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Social Accountability and Public Service Delivery in Kenya: A Case Study of Baringo County, Kenya

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Social accountability is one of the corporate governance practices that is expected to be undertaken by organisations. Within the public sector, social accountability is an emerging phenomenon that involves citizens' involvement in advocating for their rights, good governance, prudent use of public resources and transparency in all public projects. This paper examines the linkages between social accountability and the delivery of public services with specific reference to Baringo County, Kenya. The study was anchored on agency theory. A concurrent triangulation research design was used, which targeted a total of 666,763 residents from Baringo County and 6 sub-county administrators. A sample size of 384 respondents was selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The six sub-county administrators were chosen through purposive sampling methods. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. Analysis of data was performed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of SPSS Version 24.0. The research established that social accountability had a weak positive relationship with service delivery at Baringo County ($r=0.403$, $p<0.05$). It was concluded that social accountability practices influenced the delivery of public services by the County Government of Baringo to a lower level. It is therefore recommended that members of the public need to be fully educated on conducting social audits. The county government of Baringo should develop a public participation and social accountability framework to enable residents to check and assess various developmental programmes being undertaken in their county.

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INTRODUCTION

Public services are provided by governments and their agencies within their areas of jurisdiction; national or state (including county and local government level) (Singh, 2022). All citizens of a given country or local government area are expected to benefit from public services irrespective of their social status, income, disability or even location. The common and basic services that governments provide to their citizens include; education, health, water, transport, security, waste management, among others. These services are expected to be accessible to all citizens, hence the achievement of national and international sustainable development goals. Effective service delivery promotes inclusive development and growth in a nation. This study focuses on service delivery by local governments (the county government of Baringo County). The county governments (local governments) in most developing countries continue to play an important role in public service delivery (Kisaka & Jagongo, 2021). Decentralised local governments are an important point of contact between the state and citizens, where public services are generally exchanged and where local norms and by-laws regulate citizens' way of life (Ardigo, 2019). The move towards devolving various government services across various countries of the world was a way of shortening the distance between public service providers, public officials and citizens so as to make governance more responsible and mobile in order to increase citizens' contributions to policy design and implementation (Abdi & Mandere, 2022).

Poor public service delivery is pervasive in Sub-Saharan Africa (Kyando, 2022). Ineffective monitoring systems, Weak institutions and weak

accountability relationships between actors involved in the service delivery chain have exacerbated the problem. Experiences of devolution have seen an ever-growing need to incorporate accountability mechanisms into local governance structures to counter corruption and mismanagement (Ardigo, 2019). Therefore, this paper investigates how social accountability can be used to enhance public service delivery by local authorities.

Social accountability is the institutionalisation of durable social control over policies, over their implementation by the provider (Singh, 2020). Friis-Hansen (2014) defined social accountability as a citizen-led action to demand accountability from public service providers. Kyando (2022) defined social accountability as an approach towards building accountability which depends on civic engagement, where ordinary citizens and/or civil society organisations participate directly or indirectly in exacting and demanding accountability. It is the institutional arrangements to facilitate the participation of ordinary citizens in the public policy and implementation processes. Social accountability has therefore emerged as an innovative strategy which aims to improve public service delivery at the county level through engaging ordinary citizens in exacting accountability, in addition to bolstering public service officers' responsiveness. Therefore, the main question that this study asks is: How do social accountability initiatives undertaken by residents of Baringo County impact public service delivery?

Problem

Social accountability of county government programmes is key towards ensuring that citizens receive quality public services. Practitioners and

scholars have found out that social accountability has the capacity to increase the effectiveness of public service delivery, empowerment of all citizens (marginalised, disadvantaged and poor), enhance democracy, improve governance, improve public servants' response to concerns from the members of public and ensure that government development agenda is realised (Kyando, 2022). Despite these benefits being accrued from social accountability, reports have shown majority of citizens in the country are not satisfied with the county government's performance (Abdulkadir, Njoroge & Muna, 2021). There is a lack of accountability and transparency in the government operations, corruption, high level of tribalism and nepotism in employment, high resource wastage and supremacy battle between the executive and members of county assemblies (Abdulkadir, et al., 2021). These challenges continue to be experienced across the country, and Baringo County is no exception. Further, In Baringo County, household poverty index 52.2% compared to national incidence of 45.2%, clean water is scarce for domestic and farming, sanitation is a challenge to many households, there is perennial hunger, the medicals services are not accessible to many and education development is low compared to the neighbouring counties. Some of the issues that the county faces could be addressed through proper planning and the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of the development agenda. Whereas social accountability is a strategy for improving performance in the public services, it has not been empirically determined with respect to Baringo County. Therefore, this paper examines the relationship between social accountability practices and service delivery effectiveness in Baringo County, Kenya.

Objectives of the Paper

The specific objectives of this paper were:

- To determine the degree to which social accountability measures are undertaken by residents of Baringo County

- To analyse the relationship between social accountability practices and the effectiveness of public service delivery in Baringo County, Kenya.

LITERATURE

Accountable delivery of development cooperation is critical to improve its quality and effectiveness in achieving better sustainable development results. As a result, at the UN Summit on the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, member states recognised that greater accountability and transparency can help to make financial resources more adequate, predictable, targeted and of improved quality, thus fostering greater sustainable development. Research has been conducted on this effect in various nations. In the Netherlands, Fikkert (2018) focused on the relationship between stakeholder engagement and the integration of sustainability within organisations. This was based on an explorative qualitative single case study, including a 7-month participant observation period. A qualitative data analysis method was used for company data, including 8 semi-structured interviews with employees, and a thematic analysis was conducted based resulting in emerging coding categories. The study found out that the wide array of stakeholders that the organisation engages with initially forms a challenge when it comes to transparency; however, this transparency indirectly contributed to the integration of sustainability by means of, e.g. new knowledge demands.

Silvius and Schipper (2016) elaborated on literature work by studying how sustainability affects project success. According to them, project managers, logically, strive for project success and considering sustainability may influence this success. Through a review of relevant literature in books and articles, they developed a conceptual model that provided a more detailed understanding of how considering different dimensions of sustainability affected the individual criteria of project success. The study found out that providing timely, clear and relevant

information to stakeholders may also reduce the risk of the project in the form of disturbances by concerned stakeholders. Transparency and accountability may therefore contribute to a 'controlled execution of the project and possibly also to completing the deliverables on the agreed schedule and budget'. The effect of transparency and accountability on the success criteria that refer to the future use of the deliverables of the project and the business goals of that use may be less clear.

Midina, Joseph and Mohamad (2016) determined the relationship between e-PBT star rating, ISO commitment e-community, internal goals and council's size, and the extent of stakeholders' engagement disclosure on Malaysian local authority websites using an institutional theory framework. Adopting a modified stakeholders' engagement index to measure the extent of stakeholders' engagement disclosure, the unit of analysis was 108 Malaysian local council websites. They found out that local authorities that have stakeholder engagement elements contained in the internal goals disclosed more stakeholder engagement information on their websites as compared to local authorities that do not have stakeholder engagement elements in the internal goals.

Gyampo (2016) undertook a five-year review of the management of oil revenues in Ghana since the commencement of oil production in 2010. Using reports from the Petroleum Transparency and Accountability Index, official records from key state agencies, and interviews with core individuals within the petroleum sector, the paper assesses the quality of transparency and accountability in the management of Ghana's oil revenue. It argues that even though some progress has been made in the transparent and accountable use of oil revenues, more can be achieved if certain critical bills are passed and proactive interventions pursued without further delay on the part of government and policymakers within Ghana's petroleum sector. These would help prevent both potential social conflicts that may result from a lack of information

on how oil revenues are utilised and the corrupt use of oil funds by politicians and people in authority within the oil industry.

In South Africa, Sayeed, Pillay and Reddy (2014) explored the role of extension workers in promoting food security within a good governance agenda. They found out that despite the prevalence of good legislative frameworks and guidelines for Extension Workers, much still needs to be done in order to bridge the gap between policy and implementation. They concluded that the integration of accountability and transparency mechanisms into each stage of the project cycle offers an opportunity for the achievement of good food security governance amongst extension workers. The study was conducted in South Africa, while this research will be conducted in Kenya. In Kenya, Karimi and Kimutai's (2018) study focused on how participatory project management influenced the success of slum upgrading projects in Korogocho informal settlements. The study was guided by the theory of change. The study was conducted in Korogocho informal settlements in Nairobi County. The participants were selected through cluster sampling and simple random sampling. The result shows that participatory project management leads to the success of the slum upgrading projects. The community members were involved in the purchase of the resources that were needed to enhance transparency and accountability.

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by Agency theory, which was developed by Jensen and Meckling (1976). Jensen and Meckling defined the agency relationship as a form of contract between a company's owners and its managers, where the owners (as principal) appoint an agent (the managers) to manage the company on their behalf (Bernardo, 2014). As a part of this arrangement, the owners must delegate decision-making authority to the management. The owners expect the agents to act in the best interests of the owners. Ideally, the 'contract' between the owners and the managers

should ensure that the managers always act in the best interests of the owners. In the public sector context, principals in this relationship are the tax and voters (in a democracy), while the agents are managers and sometimes elected representatives. The taxpayers and voters cannot all run the government, and therefore elect leaders and appoint managers to implement government policy on their behalf. The taxpayers (citizens) are always concerned with value for money. Conflict of interest occurs when the leaders and managers use their positions to benefit themselves, rather than focusing on ensuring there is better public service delivery. Another problem in the governance of public sector organisations is how to establish strategic objectives and then monitor the success of the public sector organisation in achieving these. It is normal in most countries to have a limited audit of public sector organisations to ensure the integrity and transparency of their financial transactions, but this does not always extend to an audit of their performance or ‘fitness for purpose’.

Agency theory provides a framework for understanding social accountability in public service delivery (Awortwi, 2012). It concerns the issue of how to get the public servant (the agent) to act in the best interest of the citizenry (principal). Agents should be accountable to their principals for their decisions and actions. Social accountability means having to report back to the principal and give an account of what has been achieved, having to answer questions from the principal about performance and achievements and the principal having the power to reward or punish an agent for good or bad performance (Shah, 2019). Greater accountability should reduce the agency problem, because it provides management with a greater incentive (obtaining rewards or avoiding punishments) to achieve performance levels that are in the best interests of the shareholders. However, the costs of social accountability (which are monitoring costs) should not be excessive and should not exceed the value of the benefits that the monitoring provides.

In relation to this paper, social accountability also determines where the centre of authority lies within an entity. This means that the county government's delivery of services needs to be known and held accountable to its people (residents). But the notion of the right to call county government to account needs to be complemented by the notion of powers in the ability of those holding public office to explain various developmental projects. The accountability of management not only depends on the right of the residents to call the county government to account, but also on their ability to do so.

METHODOLOGY

The study was guided concurrent triangulation research design, which is a mixed-methods research design where data is collected concurrently, analysed concurrently and presented concurrently (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The target population involved all residents of Baringo County who were more than 666,763 as per the 2019 national census. Considering that the population for the study was above 10,000 residents, a sample size was taken for the study. Moreover, six sub-county administrators automatically participated in the study. The sample size for residents was calculated using Covin and Fisher (1991) formula of sample size determination, resulting in a population of 384 respondents. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used. These techniques were used because the population was classified into various sub-counties (6), and after stratification, the final respondents were selected through a simple random sampling method. The researcher used questionnaires and interviews to collect data. The researcher used quantitative techniques in analysing data collected from the field. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Karl Pearson correlation). Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS version 22.0) Social Sciences was used to aid in data coding, entry and analysis. Qualitative data from open-ended questions and

interviews was analysed thematically (as per various themes and sub-themes) through content analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Kenyan constitution and other government legislation require public bodies to be accountable and responsible to the citizens of the country. Even in Baringo County, it is expected that the county government would be accountable to its citizens through the setting up of various mechanisms of social audits. Therefore, the research collected data on how social accountability measures were being

applied for the purpose of ensuring effective service delivery in the county. This was facilitated through the collection of qualitative and quantitative data from Sub-County administrators and sample residents of the county. At first, the respondents (residents) were asked to indicate how various social accountability and transparency practices were followed in the delivery and implementation of services and projects. They were to give their responses on a Likert scale of five, which was: Always (5), often (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2) and never (1). The outcomes of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Accountability Practices in Baringo County

	Item	N	R	S	O	A	M	SD
i	There is a social audit committee for development projects	68 (19.8%)	89 (25.9%)	111 (32.4%)	38 (11.1%)	37 (10.8%)	2.6706	1.22089
ii	We can actually take to account all government officers to task on audit queries relating to project	108 (31.5%)	109 (31.8%)	82 (23.9%)	21 (6.1%)	23 (6.7%)	2.2478	1.15967
iii	There is transparency and openness when implementing county government projects	114 (33.2%)	102 (29.7%)	84 (24.5%)	21 (6.1%)	22 (6.4%)	2.2274	1.16260
iv	The public can access development project records easily in the spirit of accountability and integrity	118 (34.4%)	95 (27.7%)	81 (23.6%)	23 (6.7%)	26 (7.6%)	2.2536	1.21267
v	We can actually monitor the usage of public funds in the project	125 (36.4%)	102 (29.7%)	80 (23.3%)	17 (5.0%)	19 (5.5%)	2.1341	1.13146
vi	Issues of corruption in projects are actually dealt with in the county	158 (46.1%)	91 (26.5%)	65 (19.0%)	7 (2.0%)	22 (6.4%)	1.9621	1.14517
	Composite						2.2493	1.17208

Key: N-Never, R-Rarely, S-Sometimes, O-Often, A-Always, M-Mean and SD-Standard Deviation.

Data show that 111 (32.4%) of respondents indicated that, at times, there is a social audit committee for development projects, while 89 (25.9%) indicated that social audit committees are rare. The mean values show that sometimes (M=2.67 and SD=1.22) social audit committees are

formed for county government projects in Baringo County. Social audit committees are formed by the communities and project implementing agencies to check on the performance of projects being implemented. Considering the low level of performance of some of the county projects, it

means that despite audit committees existing in some areas, they are not performing their audit duties as expected by the law. In addition, the implementing agencies are required to discuss with residents on progress of the projects in public forums so that the individuals affected by the project can ask questions and be provided with appropriate feedback. Secondly, 109 (31.8%) indicated that on rare occasions, they take into account all government officers to task on audit queries relating to the project, while 108 (31.5%) did not have that opportunity. Only 23 (6.7%) indicated they had the opportunity to take government officers to task with regard to project audit queries. The mean statistics reveal that most respondents rarely ($M=2.24$ and $SD=1.15$) had an opportunity to take action against all public officials on task-related to project audit queries. This situation could be due to the unavailability of the indicated officials to be audited or residents' lack of understanding of their right to question public officials on audit queries regarding a particular project.

Research findings show that 114 (33.2%) of residents indicated that there has never been transparency and openness by their county government of Baringo during project implementation. Only a small fraction, 22 (6.4%), admitted that transparency and openness were always followed during government projects. Descriptive scores show that respondents indicated on rare occasions ($M=2.22$ and $SD=1.16$) there is transparency and openness during the implementation of development projects in the county of Baringo, Kenya. This is despite each sub-county having an accountant who monitors and audits, and advices on the projects. The indicated officers appear to be beyond reproach. When there is no openness and transparency by the implementing agencies when implementing projects, incidents of malpractices, fraud and corruption are highly likely to emerge. This explains why the residents termed the majority of development projects as failures. This shows that one of the challenges that residents face in accessing

project information is a lack of accountability and openness by the officers.

Results reveal that 118 (34.4%) of respondents indicated that public members cannot access development project records easily from county government officers in the spirit of integrity and accountability. Only 26 (7.6%) admitted that members of the public can access development project information. The results show that rarely ($M=2.25$ and $SD=1.21$) do members of the public have the opportunity to peruse development project records to ensure projects were implemented well without any incident of fraud. This shows that as part of the social accountability framework, not all members of the public can be allowed to peruse or view project information contrary to the spirit of the constitution, which guarantees every Kenyan's right to access to information. Research results also showed that 125 (36.4%) of respondents disapproved the statement that they were in a position to monitor the usage of public funds in project, 102 (29.7%) rarely monitored, 80 (23.3%) sometimes monitored, 17 (5.0%) often monitored and 19 (5.5%) always monitored. The mean values show that residents rarely ($M=2.13$ and $SD=1.13$) monitor usage of public funds in Baringo County. This is against the PFM Act, which allows the establishment of audit communities that conduct an internal audit system. When residents fail to adequately monitor fund usage in projects, it could lead to the loss of funds, where the amount that was budgeted is slashed or directed to other activities or to individual pockets of the contractors.

When asked as to whether issues of corruption in sustainable projects are dealt with in the county, close to half 158 (46.1%) indicated that they are never, 91 (26.5%) indicated that they are rarely dealt with, 65 (19.0%) indicated that at times they are dealt with in the county while 22 (6.4%) admitted that cases of corruptions are always dealt with in Baringo County. The mean values show that issues of corruption are rarely ($M=1.96$ and $SD=1.14$) handled in the county of Baringo. This is because of

residents' lack of information or evidence with regard to the pilferage of resources during project implementation. Composite data shows that social accountability practices rarely happened ($M=2.25$ and $SD=1.17$). On their part, the sub-county administrators had this to say with regard to how social audit and accountability practices influenced the delivery of services. Officer No. 3 indicated that:

"...through project supervision and writing a report on project status. They also link the public to departments on the project progress."

Another officer, No. 1, indicated that:

"...coordinating the department – follow implementation guidelines, do reports and process audits.

Another officer, No. 4, also indicated that:

"Supervisors of all county projects from all the departments. From the initiation, site handling over to the project implementation committees. Follow up contractor, ward admin also used."

The response by the sub-county administrators shows that the project management committee are tasked with the responsibility of auditing projects being implemented, and there is very little input and contributions from members of the public as part of the social audit process.

The researcher performed a correlation analysis to establish the direction and strength of public social audit strategies on and service delivery level in Baringo County. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlations

		Social accountability	Service delivery
Social accountability	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	343	
Service delivery	Pearson Correlation	.403**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	343	343

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result shows that there exists a weak positive effect ($r=0.403$), which is significant ($p=0.001$), between social accountability practices and service delivery effectiveness in Baringo County. The statistics suggest that weak social accountability and audit practices have led to low service delivery standards in the county. Nevertheless, the statistics suggest that increased social accountability practices by county government, project implementers and residents would result in increased attainment of the effectiveness of development projects if residents participate fully.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All services and programmes being undertaken by the county government have to be conducted in an

open and transparent way. Citizens have been mandated by the Constitution to audit, assess, evaluate and also question government spending on all development projects in their areas without any restriction. Despite these constitutional provisions, research data revealed that county government projects were not open for scrutiny by the members of the public in Baringo County. Information on the project was shared occasionally with some residents, and the majority of Baringo County residents did not have access to project records. Considering majority of the rural population cannot comprehend or understand project information that is commonly written in English, the research found out that public hall meetings aimed at discussing the affairs of the county rarely happened. This made it

difficult for the members of the public to take into task county government officers accountable on various audit queries that they may have with regard to various sustainable projects being undertaken in their area. This state of affairs made it impossible for citizens to detect forms of fraud and corruption in projects since accountability and transparency practices were not followed to the latter by government officials in service delivery. The study also discovered that very few respondents had the capacity to monitor fund usage on various projects. This explains why a weak correlation was found between social accountability and service delivery levels in Baringo County, Kenya. However, coefficient statistics implied that there was a likelihood for the county to attain higher service delivery standards if measures of social accountability, transparency and prudent use of resources were to be followed in the implementation of services and programmes. It is therefore recommended that the county government needs to ensure that all project information is displayed in strategic places where members of the public can read and understand. There is also a need for the county government officials to be open to scrutiny during social audit forums, rather than directing residents to make follow-ups on audit queries raised. There is a need for the county government to empower the public relations department employees who will be available to provide assistance to members of the public or make a follow-up on issues that they raise on projects being implemented in their areas.

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