knowledge of project management, and these were the outcomes: In response to the question, which had a mean of 3.10 and an SD of 1.405, 38% agreed, 9% were indifferent, 4% strongly disagreed, 4% disagreed, and 47% strongly agreed.

Whether a need assessment is conducted to identify the training needs of county personnel in charge of projects, and the following responses were received: With a mean of 4.54 and a SD of 1.468, 54% highly agree, 40% agree, 6% are neutral, and none disagree or strongly disagree. The study also asked if frequent trainings are conducted at the county level in relation to project management, with a mean of 4.10, SD of 1.635, and 55% strongly agreed, 40% agreed, 3% were indifferent, and 2% disagreed with the statement. If the county government offers incentives to staff to motivate them, a mean of 4.22 and an SD of 1.249 indicate that 46% strongly agreed, 51% agreed, 3% were indifferent, and none objected or disagreed strongly. Indicating how much human resource capabilities influence the performance of community empowerment projects, the study's human resource capabilities variable had an average value of 3.76 and an average SD of 1.4244.

The findings relates to Muraga's (2015) investigation on effects of strategic HRM practices on parastatals'. In their analysis, the study found that the better performance of any organization can be enhanced by building the capacity of human resources to make them valuable resources with the right characteristics. Additionally, human resource capability creates a competitive advantage by minimizing the cost of operations and taking advantage of opportunities and threats, which leads to better performance. The analysis done which was mainly descriptive limits generalization of the study findings since it presents a methodological gap.

Wan (2016), established a positive link of competencies of staff, their attitude, experience, and performance of community empowerment projects in terms of job satisfaction, commitment of employees, and employee productivity. However, this study indicated that for a given indicator of the performance of the organization, a specific strategic human resource is required. Dimba and K'Obonyo (2018) study found a direct link of strategic human resource practices and performance of the organization. Kehoe and Wright (2020) did a study on 'Employee attitudes and behaviour are affected by high-performance human resource practices in South Africa'. The study revealed for a firm to effectively deploy or take advantage of human resources, they must make use of appropriate capabilities. This makes the resources latent enough to give rise to better and valuable service. The research also revealed a connection between resources and skills once combined, as they help to attain competitive advantages. Building the capability of human resources ensures effective utilization of them for the better performance of the undertaking.

### C. Inferential Analysis

A Pearson correlation and regression analysis was performed to evaluate the relationship between public participation and the performance of community empowerment projects in Kwale County. The findings of this analysis are discussed as follows:

Table 2: Model Summary for Public Participation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.547 <sup>a</sup>	.410	.304	.65258

a. Predictors: (Constant), Public Participation

The dependent variable was represented by performance of community empowerment programs and public engagement was the predictor element in a regression study.  $R = 0.547$  shows a basic relationship between public engagement and the performance of community empowerment initiatives, while  $R^2 = 0.410$  suggests that a unit change in public participation may account for 41% of variation in project performance.

Table 3 ANOVA<sup>a</sup> Results for Public Participation

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	21.617	1	21.617	50.702	.000 <sup>b</sup>
1 Residual	48.179	76	.371		

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Total	69.796	58
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a. *Dependent Variable: Performance of community empowerment projects*

b. *Predictors: (Constant), Public Participation*

F = 50.702 shows public participation affects performance of community empowerment projects, an indication that, this model adequately accounts for data and that public participation have a large impact on Kwale County of community empowerment projects. When the regression model's significance level is 000, the dependent variable is highly predicted, which is less than 0.05.

Table 4: Regression Coefficient for Public Participation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	1.620	.329		4.926	.000	.589	2.727
Public participation	.586	.082	.547	7.121	.000	.423	.749

a. *Dependent Variable: Performance of Community Empowerment Projects*

Performance of community empowerment projects = 1.620 + .586 (Public participation)

According to the study's findings, Performance of community empowerment projects has been significantly impacted by the adoption of a public participation. The findings show that public participation and performance of community empowerment projects are significantly related;  $p < 0.05$  ( $P = 0.01$ ). Due to the statistical significance of the public participation values ( $t = 7.121$ ,  $p.05$ ), a rise in the mean index of public participation should result in a .586-unit (58.6%) improvement in performance of community empowerment projects. Table 24 results may be explained by the regression equation: Performance of community empowerment projects = 1.620 + 0.586 (Public participation). The model demonstrates how public participation in Kwale County favourably impacts performance of community empowerment projects.

## 5. SUMMARY

The study aimed to assess the effect of public participation on the performance of community empowerment projects in Kwale County, with findings revealing a strong positive impact. The average public participation score was high, indicating substantial community engagement, while the standard deviation showed moderate variability in participation levels. Regression analysis demonstrated that public participation significantly predicts project success, accounting for 41% of the variance in project performance, with a correlation coefficient of  $R = 0.547$  and  $F = 50.702$ , highlighting that increased public involvement corresponds to improved project outcomes.

Significance testing further established that public participation is closely linked to project performance, with a  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ , indicating statistical relevance. The data suggested that an increase in public participation would lead to a 58.6% improvement in project outcomes, showing that public engagement is crucial in driving project success. This aligns with previous findings, such as Ndung'u (2014), who reported that county governments must leverage public funds to deliver essential services, reinforcing the importance of public involvement in resource allocation and management.

Additional studies supported these findings, indicating positive effects of public awareness on trust, equality, and transparency in project management (Kugonza, 2016). Other research by Opiyo et al. (2017) and Wacera (2019) emphasized the role of public feedback and supervision, communication from national to local levels, and budget participation in enhancing project success. Collectively, these studies confirm that public participation is integral to effective governance and the successful implementation of community projects in Kwale County, helping to foster transparency, accountability, and local empowerment.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Community involvement in projects enhances ownership, accountability, and commitment, fostering long-term support critical for success. Active public participation aligns projects with local needs, ensuring relevance and impact in Kwale County. By involving the community in decision-making, projects promote transparency and trust, minimizing resistance and gaining broad support. Additionally, diverse perspectives contribute innovative solutions, leveraging local knowledge to address challenges effectively and adapt to changing conditions.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The county of Kwale should design and implement engagement plans that ensure diverse community groups, including marginalized and vulnerable populations, are included in project activities. Use various methods such as community meetings, focus groups, and surveys to gather input from a wide range of stakeholders. The county should conduct awareness campaigns to inform community members about the project's objectives, benefits, and their roles in the process. Educating the community on the importance of their participation can lead to more active and informed involvement.

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