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ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPATION STRATEGY ON PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT TANA RIVER COUNTY ASSEMBLY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT **DOI No: 10.36713/epra31887** **Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra31887**

Public participation is a constitutional requirement under Kenya's devolved governance framework and serves as a cornerstone for inclusive governance, accountability, and democratic decision-making. Despite this legal requirement, many county governments continue to experience inadequate citizen participation due to weaknesses in participation strategies. This study examined the effect of participation strategy on the performance of public participation at Tana River County Assembly, Kenya. The study was anchored on Stakeholder Theory, which emphasizes inclusive stakeholder involvement in governance and decision-making. A descriptive research design employing mixed methods was adopted. The target population comprised 6,340 stakeholders, including community members, civil society organizations, county assembly members, local leaders, persons with disabilities, and administrative staff. A sample of 370 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling approach, while 297 valid questionnaires were returned and analyzed. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression, whereas qualitative data were obtained through interviews and analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that participation strategy significantly and positively influenced the performance of public participation ($\beta = 0.517$, $p < 0.001$). Correlation analysis further established a strong positive relationship between participation strategy and public participation performance ($r = 0.593$, $p < 0.001$). Descriptive findings showed that respondents generally perceived participation strategies to be moderately effective, particularly regarding inclusivity and equal opportunity for participation, although inconsistencies remained in the regularity of public forums and accessibility of participation platforms. The study concludes that effective participation strategies characterized by inclusivity, accessibility, regular consultation forums, and user-friendly engagement platforms substantially improve public participation outcomes. The study recommends institutionalizing predictable participation forums, strengthening digital and physical engagement platforms, and enhancing inclusivity to improve participatory governance within county assemblies.

KEYWORDS: *Participation strategy, Public participation, Stakeholder engagement, County Assembly, Devolved governance, Kenya*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Public participation has become one of the fundamental pillars of democratic governance because it enhances transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and legitimacy in public decision-making processes. Across the world, governments have increasingly institutionalized citizen participation to improve governance by ensuring that public policies, legislation, budgeting, and development programmes reflect the needs and priorities of the people. According to Fung (2015), effective public participation strengthens democratic governance by creating opportunities for citizens to directly influence government decisions while improving the legitimacy of public institutions. Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) argues that meaningful citizen participation contributes to better policy outcomes by promoting trust, responsiveness, and government accountability. These perspectives demonstrate that participation is no longer viewed merely as a democratic right but as a strategic governance approach that enhances institutional performance and sustainable development.

Participation strategy refers to the structured approaches and institutional mechanisms employed by governments to facilitate meaningful citizen engagement throughout governance processes. These strategies include stakeholder consultations, public hearings, civic education programmes, participatory budgeting, digital engagement platforms, community dialogue forums, feedback mechanisms, and continuous communication channels. According to Smith (2009), participation strategies provide the institutional architecture through which governments can effectively engage

citizens in public decision-making while ensuring that participation remains inclusive and representative. Likewise, Bamberg (2022) maintains that well-designed participation strategies promote continuous dialogue between governments and citizens, thereby improving collaborative governance and strengthening public confidence in governance institutions. Effective participation strategies therefore move beyond merely informing citizens to creating opportunities for active engagement, consultation, deliberation, and shared decision-making.

Globally, many countries have incorporated public participation into governance frameworks through constitutional reforms, decentralization policies, and legislative provisions. Despite these reforms, translating legal requirements into meaningful citizen engagement remains a significant challenge. According to Bherer (2023), many governments continue to experience difficulties in implementing effective participation strategies because participation processes are often characterized by inadequate stakeholder mobilization, weak communication systems, irregular consultation forums, and limited institutional commitment. Similarly, Arnstein (1969) argues that genuine citizen participation should empower communities to influence public decisions rather than simply legitimizing decisions already made by government institutions. Consequently, governments are increasingly recognizing that successful participation requires strategic planning, effective communication, inclusivity, transparency, and continuous stakeholder engagement.

In Africa, decentralization has created significant opportunities for citizens to participate in governance through devolved administrative structures and local government institutions. The African Union (2018) notes that participatory governance has become an important mechanism for improving accountability, strengthening democratic institutions, and enhancing service delivery across African countries. However, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2021) observes that many African governments continue to experience challenges arising from inadequate participation strategies, insufficient civic awareness, resource limitations, political interference, and weak institutional capacities. Similarly, Hao, Nyaranga, and Hongo (2022) emphasize that effective participation requires governments to establish structured engagement mechanisms that promote inclusivity, accessibility, transparency, and continuous interaction between public institutions and citizens. These observations suggest that participation strategy remains a critical determinant of successful public participation across devolved governance systems.

In Kenya, public participation is firmly anchored in the Constitution of Kenya (2010), which recognizes citizen participation as a national value and principle of governance binding both national and county governments. The Constitution requires County Assemblies to facilitate public participation during legislation, budgeting, policy formulation, and oversight functions. According to Kivoi and Mukulu (2013), the constitutional framework significantly transformed governance by institutionalizing participatory democracy and requiring government institutions to actively involve citizens in decision-making processes. Despite these constitutional provisions, implementation has remained inconsistent across many counties. Lokaimoe, Bartocho, and Omillo (2021) argue that although county governments regularly conduct public participation forums, many of these engagements remain ineffective due to poor planning, inadequate communication strategies, limited stakeholder mobilization, and insufficient feedback mechanisms. Similarly, the Institute of Economic Affairs (2023) reports that many counties continue to experience challenges in achieving meaningful public participation because participation mechanisms often fail to reach marginalized communities or adequately incorporate citizens' views into final decisions.

The Tana River County Assembly presents a particularly important context for examining participation strategy because of its unique geographical, socio-economic, and demographic characteristics. The county comprises widely dispersed communities, varying literacy levels, inadequate transport infrastructure, and significant socio-economic disparities that affect citizens' ability to participate effectively in governance processes. Although the Assembly regularly organizes public participation forums as required by law, concerns persist regarding the accessibility, inclusiveness, consistency, and effectiveness of the participation strategies employed. According to the Tana River County Government (2021), efforts have been made to strengthen citizen engagement through public forums and stakeholder consultations; however, challenges related to communication, accessibility, and stakeholder mobilization continue to affect participation outcomes. Consequently, there remains a need to establish whether the participation strategies adopted by the County Assembly significantly influence the performance of public participation. This study therefore sought to determine the effect of participation strategy on the performance of public participation at Tana River County Assembly, Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

To determine the effect of participation strategy on the performance of public participation at Tana River County Assembly, Kenya.

1.3 Research question

i. What is the effect of participation strategy on the performance of public participation at Tana River County Assembly?

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Public participation is a constitutional requirement in Kenya and serves as a critical mechanism for promoting transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and citizen-centered governance in county governments. Despite the constitutional and legislative provisions requiring County Assemblies to facilitate meaningful public participation, the effectiveness of participation processes remains inconsistent across many counties. At Tana River County Assembly, various participation strategies such as public forums, stakeholder consultations, community meetings, and communication platforms have been adopted to encourage citizen involvement in legislative, budgeting, and policy-making processes. However, concerns persist regarding low attendance, inadequate stakeholder engagement, limited accessibility of participation forums, ineffective communication channels, and

insufficient incorporation of public views into decision-making. These challenges are further exacerbated by the county's vast geographical coverage, dispersed settlements, infrastructural constraints, and socio-economic disparities, which hinder meaningful citizen participation. Although previous studies have examined public participation within Kenya's devolved governance system, most have focused on constitutional implementation, governance, accountability, or public finance management, with limited empirical attention given to the influence of participation strategy on the performance of public participation, particularly within marginalized counties such as Tana River. Consequently, there remains insufficient empirical evidence on whether the participation strategies employed by the Tana River County Assembly significantly enhance the performance of public participation. This study therefore sought to determine the effect of participation strategy on the performance of public participation at Tana River County Assembly, Kenya, with the aim of generating evidence that can inform policy and strengthen participatory governance within county assemblies.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Participation Strategy and Performance of Public Participation

Participation strategy is widely recognized as a fundamental component of democratic governance because it provides the institutional mechanisms through which citizens engage in governance, policy formulation, legislative processes, budgeting, and public decision-making. According to Smith (2009), participation strategies comprise structured democratic institutions that facilitate meaningful citizen involvement while enhancing the quality and legitimacy of governance outcomes. Similarly, Bamberg (2022) argues that participation strategies encompass organized approaches such as consultative forums, stakeholder engagements, public hearings, participatory budgeting, digital engagement platforms, and continuous communication systems that strengthen collaboration between governments and citizens. Cornwall (2008) further explains that participation should extend beyond merely informing citizens by creating opportunities that enable communities to contribute actively to decision-making processes. Likewise, Arnstein (1969) contends that genuine public participation exists only when citizens possess sufficient influence to shape governance decisions rather than simply endorsing decisions that have already been made. Consequently, participation strategy has increasingly become an important governance instrument for enhancing transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness within public institutions.

International literature consistently demonstrates that effective participation strategies significantly improve the performance of public participation by strengthening democratic legitimacy, improving policy responsiveness, and enhancing public trust in government institutions. According to Fung (2015), governments that institutionalize structured participation mechanisms create stronger relationships with citizens while improving the legitimacy and effectiveness of public policies. Similarly, Bherer (2023) argues that professionally designed participation processes enable governments to manage stakeholder diversity, facilitate constructive dialogue, and promote equitable participation during public decision-making. Beierle and Cayford (2002) further observe that structured participation mechanisms improve the quality of public decisions because they allow governments to integrate local knowledge, citizen experiences, and stakeholder perspectives into policy development. In addition, OECD (2020) notes that governments increasingly utilize innovative participation strategies, including digital engagement platforms and deliberative forums, to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen confidence in governance. Likewise, Cortés-Cediel, Cantador, and Rodríguez Bolívar (2019) found that digital citizen engagement significantly improves participation by increasing accessibility, strengthening communication, and facilitating continuous interaction between governments and citizens. Collectively, these studies suggest that well-designed participation strategies contribute significantly to improving the overall performance of public participation.

Evidence from developed countries further illustrates the importance of structured participation strategies in strengthening democratic governance. According to Smith (2009), many European countries have institutionalized participatory governance through citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting, and stakeholder dialogue platforms that encourage continuous citizen engagement in policy processes. Similarly, Herzberg, Sintomer, and Röcke (2017) argue that participatory budgeting initiatives implemented across several European countries have significantly improved transparency, accountability, and citizens' confidence in local government institutions. Sintomer, Herzberg, and Röcke (2008) further maintain that structured participation mechanisms enhance democratic legitimacy because they provide citizens with opportunities to influence government priorities and resource allocation. Likewise, Bherer (2023) reports that professionally facilitated public participation processes improve collaboration among stakeholders while minimizing conflicts and enhancing the credibility of governance decisions. These findings indicate that successful participation strategies require institutional commitment, structured communication, and inclusive stakeholder engagement.

Across Africa, decentralization reforms have significantly expanded opportunities for citizen participation in governance through devolved government structures. According to the African Union (2018), participatory governance has become a critical instrument for strengthening accountability, improving service delivery, and promoting democratic governance across African countries. Similarly, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2021) argues that effective participation strategies enable governments to improve policy implementation by strengthening collaboration between citizens and public institutions. However, Hao, Nyaranga, and Hongo (2022) found that although many African governments have institutionalized participation mechanisms, implementation remains constrained by inadequate communication systems, weak institutional capacities, resource limitations, and insufficient stakeholder engagement. Likewise, Nyaranga, Hao, and Hongo (2019) emphasize that governments should integrate structured participation strategies into governance systems to improve inclusivity, accessibility, and citizen confidence in public institutions. Furthermore, Best and Yalezo (2022) argue that effective stakeholder engagement strategies significantly improve governance outcomes when governments establish regular consultation mechanisms and

maintain continuous communication with citizens. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of participation strategies depends not only on legal frameworks but also on the quality of implementation.

Within the Kenyan context, public participation is constitutionally entrenched as one of the national values and principles of governance. According to the Constitution of Kenya (2010), both national and county governments are required to facilitate meaningful citizen participation during legislation, policy formulation, budgeting, and oversight functions. Kivoi and Mukulu (2013) argue that the Constitution fundamentally transformed governance by institutionalizing participatory democracy and empowering citizens to participate directly in public decision-making. Similarly, Lokaimoe, Bartocho, and Omillo (2021) observe that Kenyan county governments have increasingly adopted participation strategies such as public barazas, consultative forums, stakeholder meetings, and civic education programmes to strengthen public participation. Gwidi and Kilei (2022) further established that effective public participation significantly improves the performance of devolved governance systems by enhancing transparency, accountability, and public confidence in county governments. Likewise, Nyagah and Njoka (2022) found that effective participation mechanisms positively influence public finance management by improving accountability and promoting prudent utilization of public resources within county governments. Additionally, Institute of Economic Affairs (2023) reports that although counties have established public participation frameworks, disparities in institutional capacity, communication infrastructure, civic awareness, and financial resources continue to affect the effectiveness of participation strategies across counties.

Despite these notable developments, previous empirical studies continue to identify several challenges affecting the implementation of participation strategies. According to Ong'olo and Awiti (2019), ineffective communication systems, political interference, inadequate civic education, and insufficient stakeholder mobilization remain major barriers to meaningful public participation in Kenya. Similarly, Wairimu (2022) argues that organizational dynamics, institutional weaknesses, and limited government responsiveness reduce the effectiveness of public participation mechanisms across devolved governments. Wambugu, Gichuhi, and Ndung'u (2024) further established that communication modes significantly influence citizens' participation levels, emphasizing that governments should adopt multiple communication channels to improve accessibility and inclusivity. Likewise, Sun, Liu, and Chen (2024) argue that citizen empowerment enhances participation by strengthening public trust, community identity, and willingness to engage in governance processes. Ahmad and Islam (2024) similarly maintain that empowerment and inclusive participation strategies are essential for promoting sustainable governance because they encourage broader stakeholder engagement and strengthen citizens' confidence in public institutions. Collectively, these studies recommend institutionalizing predictable participation mechanisms, strengthening digital engagement platforms, improving civic education, expanding stakeholder inclusivity, and enhancing government responsiveness to citizen inputs in order to improve the performance of public participation.

Although existing literature consistently demonstrates that participation strategy significantly influences the performance of public participation, important contextual knowledge gaps remain. According to Hao et al. (2022), most studies have concentrated on relatively developed counties and urban settings where institutional capacities and communication infrastructure are comparatively stronger. Similarly, Lokaimoe et al. (2021) note that limited empirical evidence exists regarding the effectiveness of participation strategies within marginalized and geographically dispersed counties characterized by infrastructural constraints and socio-economic inequalities. Tana River County exhibits unique contextual characteristics, including dispersed settlements, inadequate transport infrastructure, diverse socio-cultural communities, and varying literacy levels, which may influence the implementation and effectiveness of participation strategies. Consequently, this study sought to address this empirical gap by examining the effect of participation strategy on the performance of public participation at Tana River County Assembly, Kenya.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Stakeholder Theory

This study was anchored on Stakeholder Theory, originally advanced by Freeman (1984), which posits that organizations achieve sustainable performance by actively engaging all stakeholders who influence or are influenced by organizational decisions. The theory extends beyond traditional organizational management by emphasizing inclusivity, dialogue, transparency, and collaborative decision-making among governments, citizens, civil society organizations, and other interest groups.

Within public governance, Stakeholder Theory provides an appropriate theoretical lens for explaining participation strategy because it recognizes citizens as legitimate stakeholders whose involvement enhances governance legitimacy and policy effectiveness. According to Freeman, Harrison, and Wicks (2007), stakeholder engagement should move beyond information dissemination towards genuine participation in decision-making processes that create value for all stakeholders. Similarly, Donaldson and Preston (1995) argue that meaningful stakeholder engagement strengthens accountability, institutional trust, and democratic legitimacy by incorporating diverse societal interests into governance processes.

Applied to county assemblies, Stakeholder Theory suggests that participation strategies including public consultations, stakeholder dialogues, community forums, digital engagement platforms, and structured feedback mechanisms create opportunities for collaborative governance. Such mechanisms enhance citizen satisfaction, strengthen policy legitimacy, improve transparency, and increase community ownership of development initiatives. Recent public administration research similarly demonstrates that effective stakeholder engagement requires relational, procedural, cognitive, and institutional practices that facilitate continuous collaboration between governments and citizens.

Although Stakeholder Theory has been criticized for its limited guidance on balancing competing stakeholder interests and prioritizing conflicting demands, it remains particularly relevant to this study because it provides a comprehensive framework for examining how participation strategies influence public participation performance within county governments. Consequently, the theory adequately explains the expected positive relationship between participation strategy and public participation performance observed within Tana River County Assembly.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the effect of participation strategy on the performance of public participation at Tana River County Assembly, Kenya. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to systematically describe existing participation strategies and assess their influence on the performance of public participation without manipulating the study variables. According to Kothari (2004), descriptive research is appropriate for studies that seek to establish relationships among variables by providing factual and systematic descriptions of existing phenomena. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of participation strategies and their influence on public participation. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to sampled respondents, while qualitative data were obtained through interview guides administered to key informants. Creswell and Creswell (2018) note that combining quantitative and qualitative approaches enhances the completeness, credibility, and validity of research findings through methodological triangulation. The methodological approach adopted in this study therefore enabled both statistical analysis of participation strategy and an in-depth exploration of stakeholders' experiences.

The target population comprised 6,340 stakeholders with direct or indirect involvement in public participation activities within Tana River County Assembly. These included community members from Hola and Bura, persons with disabilities, civil society organization representatives, local leaders, Members of the County Assembly, and administrative staff. To ensure representativeness, the study employed a multistage sampling procedure involving geographical stratification, stakeholder stratification, proportionate allocation, and simple random sampling within each stratum. The sample size of 370 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table, which is appropriate for finite populations and provides statistically representative samples at a 95% confidence level. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), multistage sampling is particularly suitable for heterogeneous populations because it enhances representativeness while minimizing sampling bias. This sampling procedure ensured that all major stakeholder groups involved in public participation were adequately represented in the study.

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides. The questionnaires consisted of Likert-scale items measuring participation strategy and the performance of public participation, whereas the interview guides generated qualitative information from selected key informants regarding the implementation of participation strategies within the County Assembly. Prior to the main survey, the research instruments were subjected to content validity through expert review to ensure that they adequately measured the study constructs. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) argue that expert evaluation enhances the relevance and adequacy of research instruments. Reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with a threshold of 0.70 and above considered acceptable for internal consistency, as recommended by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2019). These validity and reliability procedures ensured that the instruments generated accurate, consistent, and dependable data.

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics comprising Pearson correlation analysis and simple linear regression were used to determine the effect of participation strategy on the performance of public participation and to answer the research question. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 5% level ($p \leq 0.05$). Qualitative data obtained from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, where responses were organized into emerging themes and integrated with quantitative findings to enrich the interpretation of the results. Ethical principles were observed throughout the study by obtaining the necessary institutional approvals, seeking informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, and using the information collected strictly for academic purposes. These ethical procedures were consistent with accepted standards for social science research and helped safeguard the rights and welfare of all study participants

4.0 RESULTS

This section presents the empirical findings on the effect of participation strategy on the performance of public participation at the Tana River County Assembly. The findings are presented sequentially from descriptive statistics to inferential analysis to demonstrate the contribution of participation strategy to public participation performance.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Participation Strategy

Table 1: ***Descriptive Statistics for Participation Strategy***

Participation Strategy Indicators	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Participation includes people from diverse backgrounds	297	3.13	1.029
Equal opportunity to participate in decision making	297	3.20	1.062
Public forums (barazas) are organized regularly	297	3.01	1.076
Public meetings are sufficient to keep citizens informed	297	3.06	1.062
Participation platforms are accessible	297	3.13	1.123
Participation tools are user-friendly	297	3.01	1.069

Source: Field Data (2025).

The descriptive findings indicate that respondents generally perceived participation strategies at the Tana River County Assembly to be moderately effective, with mean scores ranging between 3.01 and 3.20 on the four-point Likert scale. The highest mean score was recorded for equal opportunity for community members to participate in decision-making (M = 3.20, SD = 1.062), suggesting that respondents generally believed the County Assembly provided relatively equitable opportunities for stakeholder participation. Likewise, diversity of participation (M = 3.13, SD = 1.029) and accessibility of participation platforms (M = 3.13, SD = 1.123) were positively rated, implying that efforts had been made to accommodate citizens from different demographic and socio-economic backgrounds.

Nevertheless, comparatively lower mean scores were observed regarding the regular organization of public forums (M = 3.01, SD = 1.076) and the user-friendliness of participation tools (M = 3.01, SD = 1.069). Although these values remain above the neutral midpoint, they indicate that respondents perceived inconsistencies in the frequency of public consultations and the ease with which citizens could engage through available participation platforms. The relatively similar standard deviations, ranging from 1.029 to 1.123, further suggest moderate variability in respondents' perceptions, reflecting differences in participation experiences across stakeholder groups.

Qualitative interviews corroborated these quantitative findings. Several respondents acknowledged that barazas and consultative forums existed but noted that they were often convened at short notice, limiting attendance among community members residing in remote areas. Other respondents indicated that although digital participation platforms had been introduced, inadequate internet connectivity and low digital literacy constrained their utilization. These qualitative observations reinforce the descriptive statistics by demonstrating that while participation structures exist, operational limitations continue to reduce their effectiveness.

The findings support contemporary participatory governance literature which argues that meaningful citizen engagement depends not merely on legal provisions for participation but on predictable consultation schedules, inclusive representation, accessible communication channels, and user-friendly participation mechanisms. Studies have consistently demonstrated that institutionalizing participation mechanisms substantially improves transparency, accountability, and democratic legitimacy within devolved governance systems.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

To establish the relationship between participation strategy and the performance of public participation, Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was conducted.

Table 2: ***Correlation between Participation Strategy and Performance of Public Participation***

Variables	Participation Strategy	Performance of Public Participation
Participation Strategy	1	0.593**
Performance of Public Participation	0.593**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	297	297

Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between participation strategy and the performance of public participation ($r = 0.593$, $p < 0.001$). This coefficient indicates that improvements in participation strategy were associated with corresponding improvements in public participation performance. The positive coefficient demonstrates that counties implementing more inclusive participation mechanisms, accessible communication channels, frequent public consultations, and user-friendly engagement platforms are likely to experience higher levels of stakeholder satisfaction, increased attendance during public forums, greater community trust, and improved adoption of stakeholder recommendations.

The magnitude of the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.593$) suggests a substantial association according to commonly accepted social science benchmarks, implying that participation strategy constitutes one of the strongest determinants of successful public participation within the County Assembly. The probability value ($p < 0.001$) further confirms that the observed relationship was statistically significant and unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Interview findings strengthened the quantitative evidence. Community members consistently reported that open public meetings and transparent dissemination of information enhanced their confidence in County Assembly processes. One participant observed that when meetings were widely publicized and participation opportunities were equally available, citizens became more willing to attend because they believed their opinions would influence county decisions. Such qualitative evidence illustrates how accessible participation mechanisms directly foster trust, legitimacy, and sustained citizen engagement.

These findings corroborate previous empirical studies which conclude that structured participation mechanisms significantly improve governance outcomes by strengthening citizen trust, transparency, accountability, and institutional legitimacy. Similar findings have been reported among Kenyan county assemblies where increased citizen participation positively influenced institutional performance and democratic governance.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the independent contribution of participation strategy with Performance of Public Participation.

Table 3: ***Regression Coefficients***

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.500	0.165		9.108	0.000
Participation Strategy	0.442	0.048	0.517	9.177	0.000

Dependent Variable**:** Performance of Public Participation

Source: Field Data (2025).

Table 3 presents the regression coefficients for the effect of participation strategy on the performance of public participation at Tana River County Assembly. The findings indicate that participation strategy had a positive and statistically significant effect on the performance of public participation ($B = 0.442$, $\beta = 0.517$, $t = 9.177$, $p < 0.001$). The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.442$) implies that a one-unit improvement in participation strategy resulted in a 0.442-unit increase in the performance of public participation, holding other factors constant. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.517$) further demonstrates that participation strategy was a strong predictor of public participation performance within the regression model. Since the probability value ($p = 0.000$) was lower than the conventional significance level of 0.05, the results indicate that participation strategy has a statistically significant positive effect on the performance of public participation at Tana River County Assembly. Consequently, the findings provide sufficient empirical evidence to answer the research question by demonstrating that effective participation strategies significantly enhance the performance of public participation within the County Assembly.

The findings corroborate previous empirical evidence that structured participation strategies improve governance outcomes by strengthening citizen engagement, transparency, and accountability. According to Fung (2015), effective participatory governance depends on well-designed institutional mechanisms that provide citizens with meaningful opportunities to influence public decisions, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance processes. Likewise, the OECD (2020) emphasizes that high-quality citizen participation processes should be inclusive, transparent, well-communicated, and supported by continuous feedback mechanisms to improve public trust and decision-making outcomes. The strong positive regression coefficient obtained in this study therefore suggests that predictable consultation forums, accessible communication platforms, stakeholder inclusivity, and effective feedback systems substantially improve the quality and effectiveness of public participation at the county assembly level.

The study findings are also consistent with empirical evidence from Kenya and other developing countries. According to Hao, Nyaranga, and Hongo (2022), public participation significantly influences governance and sustainable development when governments institutionalize effective participation mechanisms, strengthen civic awareness, and provide timely information to citizens. Their study in Bungoma County recommended establishing formal institutional structures to coordinate public participation and improve stakeholder engagement, findings that closely align with the present study. Similarly, recent evidence synthesized from participatory governance case studies demonstrates that governance outcomes improve when participation processes provide stakeholders with genuine influence over decisions, ensure effective communication, and promote broad representation of affected groups. These findings imply that county assemblies should move beyond statutory compliance by institutionalizing participation strategies that facilitate meaningful citizen involvement throughout the governance process.

The findings further reinforce the assumptions of Stakeholder Theory, which argues that organizations achieve better performance by actively involving stakeholders in decision-making processes. In the context of Tana River County Assembly, respondents consistently reported that regular consultation forums, transparent communication, inclusive representation, and opportunities for citizens to express their views enhanced confidence in county governance and encouraged greater participation. These qualitative observations complemented the quantitative regression results by demonstrating that participation strategies create collaborative relationships between government institutions and citizens, thereby strengthening democratic governance. The findings therefore answer the research question by confirming that participation strategy exerts a significant positive influence on the performance of public participation at Tana River County Assembly. The implication is that county assemblies should prioritize institutionalized participation strategies through regular stakeholder consultations, improved communication systems, inclusive engagement mechanisms, and responsive feedback processes to enhance the performance of public participation and promote sustainable participatory governance

5.1 CONCLUSION

The study concludes that participation strategy has a statistically significant and practically meaningful positive effect on the performance of public participation at the Tana River County Assembly. The empirical evidence demonstrates that participation strategies characterized by inclusivity, accessibility, regular consultation forums, and effective communication mechanisms substantially improve stakeholder satisfaction, citizen trust, attendance during public forums, and the overall effectiveness of participatory governance. Among all stakeholder engagement strategies examined in the broader study, participation strategy emerged as the strongest predictor of public participation performance.

The findings further indicate that although the Tana River County Assembly has established institutional mechanisms for citizen participation, improvements are still required to enhance the predictability of consultation forums, strengthen digital and physical participation platforms, improve communication with marginalized communities, and institutionalize effective feedback mechanisms. Such improvements would transform participation from a procedural constitutional requirement into a genuinely collaborative governance process capable of improving legislative legitimacy and public confidence.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings of this study have important policy implications for county governments and other public institutions responsible for implementing participatory governance. First, county assemblies should institutionalize predictable and regular public participation schedules accompanied by adequate public notice to maximize stakeholder attendance and meaningful engagement. Public participation should become a continuous governance process rather than an event-driven activity, consistent with Kenya's constitutional and policy framework.

Second, county governments should diversify participation mechanisms by integrating traditional community forums with digital participation platforms, social media engagement, mobile communication technologies, and localized community outreach programmes. Such diversification would improve accessibility, particularly among youth, women, persons with disabilities, and geographically marginalized populations while reducing barriers associated with distance and infrastructure limitations.

Third, county assemblies should strengthen structured feedback mechanisms to demonstrate how citizens' contributions influence legislative and policy decisions. Transparent reporting of stakeholder inputs enhances accountability, builds public trust, and encourages sustained citizen participation in governance processes. Establishing formal feedback systems would also improve public confidence in devolved governance institutions.

Finally, policymakers should invest in civic education, communication infrastructure, and institutional capacity building to enhance citizens' understanding of participation processes and improve the ability of county officials to facilitate inclusive engagement. These interventions would strengthen the quality of public participation while promoting transparency, accountability, and democratic governance within Kenya's devolved system.

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