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**Relationship between Level of Participation and Decision-making in  
Devolved Governments in Kenya**



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## Relationship between Level of Participation and Decision-making in Devolved Governments in Kenya

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between levels of participation and decision making in devolved governments in Kenya.

**Methodology:** The study adopted both the descriptive and explanatory research designs. Multi-phase sampling was used where both the stratified, simple random sampling (lottery) as well as purposive sampling were used. The target population of the study was the 5, 637,789 citizens aged 18 years and above in the eight selected counties (Kenya National Bureau of Statistic [KNBS], 2019). The sample size was 384 respondents. The main data collection tool was the use of questionnaires where 339 questionnaires were filled and returned, interviews and document analysis were used as well. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS and was summarized and presented in tables and figures. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis.

**Findings:** The findings of the study showed that  $R^2 = 0.383$  which implies that 38.2 % of variation in decision making as the dependent variable can be explained by level of participation within the bivariate model. The study further analysed the beta coefficients of levels of participation and the results showed that levels of participation is statistically significant in explaining decision making in devolved governments in Kenya ( $\beta=0.583$ ,  $t=14.832$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). ANOVA results also showed that that the model was valid and significant ( $F(1, 333) = 68.47$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that level of participation significantly predicts decision-making.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** This study validates Arnstein's assertion that higher-order participation (marked by partnership and delegated power) correlates with substantive influence over governance decisions. The study extends the model by proposing a context-sensitive adaptation tailored to Kenya's county systems. This includes a paradigm shift from tokenistic physical inclusion to a more value-based decision making where participation is assessed by the impact that citizens views have over final decisions rather than procedural participation. Based on the findings the study recommends that devolved governments should put in place mechanisms that would ensure that citizen participation shifts from the lowest level (tokenism) to a level where there is genuine citizen influence in decision making.

**Keywords:** *Levels of Participation, Decision making, Devolved units*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Citizen involvement in decision-making is key in entrenching good governance by promoting transparency, accountability and responsiveness in both developed and developing countries (Ikizer, 2022). Public participation is also seen as a key ingredient in democratic governance that ensures that citizens are accorded the power that they need to influence decision making (Gundula, 2020). The importance of public participation in promoting good governance is reflected in the worldwide governance indicators whereby voice and accountability is considered as one of the key indicators of good governance referring to the extent to which citizens of a country are able to participate in selecting their government as well as freedom of expression and association (Ryan, 2021). This is also reflected in Ibrahim Mo's index of African governance (Mo Ibrahim foundation, 2017) which measures the extent to which people participate in political processes as well as in making decisions. One of the key aspects of governance in Ibrahim Mo's index of African governance is participation and human rights which further highlights the importance of public participation in promoting good governance. Moreover, public participation and good governance reinforce each other in that we cannot have good governance without public participation and vice versa (Addink, 2019; Ryan, 2021).

Moreover, incorporating public views in decision making helps to promote trust in government as well ensures that proposed plans and projects reflect the interests and aspirations of the public (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2022). Public participation is also key in ensuring the ownership of decisions as a way of safeguarding the sustainability of programmes and projects (Kaufman & Jacobs, 2019; Kyere, 2017). Government institutions that have embraced public participation have also witnessed effective service delivery reduced corruption and prudent use of resources (Bakari & Saidi, 2018; Opiyo et al., 2017). Based on the forgoing discussion, it is evident that we cannot have good governance without public participation. Scholars define meaningful participation as the kind of participation that ensures that public input is incorporated in decision-making (Hudson, 2021; Najimi, 2018). This view is supported by empirical findings that have demonstrated that people tend to participate more if they know that their input and views will influence decision-making (Gitegi & Iravo, 2016; Opiyo et al. 2017). The key enablers of meaningful participation are citizen empowerment, information access, adequate public participation institutional frameworks and high level of power accorded to citizens to make decisions (Gitegi & Iravo, 2016; Ministry of devolution and Planning & Council of Governors, 2016; Ndegwa, & Minja, 2018).

Originally, the aspect of levels of participation was developed by Sherry Arnstein who defined the levels of participation as the amount of citizen power and control given to citizens during public engagements to enable them influence decisions (Arnstein, 1969). Arnstein's view of public participation is that of power-sharing between public officials and the citizens and the more the power shared the more the citizens are able to influence decisions (Berman, 2017; Souza & Neto, 2018). Apart from Arnstein's typology, different scholars came up with different models to explain

the levels of citizen participation in decision-making. Some of these models include the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) (2007), David Wilcox five rung model (1994) and Eran Vigoda's model (2002).

In order to ensure that citizens are engaged in decision making to the grassroots level, Kenya started implementing devolution immediately after the promulgation of the new constitution 2010. Therefore, after the adoption of the new constitution 2010 under which Kenya operates, Kenya has 47 county governments (referred to as devolved units) and one national government. The Constitution of Kenya 2010 and other policy and legal frameworks emphasize on the need to incorporate public views upto the grassroots in all matters affecting them such as budgeting, policy and legislation processes. Scholars observe that citizens who are accorded adequate powers during public participation are more likely to influence decision making outcomes as compared to those who are accorded limited powers (Bell, & Reed, 2022; Madekwe, 2025). However, practically most citizens are given very little powers to influence decisions (tokenistic participation) where leaders conduct public participation as a way of fulfilling legal and institutional requirements (Bridgeman, 2024; Mutua et. al. 2024). Failure to give citizens adequate powers to influence decisions has impacted negatively on citizens' willingness to participate in decision making because citizens will be more willing to participate in giving their input if they are given assurance that their views will be incorporated in final decisions (Yadav, 2024; Chukwu & Onuoha, 2025).

The aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between levels of participation and decision making in devolved governments in Kenya.

Decision-making is defined as a structured rational approach that involves careful evaluation of available alternatives so as to arrive at the best alternative based on risk and reward considerations (Khanduja, 2023; Waldt & Toit, 2017). Basically, decision-making in public institutions involves negotiation, bargaining and consensus building in a bid to reach a common understanding (Bisarya & Houlihan, 2023; Manville & Ober, 2023). This is the spirit that is exhibited in the Constitution of Kenya 2010 which spells out the need to engage the public in making decisions relating to planning and budgeting, policies, and legislation.

Apart from the Constitution of Kenya, the county public participation guidelines (Ministry of devolution and planning & Council of governors, 2016), the Urban Areas and Cities Act 2011 as well as the County Government Act provides a framework that guides county governments on how to engage the public in planning and budgeting, development of policies and legislation.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The constitution of Kenya 2010 and other policy and legal frameworks emphasize on the need to incorporate public views in all matters affecting them such as budgeting, policy and legislation processes. The constitution of Kenya 2010 in particular envisions a democratic government where public participation is considered as the cornerstone of inclusive decision making. Inclusive decision-making entails incorporating citizens views in decision making and ensuring that

decisions reflect the views and aspirations of the citizens. Scholars have demonstrated that incorporating public views in decision making helps to promote public trust, accountability, ownership of decisions and effective service delivery (Ndevu & Matsiliiza, 2021, Nyama & Mukwada, 2022). Citizens can only be able to influence decisions if they are accorded adequate powers and control to enable them influence decisions made (Arnstein, 1969; Muhdiarta, 2025). Empirical evidence in Kenya shows that citizen participation has been tokenistic with very little opportunity given to citizens to influence decisions and that public participation is done to satisfy legal and institutional requirements (Malusha & Njoroge, 2023; Mutua et al., 2024). Moreover, reports by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA Kenya, 2023) and Transparency International Kenya (2024) indicate that less than 30% of citizen proposals raised during public forums are reflected in county budgets and development plans. The low levels of citizen engagement is also reflected in a number of instances documented where county governments have failed to sufficiently involve citizens in critical decisions affecting their lives. These instances are reflected in the number of petitions relating to public participation presented to both the high court and supreme courts of Kenya (Kenya Human Rights Commission & 2 others v. County Government of Mombasa & 2 others, 2018; Kituo cha Sheria & 2 others v. County Government of Nairobi & 2 others, 2016; Wyckliffe Oparanya & 2 others v. County Government of Kakamega & 2 others, 2016). The petitions mainly border on inadequate or lack of public engagement when making decisions and failure by county governments to incorporate public views in decision-making. This raises serious questions on the effectiveness of public participation in devolved governments in Kenya. Poor citizen engagement has been attributed to low levels of involvement, poor institutional frameworks, lack of clear feedback mechanisms, poor information access and low levels of awareness among citizens on how to ensure that their views are incorporated in decisions affecting them (Be-ere, 2023; Masiya et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2019). Poor public engagement has resulted in lack of trust in public officials, poor accountability and transparency, corruption, poor sustainability of projects and mass demonstrations occasioned by poor service delivery (Kimutai & Amisi, 2018, Kisubi & Kisambira, 2022, Soithong, 2021). In addition, lack of meaningful public engagement has led to a disconnect between the county governments and the communities they serve, resulting in policies, budgets and plans that may not fully reflect the needs and priorities of the citizens.

If the aforementioned situation persists, it may create political apathy among members of the public, derail the economic transformation of counties as envisioned in the 2010 constitution and negatively affect the general growth of the country's economy.

Most studies on public participation and devolved governance in Kenya focus on ways of improving public participation, participatory budgeting, factors affecting public participation in devolved governance as well as on the role of public participation on performance of devolved governance systems and service delivery (Kimutai & Amisi, 2018; Mbithi et al., 2018; Okumu, 2021; Yegon & Omwenga, 2022). The few studies on public participation and decision-making

focus on specific issues such as budgeting and planning and concentrate on single case studies of individual counties (Awire, & Nyakwara, 2019; Magani, & Gichure, 2018; Ronoh, 2020).

The proposed study seeks to fill the conceptual, methodological and contextual gaps associated with other studies by conducting a study on the relationship between levels of participation and decision-making in devolved governments in Kenya.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.1.1 Arnstein's Theory of Ladder of Citizen Participation**

Sherry Arnstein's (1969) theory of ladder of citizen participation provides a framework for understanding the different degrees of citizen involvement. The framework provides guidance concerning the degrees of power given to citizens in terms of making decisions as reflected by the level of involvement (Gaber, 2019). Arnstein came up with eight different levels of participation ranging from the lowest to the highest: manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership and delegated power (See figure 1). The eight levels are further classified into three key levels comprising of non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power.

The classification is based on the level of citizen power and influence on decision-making whereby non-participation signifies the lowest level where citizens only act as recipients of information and decisions made, tokenism represents provision of opportunity to participate but with no decision-making power while citizen power represents the highest level where citizens can influence decisions made (Lauria & Slotterback, 2020).

According to Arnstein (1969), the lowest level of involvement refers to a level where the public is only given information but not given adequate opportunities to make decisions. She further identifies therapy as the second lowest form of involvement which only aims at providing group consolation to an unhappy public in a dishonest manner. Next in the ladder is the informing stage is considered a one-way flow of information from the officials to citizens with no clear feedback and power negotiation mechanisms. Usually, this stage becomes unproductive especially when information needed for decision making is provided late to the citizens. At the consultation stage, the public can give input but they have very little power to influence decisions because mostly the consultation is done as a way of fulfilling legal or institutional requirements.

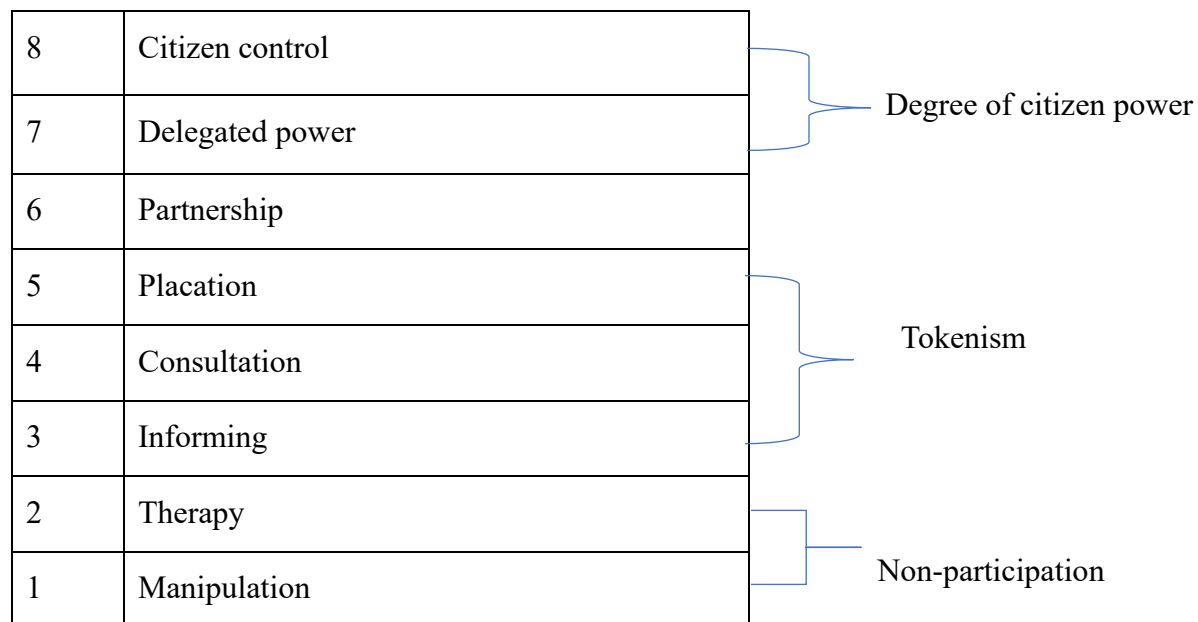
The next stage is the placation stage whereby citizens are given some degree of influence by being allowed to advise the public officials although decision making still rests with the public officials. At the partnership level members of the public have some degree of influence and can negotiate with leaders on how to share decision-making power but have no control over final decisions. The next level of citizen involvement which is considered a higher level of involvement is citizen control where the citizens have the power to influence decisions during public participation. The

highest level of involvement is delegated power whereby citizens exercise control over decisions made together with the power holders.

At the core of Arnstein's theory is the need to provide the citizens with adequate power to make decisions during public participation processes. This is in line with the international public participation best practice as reflected in the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2, 2016) guidelines as well as the World Bank framework for public participation (World Bank Group, 2014). Arnstein (1969) is cognizant of the shortcomings of the theory one of which is the fact that the theory assumes that power holders and citizens are a homogenous group yet they differ in terms of their composition. For instance, they differ in terms of their race, socio-economic backgrounds and educational backgrounds which determine their abilities to engage.

The other shortcoming of the model is that it assumes that the levels of participation are hierarchical in nature and yet sometimes participation levels can move back and forth depending on support provided and that in some instances the levels can overlap (Toscano & Matter, 2017). Furthermore, other critics observe that the ladder might not be applicable in present times since the political social and economic contexts have changed (Varwell, 2022; Lauria & Slotterback, 2020).

Arnstein's ladder of participation is illustrated in figure 1.



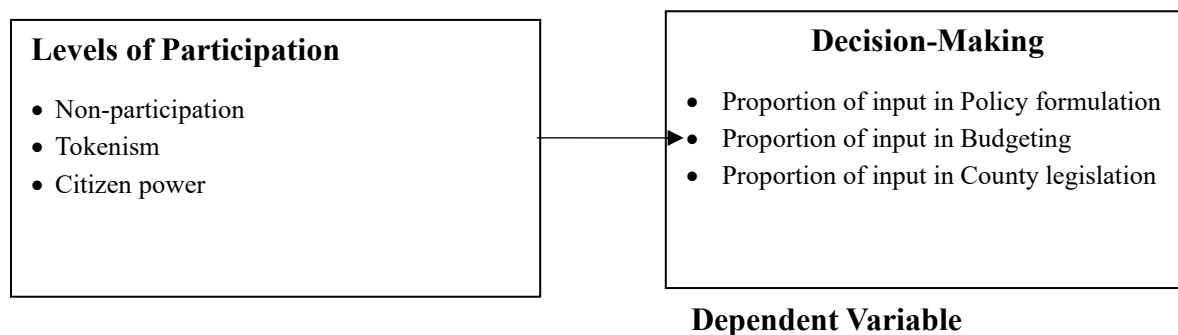
*Figure 1 Arnstein's Eight- Rung Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969).*

Despite the shortcomings, Arnstein's theory provides a continuum of stages of public participation that provides an understanding of the kind of power that should be provided to the citizens to influence decisions during public participation. This implies that the higher the level of power provided to citizens the higher their ability to influence the decisions made and vice versa. This

theory is very key in understanding the study variable on levels of public participation which is key in determining the amount of power wielded by the citizens and hence the extent to which they can influence decision-making.

### 2.3 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is defined as a simplified structure based on key concepts of the study used by a researcher to explain the relationships that exist among some given variables that will guide the direction of the study (Adom et al., 2018). The main objective of this study sought to investigate the relationship between levels of participation and decision making in devolved governments in Kenya. The conceptual framework is as shown in Figure 2



**Figure 2 Conceptual framework**

#### Independent Variable

### 2.4 Levels of Participation

Originally, the aspect of levels of participation was developed by Sherry Arnstein who defined the levels of participation as the amount of citizen power and control given to citizens during public engagements to enable them influence decisions (Arnstein, 1969). Arnstein's view of public participation is that of power-sharing between public officials and the citizens and the more the power shared the more the citizens are able to influence decisions (Berman, 2017

Apart from Arnstein's typology, different scholars came up with different models to explain the levels of citizen participation in decision-making. Some of these models include the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) (2007), David Wilcox five rung model (1994) and Eran Vigoda's model (2002).

Arnstein's model is closely related to the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) framework which reflects the goals made at each level to the public and that higher goals imply increasing level of influence in decision-making (IAP2, 2007). According to the IAP2 framework, the public involvement goals begin with information sharing which is aimed at enabling the public to understand the problems better and enable them to understand the available solutions and alternatives (Ramasubramanian, 2010). While consultation is aimed at obtaining feedback from the public, involvement involves a direct engagement with the public to ensure their concerns and

aspirations are factored in decision making. Collaboration is aimed at ensuring that there is partnership with the public on each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solutions while empowerment is aimed at putting the final decision making in the hands of the public.

In addition, Wilcox (1994) came up with five key levels of participation which comprise of information, consultation, deciding together, acting together and supporting independent community interests. Unlike Arnstein, Wilcox argued that each level serves a specific purpose and that none is superior to the other. Vigoda (2003) also came up with a continuum of interactions between the public administrators and the citizens whereby in one end of the continuum citizens are seen as subjects who are forced to follow the directives of government while on the other end of the continuum the roles are reversed and citizens are able to have coercive power over their government or elected leaders.

The four types of interactions along the continuum vary from coerciveness, delegation responsiveness and collaboration. Vigoda advocates for collaborative interactions and partnerships between citizens and authorities. Furthermore, citizens can play different roles along the continuum such as voters, clients, customers, partners or owners. On the other hand, the authorities play the roles of rulers, trustees, managers, or partners. Citizens can influence decisions more in a situation where they act as partners or owners and authorities' function as partners.

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is evident that at the core of the different models of participation focusing on the citizen levels of participation is the need to provide the citizens with adequate power to make decisions during public participation processes.

This study focused on the three basic levels of participation as proposed by Sherry Arnstein to determine the level of citizen power accorded to citizens to enable them influence decisions. The lowest level is referred as the non-participation level which is characterized by manipulation and therapy where public officials educate and give information to the public to shape their views and perspectives with an aim of influencing them to approve the decisions already made by the public officials (Souza & Neto, 2018). The second level is the tokenism level which comprises of informing, consultation, and placation whereby some public consultation is done but the citizens are not guaranteed if their input will inform decision-making (Souza & Neto, 2018). The highest level is the degree of citizen power which is achieved through partnership, delegated power and citizen control. At this level, the government officials seek to work with the citizens to influence decision-making and at the highest level the citizens are given the power to control decision-making independently (Gaber, 2019). Arnstein's model has been used successfully to analyze levels of participation in both developing and developed countries (Feng, et al., 2020; Hassan, 2019; Mbithi, et al. 2018; Mwangi & Kubasu, 2022; Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2019). This study adopted Arnstein's model of participation to determine the levels of public participation in devolved governments in Kenya. The study therefore focused on three key aspects of participation: non participation, tokenism and citizen power.

## 2.5 Decision Making

Decision-making is defined as a structured rational approach that involves careful evaluation of available alternatives so as to arrive at the best alternative based on risk and reward considerations (Khanduja, 2023; Waldt & Toit, 2017). Basically, decision-making in public institutions involves negotiation, bargaining and consensus building in a bid to reach a common understanding (Bisarya & Houlihan, 2023; Manville & Ober, 2023). This is the spirit that is exhibited in the constitution of Kenya 2010 which spells out the need to engage the public in making decisions relating to planning and budgeting, policies, and legislation.

The county public participation guidelines (Ministry of devolution and planning & Council of governors, 2016) provides a framework that guides county governments on how to engage the public in planning and budgeting, development of policies and legislation. The minimum requirements set in guidelines in relation to budgeting; legislation and policymaking require public officials to disseminate information to the public 7 days before they are required to give input. The public officials are also required to build the capacity of the public to enable them to understand the process of budgeting, policy and legislation as well as enable them to understand why their input in the process is important.

Moreover, before the engagement, the public should agree with the public officials on how they are expected to participate as well as how their input will influence decision-making at the end of the process by devising ways of providing feedback regarding how the input was used and what was not used in decision-making with appropriate justifications. This is because scholars have observed that citizens will be more willing to participate in giving their views if they are assured that their input will be incorporated in decision making (Mbithi, et al, 2018; & Mansoor, 2021). Similarly, the public participation guidelines also require public officials to be proactive in collecting and collating public input in a systematic and retrievable manner.

According to the guidelines, public engagement should not end at the designing of budgets, policies and legislation but should be sustained to the implementation to ensure that what was proposed at the initial stages is what goes into the implementation stage by developing clear monitoring mechanisms. This is in line with the World Bank's (2022) manual for participatory budgeting in Kenya which suggests that participatory budgeting should be undertaken in all the stages of the cycle from the beginning to the end. In addition to the aforementioned minimum requirements proposed in the county public participation guidelines, in relation to county planning and budgeting, public officials are required to establish a planning unit to coordinate integrated development planning of the county as well as to establish and operationalize the County Budget and Economic Forum (CBEF) comprising of the governor, County Executive Committee Members (CECMs) and representatives of the people.

The planning unit is also supposed to coordinate public consultative forums as well as to establish clear feedback and complaint procedures that the public can use to express their feelings about county budgets and plans (Ministry of devolution and planning & Council of governors, 2016).

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is clear that meaningful public participation will be enhanced if there is sustained citizen engagement in preparation and implementation of projects and plans, provision of timely, user-friendly information, agreement on how public feedback will influence decisions and the establishment of appropriate feedback mechanisms from both the public and the government officials. This study will measure decision-making in relation to policy formulation budgeting and county legislation.

## 2.6 Empirical Review

Aboussi and Wang (2023) conducted a survey to examine the current status of public participation in a Chinese local government environmental agency. The findings of the study showed that informational and consultative forms of participation were the most common while other forms of sharing authority in decision making were scarce. According to Arnstein's model, higher levels of participation guarantee more citizen control and power over decision-making while lower levels limit citizen authority over decision making. The citizens in this study were unable to influence decisions because of the limited power given to them to influence decisions.

In another study, Malusha and Njoroge (2023) conducted a descriptive study in Voi subcounty Taita Taveta County to determine the effect of informing, consultation, collaboration and empowerment in participation on implementation of County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP). The findings of the study showed that in most cases citizens are engaged at informational and consultation stages and higher levels of involvement (collaboration and empowerment) were utilised dismally. This affected the citizens' power to influence key decisions relating to CIDP. Consequently, the researchers recommend that counties should promote meaningful participation by involving citizens at higher levels so as to enable them influence decisions.

In a recent study conducted in Ashanti region of Ghana, Asamoah and Ile (2024) utilised Arnsteins ladder of participation to determine the levels of citizen participation in decision-making. The study used case study methodology to interview 43 metropolitan, municipal and district assembly members and citizens who had been involved in decision-making. The study found that citizens perceived assembly members and municipal staff to be more knowledgeable hence they delegated the responsibility of decision-making to them. The citizens had no powers to influence decisions due to the power imbalances that existed between the citizens and the leaders. The study recommended that citizens should be empowered to enable them influence decisions affecting their lives.

In yet another study Shuriye and Njoroge (2023) used descriptive survey targeting 69 respondents where subcounty and ward administrators as well as CECMs were involved. The study was conducted in Garissa County Kenya to investigate the effect of public participation on budget

implementation in devolved governments. One of the key findings of the study was that there were low levels of citizen participation because citizens input in was considered to a low extent in decision-making. This was citizens were accorded very little power to influence the decisions made.

Bridgeman (2024) also conducted a study in Wales in the United Kingdom to assess the parents' perception of power in the school exclusion process and how the Welsh government factored the views of the parents in decision making. The data was collected by interviewing 439 parents in Wales. Using Arnstein's ladder of participation to analyse the levels of participation, Bridgeman (2024) found that most parents' involvement in the school exclusion process was at 'non-participation' level because most parents had challenges in communicating with school staff. These findings underscore the need to create proper feedback and channels of communication between the decisionmakers and the citizens.

Mutua et al. (2024) also conducted another study to investigate the influence of public participation in the planning phase on the outcome of water projects in Matungulu sub-county Machakos County in Kenya. The study adopted the use of mixed methods approach where 220 respondents comprising household heads, committee representatives and water project managers were engaged in the study. The study used Arnstein's ladder of participation as a lens to analyze the levels of participation by the citizens in Matungulu. The findings showed that the citizen's level of participation at the planning phase was still at the lowest level because citizens were excluded in making the final plans for the projects. In essence the citizens were only consulted at the project inception but the leaders did the actual plans with very little input from the citizens.

## 2.7 Research Gaps

The review of literature showed that most of the studies reviewed on levels of participation and decision-making were conducted in different contexts outside Kenya (Aboussi & Wang 2023; Bridgeman 2024 & Asamoah & Ile, 2024). Scholars argue that the societal and institutional contexts significantly determine the success of public participation (Baker & Chapin, 2018; & Ngunjiri, 2023). This calls for a study on the relationship between levels of participation and decision making conducted within the Kenyan context.

Furthermore, most of the studies on levels of participation and decision-making focused on case studies whose sample size is generally small compared to this study which is a survey hence accommodated a bigger sample of 384 respondents. Example of these studies conducted in Kenya include a study by Malusha and Njoroge (2023) conducted in Taita Taveta county which had a sample of 64, a study by Shuriye and Njoroge (2023) conducted in Garissa County with a sample of 69 respondents. Scholars have observed that larger samples reduce sampling errors in random samples and make it easy to generalize findings to the larger population with higher levels of confidence because they have higher population validity (Babbie, 2008; Fink, 2009). This study sought to fill the contextual and methodological gaps identified in the reviewed studies.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study was anchored on the positivist research philosophy whose basic belief is that all phenomena should be understood through empirical scientific measurements (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). The study used both the descriptive survey and the explanatory research designs in order to describe and analyze the relationship between levels of participation and decision making in devolved governments in Kenya. Descriptive survey designs are those that are concerned with describing the characteristics of individuals, groups or situations (Kothari, 2004). Basically, descriptive research helps the researcher to objectively describe the relationship between two or more variables to provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon such as individual, group, organization or objects (Hepner et al.2008; Mishra & Alok, 2011; Mitchel & Jolley, 2010). The explanatory research design enabled the researcher to give meaning to descriptive data by explaining the relationship between variables (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The target population of the study was 5, 637,789 citizens aged 18 years and above in the eight selected counties (Kenya National Bureau of Statistic [KNBS], 2019). The target population was arrived at based on the citizens who had obtained identity cards (aged 18 years and above) and are therefore eligible to participate in decision-making in matters affecting their counties. Using Cochran's formula the sample size arrived at was 384 respondents drawn from 8 counties comprising Taita Taveta, Makeni, Nairobi, Kiambu, Baringo, Wajir, Kisumu and Vihiga. The study adopted the use of multi-phase sampling technique which comprises of the stratified, simple random sampling (lottery) and purposive random sampling to obtain the sample. The main data collection instrument for the study was the use of a questionnaire. The data was further supplemented by the data from document analysis and the interview guide. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis where coding and categorization of similar themes was done. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean, frequencies and standard deviation) were used to describe data while regression analysis was used to analyze the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

### **4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The study sample was 384 respondents out of which 339 questionnaires were filled correctly and returned representing 87.8% response rate.

#### **4.1 Descriptive Statistics**

Likert scale items for the variables were analysed using frequency distribution tables that indicated frequency and percentages for all the five options as contained in the questionnaire. The statistics are based on the responses provided by respondents in a five-point likert-scale questions ranging from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree. The mean and standard deviation for the Likert scale was also calculated. Within variables, the Likert items contained both positive worded and negative worded statements. The negative worded were reverse-coded.

#### 4.11 Level of Participation

Table 1 contains Likert scale questions for the variable levels of participation. Respondents mostly agreed with four statements and disagreed with an equal number of statements within the Likert scale ( $M=3.11$ ,  $SD=0.77$ ). 68 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they participate in public participation meetings mainly to get information from county government officials. 57% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *'during public participation meetings, county government officials educate me on matters affecting me with little input from my end'*. Additionally, 52 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they do not get adequate time to seek clarification or ask questions during public participation. 48% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they get adequate opportunity to give their views and opinions during public participation. Further, 41 % strongly disagreed or disagreed that county governments have established an inclusive committee that represents their interests during public engagements. Moreover, 43 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they collaborate with the county in identifying alternative solutions to community issues. The same statement had a considerable number (41%) either disagreeing or strongly agreeing. 44 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement *'My county does not involve me in determining the issues to be discussed during public participation'* 49% either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that *'my county gives me satisfactory powers to influence budgets, policies and legislation during public participation'*.

The results show that the levels of participation in terms of citizen control over decision-making is still low with majority of respondents indicating that they are mainly consulted and given information but they are not accorded enough powers to make decisions. The results above were corroborated by the themes that emerged from the interviews whereby majority of the officers in charge of public participation said that when making decisions they guide the citizens on how to arrive at a decision. It was also clear from the interviews that most public participation officers believed that citizens lack the capacity to make independent decisions. The results reflect what Aboussi and Wang (2023) observed in China where informational and consultative forms of participation were common while other forms of authority sharing were rare. The findings are also reflected locally where Malusha and Njoroge (2022) found that mostly citizens are engaged at informational and consultation stages and higher levels of involvement were lacking. According to Arnstein's ladder of participation, these levels fall under the second level known as the tokenism level which comprises of informing, consultation, and placation whereby some public consultation is done but the citizens are not guaranteed if their input will inform decision-making (Souza & Neto, 2018). Low levels of participation according to Arnstein's model of participation limit the citizens control and influence in decision making which undermines the essence of public participation (Arnstein 1969).

Table 1: Levels of Participation

S/N	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	M/SD
	I go for public participation meetings mainly to get information from government officials	34(10.0)	34(10.0)	41(12.1)	149(44)	81(23.9)	M=3.61 SD=1.23
	During public participation meetings, county government officials educate me on matters affecting me with little input from my end	32(9.6)	64(19.1)	48(14.3)	127(37.9)	64(19.1)	M=3.28 SD=1.26
	I do not get adequate time to seek clarification/ask questions during public participation	60(17.7)	108(31.9)	50(14.7)	83(24.5)	38(11.2)	M=2.78 SD=1.30
	I get adequate opportunity to give my views and opinion during public participation	34(10.2)	95(28.4)	42(12.6)	92(27.5)	71(21.3)	M=3.21 SD=1.33
	My county has established an inclusive committee that represents my interests during public engagements	61(18.1)	79(23.4)	54(16.0)	97(28.8)	46(13.6)	M=2.96 SD=1.34
	I partner/collaborate with my county in identifying alternative solutions to community issues.	49(14.6)	90(26.9)	50(14.9)	82(24.5)	64(19.1)	M=3.07 SD=1.37
	My county does not involve me in determining the issues to be discussed during public participation	64(18.9)	86(25.4)	44(13.0)	85(25.1)	59(17.5)	M=2.97 SD=1.40
	My county gives me satisfactory powers to influence budgets, policies and legislation during public participation	79(23.3)	87(25.7)	37(10.9)	80(23.6)	56(16.5)	M=2.84 SD=1.44
	<b>Overall Mean=3.11</b>	<b>SD=0.77</b>					

#### 4.12 Descriptive Statistics for Decision Making

Table 2 contains Likert scale questions for the dependent variable decision-making. Respondents mainly, disagreed with almost all statements apart from one within the Likert scale (M=2.85, SD=0.73). 45% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the county considers their views and suggestions on policy making during public participation. In addition, 48% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their suggestions on policy reviews are considered when drafting final policy. 41% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their views and suggestions on county development plans are considered. Further, 57% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that '*My input on budget priorities was not reflected in the final budget by my county*'. 50% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their input on budget priorities was not reflected in the final budget by my county. Nevertheless, 43% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their input on review of county laws is factored before final draft. Mbithi et al (2018) in their study found that most counties do not

consider the citizens input when making decisions hence undermining one of the tenets of meaningful participation.

42% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that *'My county does not provide me with copies of public participation minutes to help me track how my input would influence the final policy, budgeting and legislative decisions'*. 52% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their country governments give them feedback on how their input influenced final decisions after public participation. Finally, 54 percent disagreed that their county governments have established avenues where they can challenge decisions that do not reflect their suggestions and views.

Based on the emerging themes where citizens were asked to indicate the level of influence they have in decision making, the results showed that 17% of the citizens do not have any influence while majority (60.3%) noted that citizens have little influence. Thus, cumulatively 94% of respondents said that citizens have either little or no influence over decision making outcomes. It was clear that public participation officers have put in place mechanisms of recording the proceedings of the public participation meetings through audio recordings or written minutes. However, these records are not shared with the citizens hence limiting their confirmation of proceedings of meetings in good time. It was also evident from the interviews that most counties provide feedback to citizens only when they hold the subsequent public participation forum and that there are no specific mechanisms of providing feedback to citizens or clear avenues where citizens can challenge decisions made. This may lead to delayed feedback which eventually may have very little or no effect on decisions made.

Losike et al. (2021) found that feedback mechanisms positively influenced public participation programmes in Turkana County. Several scholars have observed that citizens will be more willing to participate in giving their views if they believe that their input will be incorporated in decision making (Madekwe, 2025 & Yadav, 2024). Madekwe (2025) advises that decisionmakers should be able to demonstrate to citizens that their input is valued and be able to show the impact of their input on policy outcomes. This underscores the need for establishment of clear feedback mechanisms to ensure that timely feedback to citizens for effective decision making.

**Table 2: Decision Making -Related Statements**

S/N	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	M/SD
	My county considers my views and suggestions on policy making that I provide during public participation	50(15.0)	103(30.9)	70(21.0)	70 (21.0)	40(12.0)	M=2.84 SD=1.26
	My suggestions on policy reviews are considered by my county when drafting the final policy	41(12.3)	121(36.3)	75(22.5)	62(18.6)	34(10.2)	M=2.78 SD=1.19
	My views and suggestions on County Development Plans (CIDP) are factored by my county	44(13.2)	95(28.5)	67(20.1)	82(24.6)	45(13.5)	M=2.97 SD=1.27
	My input on budget priorities was not reflected in the final budget by my county	31(9.4)	42(12.8)	67(20.4)	141(42.8)	48(14.6)	M=3.40 SD=1.17
	My views and suggestions on drafting of county laws were not considered in the final document by my county	51(15.6)	115(35.3)	80(24.5)	52(16.0)	28(8.6)	M=2.67 SD=1.17
	My county does not provide me with copies of public participation minutes to help me track how my input would influence the final policy, budgeting and legislative decisions	87(10.5)	105(31.3)	42(12.5)	55(16.4)	46(13.7)	M=2.61 SD=1.38
	My county gives me feedback on how my input influenced the final decisions after public participation	64(19.3)	111(33.4)	37(11.1)	68(20.5)	52(15.7)	
	My county has established clear avenues where I can challenge any decisions that do not reflect my suggestions and views	71(21.2)	109(32.5)	55(16.4)	56(16.7)	44(13.1)	
	<b>Overall Mean=2.85</b>		<b>SD=0.73</b>				

#### 4.2 Correlation Coefficient Analysis

In order to analyze the relationship between levels of participation and decision making the Pearsons Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. Results of table 3 indicates that level of participation and decision making had a positive strong correlation ( $r=0.620$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This means that an increase in the level of participation significantly increases decision making. The findings confirm what Malusha and Njoroge (2023) reported whereby high levels of participation were found to positively influence the quality of County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) outcomes in the county.

**Table 3 Correlations**

Correlations						
			DM	LP		
Spearman's rho	DM	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	<b>.620**</b>		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000		
		N	335	335		
	LP	Correlation Coefficient	<b>.620**</b>	1.000		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.		
		N	335	339		

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### 4.21 Analysis of Variance

ANOVA table 4 indicates that the bivariate linear regression model was found to be valid and significant ( $F(1, 333) = 68.47, p < 0.05$ ). This is because the p-value was less than the selected significance level (0.05). Furthermore, F calculated (206.835) is greater than F critical (3.87) hence the model is considered to be statistically significant and has goodness of fit. The high F-value and the low p-value show that there is a strong positive relationship between level of participation and decision making. This implies that level of participation significantly predicts decision-making.

#### *ANOVA Table for Level of Participation and Decision-Making*

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	68.468	1	68.468	206.835	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	110.232	333	.331		
	Total	178.699	334			

a. Dependent Variable: Decision Making

a. Predictors: (Constant), Level of Public Participation

#### 4.3 Regression Analysis

##### 4.3.1 Coefficients

Bi-variate linear regression was used to test the relationship between levels of participation and decision making. The output is as shown in table 5. The study used the following linear regression model:

$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$  was fitted, Where Y is decision making,  $\beta_0$  is the constant and  $X_1$  is the level of participation and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term, substituting the values from the regression output,

$$Y = 1.308 + 0.583 X_1$$

*Table 5 Beta Coefficients Table for Level of Participating and Decision-Making*

		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.038	.130		8.003	.000
	Level of Public Participation	.583	.041	.619	14.382	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Decision Making

The results in table 4.35 show that the level of participation is statistically significant in explaining decision making in devolved governments in Kenya because the p-value (0.000) was less than the chosen level of significance ( $p < 0.05$ ). The findings also showed that the relationship between levels of participation and decision making was positive ( $\beta = 0.583$ ). These results imply that a unit change in the level of participation leads to a positive change in decision making at the rate of 0.583. In line with these findings, Njoroge and Shuriye (2023) found that there is a significant positive relationship between level of participation and decision making in that citizens in Garrisa county were not able to influence budget decisions due to the low levels of participation accorded to them. Bridgeman (2024) found that most parents' level of involvement was very low 'non-participation' level) hence impacting negatively on the parents' ability to influence decisions at the school. Mutua et al. (2024) also posted similar findings where low levels of citizen engagement limited their ability to influence decisions regarding county projects.

### 4.3.2 Model Summary

The model summary in table 6 was used to show the relationship between level of participation and decision making. The table indicates  $R^2 = 0.383$  which implies that 38.3 % of variation in decision making as the dependent variable can be explained by level of participation within the bivariate model. The model failed to explain the remaining 61.8 % of the variation in decision making which could be explained by other factors that were not included in the model.

*Table 6 Model Summary for Level of Participation and Decision-Making*

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.619 <sup>a</sup>	.383	.381	.57535

a. Predictors: (Constant), Level of Public Participation

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary

The findings of the study confirmed that there is a statistically significant relationship between levels of participation and decision-making in devolved governments in Kenya. The results showed that a positive increase in levels of participation led to a positive increase in decision-making in devolved governments in Kenya. The data from the interviews revealed that although

the public is consulted on issues of policies, legislation and budgets, the final decision outcomes did not reflect the views of the public.

### **Conclusions**

The study concluded that levels of participation was statistically significant in explaining decision-making in devolved governments in Kenya. This implies that citizens who are accorded higher powers (Partnership and citizen control) during public participation have a greater influence in decisions made. The results echo Shuriye (2023) and Bridegeman (2024) findings that low levels of participation impact negatively on citizens' ability to influence decision making.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of the study showed that level of participation had a positive statistically significant relationship with decision making in devolved governments in Kenya. Based on these findings the study recommends that devolved governments should put in place mechanisms to ensure that participation changes from the lowest level (tokenism) to meaningful participation where public input informs final decision outcomes. There is also need for county and national governments to develop public engagement frameworks that allow the citizens and the government officials to design and plan participation engagements together so as to reinforce partnership as well as ownership of not only the participation process but also the decision-making outcomes. Further, the study recommends that devolved units should introduce feedback mechanisms that the public can trace how their input informed the final decisions. The study also recommends that the ministry responsible for devolution matters should develop a standard for meaningful participation and incorporate regular audits of public participation processes to ensure that counties adhere to higher standards of participation and avoid slipping back into tokenism

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