

Constructive Strategies for Enhancing Public Engagement in County Governance: A Focus on Nandi, Kenya, 2024.

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Abstract: This article examined the effectiveness of constructive strategies for engaging the public in county governance in Nandi County, Kenya, 2024. It highlighted that the legal and institutional framework has not ensured public participation as intended by the Kenya 2010 constitution. The study's objectives included examining the effectiveness of constructive strategies for engaging the public in county governance in Nandi County. It utilised Adam Smith's Rational Choice Model and employed a concurrent mixed research design, incorporating purposive sampling. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews, with secondary data from document analysis. Analysis was done using a statistical package for the social sciences for descriptive statistics, and qualitative data was processed through thematic analysis. Devolution in Kenya, implemented in 2013, shifted responsibilities to county governments to enhance transparency and public participation. It allowed citizens to elect local leaders and engage in decision-making, promoting responsive governance. The County Government Act (2012) emphasises timely access to information and the role of non-state actors in fostering citizen involvement. The findings revealed that the most common mode of collaboration was electing project leaders. However, many individuals were unaware of the importance of participation, leading to low engagement, especially in project identification and implementation. The primary source of information on development projects was barazas (public meetings). The study concluded that public participation in development projects is below desired levels as per the County Government Act and recommended that Nandi County should improve public engagement across all sectors for a more significant impact on constructive strategies.

Keywords: Constructive strategies, County Government, Nandi, Kenya.

I. Introduction

The concept of public involvement in government decision-making has a rich history that dates back to ancient Greece, around 508 BC. During this time, the significance of constructive strategies for engaging the public in governance became increasingly acknowledged, marking the establishment of public participation and constitutional laws. However, evidence suggests that various forms of collaborative engagement may have existed in different regions of the world even before the 5th century BC (Muse & Narsiah, 2015). Public participation, often referred to as a collaborative approach, extends beyond mere citizen involvement in electing representatives; it encompasses all processes that facilitate public engagement in decision-making. Haque (2003) points out that public participation in governance is limited in Eastern Asia despite the region's strong economies. Conversely, Latin America is making strides in democracy and citizen engagement, particularly in countries like Bolivia and Brazil, with a focus on accountability and oversight (Oropeza & Perron, 2013).

Public participation in Africa has changed over the last 30 years. In Ghana's Upper West Region, low participation is due to citizen unawareness and limited resources. In contrast, Uganda promotes involvement through strong decentralisation, with local councils and annual budget conferences that include public input, as seen in the Local Government Development Program (LGDP). Kenya's devolution also enhances citizen engagement in governance. Overall, increased participation fosters trust, informs decisions and strengthens community appreciation for local projects. Participatory development in Kenya began with donor-funded projects, but the District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD) launched in 1983 faced criticism for ignoring Indigenous knowledge and remaining centralised (Wakwabubi & Shiverenje, 2003; Chitere & Ireri, 2008). The Physical Planning Act of 1996 aimed to improve community involvement but failed to educate the public, especially in rural areas (Okello et al., 2008). After 2001, initiatives like the Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP) and the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) enhanced participation, with the CDF effectively decentralising resources to reduce poverty (Kimani, Nekesa, & Ndungu, 2012). Currently, the 2010 constitution promotes constructive strategies through public involvement in decision-making, as devolution has strengthened accountability and political engagement (Muriu, 2013).

Devolution in Kenya, implemented in 2013, shifted responsibilities from the central government to county governments, promoting transparency and public participation in governance (Article 201 (1) (a)). This decentralisation allows local authorities to address community issues better and enhances citizen engagement in decision-making. Kenya's unique model of devolution, influenced by South Africa, empowers citizens to elect local leaders and participate in development planning, aiming for more effective and responsive governance. Citizen participation is anchored on the sovereignty of the people of Kenya, as outlined in Article 1 (1) of the Constitution. Article 10 (2) (a) recognises public participation as a key national value, emphasising democracy. Chapter 11 highlights self-governance and citizen involvement in decision-making, focusing on empowerment and responsible resource use. Key articles, such as 232 (d) and 196 (1) (b), mandate public participation in policy-making and

legislative processes. The County Government Act (2012) emphasises timely access to information, involvement in law processes, and the role of non-state actors in oversight for citizen participation.

This article, therefore, provides a comprehensive examination of the research findings, accompanied by a thorough interpretation of the data and an extensive discussion regarding the various modes of public participation. The study specifically investigates how the public engages in county development projects, analysing the diverse methods and levels of involvement utilised by individuals and communities. The findings are organised and presented in direct relation to the overarching research question, yielding valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of constructive strategies on public participation to engage the public on Nandi County governance.

II. Statement of the Problem

The public participation framework in Nandi County has faced several obstacles, including issues related to corruption and mismanagement, which have resulted in resource losses and a level of public dissatisfaction. Despite the constitutional measures designed to promote accountability, challenges such as political disagreements and difficulties in oversight have arisen. These issues have led to public demonstrations, highlighting the community's demand for increased transparency, a collaborative approach, and constructive dialogue with their leaders regarding the ongoing challenges the county faces.

Objectives of the study

The study endeavoured to examine the effectiveness of constructive strategies for engaging the public in county governance in Nandi County, Kenya, 2024.

III. Methodology

This article applies the Rational Choice Model to examine constructive and collaborative decision-making in Nandi County. It suggests that individuals, driven by self-interest, evaluate alternatives in various contexts, including voting and government oversight. Rational choice theory posits that voters have little incentive to monitor government activities effectively. The theory informs data collection on participation in government oversight, focusing on attitudes, constraints, and social outcomes (Callahan, 2007). The study used a mixed-methods design to evaluate constructive strategies for public participation in Nandi County's development projects. It involved questionnaires and interviews about participation modes and information access. The target population was individuals over 18 years, eligible for decision-making, with secondary data used for population estimates (Kothari, 2004).

This article is a survey of a diverse county population. To minimise sampling error and control bias, the researcher employed purposive and cluster sampling (Creswell, 2012; Kothari, 2004). The researcher randomly selected six sub-counties and stratified them into clusters based on ward boundaries, allowing for more precise estimates and reliable results for each ward in the study. Data was collected in Nandi County across six sub-counties: Nandi North, Nandi East, Chesumei, Nandi Central, Nandi South, and Tinderet. The population in these areas represents the broader characteristics of the county, making it a suitable sampling unit. A list of Wards from these six sub-counties was obtained from county offices. Wards are the smallest units of authority recognised by the constitution and are led by elected Members of County Assembly (MCAs), who participate in county development legislation.

The sample size for this research was determined using Fisher et al.'s (1991) formula, which is based on national population statistics and secondary sources for characteristics. It gives for infinite populations. This study used questionnaires with both closed-ended and open-ended questions and interview schedules to obtain the primary data. Secondary data was obtained by analysing documents and records on various activities related to public participation. This research used a mixed-methods approach, analysing both quantitative and qualitative data for reliability and validity. Quantitative results were processed with descriptive statistics and presented in tables, while qualitative themes were reported alongside to enhance the findings.

IV. Results and Discussion

Effectiveness of Each Mode of Participation

The researcher sought to find out from the participants which constructive strategies to engage the public they think are the most effective. This study was tailored to help the researcher cross-check the responses on the involvement of individual respondents through the various constructive strategies, vis-a-vis opinions on the effectiveness of each approach. The options provided, therefore, included attending the budget reading, scrutinising records, participating in the demonstrations, and attending for, and the rest were presented as others.

Table 1: Effectiveness of modes of participation

Effective participation mode	N (%)
Attending budget reading	27(11.6)
Scrutinising records	40(17.2)

Participation in demonstration	56(24.0)
Attending fora	74(31.8)
Others	36(15.5)

Attending public fora on issues of development projects

The findings from the collected data indicate that attending forums is the most effective mode of participation. This model is demonstrated by the high number of participants, 74 (31.8%), who identified forums as the most effective means of engagement. A forum is defined as a public deliberation meeting where individuals gather face-to-face for discussions aimed at addressing specific issues (Bone, Crockett, & Hodge, 2006). In the context of this study, a forum involves meetings between county government officials and members of the public. These forums are typically organised by the governor's office, in collaboration with six sub-county administrators and county assembly members, to tackle developmental issues, resolve problems, and solicit public input and ideas.

The results regarding effectiveness further affirm the popularity of forums as a mode of participation. For example, when asked if they had attended a forum focused on public participation, 56 (24%) participants agreed, while an additional 19 (8.2%) strongly agreed, resulting in a cumulative total of 75 (32.2%) participants who have attended at least one forum in the past.

Table 2: Participation in the public forum

Mode of participation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Attend fora where the governor or other county executives are addressing issues of development around our area.	72(30.9)	53(22.7)	29(12.4)	56(24.0)	19(8.2)

The results indicate that the Nandi County government has done little to promote forums as a means of public participation, which has led to low attendance. However, the public perceives these forums as effective. The researcher sought to understand the reasons behind the lack of participation among those who do not attend development forums. For example, there were 72 participants (30.9%) who strongly disagreed with the statement that they usually attend forums, while another 53 participants (22.7%) disagreed. In total, 125 participants (53.6%) reported that they had never participated in a forum in the past.

Additionally, 29 participants (12.4%) neither agreed nor disagreed about their participation in forums. Those who disagreed about their attendance provided various reasons, which the researcher considered valuable for planning future public engagement. Addressing these reasons could lead to higher attendance and greater efficiency.

There are likely many reasons why people are reluctant to attend public forums, but the researcher identified some key factors through interviews. For instance, one respondent (interview respondent 1) stated, "They are not effective since not everybody is invited, and such workshops create a pretence of public opinion." This comment aligns with the findings of Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw (2002), who noted that people often leave forums feeling disappointed and discouraged. This feedback could help to identify and address the underlying resentment and mistrust towards planners, as well as the unintended negative effects of technical planning practices.

Regarding workshops, another respondent (interview respondent 8) mentioned, "They are only held in halls far from us." This response highlights the issue of accessibility, which should be a concern for the county government. Moreover, a different respondent (interview respondent 3) commented on barazas, stating, "The barazas are very inactive." This response suggests that barazas may not be delivering the expected outcomes. Other responses about attending public forums included feedback from respondent 7, who noted, "Not all people can manage to attend them."

Additionally, interview respondent 9 pointed out the lack of awareness, saying, "There is a lack of awareness or knowledge about such forums." While it was anticipated that many people would be informed about county communications, these responses indicate otherwise. Interview respondent 12 also shared, "I have not been invited to any forum or received any information related to meetings." The results indicate that the Nandi County government has made limited efforts to promote forums for public participation, leading to low attendance. However, the public views these forums as effective. The researcher aimed to understand why many people do not attend. Specifically, 72 participants (30.9%) strongly disagreed that they usually attend forums, and 53 participants (22.7%) disagreed, resulting in 125 participants (53.6%) stating they had never attended a forum. Additionally, 29 participants (12.4%) were neutral about their participation.

Participants offered various reasons for their lack of attendance. One respondent noted, “They are not effective since not everybody is invited, creating a false impression of public opinion,” which reflects sentiments expressed by Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw (2002) about disappointment with forums. Another respondent mentioned that workshops are often held far from their communities, raising concerns about accessibility. A different comment pointed out that barazas are inactive and may not yield the expected results.

Many responses highlighted a lack of awareness about these forums, with one participant stating they had not been invited or informed of any meetings. Addressing these issues could enhance public engagement and increase attendance at future forums. The results from the above interviews show that the use of a forum as a mode of public participation is popular, though not as expected. A comparison of those who at least agree to have attended a forum in the past 75(32.2%) and those who think fora as a form of participation is effective, 74(31.8%) reveal a slight difference in participation. The low attendance, which again reflected in those who think the mode is effective, explains why Bone, Crockett and Hodge (2006) noted that, for public fora to succeed, those planning should frame the issues so that they are clear to all participants; convene the process and ensure all stakeholders are involved.

Participation in Demonstrations

According to the data collected, participation in demonstrations is the second most effective mode of participation, at 56(24.0%). The researcher again compared the results with those of a question on whether individual respondents in this study have ever been involved in demonstrations to protest negative developments in government projects and plans.

Table 3: Participation in the demonstration

Mode of participation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Participate in demonstrations to protest against specific county government plans and projects	82(35.2)	65(27.9)	42(18.0)	26(11.2)	15(6.4)

The results indicate that 26(11.2%) strongly agreed to have taken part in demonstrations and another 15(6.4%) strongly agreed to have participated. The number of participants in this study who have been part of a demonstration is cumulatively 41(17.6%). Those who think demonstration is an effective mode of participation in government projects are more than those who have taken part in such demonstrations. The results from the data collected indicate that 82(35.2%) participants in the sampled population strongly disagree with their participation in demonstrations, and another 65(27.9%) also indicated that they disagree. Cumulatively, those who have never been part of a demonstration are 147(63.1%). There are 42(18%) participants who neither agree nor disagree. The results of both those who disagree and those who neither agree nor disagree form a significant part of the participants in this research study. This view can be interpreted to mean that the members of the public are not sure if this is the right way to solve grievances. This perspective can be understood from the standpoint of the Rational Choice Theorist, so that in this study, participation comes at a cost. An individual’s choice to participate in the demonstration is subjective to constraints and social outcomes. For instance, if demonstrations could receive social approval, then it could increase the psychological benefits of participation. However, based on the understanding of the demonstration available out there, it could become a constraint, hence removing it as an alternative for certain groups in the population. For example, people may have perceived demonstrations to be a method used by idlers and bad people in society.

The difference in participation can be attributed to the nature of activities involved in demonstrations that do not favour the old, physically challenged persons and those who fear violent activities. Some of the so-called peaceful demonstrations have ended up, on many occasions, violent and with casualties. Also, most demonstrations take place in urban areas because they are meant to capture the attention of senior government officials and the media. Based on Innes and Booher, (2000) explanation, there may be misconceptions that have led to people being silent and tongue-tied concerning misdeeds or non-performance on the side of public officials.

Another way to understand this is that there have never been any demonstrations in their area or on any development issue concerning them. Demonstrations are a rare phenomenon in rural areas of the country. Most demonstrations take place in urban areas, and they may have an insignificant impact if held in rural areas. This scenario explains the discrepancy in attendance, but on many occasions, the method is efficient, and the results are almost guaranteed.

Scrutinising records to seek information on projects

Scrutinising records came third in efficiency, with the support of 40(17.2%) of the participants in this study. Scrutinising records involves going through the county documents to check them against what one knows or expects. Records scrutinising is a process of finding out information which may not be readily available to the public but is accessible through the county offices or the county website.

Scrutinising records may not be effective across the population in this study because of the technicality in understanding such records as can be found in the county government. Applying the rational choice theory, therefore, scrutinising records is not a possible alternative for participation for all members of the population. The inability to meet the cost of participation in this mode automatically creates a limitation on the use of the mode. In that sense, it requires one to be trained or to be an expert in a given field or even more to receive an explanation. In another question, when the respondents were asked whether they had participated in scrutinising records, 32(13.7%) did affirm their participation in such an exercise. There are a further 13(5.6%) who strongly agree to have participated in scrutinising county records on development, bringing the total of those who have participated to 45(19.3%).

Table 4: Participation in scrutinising records

Mode of participation.	Strongly Disagree.	Disagree.	Neither Disagree nor Agree.	Agree.	Strongly Agree
Participate in scrutinising records to seek information about a particular project.	91(39.1)	70(30.0)	21(9.0)	32(13.7)	13(5.6)

The results confirm that, indeed the mode of participation ranks third most effective. The differences in numbers for those who have participated 45(19.3%) and those who think it is the third most effective 40(17.2%) can be explained. Not all of those who participated think the exercise provided them with the information they needed, and therefore, only 40(17.2%) found value in the exercise. This percentage is acceptable since not all who are literate can understand county government records. As Kauzya (2007) explained, scrutinising written documents by members of the public is for the purpose of judging the accuracy of the information provided. The researcher notes that some records are complex to understand, and unless one gets the required assistance, the records can be of little significance. Levels of understanding differ and may very well be the reason others thought the method was not effective in providing the much-desired information about a given project.

Another possible reason is that access to such records may have financial implications. Some records, such as tender documents, may require buying copies from cybercafé. Some require internet access, which also requires paying. One respondent explained that scrutinising records can be the best, but there is no motivation to spend money on such a course. For instance, on print media, the respondent indicated that they are “not effective because not all people can manage to afford them.”

Participation in budget reading at the County headquarters

Attending budget reading is not a popular mode, with only 27(11.6%) of the study participants indicating that it is effective.

Table 5: Participation in budget reading at the County headquarters

Mode of participation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Regularly attend a budget reading at the county headquarters	119(51.1)	60(25.8)	28(12.0)	20(8.6)	3(1.3)

When the results were checked against those of participation in attending the budget reading, 20(8.6%) participants agreed with the opinion that they regularly attended the budget reading, and another 3(1.3%) strongly agreed. There was a total of 23(9.9%) participants in the study who attended the budget reading.

There is a small difference between those who think attending budget reading is effective as a mode of participation in government projects and those who actually attend. More think it is effective than those who attend the budget reading sessions. This result can be interpreted to mean the method is effective, but because of the difficulty in understanding budget issues, people opt for much easier modes of participation. Budget reading takes place at the county headquarters annually at the start of the government financial year. At the budget reading forum, a breakdown of all county activities and allocations to various ministries are unveiled to the public. The process is aimed at promoting transparency on the use of public funds by the county government. The public is then able to demand accountability and monitor the projects to ensure the prudent use of county

government resources for the public good. The rational choice is based on the level of education of individuals and their understanding of financial records, which allows them to participate effectively and demand what is due for their government expenditure.

The fact that budget reading takes place at the county headquarters can cause inconveniences to people living in far places, hence a higher cost of participation. Utilising the Rational choice theory, individuals are likely to attend or ignore such budget reading functions depending on how much it costs or the benefits they draw from the process. For example, some of the rural dwellers could be willing to participate, but due to proximity to the county headquarters, they are not able to attend.

For instance, results on the attendance of budget reading showed that 119(51.1%) participants in the study strongly disagreed that they regularly attended budget reading at the county headquarters. Another 60(25.8%) disagree with the opinion that they regularly attend budget reading at the county headquarters. Cumulatively, 179(76.9%) disagree with the opinion of having ever attended the budget reading. These results suggest that attendance of budget reading is not a popular mode of participation among the residents of Nandi County. Those who indicated that they neither agree nor disagree with the opinion could mean they are not able to determine the relevance of such an exercise. This situation could also be attributed to the fact that county budget reading is not well-popularised as a mode of participation, and therefore, people think their attendance is of little significance. The respondents, for instance were asked a question on whether they could tell the budget allocation for road projects in their area. The results from the data were tabulated as follows:

Table 6: Knowledge of budget allocation for road projects

		N	%
Awareness of budget allocation for road projects	Yes	33	(14.2)
	No	189	(81.1)

Those who know the budget allocation for road projects in their area are 33(14.2%). A significant number, 189(81.1%), do not have any idea about the amount of money allocated for road projects in their area. There was an open-ended question that sought an explanation on why the participants could not tell allocations for the particular roads around their area.

From the responses, the researcher found out that many people do not have information about county allocation on roads. Different reasons can explain that, for instance, in some of the respondents, site accessibility to such information is the main challenge. That information is, however, public and should be easily accessible to all the residents of Nandi County. Some of the responses also point out the inefficiency of the county officials in communicating information concerning county developments. For instance, instead of reading the budget at the county headquarters, the budget unveiling process can be further delocalised to the sub-county level. That will promote participation on the side of the public and help avoid invalid claims of corruption on the side of public officials. An informed population is an empowered population that can ensure effective public monitoring of county projects.

A keen analysis of the qualitative responses from all the participants reveals, among other possible reasons, that the proximity of the county headquarters from where most people live is likely to affect attendance. There is limited information reaching the public either intentionally or because of some barriers. Other reasons may include the fact that most of the information released during such forums is technical and may not be presented in simple language. There is no motivation for individuals with limited knowledge of financial matters unless the county works to ensure that information is presented in the simplest manner possible. All these reasons border on the efficacy of budget reading as a mode of public participation.

Other modes of participation listed by survey respondents

When given the option to list any other modes of participation that participants thought could be more efficient if used, they listed a number. They include election of representatives in projects, seminars, partnerships, workshops, signed petitions and elected leaders (Members of County Assembly). The researcher picked a few that had additional data from other questions in the study to check on the reliability of the results. Those picked include the election of representatives in county projects, seminars, and providing labour in county government projects and workshops. Overall, the results indicate that other modes had 36(16.5%) efficiency. The results of the question on individual respondents' participation in the modes listed are tabulated as follows:

Table 7: Other modes of participation

Modes of participation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Participated in providing labour in county government projects	93(39.9)	69(29.6)	18(7.7)	38(16.3)	12(5.2)

Participated in the election of leaders to serve in particular projects funded by the county government.	75(32.2)	37(15.9)	14(6.0)	65(27.9)	41(17.6)
Attended seminars/workshops that provide education on participation in county government plans and projects	79(33.9)	65(27.9)	23(9.9)	44(18.9)	21(9.0)

Providing labour in county projects

Providing labour in development projects is a means of public participation. 38(16.3%) participants indicated that they have participated by providing labour in county development projects. Another 12(5.2%) strongly agree that they have participated in providing labour in county government development projects. Cumulatively, those who have provided labour in government projects in the past are 50(21.5%).

On another hand, 93(39.9%) of the participants in this study strongly disagree with having provided labour in any county development project. Another 69(29.6%) indicated that they disagreed with the opinion. Hence, a cumulative 162(69.5%) do not agree with the opinion on having provided labour. The researcher was keen to understand why so many of the respondents have not rendered their service in development projects. These findings necessitated finding out information on the distribution of county projects with the help of an interview schedule. For example, the researcher carried out an analysis of the interview schedule responses using the theme “development projects”. On roads, respondent number 1 explained that “nothing currently but previous road construction”. Another one, respondent 81, pointed out that “not aware of any”. The responses signify the presence of few or no development projects within some areas.

Although one can argue that usually, those who work in public development projects are employed on wages or salary, it is important to note that the government recommends that they be sourced from the area of the project. That is to ensure the locals benefit and, at the same time, own the project. Only technical or skilled labour that cannot be found in the particular area of the project can be sourced from outside. In areas where contractors have been perceived to outsource labor especially those available locally, it has elicited negative reactions both from the public and local leadership. For example, road project contracts from the county government of Nandi are expected to source human resources locally so as to open opportunities for the people around the area where the project is being implemented.

Participation through elections of project leaders

In this study, the researcher sought to find out participants’ opinions on the election of leaders in projects funded by the county government. The efficacy of an electoral process is dependent on a properly structured electoral system and the independence of such bodies. In Kenya, elections are a characteristic of our governance structure. Leaders both at the national and county governments ascend to power through a popular vote in elections. The same is replicated in the elections taking place at the lowest level, including in development projects.

Results suggest that many participants may have used elections. For instance, 65(27.9%) participants agree that they have participated in the election of leaders for particular projects, and another 41(17.6%) strongly agree. Cumulatively, those who agree that they have participated in the election of leaders for particular county projects are 106(45.5%). The difference between those who agree and those who do not is smaller for this opinion, meaning that such elections are there. It is, however not clear as to why people do not take part so that close to half the population participates while the rest do not take part.

The results show that 75(32.2%) participants strongly disagree to have participated in any election in county projects. Another 37(15.9%) disagree with the opinion that they have participated in the election of leaders in county projects. Cumulatively, those who disagree with the given opinion are 112(48.1%). There are 14(6%) who neither agree nor disagree on their participation in such elections as for particular project leaders. This high number of residents who do not participate in elections supports Aklilu, Belete, and Moyo’s (2014) explanation that elections are less effective as an accountability mechanism. Another thing about elections is that they cannot be of use in transforming a regime that tolerates poor performance. Elections do not also provide a means to give feedback. These elections confirm the postulations of the Rational Choice Theory that self-interest motivates individuals to participate only if it is rational. In this case, if casting an informed vote does not guarantee maximum benefits, then the process is not worth the cost.

Participation in seminars and workshops

Seminars and workshops are meetings between trainers and participants in a given area. Both seminars and workshops are aimed at the dissemination of knowledge in order to achieve a desired level of understanding. 44(18.9%) agree to have attended a seminar on public participation, and another 21(9%) strongly agree with the opinion. Cumulatively, those who agree to have attended at least a seminar or workshop in the past are 65(27.9%). This number is relatively small and may point out reasons as to why it is perceived to have low-efficiency levels.

On another hand, 79(33.9%) participants strongly disagreed to have participated in any seminars that provided education on public participation rights. 65(27.9%) participants disagree with the given opinion. Cumulatively, those who disagree with this opinion are 144(61.8%), meaning they have never attended a seminar on public participation. There are some 23(9.9%) participants who neither agree nor disagree with the opinion.

Based on these results, those who disagree to have participated in any seminar in the past are 144(61.8%) compared to only 65(27.9%) who agreed to the opinion that they have attended a seminar in the past. This situation means seminars may not be popularly used as a mode of public participation in Nandi County. The other way to understand this is that the seminars may be there, but due to the vast nature of the county, they are organised only in a few areas. It is also possible that people are not able to differentiate seminars from the other modes of participation like the “meet the people tour” by the governor and county officials.

To clarify any uncertainty regarding participants’ ability to distinguish seminars from other types of involvement, the researcher decided to compare the responses to this question with those from an earlier question in the survey. The earlier question asked whether respondents had attended any training sessions, seminars, or meetings organised by the county government to emphasise the importance of public participation.

Table 8: Attendance of training, seminar or meeting on public participation

	Yes (%)	No (%)
Attended training, seminars or meetings organised by the county government.	71(30.5)	162(69.5)

The researcher sought to find out if the participants had attended trainings, seminars or meetings organised by the county government officials in the past to teach the importance of public participation. The results indicate that 71(30.5%) of the participants in the study had attended at least a training, seminar, or meeting. However, as many as 162(69.5%) have never attended anything organised by the county government on public participation. The question was answered by all the participants, confirming that it was clearly understood and the answers provided therefore depicted the true situation on public participation efforts in Nandi County. The comparison was helpful in understanding the previous results on attendance of a seminar. For example, those who have attended at least a seminar increased from 65(27.9%) previously before broadening the options to 71(30.5%) for training, seminars, or meetings. Those who have never attended any increased from 144(61.8%) previously before broadening the options to 162(69.5%).

Strikingly the 23(9.9%) participants who neither agreed nor disagreed with the opinion that they have attended a seminar got to be sure and indicated either **Yes** or **No**. This percentage means the doubts had been removed and could easily tell whether they had attended training, seminars, or meetings so long as it was teaching on public participation.

The research sought to identify the reasons for those who indicated that they had never attended anything to do with public participation pieces of training. Except for a few who cited their absence from the county or work-related reasons, many did explain that they had never heard of such a meeting, seminar or forum aimed at training on public participation. From the results, it is evident that the constitution of Kenya (CoK, 2010), which supports access to information on public service management by citizens has not been fully implemented. This access is a key ingredient to active and effective citizen participation. The constitution directs Kenya’s national and county assemblies to perform their roles openly and transparently. Article 118 (1) (a) specifically directs the national and county assemblies, respectively, to hold public meetings and function openly to the full view of citizens.

The results also proved that the governor of Nandi County may not have implemented the provisions of the County Government Act (2012), which were meant to solve problems of public participation. The governors are directed to ensure public participation as per the provision of the County Government Act 2012 (30) (3) (g), which requires governors to promote and ensure the facilitation of citizen participation in the development of plans and policies and the delivery of services in the county.

For example, one interviewed respondent explained that “The County of Nandi has done less than expected since there are no projects and good communication on what or which projects the county will do”. Another respondent, 3, explained that “Public participation may be done, but the views given during participation ends up being disregarded by the executive or enablers”. The above explanations give a sense of apathy; people expect more but receive too little or none. There was also another interview respondent, seven, who explained that “Poor means of informing the public on participation make hard to understand.” Other participants who took part in the survey gave the following narratives;

“The county government does selective public participation depending on the level of implementation of the project” (Survey respondent 38). “The participation organisers do not mobilise participants in advance. The same organisers do not give the low living standard people to express their issues during forums” (Survey respondent 56). “The county government has not educated the public on their rights, including those of public participation” (Survey respondent 77). “In my opinion, the county government has a long way to go in public participation. The first step must be educating the public that they have a lot to do by

participating in each project in the county that concerns them” (Survey respondent 165).

There are a few, however, who indicated that the county has done their work of educating the public properly. For example, “They have actually done some projects, but some are not completed. They inform us”. (Survey respondent number 16) “The county has constantly conveyed a plan of action”. (Survey respondent number 90).

From the results in this section, the county government of Nandi has to improve their pieces of training, seminars and meetings to ensure more people are reached. It could be true, however, that the county government does not invest much time and resources on face-to-face meetings for fear of criticism from those who oppose the regime. Kauzya (2007) explained that those who attend public hearings tend to be mostly the critics of government. This cohort affects government engagements with the public because it ends up reflecting the nature and extent of the opposition. Such challenges notwithstanding, Bone, Crockett and Hodge (2006) point out that public fora or face-to-face meetings are not about winning or losing but rather about listening to individual experiences, concerns and what they value in regard to issues as well as hard facts. The nature of meetings is such that, they build on the existing capacity of the public to think, articulate and act together for a common good. The choices are then made considering the values and divergent views of people.

Lobbying for issues through elected leadership

The researcher sought to know if the individual participants in the study had ever lobbied on issues that required them to send the Member of County Assembly (MCA) to address a specific issue. The results of the study showed that 83(35.6%) participants indicated they had lobbied. The rest, 148(63.5%), have never lobbied, and only 2(0.9%) never responded to the question. The results can be interpreted to mean that lobbying through elected leaders is not a popular form of public participation. There are a few reasons that can explain this. First, it could be that the political leaders make it difficult to reach them. Some participants answered the second part of the question open-ended, which sought to clarify the particular issues they were lobbying. Responses received include,

“Reconstruction of damaged roads and supply of tap water to the community” (Survey respondent 53). “I have sent MCA to make a follow-up Kenya power last mile electricity supply in our area, also to improve our ward rural roads” (Survey respondent 91). “The issue of feeder roads in my village to be upgraded, water pipes to enable members of the public have clean water in their homes” (Survey respondent 103).

These are but a few responses. Many of those who responded confirmed there is some level of lobbying that goes on throughout Nandi County. Some of the projects they lobbied for have been done, while others await future actions. The fact that some of the projects are already done confirms Irimieş (2017) postulations that, lobbying allows the decision-making processes and institutions to achieve higher accuracy in the control of interests, priorities and the orientation of representative groups. The representatives are able to respond to demands and issues and respond in a timely and accurate manner.

Participation in signing petitions

Another question was to find out if individual participants have ever petitioned against a proposal by the county government. The results of the data collected for this question indicated that, only 12(5.2%) have participated in such an exercise. Many of the participants, 217(93.1%), have never petitioned the county government. Only 4(1.7%) participants did not respond to the question. The researcher notes that very few people have signed any petition. An analysis of the 12(5.2%) responses to the open-ended question of the survey questionnaire proves that few people will take such initiatives. This cohort may be the preserve of a few with technical knowledge or who are driven by specific interests.

Further analysis of the educational backgrounds of those who provided the narratives indicates that they possess a significant level of expertise across various fields. Notably, all five individuals have attained university-level education. Survey respondent 14 did not specify their occupation, while respondents 26, 56, and 97 are both teachers, and respondent 155 is a retired high school principal. This group suggests that leaders involved in any petition efforts should be individuals with a robust understanding of the relevant issues. As members of the societal elite, these petition participants, due to their higher educational qualifications compared to many, may feel a sense of obligation to engage in areas where others might lack the ability to contribute.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article notes that there is public participation in Nandi County. From the research findings, participation is not as effective as was envisioned by the constitution of Kenya in 2010. There is, however, great improvement in participation in the devolved unit compared to the previously centralised management at the national level. The public is aware of public participation and the importance of their participation, but the researcher noted that members of the public cannot tell when to participate and where. This study, therefore, concludes that Nandi County has not done enough to sensitise the public on the importance of their participation. The county has also not made clear the role of the public in development projects.

The article further notes that there are many ways the public can participate in county development projects. They include participation in budget preparation, attending fora, scrutinising records, elections of project leaders and seminars. Public participation is present at all stages of development projects. Participation is, however, lower than the desired levels. There are

many sources of information for the public on county development projects. The county has, however, failed to identify the most appropriate way or channel of information to the various categories of their clients.

It was also established that many people are not bothered by the budget allocations for various government projects in their area. Also, some modes of participation, for example, budget reading, scrutinising records and signing petitions are likely to be influenced by factors like level of education, individual occupations and proximity from the county headquarters. This situation is in line with the postulations of Rational Choice Theorists that constraints affect an actor's choice. The modes of participation provided in the study were not exhaustive. Participants indicated that there are other modes, including consultations, working groups, workshops and partnerships.

VI. Recommendations

This study, therefore, recommends that the Nandi County government should educate the public on formal and informal modes of participation, empowering citizens to voice concerns about mismanagement. This approach should include promoting strong, community-driven, and knowledgeable civil society organisations. Furthermore, the government should inform the public of their roles in development projects, emphasising that monitoring can involve independent individuals or community groups, not just government authorities. Those responsible for overseeing county projects should be held accountable, as successful participation in development relies on valuing public opinion throughout planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The government should prioritise establishing effective communication channels to clearly disseminate information to the public, empowering citizens to hold officials accountable during project development. Encouraging direct public feedback is essential for reporting misconduct related to public resources. For example, the county could form advisory committees of citizens to gather insights on public opinion while being mindful of the diverse values among members to prevent conflicts that may hinder effectiveness. Additionally, the county government should actively promote public participation in all sector development projects to maximise their positive impact.

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