

STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE PRACTICES AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This study sought to explore the strategic governance practices in County service delivery in Kisii County Kenya.

Statement of the Problem: Service delivery remains challenging for county governments despite Kenya's 2010 constitutional devolution. Kisii County scored poorly on budget transparency (41%) and public participation (7/100 points), indicating significant governance issues affecting service delivery efficiency.

Methodology: The study used descriptive design targeting 200 senior county employees with questionnaires distributed via drop-and-pick method. A pilot study with 20 questionnaires was conducted to pretest the instrument. Longitudinal design was chosen for its superiority in capturing developmental processes over time.

Results of the Study: Strong positive correlations were found between public trust and service delivery ($r=0.853$, $p=0.001$) and between governance transparency and service delivery ($r=0.873$, $p=0.000$). Both relationships were statistically significant and aligned with findings from previous studies by Brayo and Kinyondo (2020) and Kiambati (2020).

Conclusion: Strategic governance practices significantly influence County service delivery in Kisii County, with findings highlighting a positive relationship between governance practices and service delivery outcomes.

Keywords: *Strategic Governance, Practices, Service Delivery, Kisii County, Kenya*

INTRODUCTION

Decentralization of government authority to the local level has been implemented with success in several countries worldwide, including the United Kingdom, India, and the United States of America (Brazil). Studies conducted around the world show that this kind of decentralization of authority affects how citizens are served. Landells and Albrecht (2019) define governance as a structure of roles, rules, authority, procedures, decision-making processes, and responsibilities. Amolo (2010) asserts that decentralization has become a more popular strategy in African nations as a means of enhancing governance and addressing institutional flaws that have been created by overly centralized regimes. These include the exclusion of certain communities from the mainstream policy-making process and corruption. The issue of accountability and governance transparency in the public service has been a topical one thus subjected to various scholarly discourses.

However, citizens are unhappy with the way in delivery of public services are provided the devolved governments (Chima, Bello, Okoroafor & Obilor, 2018). For example, numerous national and local governments throughout the world have failed to meet the requirements of their constituents and have not been able to offer adequate services to them. Further, inadequate service delivery, bureaucratic red tape, a lack of flexibility, insufficient accountability, and subpar performance have long been complaints leveled against most government agencies globally (Fei, Subramanian & Suppramaniam, 2019). The leadership of any County government (CG) determines how well it performs and provides services. Thus, a major factor influencing how well a government does in providing services is a change in leadership. Concerns remain regarding counties' capacity to implement effective financial management systems and integrate the principles of accountability and governance transparency into their daily operations (Adan & Nyangau, 2023).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Service delivery is still a major challenge for many county governments despite the 2010 Kenyan constitution that decentralized government services closer to the people through the devolved systems of governance (Republic of Kenya, 2017). Ngigi and Busolo (2019) concur that county governments in Kenya are not effective in their service delivery due to structural limitations. Lack of synergy and harmony among county governance units also derails effective service delivery (Nyaga & Nzulwa, 2017).

Governance transparency (CBT) reveals that Kisii County scored a national budget governance transparency index of 41% which was below average. The county also scored 7 out of 100 points on level of information provided on public participation in its development projects. According to Ndirangu (2018) stakeholder collaboration improves problem-solving, efficiency, quality, accountability, stakeholder engagement, and relationship-building, all of which have a positive effect on service delivery. As a result, the communities and people they serve are better served by more responsive, efficient, and long-lasting services.

Despite Kenya's adoption of devolved governance through the 2010 Constitution, challenges in service delivery persist at the county level, largely attributed to weak governance practices. In Kisii County, numerous service delivery inefficiencies have been reported, including delays in project implementation, misallocation of resources, and limited public participation in decision-making (Controller of Budget, 2023). These challenges point to possible gaps in strategic governance practices such as public trust, governance transparency, stakeholder collaboration, and reporting systems mechanisms. These challenges raise critical questions about the role and effectiveness of strategic governance practices in enhancing service delivery in Kisii County. Without a structured approach to build public trust, ensure governance transparency, enhance stakeholder collaboration, and improve reporting systems, the promise of devolution may remain unfulfilled. This study therefore sought to examine the influence of strategic governance practices on service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- i. To determine the influence of Public trust on County Service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya.
- ii. To establish the influence of Governance transparency on County Service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya.
- iii. To assess the influence of Stakeholder collaboration on County Service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya.
- iv. To establish the influence of Reporting Systems on County Service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What is the influence of Public trust on County Service delivery in Kisii County,

Kenya?

- ii. What is the influence of Governance transparency on County Service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya?
- iii. What is the influence of Stakeholder collaboration on County Service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya?
- iv. What is the influence of Reporting Systems on County Service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya?

THEORITICAL REVIEW

The Cognitive Theory of Public Trust, developed by Robert Morgan in 1990 and later enhanced through his collaboration with James H. Davis in 2000, provides a foundational framework for understanding trust dynamics in public service contexts. This theory conceptualizes public trust as a cognitive process where individuals form rational assessments about the trustworthiness of public entities (Morgan, 1990). Unlike theories that view trust primarily through interpersonal or emotional lenses, the cognitive approach emphasizes that citizens' trust in government institutions stems from deliberate evaluations based on perceived credibility, reliability, and competence in service delivery (Morgan & Davis, 2000).

The theory posits that public trust formation is not arbitrary but results from citizens' rational evaluation of government performance, transparency, and accountability. When applied to county governance, this framework suggests that citizens will trust local governments only to the extent that they demonstrate consistent competence and reliability in fulfilling service obligations. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to the current study as it highlights how county governments can enhance service delivery outcomes by building trustworthiness through demonstrated competence and transparent governance practices, ultimately fostering the public confidence necessary for effective governance (Morgan & Davis, 2000).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

A study in Tanzania, Brayo and Kinyondo (2020) examined the citizens' public trust in government and their willingness in paying taxes to improve public service delivery. According to descriptive statistics, 79.4% of people have faith in their government. The results demonstrate that the quality of public goods and services has a favorable and considerable

impact on citizens' public trust in the government. A rise in a citizen's faith in the government is correlated with every unit increase in public service delivery. If public services were enhanced, about 91.3 percent of citizens were willing to pay higher taxes. Greater readiness to pay taxes to fund public service improvements was encouraged by increasing levels of citizen public trust in the government and the provision of high-quality public services. Therefore, focusing public policies on citizens who are unsatisfied is essential to strengthening the effect on citizen public trust in the government.

In Kenya, Ogola, Kung'u and Nassiuma (2021) assessed the effect of public trust on service delivery in the National Police Service (NPS) in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study used motive-based theory, which incorporates assumptions about the goals and motives of law enforcement and mirrors the idea of fiduciary public trust. A random sample of 215 police officers was chosen from the 2100 police officers that were the focus of the study. To gather primary data, questionnaires and a guide for key informant interviews were employed. Of the police officers surveyed, the majority (62%) were unsure if there was a decline in complaints made against them. Since most respondents (94%) did not public trust the police, they were afraid of becoming victims and therefore unable to report crimes. The absence of a robust community stakeholder collaboration in crime prevention and police accessibility could have impacted the execution of police reforms.

A survey by Munoru (2015) looked at the strategies KPLC used to enhance service delivery as well as the difficulties the business encountered putting the tactics into practice. This study used a case study approach with KPLC serving as the primary research subject. Ten people in high management roles within the organization were targeted for interviews as part of the study. The study found that some of the biggest obstacles to the implementation of these techniques were insufficient technology, management, reluctance employee opposition, and corruption. In order to compete well with their counterparts in the private sector, the report also suggests that businesses adopt the new public management principles, which center on integrating private sector methods in the public sector.

Endeki and Minja (2021) looked at the causal relationships between public sector efficiency and the NPM model's core pillars of citizen satisfaction, accountability demands, and decentralization of public services. The researcher employed a descriptive design with a sample of 242 respondents from the State Department of Public Works was used by the

researcher. The study's conclusions clearly showed how the three predictor variables; demand for accountability, citizen satisfaction, and decentralization of services, intersect with public sector efficiency. These findings show a significant and positive association between the predictor factors and the efficiency of public sector service delivery in the SDPW. Thus, the researcher came to the conclusion that the New Public Management theory's strong constructs for explaining public sector efficiency were the desire for accountability, citizen satisfaction, and decentralization of services.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework has assumption that the relationship between strategic governance practices and county service delivery is significant. The study's independent variable was strategic governance practice whose measures focused on Public Trust, Governance Transparency, Stakeholder Collaboration and Reporting Systems. In addition, the dependent variable is County Service delivery measured Quality of Services, Citizen Satisfaction and Service Accessibility; shown as follows.

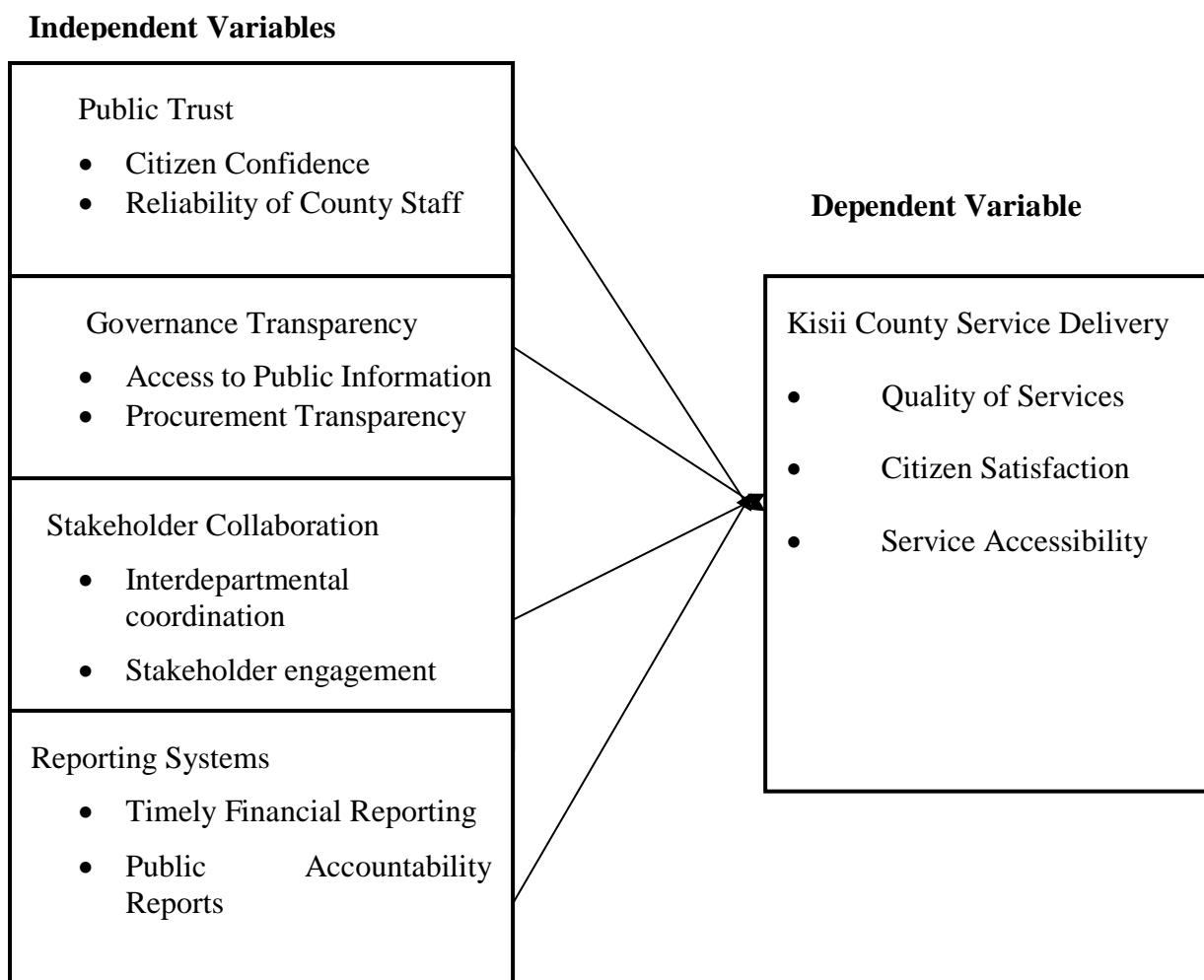


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied descriptive research design. It considered the adoption of positivism research philosophy. The study's unit of analysis was Kisii County Government. The study focused on 200 staff members working within the County Government. Since this study comprised of a small population, the study employed use of census approach, for data collection. Data collected was quantitative in nature which was obtained through use of questionnaires. Both descriptive statistics and multiple regression methods were applied in data collection in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive analysis was carried on the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable. The first objective yielded descriptive results as indicated on Table 1.

Table 1: Public Trust and Service Delivery

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Residents from our county feel we offer credible services	3.981	0.626
We offer services with a lot of professionalism to all our clients/residents	3.970	0.725
Our employees feel adequately engaged to in their respective job areas	3.868	0.815
Our services are compliant with governance principles in our service charter	3.854	0.728
We have competent professionals that understand their duties and assignments	3.828	0.831
Our county involves all stakeholders at every level of public interest on county matters	3.771	0.642
Aggregate	3.864	0.728

The first objective of the study was to determine the influence of Public trust on county service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements related to public trust and county service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya. From the results, the respondents agreed that residents from their county feel that they offer credible services ($M= 3.981$, $SD= 0.626$). In addition, the respondents agreed that they offer services with a lot of professionalism to all their clients/residents ($M=3.970$, $SD=0.725$). Further, the respondents agreed that their employees feel adequately engaged to in their respective job areas ($M=3.868$, $SD=0.815$).

From the results, the respondents agreed that their services are compliant with governance principles in their service charter ($M=3.854$, $SD= 0.728$). In addition, the respondents agreed that they have competent professionals that understand their duties and assignments ($M=3.828$, $SD=0.831$). Further, the respondents agreed that their county involves all stakeholders at every

level of public interest on county matters (M=3.771, SD=0.642).

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between Independent variables and the dependent variable. The results yielded were as shown in table 2 below;

Table 2: Regression Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.354	0.096		3.688	0.000
Public Trust	0.378	0.099	0.379	3.818	0.001
Governance Transparency	0.385	0.099	0.384	3.889	0.000
Stakeholder Collaboration	0.363	0.091	0.364	3.989	0.002
Reporting Systems	0.324	0.085	0.323	3.812	0.003

The overall regression model was as follows;

$$Y = 0.354 + 0.378X_1 + 0.385X_2 + 0.363X_3 + 0.324X_4 + \varepsilon$$

The results from the multiple regression analysis reveal that strategic governance practices, i.e. Public trust, Governance transparency, Stakeholder collaboration, and Reporting systems are all having a positive and statistically significant effect on County service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya. Each variable had a p-value below 0.05, an indication of a significant contribution to the model. From the regression results, the first variable Public trust in leadership was found to significantly influence County service delivery. A unit increase in public trust results to a corresponding 0.378 unit increase in County service delivery, holding other variables constant. This finding aligns with Onyango and Wanyama (2019), who found that citizen public trust in county leaders improves compliance, cooperation, and uptake of public services. High public trust enhances communication and reduces resistance to

governance initiatives.

The second variable Governance transparency had the highest standardized beta coefficient $\beta = 0.364$; $p=0.001$), suggesting it is the most influential predictor in the model. The more open and accountable a county government is through clear budgeting, public disclosure, and open procurement the higher the quality of service delivery. This echoes findings by Mwangi (2020), who noted that counties practicing fiscal and administrative governance transparency experienced improved infrastructure delivery and citizen satisfaction. The third variable Stakeholder Collaboration among departments and with stakeholders was also a strong predictor of improved service delivery. This had a standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.363$, $p = 0.001$) A one-unit improvement in stakeholder collaboration leads to a 0.363 increase in service delivery. This supports Mutua and Karanja (2021), who found that inter-agency coordination and stakeholder partnerships in devolved governments in Kenya led to faster project implementation and better service integration.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.889 ^a	.790	.791	.10381

a. Predictors: (Constant), public trust, governance transparency, stakeholder collaboration and reporting systems

The model summary was used to explain the variation in the dependent variable that could be explained by the independent variables. The r-squared for the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable was 0.790. This implied that 79% of the variation in the dependent variable (service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya) could be explained by independent variables (public trust, governance transparency, stakeholder collaboration and reporting systems). However, the remaining 21% were caused by other factors which are not within the scope of this study.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	111.057	4	27.764	247.67	.002 ^b
Residual	19.625	175	.1121		
Total	130.682	179			

The ANOVA was used to determine whether the model was a good fit for the data. F calculated was 247.67 while the F critical was 2.423. The p value was 0.002. Since the F-calculated was greater than the F-critical and the p value 0.002 was less than 0.05, the model was considered as a good fit for the data. Therefore, the model was suitable to predict the influence of strategic governance practices on County service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya.

CONCLUSION

The study findings revealed that strategic governance practices had a positive and significant influence on County service delivery in Kisii County, Kenya. From the results, the respondents agreed that residents from their county felt that they were offered credible services. In addition, the respondents agreed that County officials offered services with a lot of professionalism to all their clients/residents. Additionally, the respondents agreed that their employees were adequately engaged to in their respective job areas, thereby enjoying job satisfaction. From the results, the respondents agreed that County services being offered are compliant with governance principles in their service charter. In addition, the respondents strongly agreed that they had competent professionals that understood their duties and assignments efficiently. Lastly, the respondents further agreed that the county they serve embraced a multi-sectorial approach which involved all stakeholders at every step of public interest on county matters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The county government should actively work on building, developing and maintaining strategic governance practices in all their operations while prioritizing ethical leadership, accountability, and consistent communication. Leaders should engage in community outreach and feedback mechanisms to ensure that citizens' concerns are heard and addressed amicably. Implementing integrity and anti-corruption measures, as well as promoting inclusivity in

decision-making processes, will help foster a culture of public trust, efficiency and austerity. Moreover, establishing independent oversight bodies could further enhance public confidence in governance to facilitate better Progressive County.

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