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Stakeholder Management Strategies and Service Delivery in County Governments in Kenya

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Abstract: **The study looked at Kenyan county governments' stakeholder management strategies and service delivery. Stakeholder identification was the strategy for managing stakeholders. To gather primary data, a descriptive survey study approach using structured and semi-structured questionnaires was applied. Nine county governments in Kenya were purposively chosen for the study's sample size. Two hundred and nineteen (219) respondents were picked using a random sampling procedure, and their responses were compiled. The study's primary variables were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, and their statistical relationships were examined using regression and correlation analysis. The results of the study revealed a statistically significant relationship between stakeholder identification and service delivery.**

Keywords: **County Government, Service Delivery, Stakeholder Identification.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Identification of stakeholders appears to be the focus of discussion among practitioners and academicians (Yang & Rivers, 2009). Stakeholder identification is important to the organization; stakeholder engagement becomes problematic if stakeholders are not identified. Businesses usually engage with a diverse range of people and interest groups, such as operators, investors, consumers, staff, suppliers, buyers, corporate groups, government, media, social advocacy organizations, and others, in their day-to-day business activities (Carroll, 1991; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Identifying stakeholder groups is essential for considering and managing their desires and optimizing brand reputation and competitiveness.

According to Bobeica (2011), identifying stakeholders is complex, and nobody understands who they are. Nevertheless, these stakeholders are nearly infinite in number (Doh & Quigley, 2014). The plurality of stakeholders with whom the county government must interact suggests the need for an innovative plan to consider and maintain interactions with stakeholders.

Earlier stakeholders' identification is vital in providing government services to citizens. Identifying stakeholders at the heart of the service is critical to delivering the service's quality (Bracken, 2015).

There are three types of stakeholders: organizational stakeholders, economic stakeholders, and societal stakeholders (Bourne, 2016). The classification is based on both those affected by the provided services and those tasked with providing the services. Organizational stakeholders (employees, managers, stockholders, and unions) are always willing to cooperate without cohesion on projects being implemented (Pulè, 2021). Such stakeholders always team up to ensure that the projects are undertaken effectively for the benefit of all. Neither of them shuns personal interests at the expense of providing better service to citizens.

On the other hand, economic stakeholders include customers, creditors, suppliers, and distributors. Societal stakeholders include communities, governments, non-governmental organizations, and non-profit organizations. They always oppose any project that does not suit their needs individually. Such stakeholders hold the projects to a standstill, provided their conditions are not factored in. In such a case, such stakeholders stir conflicts of interest, rendering service delivery a stalemate. It is, therefore, necessary for the county government officials tasked with project implementation exercises to identify stakeholders carefully and engage only those who support projects geared towards improving the quality of life of the citizens (Gregory, 2020).

According to Leventon et al. (2016), the key challenge in identifying stakeholders is to know who the stakeholders are initially and recognize others who help the relevant authorities implement the initiatives. The exercise needs a comprehensive study to acknowledge the range of stakeholders who favour strides to enhance service quality as required in the constitution.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The introduction of a new constitution in Kenya in 2010 resulted in structural changes to the country's government. The devolved government was promoted by this constitution and implemented following the 2013 general election. Thus, the resurgence of decentralized administration offered chances to use effective stakeholder management techniques to bring people's important services closer.

An effective management method for enhancing an organization's service delivery is stakeholder management. As a result, it aids in promoting, supporting, contributing, instilling best practices, and monitoring different organisational stakeholders (Karimi, 2017). Effective stakeholder management techniques seek to achieve numerous corporate goals, according to the literature that is currently available.

Stakeholder management techniques are helpful for corporate finance success, according to Pedrini and Ferri (2019). The effectiveness of stakeholder management techniques improved business sustainability, according to Oppong et al. (2017). Stakeholder management methods are a constant mechanism in all operations and are crucial for all organizational structures.

According to studies (Balunywa et al., 2014; Karama et al., 2019), stakeholder management practices in devolved governments improve service quality. The relationship between service delivery and stakeholder management methods is discussed in the existing literature, according to Wagana (2017) (Olatona & Olomola, 2015; Sow & Razafimahefa, 2015).

County Governments in Kenya have made significant progress in building regional stakeholders. Diverse stakeholders actively participate in decision-making, which helps County Governments accept diverse planning initiatives while reducing stakeholder opposition (Ipsos, 2019). Contrary to what many people think, this is not demonstrated by the availability of amenities. Tanul (2015) bemoaned the fact that despite the tremendous opportunities provided by devolved administrations, many county governments still perform appallingly in comparison to residents' expectations.

According to Transparency International (2019), more than 55% of individuals were dissatisfied with how the county government of Kenya delivered services. Numerous county governments struggle with poor service delivery, which is characterized by major financial embezzlement, uneven resource distribution, and nepotism in job promotions. As a result, protests and strikes continue to take place across the nation.

According to Ipsos Research (2019), 36% of the citizens polled thought that corruption had risen at the county level and was impeding the quality of service delivery. County governments must supply high-quality services despite the public's lack of trust. However, the majority of citizens (49%) said that the county's governance was now more successful.

The current study evaluates numerous socioeconomic outcomes, including significant service delivery outcomes, as a result of stakeholder management practices. Although there has been a notable improvement in stakeholder management strategies in county governments' decision-making processes, previous studies (Lewis, 2017; Wagana, 2017; Nayak & Samanta, 2014; Wambua, 2014; Nyaga & Nzulwa, 2017) found that there have not been any corresponding changes in the delivery of public services. In view of the aforementioned contradicting findings, the study aims to examine the influence of stakeholder identification strategy on county governments' service delivery in Kenya.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES OF STUDY

The study's general objective was to examine the influence of stakeholder management strategies on service delivery in county governments in Kenya. The specific objective was to examine the influence of stakeholder identification strategy on service delivery in county governments. With the intent of addressing the above objective, the null hypothesis was tested.

$H_{01:}$ Stakeholder identification strategy has no significant influence on service delivery in county governments in Kenya.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Stakeholder theory was used to guide the study

4.1 Stakeholder Theory

Ian Mitroff (1983) and Freeman (1984) are credited with developing this hypothesis. Businesses exist, according to their supporters, because of the connections between many stakeholders. Therefore, in order to foster better collaboration, the proponents encouraged fairness, compassion, and honesty in managing stakeholders. Enhancing concrete relationships that support an organization's achievement of its goals involves treating stakeholders impartially. A typical strategy is to identify specific stakeholders in the entity and then examine the conditions in which managers interact with particular stakeholder groups (Freeman, 2015). According to Mellat-Parast (2015), in order for a company to succeed and maintain legitimacy, it must meet the needs, expectations, and interests of its stakeholders. Odero (2017) found that in order to survive, businesses adapt to suit stakeholder demands. By forging beneficial relationships with stakeholders, businesses that use stakeholder theory can benefit financially (Jones et al., 2018). This is what Donaldson and Preston (1995) stress.

A better stakeholder collaboration based on assurance, dependability, and innovation will have a strategic advantage and increase the effectiveness of the business, claims Mutisya (2020). Stakeholders in both enterprises have the power to affect how the organizations operate. The possible support or opposition of these stakeholders to the business and its strategic goals should then be determined (De Gooyert et al., 2017). The management of the organization must conduct a stakeholder identification exercise to identify the various characteristics of the organization's stakeholders, including who they are, where they are from, and what interest they have in the operation of the organization. As a result, each stakeholder has a unique interest and influence in the organization. The element of the principal's authority to influence public opinion and the manner in which services are provided is where this theory's applicability in the current study rests. The law covers both the management of stakeholders' interests during the decision-making process and transparency in stakeholders' actions. In order to ensure that the self-interest of those authorized to act on their behalf is consistent with the efficient distribution to the public, it is essential to balance the interest management of stakeholders.

5. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The empirical literature is a systematic review of prior research findings concerning the current study's objectives. Prior research by (Zikmund et al., 2010) indicated that the empirical literature review is a direct search of written works, such as journals and textbooks, which examines the hypotheses and provides pragmatic findings applicable to the issue at hand. The study variable was the stakeholder identification strategy.

5.1 Stakeholder Identification and Service Delivery

In their study of six water and energy companies in the United Kingdom, Harvey and Schaefer (2001) looked at how managers dealt with environmental stakeholders and what categories of stakeholders they thought were important. They saw that the corporations lacked a systematic system for determining the worth of each stakeholder. Instead, the managers' gut feelings and stakeholders' perspectives of the enterprises determined the managers' roles. The authors also noted that managers viewed economic and environmental authorities, as well as legislators through regulation, as the most influential organizational control stakeholders. Additionally, it was determined that these stakeholders had a great deal of control, authority, and importance. Harvey and Schaefer also claimed that managers' perceptions of and responses to distinct stakeholder classes were influenced by strength, authority, and urgency. This, confirms Mitchell et al.'s (1997) assertion that managers' perceptions of the presence or absence of attributes of strength, authority, and priority determine which stakeholders are treated with respect (Francisco de Oliveira et al., 2019). Parent and Deephouse (2007) investigated the identification and prioritizing of managers' stakeholders.

How do managers identify and prioritize stakeholders, and how well do these management tactics fit within Mitchell et al. (1997)'s framework? was the research topic. A multi-method comparative study of two large-scale athletic event management teams was used to research the subject. The study demonstrated that identifying and prioritizing stakeholders was significantly influenced by the manager's position and hierarchical rank. According to them, (Parent & Deephouse, 2007), stakeholder influence was the best sign of salience, followed by urgency and believability. In order to understand the challenges of managing the service delivery of stakeholder identification-based power in Kenya's regulatory standards bodies, Cheruiyot and Mugambi (2016) conducted an analysis of the impact. The main goals of the analysis were to discover the effect of stakeholder individuality or saliency on service delivery in Traditional Regulatory Agencies and to ascertain the influence of resource divisibility on service delivery in Regular Regulatory Agencies. The study showed that stakeholder recognition (uniqueness and resource divisibility) did not have a significant impact on the standards regulating agencies. An adequate overview of stakeholders could not be done due to the registry's lack of acknowledgement of individual stakeholders. Consequently, even though identifying stakeholders is a crucial part of project design and management, it was overlooked and inadequately considered in the study.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey descriptive research design. Such a type of research design is to provide insight into situational happenings and how they happened. Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) opined that descriptive survey research is to find out and describe things as they are, observe, and analyze the findings to draw conclusive results.

The data for the study focused on forty-seven (47) county governments in Kenya as the unit of analysis. The unit of observation was county government officials namely; Governors, County Executive Committee, and Members of the County Assembly. Taro Yamane’s 1967 formula was used to get 219 respondents in the study. An optimum sample should be in the range of 10%-30% (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012; Sekaran, 2009). A purposive sampling technique was used to select nine counties. The nine-county governments represented 20 % of all the county governments in Kenya, which is considered an optimal sample size. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data to conclude the study objectives. The data collected was tested for the assumptions of various analytical models upon which the most appropriate model was adapted.

7. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

For data description and hypothesis testing, the acquired data was examined using IBM SPSS.

7.1 Descriptive statistics

The identification of stakeholders is a critical strategy for efficient service delivery. By identifying multiple stakeholders, management can map out stakeholders with a variety of services to help improve service delivery. Respondents were questioned if stakeholders had been carefully identified and looked over. According to the findings, 98.3% of the respondents (173) believed that stakeholder identification led to enhanced service delivery at the county government level. Only one (0.06%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that stakeholder identification does not improve service delivery, and the other two (1.1%) respondents were undecided. The results of the responses are presented below:

Table 1: Stakeholder identification

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SDV
Stakeholders who define public service objectives are rated highly in performance	0.06%	0.06%	8%	56.80%	34.10%	4.23	0.665
Stakeholders who initiate and finance the organization are regarded as determinants of organizational success	3%	0%	10.80%	52.80%	34.70%	4.19	0.759

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Technically advanced Stakeholders perform the organizational work to the satisfaction of citizens	0%	0.06%	15.30%	48.30%	35.80%	4.01	0.707
Stakeholders are identified depending on the scope of the system through which they provide services	1.70%	1.10%	9.70%	52.80%	34.70%	4.18	0.784
Stakeholders who help create value for money from projects are celebrated and rewarded.	0.06%	0%	18.80%	42.60%	38.10%	4.13	0.769
Stakeholders who do service planning and delivery process of all county government processes are considered key stakeholders	0%	0%	12.50%	49.40%	38.10%	4.26	0.665
Stakeholders who consistently provide the previous project outcomes greatly boost performance	0.06%	1.70%	8%	55.10%	34.10%	4.22	0.708
Stakeholders who provide alternative solutions to issues greatly contribute to the progressive growth of the county government.	0%	1.10%	10.20%	47.20%	41.50%	4.29	0.694

The respondents were asked to give their opinions on stakeholder identification based on the scale items, as shown in Table 1 above. The respondent majority, 56.8% (M=4.23, SD=0.66), agreed with the first statement that stakeholders who define the public service objectives are highly rated on performance. Other responses were as follows; 34.1% strongly agreed, 8% remained neutral, 0.06% disagreed, and 0.06% strongly disagreed with the statement. On the second statement that stakeholders who initiate and finance the organization are regarded as determinants of organizational success, most respondents agreed 52.8% (M=4.19, SD= 0.759) to the statement. Of other respondents, 34.7% strongly agreed, 10.8% remained neutral, and the remaining 3% strongly disagreed with the statement.

On the third item, technically advanced Stakeholders perform the organizational work to the satisfaction of citizens; the majority of the respondents, 48.3% (M= 4.01, SD= 0.707), agreed with the statement of other respondents, 35.8% strongly agreed, 15.3% were neutral, and 0.06% disagreed with the statement.

Respondents were asked whether stakeholders are identified depending on the scope of the system through which they provide services. From the study findings, the majority of the respondents, 52.8% (M=4.18, SD=0.784), agreed with the statement. Of other respondents, 34.7%, strongly agreed, 9.7% were neutral, 1.7% strongly disagreed, and 1.1% disagreed with the statement.

When asked about their opinion that stakeholders who help create value for money from projects are celebrated and rewarded, the majority of the respondents, 42.6% (M=4.13, SD=0.769), agreed with the statement. While 38.15 strongly agreed, 18.8% remained neutral, and the remaining 0.06% strongly disagreed with the statement.

On the sixth statement that stakeholders who do service planning and delivery process of all county government processes are considered vital stakeholders, the majority of the respondents, 49.4% (M=4.26%, SD=0.665), agreed with the statement. Other respondents, 38.1%, strongly agreed, and the remaining 12.5% were neutral.

Stakeholders who consistently provide the previous project outcomes significantly boost performance: a majority of the respondents, 55.1% (M=4.22, SD=0.708), agreed with the statement. Of other respondents, 34.1% strongly agreed, 8% remained neutral, 1.7% disagreed, and 0.06% strongly disagreed with the statement.

Lastly, respondents were asked whether stakeholders who provide alternative solutions to issues greatly contribute to the progressive growth of the county government. Most respondents, 47.2% (M=4.29, SD=0.694), agreed with the statement. Other respondents, 41.5%, strongly agreed with the statement, 10.2% were neutral, and the remaining 1.1% disagreed.

7.2 Regression analyses

The study further carried out regression analysis to establish the statistically significant relationship between the independent variable that is, stakeholder identification on the dependent variable service delivery. Recent researchers (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Rahi, 2017; Omondi, 2018; Kung'u, 2019) states that regression analysis is a statistical process of estimating the relationship between variables. Carrying out regression analysis helps in generating a multiple linear model equation which describes the contribution of each predictor variable to the response variable. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Model Summary on Stakeholders Identification and Service Delivery

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.503[a]	.253	.249	.43875

a. Predictors: (Constant), SI

b. Dependent Variable: SD

From the findings in Table 2, stakeholder identification had an R squared of 0.253 implying that 25.3% variations in service delivery at the counties are explained by stakeholder identification strategy. The remaining unexplained 74.7% variations in service delivery could be explained by other stakeholder management strategies not included in the model. The correlation coefficient of 0.503 implies that stakeholder identification had a positive statistically linear relationship with service delivery at the counties**.**

Table 3: ANOVA Statistics (Stakeholders Identification and Service Delivery)

Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	11.364	1	11.364	59.035	.000[b]
	Residual	33.495	174	.192		
	Total	44.859	175			

a. Dependent Variable: SD

b. Predictors: (Constant), SI

The findings on the ANOVA as shown in Table 3 indicates that (F (176) = 59.035, $p=0.000<0.05$). The results imply that the model summary was statistically significant. The findings reveal that stakeholder identification was statistically significant in explaining service delivery in Kenyan counties. Therefore, with a $p<0.05$ level of significance, the null hypothesis (**Ho_1**) will be rejected and thus the alternative hypothesis (Ha_1) which states that "There is a statistically significant relationship between stakeholder's identification and service delivery in Kenyan counties" will be accepted. Thus, there is a positive statistically significant relationship between stakeholder identification and service delivery in Kenyan counties.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients (Stakeholders Identification and Service Delivery)

Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**			**Collinearity Statistics**	
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**T**	**VIF**
1	(Constant)	2.135	.261		8.193	.000		
	SI	.467	.061	.503	7.683	.000	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: SD

From the regression coefficients, as shown in Table 4, the findings revealed that there was a positive statistically significant relationship between stakeholder identification and service delivery as supported by a beta coefficient of $\beta=0.467$ and a $p=0.000<0.05$. The results imply that a unit increase in stakeholder identification and other factors held constant will increase the service delivery in Kenyan counties by 0.467 units. Further in support of the findings, $t_{cal}= 7.683 > t_{critical} =1.96$ at a 95 per cent confidence level the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

The linear regression fitted equation is:

$SD= 2.135+ .467X_1+.061$-- i

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8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on its findings, the study concludes that grouping stakeholders into organizational, economic, and societal categories improves the quality of service provided by Kenya's county governments. Since most stakeholders have a specific role in enhancing service delivery, it is essential to identify them. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. In light of its findings, the report recommends implementing the mapping of stakeholders through identification. The study suggests that stakeholders should be identified and mapped out. This will make it easier to find stakeholders who share the residents' desire to improve service delivery. Different stakeholders in projects have various interests. The county governments will therefore benefit from identifying those stakeholders who are financially equipped to supply services to the counties.

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