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Citizen's Participation in Promoting Sustainable Development:
A Critical Evaluation of Challenges and Opportunities
With reference to Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the challenges and opportunities of citizen's participation in promoting sustainable development in Bungoma County, Kenya, since 1950. Citizen's participation as a component of democracy is sacrosanct as it gives a blue print for exercise of people's rights. A qualitative study approach was adopted that employed historical and descriptive designs. Purposive and quota sampling techniques were used to select respondents. Primary data was collected using archival sources, oral interviews, focus group discussions and qualitative questionnaires. Secondary data was gathered from books, journals, internet sources and newspapers. Content analysis approach, while using the interpretivist philosophy, was applied to analyse data that was presented thematically, under themes and sub-themes. Corroboration of multiple sources ensures validity. Findings revealed some weaknesses from the organizational structures, political interference, ineptness of civic empowerment and citizen apathy. However, opportunities included civic education awareness, civil society organizations and constitutional provisions for citizen participation. The research article concludes that people's participation in sustainable development is achieved when we engage appropriate participatory organizational structures. The research article proposes that the development agencies should establish proper participatory structures that embrace inclusivity of diverse social groups and capacity building through civic education.

Keywords: Citizen Participation, Community Participation, Decision-making, Sustainable development.

1.0 Introduction

Citizen's participation is the process by which people participate in decision making in institutions, programs and environments that affect their lives. People engage in decision making towards development to ensure consistency with the community needs. Formation of voluntary organizations laid the foundation for citizen engagement in development that was a prerequisite to learn about the government. Citizen participation as a fundamental aspect of democracy

guarantees power to the people to engage meaningfully with the leaders and policy makers in contribution towards governance. Further, citizen engagement promotes democracy on account of ensuring inclusivity and transparency in governance towards sustainable development. Engaging the people in development process is key since citizens possess a unique knowledge of the challenges they face in their communities.

Citizen's participation, a tenet of democracy has its origin in ancient Greece (Ball, Dagger, and O' Neill 2014). The concept of democracy originated in ancient Athens through the contribution of its citizens and was achieved by creating states that operated entirely as societies of the people where the power and ability to govern emanated from the citizenry. The American and French revolutions of the 18thc were important historic events that shifted the tide of world history in favour of democracy. Subsequent revolutions in the 19thc were in pursuit of democracy and therefore citizen power was fundamental in decision-making. Democracy was popularized by the social and economic developments in the 18th and the 19th centuries such as urbanization, spread of education, transport and communication technology. This enabled acquisition of knowledge by the citizens to participate in public affairs.

During the colonial period in Kenya, community development schemes were introduced (Birachi 2018). Their aim was to engage the Africans in improving their livelihoods through health, agriculture, mass literacy and civic education schemes. The communities became the focal point of social and economic development and therefore encouraging participatory practices. After independence in 1963, the government outlined measures and strategies in the Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 for development that encouraged people's participation through self-help initiatives towards development. Anchoring on the principles of African socialism, the Government of Kenya designed development programs that directed towards the rural areas to ensure people's participation. Sustainable development activities depended on the concerted effort of the central government, the local authorities and the individual communities. In tandem to the development strategies, the *harambee* philosophy was encouraged in community-initiated activities. On the other hand, government interventionist strategies that embraced the rural development strategy aimed at decentralizing development to the rural areas and therefore encouraging people's participation in decision-making. However, citizen participation in development processes has been hampered by social, economic and political challenges that emanated from improper organizational structures as well as uninformed citizenry. Citizen participation is a phenomenon embraced globally and most countries are grabbing to ensure it is achieved.

2.0 Statement of the problem

Citizen's participation in promoting sustainable development was recognized since the colonial period. The principle of mutual social responsibility, which informed African socialism, was manifested in people's participation in community development initiatives, as well as in the government interventionist programs. The decentralization of development programs to the grassroots level aimed at engaging the people who understood their socio-economic needs. The district became the centre for planning, implementation and management of rural development where participatory forums were organized. Citizen's participation was further legalized in the constitution 2010 and subsequent devolution of power to County Governments. However, the nature of citizen participation contemplated since 1950 has not been fully achieved. It is against this background that the study examined the challenges and opportunities of citizen participation in catalysing sustainable developments in Bungoma County since 1950.

3.0 Literature review

The perception level of the citizens about their influence in decision-making is a standard gauge to the amount of engagement in the government's decision-making processes. Schlozman, Verba and Brady (2012) showed that low levels of involvement relate to people's low perception of the influence or impact in the governance processes. William and Scicchitano (2014) revealed in their study that people slurred away from public meetings if their input was disregarded and not incorporated in planning and implementation. This literature provides a gap to interrogate the weakness of organizational structures that posed a challenge to citizen participation in Bungoma County.

Mbithi, Ndambuki and Juma (2018) investigated gubernatorial performance and entrenched power to determine institutional determinants of public participation. They argued that governor's performance and proper legislative frameworks and supportive services lead to better public participation efforts. They only showed that good governor performance is a predictor of citizen participation but do not state how poor governor performance is a hindrance to citizen participation of which this research study delved into examining the non-performance of leaders as a hindrance to citizen participation in decision-making.

According to Mubaganzi and Gray (2011), the South African participatory systems and processes are devoid of transformative attributes and entangled with a mix up of negligence, corruption, infrequent feedback and citizen apathy.

Access to information was inadequate and therefore participatory meetings were brief and occurred in sporadic inputs that embellished specific developmental stages in planning and programming cycle. Authors argued that emphasis was on meeting different performance targets rather than citizen involvement or engagement in making decision about issues that affect them.

In a research on challenges of community participation in development projects in Uganda, Omu (2008) found that communities were ill directed to understand the goals and objectives of development projects resulting into negative reaction and low participation. People were led to believe that they needed to toe the line drawn by donors and were passive recipients. The study interrogated the weaknesses in the structures of the development agencies creating a lacuna for the current research to investigate the community's perception about participation in development processes towards sustainable development.

Hao, Simiyu and Hongo (2022) assert that holistic community engagement is inevitable in governance and for long-term socio-economic development. In a study on 'Enhancing public participation in governance for sustainable development in Bungoma County' they revealed that the interconnectedness between the public and the county government is imperfectly coordinated. This is depicted in the absence of a central approach of citizen-needful delivery of services and imperfect governance structures and institutions. They argue that public participation seems to be understated in policy processes and there is little knowledge about citizen duties in governance programs. The literature revealed that non-existent governance structures weakened citizen participation and therefore negatively affecting development sustainability. The study employed quantitative research methods using descriptive statistics in analysing data. The current research adopted a qualitative approach using historical and descriptive research designs.

4.0 Methodology

The research employed a qualitative approach that used historical and descriptive research designs. Snowball, purposive and quota sampling techniques were used to select respondents from ward administrators, village administrators, government employees, farmers and businessmen and women. Qualitative methods of data collection were used. Primary data was collected through qualitative questionnaires, qualitative interviews, focus group discussions and archival sources. Archival sources provided information on colonial and post-independence programs that engaged citizens. Secondary data was gathered from books, journals, internet sources and newspapers. Data was analysed using content analysis approach based on the interpretivist philosophy. It was then presented thematically under themes and sub themes based on the objective of the study. Corroboration of multiple sources was employed to ensure validity of data. The scholarly ethical principles of the study were adhered to. The researchers sought for participants consent and informed them about the purpose of the study.

5.0 Discussion of Findings

5.1 Challenges of Citizen Participation

After Kenya gained independence in 1963, its major task was to alleviate poverty, disease and illiteracy and therefore the need to turn to rapid social and economic development strategies. To achieve the social and economic transformation, the Government of Kenya initiated development plans, strategies and programs where all citizens played a fundamental role in the rapid development of the economy and society. However, citizen participation faced a number of challenges in its contribution to development.

5.1.1 Central Government Interference

In 1983, the District Focus for Rural Development Strategy was initiated which aimed at decentralizing development planning. There were development committees that were inherited from the colonial government right from the provincial to the sub-location levels. Each district had a District Development Committee (DDC), the District Executive Committee (DEC) and the District Planning Unit (DPU). The District Development Committee was charged with the responsibility of reviewing the progress of the on-going projects and performed the oversight roles in their implementation.

The composition of the development committees at the district level comprised of the District Commissioner who was the chairperson, the District Development Officer was the secretary, heads of departments of development-oriented sectors, representatives from non-governmental organizations, members of parliament and representatives of development-oriented parastatals. Archival sources as proven in the minutes of meetings indicated the deliberations at the DDC that planned for development projects such as construction of roads, development of cattle dips and

establishment of health centres. Development committees formed at the division, location as well as sub-location level played an oversight role in the planning, monitoring and implementation of the projects at local levels.

Basing on the institutional framework, the composition of the committees revealed undue government involvement since most of the members including the top most were civil servants employed by the government. During the meetings, in the absence of politicians who were members of parliament or the civil society representatives, they made decisions on behalf of the communities. In this scenario, they did not understand the problems that affected the people and could not make decisions in line with community challenges. Therefore, the composition of the district, division and even location committees revealed minimal representations of the local people where most of them were government appointees who represented the will of the central government. Central government involvement in the DDCs still remained a problem in engaging citizens in decision-making and therefore the decentralization policy did not achieve much in allowing the community members to participate actively in development matters to alleviate their problems. Archival sources according to District Development Committees Projects Progress Reports revealed that there was no indication of participatory planning by the local citizens. Reports from the Divisional Development Committees indicated that planning was done by the District Development Officer. The people who took charge of the planning process were government appointees who in most cases were not residents within the community. Limitations in planning at the division, location and sub-location levels were revealed since there was lack of community involvement.

Archival sources revealed that the social development projects and programs implemented by the District Development Committee in many cases were superimposed and others were introduced without reference to the tangible needs of the local people and their active and sincere participation. The role of the people in local initiatives and self-help efforts was undermined by the Provincial Administration or the politicians. These findings correlate with oral interview with Wetangula (2019), who submitted:

In most cases we sat on the DDC to represent the needs and challenges facing local people in areas of our jurisdiction but rarely did our suggestion or desires put in consideration. There were so many development projects that required attention and therefore the D.C, the D.D.O and members of parliament made the final decisions about the social and economic projects and their locations.

In agreement and in a nutshell, people's participation in the DFRD strategy was minimal as the community members were not informed of the operations but only a few representatives were allowed on the committees. Apart from the sub-location, location and division development committees, there were no specific planning and implementation committees that were constituted which composed of the local leaders and people. Basing on the aforementioned, it is clear that the major setback of the DFRD strategy was the greater government involvement in its implementation at the expense of local community participation.

5.1.2 Elite Capture

In this context, elite capture refers to a situation where the educated and affluent in society define and shape development processes according to their own priorities. The elites who have access to and control over economic, social, political and organizational structures tend to have influence on the development processes as well as the outcome as a result of their superior social, political and economic status (Chitere 1984). Due to higher levels of inequality in rural settings, the elite in society may have more influence in community decisions and by virtue of their status occupy important positions in committees. On the contrary, the elites may improve community projects through their contribution in expertise and resource mobilization as well as increased ownership of communities over projects.

The elite capture in the composition of the DFRD strategy committees at various levels hindered local participation in decision-making. Lower level committees at the division, location and sub-location were constituted of the elite who were the economically well-off, politicians and socially able in society (Hao, Simiyu and Hongo 2022). These were influential people such as assistant chiefs, chiefs, traders or businessmen, professionals such as heads of learning institutions, chairpersons of the ruling party, and representatives of community -based organizations and religious organizations. In this case, the elites participated in identifying projects while the average locals who had very little representation in the committees were accorded less attention. It, therefore, meant that the projects at lower level committees were subjected to further vetting at higher level committees and many a times were subsequently dropped hence demeaning local community participation. This state of events meant that the elite in society imposed their choices and preferences of development projects on the local people in the community.

5.1.3 Political Interference

Decision-making processes that are interfered by politics limits the desire of the community or citizens to demonstrate their democratic right of participation in development processes. It further reduces their ability to make rational decisions that directly affect their lives. In most cases, direct political interference dictates the direction of development projects for party political interests. A strong political interference acts as deterrent factor on the potential for meaningful local participation.

Political interference was manifested in the District Focus for Rural Development strategy where political interests outshined the development agenda in a manner that people's involvement and participation was minimal and was not genuinely represented. In dispensation of their duties, the DDC comprised of politicians and civil servants and were sometimes quite authoritative in making decisions (Chitere and Ileri 2022). Oral interview with Mukhongo (23 June 2023), revealed that the DDC was dominated by the decisions of members of parliament who competed for projects such as schools, water schemes and roads to be located in their regions within the district.

These findings resonates with a study in Kajiado which revealed that the role of political leaders was not clearly stipulated and formulated and therefore took advantage of this clarity to dominate and politicize the project identification process. Politicians were therefore viewed as retrogressive whose interest was to use government investment in their constituencies to improve their prospects of remaining in political positions. Archival evidence from District Development Committee minutes revealed that the composition of the committee comprised of members of parliament from all constituencies within the district. Politicians made decisions of their interests that earned them political favour to remain politically strong in their constituencies. This therefore meant that the capacity of the public to address their social and economic needs was greatly reduced hence the potential to achieve sustainable development was thwarted.

The structure, composition and governance of local fund committees was an impediment to active citizen participation and independent oversight. The Constituency Development Fund was initiated by politicians and therefore tended to be misused for political window dressing and symbolic decision-making. This meant that the identification and implementation of projects was pre-determined by politicians and any decisions made at various committee levels were to be in line with the interests of the politicians. This was achieved through the manipulation of committee membership where positions were filled with their supporters who controlled decision-making processes and priority setting. In this case, politicians advanced their interests rather than the interests of the local people. It was further revealed that the development procedures under the CDF that incorporated the appointees of the Members of Parliament in committees were the decision makers, implementers as well as playing the oversight role. This perception undermined the role of citizen participation in sustainable development.

It was revealed in FGDs that political inclination also influenced the quality of citizen participation. During participatory forums, representatives of political leaders discriminated against those who did not vote for the incumbent political leader basing on party inclinations. Those with divergent political views were discriminated against such that their views did not count in decision making while those who were deemed politically right in the incumbent regime were allowed to express their views that were in line with the interest of the political leaders. The political division that was propagated by the political leaders worked against cohesion and unity intended to be inculcated amongst the citizenry for positive sustainable development. This in turn fuels opposition against the incumbent regime and rivalry amongst the leaders. This scenario therefore creates an unpleasant environment that does not encourage and promote citizen participation in sustainable development.

5.1.4 Low Civic Awareness

Focus Group Discussions showed that local people had low capacity to participate in decision-making forums since most of them did not understand their roles in such meetings. Most respondents pointed out inadequacy of information about organized participatory meetings at the location or even ward levels for various development agencies such as CDF or the County Government. However, some confirmed that they received communication through public gatherings such as public barazas, funeral functions or even during church meetings. As much as they received communication, they had inadequate knowledge on how to express their views and opinions and were also not certain of the criteria used to allow them an opportunity to speak. Other respondents clearly stated that lack of civic education on the democratic rights of citizens in Bungoma County resulted in lack of information about citizen participation as stipulated in the Constitution of Kenya and the Acts of Devolution.

Therefore, it indicated that the literate in society were not empowered with information through documents such as brochures, posters or even planned educative sessions about development programs and activities that called for citizen or local participation to attain effective implementation of sustainable development projects. Another respondent

therefore concluded that there was no capacity building that would equip both the literate and illiterate in society with adequate information on citizen participation in development programs and activities.

Oral interviews showed that the County Assembly in collaboration with the sub-county administrators, ward administrators and village administrators organized participatory forums to discuss the County Integrated Development Plan with the citizens. A schedule for each sub-county was prepared and posted on noticeboards for public communication. The village administrators also reached their people through public barazas. However, the people were not provided with prior information about the agenda or issues under discussion. This corroborates with other findings which revealed that most of the County Governments organized for participatory forums to deliberate on CIDPs without prior adequate information and necessary documents leading to poor turn-up for the meeting and insufficient contributions.

Conclusively, low civic awareness and consciousness among the citizens led to little patriotism, civility and personal responsibility to participate in government matters pertaining development. This was attributed to the absence of a framework that will guide civic education and effective structures on public participation mechanisms as provided by the Constitution of Kenya to facilitate citizen participation such as the County Budget Economic Forum (CBEF) and the Sector Working Groups that functioned minimally in Bungoma County. As a result of low and poor civic consciousness, citizens are easily susceptible to political interference in their understanding and engagement in government matters. More so, there were minimal efforts to reach the minorities and other marginalized groups with a relevant, appropriate and harmonized curriculum on civic education.

5.1.5 Improper Organizational Structures

The decentralizing policy was initiated in Kenya to allow citizen participation in development activities and therefore taking charge of their own progress. This meant that proper organizational structures were to be put in place to capture and allow all the local people at grassroots level to participate actively. Inclusivity of all social groups in participation towards sustainable development depended on the organizational framework that would attract and encourage participation. Archival sources evidence revealed that under the District Focus for Rural Development Strategy, the institutional framework was designed by the central government as it clearly stipulated members to constitute each development committee at the district, division, location and sub-location levels. Evidence from the list of attendance at the division, location and sub-location development committee meetings indicated that there was minimal representation of the local people and the marginalized groups. It meant that membership was not broadened to allow a higher number of the local people. Archival evidence showed that there were local committees that were formed to manage development projects such as cattle dips. In such committees, the elite were included which limited local representation. However, archival sources as evidenced in Bungoma Annual Progress Reports indicated that these committees were weak and failed to discharge their co-ordination and supervisory functions. The weakness of the cattle dip committees was an impediment to the progress of the projects in 1975-76. They failed to mobilize the community to make local contributions towards the construction of cattle dips.

Archival evidence showed that lower level development committees did very little in terms of project identification and implementation. The Locational Development Committees only forwarded project ideas or proposals to the Divisional Development Committees concerning water schemes, bridges, roads, cattle dips, health facilities and soil conservation but did not have the feasibility or costing capacity. The meetings were very much oriented to pushing for specific projects and instructing the chiefs and local councillors to be advocates at higher committee levels. The Sub-locational Development Committees were not active in the district and only performed the project advocacy activities and *harambee* drives as the LDCs. They were only useful for informing the chiefs about sub-location problems and needs but not as forums for actual project identification and problem-solving.

The Constituency Development Fund as a decentralized development program was equally undermined due to lack of established organizational structures and mechanisms through which the local people could effectively participate in development programs. The institutional framework or structure of CDF is centralized at the constituency level. The administrative systems that control decision-making and allocation of financial resources have limited representation of the marginalized groups therefore jeopardizing local participation. The bureaucratic procedures hamper genuine participation since only few people are selected to make decisions. Administrators in such structures tended to have a negative perception about the local people who were regarded to be illiterate and therefore, no constructive ideas would come out of them. Respondents in focus group discussions revealed that illiteracy among community members is a deterrent factor to citizen participation that concurs with secondary data. Others pointed out lack of access to timely and

appropriate information about the participatory forums meaning that it was only accessible to a few people especially to members of the constituted committees.

The Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) introduced in 1998 was a decentralized funding program and development strategy that embraced a participatory approach to development. Participatory initiatives from the government and the civil society were centered on it and also legislations, systems and procedures were developed for citizen engagement. The Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan was a participatory system introduced to allow citizen participation in identifying and monitoring capital projects in local authorities. It was revealed that LATF embraced organizational structures that were complex and incomprehensible to people and therefore inaccessible to citizens. The organizational mechanism was managed through separate structures with minimal consultation between them and the national government. The complexity of the governance structures deterred active citizen participation.

5.1.6 Citizen Apathy

Citizen apathy refers to a situation when citizens keep away from participatory forums. It refers to when citizens are indifferent in their perception or attitude towards certain organized activities whether political or economic such as participating in decision-making forums towards development programs. Lack of interest or even being bothered to participate creates a scenario of citizen apathy. The interpretive approach seeks to understand the state of disinterest of citizens towards participatory forums from subjective experiences of the individuals. FGDs and interviewees revealed that lack of interest or unwillingness of the citizens to participate in decision-making forums was a result of varied factors. Non-involvement of community views and ideas in the development process made people to shun away from such forums since it was perceived a waste of time since there were already pre-determined decisions. FGD (2023) revelation have it that:

Most of the projects' decisions were made in offices and therefore during meetings, community views and opinions are never put in consideration in the process of planning, monitoring and evaluation. Community members are not involved apart from handing over of the projects for the purpose of taking photographs.

This corroborates with Ronoh, Mulongo and Kurgat who revealed that overlooking the capacity of the community to undertake and manage projects leads to a flawed development process that consequently destroys a community's chance of success. Citizens fail to participate in decision making towards development programs because local and civil leaders are too anxious about getting results quickly and therefore generate reports about projects. In this case, the local people are treated as spectators instead of participants.

Other respondents revealed that people lacked time to attend public participation forums since most of them were busy trying to fend for their families and therefore found such meetings as a waste of time and resources. This corroborates with findings by other scholars who revealed that citizens shy away from participatory forums since they render them worthless and put demands on their time, energy and money. FGDs also revealed that people were apathetic to participatory forums due to the desire for incentives. Due to poverty, people saw this as an opportunity to receive incentives in form of money or handouts from the organizers and therefore if money was not assured, then the morale to attend also went down. This was an indication that love for money is a prerequisite for citizen participation. The theory in the study avers that participation is a rational cause of action that resulted into desirable outcomes and therefore attending participatory forums were pleasurable if people received monetary gains.

Another deterrent factor to citizen participation pointed out was non-performance of leaders especially in accomplishing projects. The stalled or incomplete projects arose due to corruption and poor leadership. Failure of the developing agencies to meet people's expectation was therefore an obstacle to citizen participation. Incomplete or stalled projects that were commenced in the community discouraged people to participate in decision-making forums. Due to rivalry and competition, the communities in which such projects were began remained disillusioned towards such participatory forums due to marginalization at that time. In a nutshell, citizen apathy was an impediment to citizen participation towards sustainable development.

5.1.7 Lack of Financial and Human Capacity

Financial and human capacity constraints incapacitated the efforts to involve the public in participatory forums and on the other hand the capacity of the public to be involved in the participation in sustainable development. Interviews with ward administrators and FGDs with village administrators revealed that, being in charge of the organizational logistics of citizen participation in the County Government, there were inadequate funds to facilitate these processes. This therefore, meant that there were only limited number of meetings that were organized that did not capture all citizens. It was therefore, revealed that engaging citizens in decision-making required a lot of money and it was time consuming. It also

required adequate preparation of forums, workshops or public meetings that had cost implications. Most respondents therefore identified funding as an impediment to citizen participation since it limited participatory meetings. Financial capacity towards citizen participation was low and could not allow proper organizational structures to capture the large regions of administration.

Additionally, lack of human capacity in terms of trained personnel was another deterrent factor to citizen participation in sustainable development. Minimal effort was made to have an appropriate trained staff to ensure capacity building of the local people about the importance of participation in decision making towards sustainable development. These findings correlate with other scholars who revealed that lack of capacity building programs contributed to inefficient and inactivity of human personnel in performing their roles and responsibilities. This was characterized by inadequate training hence insufficient human resources.

5.1.8 Lack of Fairness in Participation

A fair public participation demands for provision of equal opportunities to all people of various economic and social backgrounds as well as regions to contribute or deliberate over development projects. It is fundamental and prudent that citizens participate in all processes of development activities that provides a fair playing ground of expressing ideas and opinions. FGD with village administrators revealed that due to organizational issues, this opportunity and time provided was not convenient for meaningful citizen participation. As much as participatory forums are organized at sub-location, location or ward levels, they were so much limited that would not allow fair participation. Additionally, fair citizen participation process calls for the marginalized groups to be actively involved in decision making through special invitation as an indicator of recognition of these groups. Self-selection and availability for the meetings only attracts the most influential and the elite folk in society.

Focus Group Discussion with village elders disclosed that some regions were marginalized in terms of participation. Selection of representatives in participatory forums or committees was not prudently done since people who were not well informed and conversant about the community needs were selected and therefore gave inappropriate ideas and opinions contrary to the needs of the community. Some regions were neglected due to political inclinations and therefore lagged behind in development. They lacked basic social services such as electricity, accessible roads and water schemes. Inappropriate representation caused some regions to remain voiceless and unheard of and therefore remained behind in development.

5.1.9 Poor Communication and Information Mechanisms

Focus Group Discussions and interviewees exposed that there was poor communication and information sharing between the development agencies and the community people. It was observed that citizens had partial or no information related to participatory forums. Communication systems that used such as public *barazas*, websites and social media for the case of the County Government only reached a few specified people. This resulted in poor involvement of citizens in decision-making about development programs and projects. This is in correlation with other scholars who revealed that community members did not fully participate in decision-making on identification and implementation of development projects due to poor communication from the organizing agents. However, after intervention on improvement of communication systems, community members became engaged in decision making about their health needs as well as monitoring service delivery.

Respondents reported that reliable participatory mechanisms for effecting citizen participation in the budgeting process were not made available to citizens. They revealed that in the CDF and County Government development programs, there were no mechanisms and structures that engaged the public directly in the budgetary process. There was ineffective information sharing and communication about the same and it was left to the technical teams. Communication was made through the daily newspapers, websites and social media groups that was only accessible to a few people who had less interest. These findings correlate with Alwanga and Wanjiku's (2020) findings who revealed that counties continue to face challenges of tokenistic forms of citizen participation where meetings are held without prior provision of budget proposals in simpler versions that is comprehensible to many people. It was further observed that there were no organized procedures for citizen prioritization of their needs during these meetings. It is therefore concluded that communication mechanisms and information sharing is fundamental in promoting active citizen participation in sustainable development.

5.1.10 Corruption

Simiyu perceives corruption as lack of financial integrity characterized by dishonesty, lack of transparency and accountability in the utilization of institutional funds. Financial resources may emanate from the government, non-governmental organization or other donor agencies. Respondents pointed out corruption as one of the challenges to citizen participation in sustainable development. Corruption among the political leaders as well as managers of the development programs influenced citizen participation since transparency and accountability was lacking in some cases in the allocation and use of financial resources. More so, some leaders perceived development projects as a way of benefiting financially at the expense of the local community. These local leaders even proposed that development projects such as water projects and construction of roads should be located within their regions of residence. These corrupt practices consequently compromised the community's interest in participating in development initiatives at local levels. Archival sources showed that corruption among leaders was an impeding factor to citizen participation in decision making towards sustainable development. This manifested among civil servants as evidenced when the Second President Daniel Arap Moi issued a statement clarifying the ban on the administration role in collecting *harambee* funds in 1990. He expressed the importance and benefits of the *harambee* spirit and, on the contrary, indicated the misuse of the philosophy by some government officials. In his own words:

The *harambee* spirit has been one of the distinguishing characteristics of our country's development since independence. The enormous achievements in various fields especially education and health would not have been possible without *harambee* donations.... The government is fully committed to the spirit and will do everything within its power to ensure that the role played by *harambee* in our development continues to grow. Unfortunately, in the recent past, it has come to my attention that a trend has developed in some quarters that might pose a threat to this spirit. Some chiefs and assistant chiefs have *harambee* receipt books throughout the year to solicit funds from the public with no specific *harambee* projects in mind. Similar receipts books are found in some government offices where officer's secretaries and messengers demand contributions from the public as a precondition for providing certain services. Some political leaders use their positions to force donations out of the public or companies and organizations (Moi 1986:21).

This was a clear indication of the misuse of the *harambee* spirit meant to encourage citizens to participate in sustainable development projects. Coercion of public members to contribute towards development contradicts the essence of the *harambee* philosophy anchored on voluntarism hence alienating citizens from active participation in sustainable development programs.

5.2 Opportunities to Citizen Participation

5.2.1 Civic Education and Capacity Building

Soon after independence in 1963, President Jomo Kenyatta introduced the *harambee* philosophy that paved way for the establishment of *harambee* schools through community effort. The community-based self-help efforts in social development was recognized in the Second National Development Plan (1970-1974) aimed at improving the provision of social services and therefore, quality education that promoted national values of patriotism, self-reliance and the need for national development. This was the basis of civic education that was scaled down to the rural areas through the *harambee* schools.

With the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education in 1985, Geography, History and Civics (GHC) was combined course that became part of Kenya's primary education curriculum, later on changed to Social Studies in 2008. At the secondary level, civic education was taught under the subject History and Government. The Kenya Institute of Education infused topics on civic education that included citizenship, national integration, constitution and constitution making, democracy and human rights, function of the government and the electoral processes. In an oral interview with Simiyu (August 2023), he observed that civic education is integrated in the curriculum in the formal schooling system. This provided a good opportunity to inculcate a sense of civic awareness amongst the young minds who will eventually develop a culture of exercising their democratic right in decision making on development matters that would impart citizen norms, civic knowledge, skills and attitudes to help the young people to make informed and rational decisions.

In 1992, Civil Society Organizations initiated activities around civic education as a result of the re-introduction of multi-party democracy. The CSOs targeted the illiterate adults and marginalized groups in the society who did not access the formal school system of education. In 1998, in partnership with external donors, the National Civic Education Program 1 Uraia (NCEP-1) was the first systematic and comprehensive civil society organization that initiated civic education programs to promote civic skills, democratic values and engagement in the democratic regime. This aimed therefore at preparing Kenyans to exercise their right in participation in democratic processes and contribute to the consolidation of mature political culture among the citizens. Provision of civic education empowered the people to participate in sustainable development processes.

Respondents in FGDs revealed that provision of civic education is a way to capacity build the community with adequate knowledge that enhances the individuals' capacity to participate in decision-making about development projects. This then transforms the people's assumption and attitude that all development issues should be addressed by the government, an attitude that often resulted to citizen apathy. Citizen empowerment through civic education is fundamental as it influences the citizens to make rational decisions and therefore put responsive leaders in office who deliver services to the community. It is therefore imperative that the County Government of Bungoma institutionalizes workable civic education modalities as a mechanism to enhance capacity building among the community members to promote participation in decision-making towards sustainable development projects.

Between 2002 and 2003, the Kenya National Civic Education Program II-Uraia was implemented nationwide. Its objective was to change individual's awareness, competence and engagement in issues related to democracy, human rights, governance, constitutionalism and nation building. A number of CSOs linked to four larger civil societies that included Ecumenical Civic Education Program (ECEP), Consortium for Empowerment and Development of Marginalized Communities (CEDMAC), National Muslim Civic Education Consortium (NAMCEC) and Constitution and Reforms Education Consortium (CRECO). The program's mandate was to develop among the ordinary citizens the skills, values, dispositions and levels of knowledge and awareness to support democratic political processes that would lead to more effective participation. These CSOs employed discrete workshops, drama events, informal meetings, cultural gatherings and other public events that provided a good opportunity to engage the citizens in civic awareness.

Oral interview with Sabwami (June 2023) revealed that citizen awareness on participation procedures can only be achieved through civic education programs. Adequately funded and comprehensive civic education programs based on a well-designed curriculum adopted by the County Government of Bungoma and sustained for a longer period empowers the citizens to take part in participation processes and consequently create and encourage a participatory culture in them. Acquisition of civic education inculcates a sense of rational self-interest among individuals who will be motivated and therefore desire to participate in decision-making and result in achieving happiness when their social and economic challenges are addressed. In the same vein, the establishment of offices to facilitate public participation designated at the sub-county, ward and village levels with civic education facilitators impacts on people's participation. These officers at their local levels will develop the infrastructure for public participation that include information centres, modalities and platforms for citizen participation and public communication frameworks. In a nutshell, civic education provides a basis for capacity building amongst the citizenry for proper acquisition of civic knowledge, skills and attitudes.

5.2.2 Civil Society Organizations Engagement

Civil Society Organizations (CSO) are non-state actors whose aims are neither to generate profits nor to seek governing power. They unite people to advance shared goals and interests. CSOs include Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) professional associations, people's associations and faith-based organizations. Civil Societies act as intermediaries between the less privileged in society and the national governments by assisting them to obtain resources and influence social change on their behalf. Most of the CSOs are located in the villages whose activities are to engage or involve the local people at the grassroots level and therefore play a crucial role in promoting social change in society. CSOs have a success story of promoting inter-tribal cultural exchange for social cohesion, diversity and understanding of other people's cultures through group meetings, cultural festivals, awareness campaigns and religious festivals. CSOs also played a key role in sustainable development focusing on health, education, water and sanitation and other issues such as gender, environment in line with the sustainable development goals.

In 1998, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission was established as an executive arm of the Catholic Bishops on matters peace and justice. Its broad aim was to sensitize individuals, communities and entire nation on justice and peace issues and their respective roles and duties in addressing peace, human advancement and human rights. Its programs included democratization and governance, peace building and conflict resolution and constitutional reform programs. The commission implemented its activities through the Diocese of Bungoma, deaneries (Misikhu and Kibabii), parishes, sub parishes and small Christian community prayer groups. It targeted its Christian congregations through the small Christian communities and resident associations such as the Catholic Women Association and the Catholic Men Association in various parishes. This initiative attracted the Christian community that acted as a good avenue to promote the activities of people's engagement in catalysing sustainable development. In 1999, the Western Women Network, a non-governmental organization was established to contribute to human transformation and development by mobilizing women and their families to develop a joint approach in identifying and addressing issues that hindered their social and economic empowerment. The organization was therefore engaged in establishing of Community Support Centres (CSCs) where they emphasized and promoted innovative, non-formal education techniques in problem identification and

problem-solving. Furthermore, women were facilitated to realize and utilize existing resources within their localities that they could employ to improve and maintain economic status and sustainable development.

In 2013, REDO Kenya (Rural Empowerment Development Organization), a non-governmental organization was engaged in governance and advocacy, social accountability and civic education activities. Under governance and advocacy, the organization trained the community on the budgetary processes of the County Government and public participation in the County Integrated Development Plans. Budget champions were trained on how to present their views during the budget participatory processes in the County Government. More so, REDO Kenya organized for participatory forums known as '*Bunge la Mwananchi*' on market places where theatrical dances were presented to attract the audience. The use of citizen's parliament or '*Bunge la Mwananchi*' was a community forum or platform for communication to discuss, share and exchange information on matters of governance and development.

In this case, the agenda of citizen participation on sustainable development was well articulated in such forums. These CSOs that represent the poor are endowed with the capacity in which the community is directly affected. Through formal mechanisms of consultations and participation, the local people are actively engaged in decision-making. For continuity and effectiveness, NGOs embraced consultations through briefing sessions, holding events, focus group meetings and workshops aimed at improving communication and building trust. In concurrence with the aforementioned findings, secondary sources revealed that there were collaborative initiatives between government and the civil society organizations that resulted in successful participatory initiatives. Joint mobilization efforts yielded greater citizen engagement and consequently improved development results.

5.2.3 Community -Based Organizations' Engagement

These are community-organized groups that aim at directly addressing the immediate concerns of the members. A key feature of CBOs is that they mobilized communities by expressing demands, organizing and implementing participatory processes, accessing external development services and sharing benefits among members. CBOs that include women and youth groups engage in income generating activities aimed at political economic and social empowerment of the members and by extension playing a crucial role in poverty alleviation. Wanyama (2003) in his study on local organizations and sustainable development in Western Province revealed that NGOs initiated the formation of CBOs used as delivery mechanisms in local communities. They dispensed services such as managing primary health care, managing water boreholes and addressing other local socio-economic problems aimed at improving the living standards of the community members.

In concurrence with these findings, Birachi (2018) in her study on the influence of civic education in participation in elections showed that such avenues of mobilized community-based organizations proved to be beneficial in sensitizing one another to make informed decisions. Members shared openly about their social and economic challenges hence educating one another on their democratic rights. Basing on this strength of unity and commitment, respondents attested that CBOs were used by development agencies to attract a larger audience that participated in decision-making processes towards sustainable development. CBOs were grouped to converge at a central point basing on the ward or village level and effectively undertake participatory processes in development projects.

5.2.4 Constitutional Provisions on Citizen Participation

The Constitution of Kenya, 2010 establishes public participation as one of the national values and principles of the governance process. The constitutional provisions empower the County Government to institutionalize citizen participation through county legislations. The County Government is mandated to co-ordinate the participation of communities and locations in governance at the local level and assist the communities and locations to develop the administrative capacity for effective participation in governance at the local level. The government legislations on citizen participation are in line with the philosophic concept in the research that postulates that policies and laws are judged in society and the government by their proclivity to promote the desired goal. Therefore, well-designed and implemented public participation policies encouraged citizen engagement in development programs.

In cognizance of these legislations, the County Government Acts 2012, has several sections that provide for both principles and processes for public participation at the County level. Part VIII of the Act is entirely on citizen participation that include promotion of public-private partnerships, such as joint committees, technical teams and citizen commission to encourage direct dialogue and concerted action on sustainable development among other provisions. The County Government of Bungoma reiterated to this legislations by developing the Bungoma County Public Participation Bill, 2015 and the Institute for Social Accountability (TISA), which provides for a public participation framework.

The main provisions in the two model laws are dedicated institutions for public participation and provision for various forums through which the citizens can participate in county affairs. It has developed elaborate public participation frameworks that involve the establishment of citizen centered and focused structures for public participation from the county to the village level. The county forums at the county, sub-county, wards and village levels are empowered to facilitate effective citizen participation through resource provisions, clear structures of management and political support at the highest level. The development of administrative capacities at the local level through the village, ward and sub-county units provides an opportunity for civic engagement among the individual and therefore promotes general happiness and the desire to participate.

5.2.5 Self-Mobilization

People participate in development programs by taking self-initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. Such initiatives enable people to take control of their resources. Such mobilization and collective action instills a sense of trust, commitment and confidence in people and therefore increase their enthusiasm to participate fully in all the development programs. Respondents concurred with this assertion that when people gather together for a common objective out of self-motivation, they respond positively and turn out in large numbers. Therefore, organizing for community cultural events at ward or village units such as cultural competitions, games and music attracted a large audience and provided an opportunity to infiltrate the objectives of the development agencies in effect to citizen participation. Well-organized community gatherings attracted people from diverse social groups that provided a platform for decision-making. In the same vein, self-mobilization manifested through the establishment of citizen advisory groups. In such cases, a clear framework or structure of the advisory group was designed.

Respondents pointed out the establishment of village councils as stipulated in the Acts of Devolution, Part VI section 53 that embraced broad-based inclusivity. These councils are responsible for ensuring and coordinating the participation at the village units in governance as well as developing the administrative capacity for effective exercise of the functions and powers and citizen participation in the governance process. The expanded village councils under the administration of the village administrator acts as citizen advisory groups and their closeness to the local population attracted a larger audience for public participation. According to a respondent, village administrators manage smaller village units who are closer to the local population and understand their problems. Empowering village administrators and providing adequate funds through the county budget enables them to utilize their offices to involve the community to participate in decision-making.

5.2.6 Fight Against Corruption

Corruption is a challenge to citizen participation and acknowledged as a hindrance to social economic development that consequently undermines the effort to achieve the set development goals at all levels. Corruption impact negatively on the poor and the marginalized and the entire society therefore, broadening the margin of poverty. Basing on this scenario, fight against corruption encourages people to participate in the democratic processes in assurance of transparency and accountability.

To achieve good governance, fighting against corruption is fundamental in any society. The effort to fight against corruption can be traced back to the colonial period in the 1920s with national legislative initiatives. The enactment of the Prevention of Corruption Ordinance (Cap. 65) in 1956 laid the basis for legislation against corruption. Consequently, there were succeeding Acts that followed for instance in 1972 when the act was amended to create an Anti-Corruption Squad in the Police Department. The Act was amended in 1997 to create the Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority that was vested with prosecutorial and investigative powers. In 1998, the Parliamentary Select Committee on corruption was constituted whose mandate was to explore the causes and the impact of corruption on the Kenya Community and avail feedback to the Parliament. The enactment of the Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Act (ACECA) 2003, Public Officer Ethics Act (POEA), 2003 and the establishment of Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission were legislative measures undertaken against corruption in Kenya.

The emergence of various organizations, such as Non-Governmental Organizations as well as professional bodies, played a key role in combating corruption. It is, therefore, acknowledged that the fight against corruption is not one man's show or responsibility of a single institution but requires the co-operation and collaboration of all the stakeholders to stamp out this vice. These efforts repudiate the notion of legalizing corruption, which is enhanced by poor governance systems. Therefore, the improvement of administrative institutions and the capacity to manage society through an institutionalized framework of the social, judicial, political and economic checks and balances system improves the weak institutions.

In an oral interview with Simiyu (July 2023), he indicated that anti-corruption public awareness and education created beliefs and practices that embraced the moral ethics of integrity therefore instilling a positive attitude in the society. This in the long run created a corruption free society, to some extent since it is intrinsically embraced which became a moral ethical responsibility for everyone. Awareness of the 'dragon' corruption about its working and effects on the individuals and the society as a whole is a driving force for a strong opposition against it. Therefore, the people's demands for institutional changes that guarantees transparency and accountability of all the administrative as well as political leaders provided high chances of instilling confidence amongst the citizenry. In an FGD, respondents revealed that introduction of anti-corruption modules in the curricula in all levels of education as well as training or tertiary institutions empowered the people to recognize and acknowledge the importance of acting strongly against corruption. The education system was fundamental in inculcating the attributes of patriotism, honesty, accountability and transparency amongst the citizens. In a nutshell, a corruption free society encouraged people to demonstrate their democratic right of participating in decision making towards sustainable development projects.

5.3 Conclusion

The research article concludes that the setbacks to citizen participation in bolstering sustainable development emanated from the inability of the development institutions to establish proper organizational structures and the ineptitude to empower people adequately to participate in decision-making processes towards sustainable development. Central government interference worked against its initial objective of decentralization. Political interference derailed the smooth running of the processes. However, success of community participation in sustainable development is aptly achieved through civic empowerment and use of proper mobilization strategies. Civil Society Organizations as well as Community-Based Organizations provide suitable platforms to engage the people in decision-making on matters pertaining their social and economic needs since they are the best judges of their own welfare and social progressive change. It is imperative to understand the community needs and therefore engaging people in smaller village units was more convincing.

Recommendation

The research article recommends the need for engaging capacity building and creation of civic awareness among the populous that is key in enhancing citizen participation. It is recommended that the County Government of Bungoma operationalizes the Civic Education Policy.

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