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Public Participation and Performance of Machakos County Government, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study focused on assessing the relationship between public participation and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. Specifically, the study focused on establishing the relationship between citizen engagement and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya and establishing the relationship between inclusivity and representation and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. This study was guided by Stakeholder Theory and Social Capital Theory.

Methodology: The study used a descriptive research design. The target population was employees working in Machakos county government, Kenya. The study targeted the heads of department and their assistants, County Executive (governor, deputy and MCAs) and County Public Service Board. The total target population was therefore 126 respondents. The study employed a census approach. This research used a questionnaire to collect primary data. Data from questionnaires was coded and analyzed using the latest Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software. The study used descriptive and inferential statistics for data analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, mean (measure of dispersion), standard deviation, and percentages were used. Inferential data analysis was conducted by use of Pearson correlation coefficient, and multiple regression analysis.

Findings: The study concludes that citizen engagement has a positive and significant effect on performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. Further, the study concludes that inclusivity and representation have a positive and significant effect on performance of Machakos county government, Kenya.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Based on the findings, the study recommends that county governments in Kenya should strengthen citizen engagement by providing regular and accessible platforms for citizens to participate in planning, budgeting, and monitoring county projects. This would enhance public participation, improve responsiveness to citizens' needs, and contribute to better county government performance.

Key Words: *Public Participation, Citizen Engagement, Inclusivity and Representation, County Government*

Background to the Study

The global shift toward decentralization and devolution has become a defining feature of modern governance, aimed at enhancing local autonomy, improving public service delivery, and fostering democratic engagement (Suphattanakul, 2022). Devolution refers to the statutory granting of powers from the central government to sub-national or local entities such as county, provincial, or municipal governments. According to the World Bank (2021), over 70 countries have implemented some form of devolved governance, with more than 40% of the global population now living under decentralized systems. For instance, in federal countries like Germany, India, and the United States, states and counties have constitutionally enshrined powers, while in unitary states such as Indonesia and the Philippines, legislative reforms have granted significant authority to local governments. Empirical evidence suggests that devolution, when well-executed, contributes to improved public spending efficiency and localized development outcomes (Rodden, 2019).

Across many regions, devolved governance has been associated with higher responsiveness to local needs and greater accountability. In Indonesia, following the 2001 "big bang" decentralization, sub-national governments gained control of more than 30% of total public expenditures, leading to measurable improvements in health and education indicators (Smoke, 2015). Similarly, in Uganda, where 56 district governments manage significant portions of national development plans, localized decision-making has led to improved immunization coverage and school enrolment rates (Francis & James, 2023). However, the success of devolution varies depending on institutional design, fiscal autonomy, and political will. In some Latin American countries, for example, despite formal devolution, limited fiscal transfers and weak local capacities have undermined effective governance at the sub-national level (Falleti, 2020).

Within the broader framework of devolution, public participation has emerged as a critical mechanism for ensuring that decentralized governance systems are transparent, inclusive, and accountable. Citizen involvement in planning, budgeting, and policy implementation ensures that county governments are not only closer to the people administratively but also responsive to their actual needs. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) reports that sub-national governments that actively involve citizens in governance processes achieve up to 25% higher satisfaction rates in service delivery compared to those that do not. For example, Brazil's participatory budgeting processes in devolved city councils have resulted in more equitable public spending and improved trust in local institutions (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2023). The study aims to assess the relationship between public participation and performance of Machakos County government, Kenya.

Machakos County has demonstrated commendable progress in budget transparency and fiscal management. Its transparency score in the County Budget Transparency Survey (CBTS) rose

sharply—from just 33 out of 100 in 2021 to 47 in 2022, and reached 74 out of 100 in 2023—making it one of the most improved counties in openness and public disclosure (Gabow & Nyandoro, 2021). This improvement reflects Machakos publishing all 11 critical budget documents, including the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP), Annual Development Plan, Programme-Based Budget, and quarterly implementation reports. The county's enhanced transparency supports stronger accountability and better-informed citizen oversight (Opiyo, 2023).

In terms of budget execution and development outcomes, however, Machakos continues to underperform. According to the Controller of Budget's 2023/24 report, only about 3.5% of the county's annual budget was spent on development activities during the first quarter—one of the lowest rates nationally (Nyagah & Njoka, 2024). While budget absorption improved from 41% in FY 2021/22 to 49% in FY 2022/23, this remains below the desired threshold for achieving infrastructure, health, and water service targets. High recurrent expenditure—over 60% allocated to salaries and operations—further constrains development programming and limits impact at the grassroots level (Kariuki, Ombaka & Kiumbe, 2023).

On fiscal sustainability and revenue mobilization, Machakos has also faced challenges. While own-source revenue rose by 28%—from KSh 1.1 billion in FY 2021/22 to KSh 1.4 billion in FY 2022/23—and overall revenue grew 11.9% to nearly KSh 12 billion, these gains have been insufficient to offset budgetary shortfalls (Abdullahi & Allan, 2022). Notably, the county's revenue collection has declined over time—from KSh 1.557 billion in FY 2018/19 to KSh 1.118 billion in FY 2021/22—raising concerns about inefficiencies, weak enforcement, and declining external funding streams. These trends continue to affect the county's ability to meet its budget targets (Gabow & Nyandoro, 2021).

Despite these financial constraints, Machakos ranks relatively high on development indicators and human development metrics. The county contributes approximately USD 3.46 billion to the national economy, making it the sixth-largest county by GDP contribution, with a per capita GDP of about USD 2,347 (Opiyo, 2023). Its Human Development Index (HDI) score of 0.633 places it among medium human development counties, ahead of many peers. Investments in infrastructure under past administrations—such as over 200 km of new tarmac and 8,000 km of graded roads, plus 500 solar-powered boreholes and 240 dams—demonstrate Machakos' potential for transformative service delivery despite funding gaps. These achievements show the county's ability to grow with improved governance and resource management (Nyagah & Njoka, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

County governments in Kenya play a crucial role in advancing development, improving service delivery, and promoting inclusive governance at the grassroots level. Established under the 2010 Constitution, the 47 county governments are responsible for functions such as health care,

agriculture, early childhood education, water services, and local infrastructure (Gabow & Nyandoro, 2021). Their localized approach helps address community-specific needs more effectively than centralized administration. According to the Commission on Revenue Allocation (CRA), counties collectively receive over KSh 385 billion annually through equitable share and conditional grants, which they use to implement development projects and deliver essential services (Opiyo, 2023). For instance, counties manage over 80% of Kenya's health facilities, contributing to improved access to maternal and primary healthcare. Furthermore, county governments facilitate public participation and accountability by involving citizens in decision-making, which has led to more responsive and transparent governance. This decentralization has been key in reducing regional disparities and empowering communities to drive their own development agendas (Nyagah & Njoka, 2024).

According to the Office of the Auditor-General's 2022 report, several counties—including Machakos—were flagged for mismanagement of funds and uncompleted projects despite full payment. Additionally, a 2023 Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) report indicated that only about 52% of citizens felt satisfied with basic health and water services offered by their counties, pointing to major inefficiencies and infrastructure gaps (Abdullahi & Allan, 2022). The Controller of Budget's 2023 report showed that by the third quarter of the financial year, counties had absorbed only 62% of their development budgets, falling short of execution targets. This underperformance affects the delivery of key infrastructure, education, and health projects. In Machakos County, failure to meet annual targets has been linked to poor coordination between the executive and county assembly, as well as delays in national transfers. These challenges undermine the overall impact of devolution and slow down progress in improving citizens' quality of life at the grassroots level (Kariuki, Ombaka & Kiumbe, 2023).

Public participation in Machakos County shows a positive but complex relationship with government performance. Transparency has significantly improved, with the county publishing all 11 key budget documents and increasing its budget transparency score from 33 out of 100 in 2021 to 74 out of 100 in 2023. This improvement reflects a stronger commitment to openness and accountability (Abdullahi & Allan, 2022). However, studies assessing development projects like road construction in the county have shown that while stakeholder involvement explained 58.6% of the variance in project performance, the relationship was not statistically significant, suggesting that participation alone may not directly guarantee better outcomes. Other studies have identified stakeholder engagement as a supporting factor in project success, but less influential than budget and technical capacity (Gabow & Nyandoro, 2021). Various studies have been conducted in different parts of the word on public participation and county performance. For instance, Nyagah and Njoka (2024) in Kenya examined public participation and public finance management performance in Embu County Government. In Kenya, Kariuki, Ombaka and Kiumbe (2023) assessed public participation and performance of chattered public

universities and Abdullahi and Allan (2022) researched on public participation in monitoring and evaluation and successful implementation of county government funded projects in Wajir County. However, none of these studies focused on citizen engagement and inclusivity and representation on performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. To fill the highlighted gaps, the current sought to establish the relationship between public participation (citizen engagement and inclusivity and representation) and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya.

Objective of the Study

General Objective

The general objective of this study is to assess the relationship between public participation and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya

Specific Objectives

i. To establish the relationship between citizen engagement and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya.
ii. To establish the relationship between inclusivity and representation and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, introduced by Edward Freeman in the 1980s, posits that organizations—including public institutions—have responsibilities to all stakeholders, not just shareholders or internal actors (Mbithi & Wasike, 2020). In the public sector, stakeholders include citizens, civil society organizations, elected leaders, donors, and marginalized groups, all of whom have a legitimate interest in how resources are allocated and decisions are made. This theory argues that recognizing and addressing the needs and concerns of these diverse stakeholders leads to more ethical, sustainable, and effective governance outcomes. Inclusivity and representation become central in understanding how performance can be improved through broad-based engagement (Putra, Anita & Helmy, 2023).

Applied to Machakos County Government, Stakeholder Theory emphasizes that government performance is enhanced when diverse voices are included in planning, budgeting, and policy formulation processes (Attahiru, 2022). If county leaders actively consult and collaborate with different groups—such as youth, women, people with disabilities, and local community organizations—they are better able to design and implement services that meet actual public needs. This inclusivity builds trust, strengthens accountability, and improves legitimacy, all of which contribute to more responsive and effective service delivery. By treating citizens as partners rather than passive recipients, the county can foster shared ownership of development

initiatives and thus achieve better performance outcomes (Gatimu & Minja, 2024). The theory was used to establish the relationship between citizen engagement and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory, developed by theorists like Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam, and James Coleman (1974), refers to the networks, relationships, norms, and trust that exist among individuals and groups within a society, which facilitate cooperation and collective action (Chulwoo, 2021). the theory asserts that social cohesion and trust among citizens and between citizens and institutions contribute significantly to the effectiveness of governance. In this framework, strong social capital leads to improved communication, higher levels of civic engagement, and increased public oversight, all of which help enhance the performance of public institutions (Waka, Onyancha & Okendo, 2024).

In the case of Machakos County Government, Social Capital Theory explains how inclusive and participatory governance fosters stronger community ties and trust in public institutions (Mudachi, 2023). When citizens see their concerns reflected in county policies and when they are actively engaged in decision-making and monitoring of service delivery, they are more likely to cooperate with the county government. This collective involvement results in increased transparency, reduced conflict, better resource utilization, and ultimately better governance outcomes. In short, building social capital through inclusive representation and citizen participation can significantly enhance the performance of county governments in Kenya (Wafula, Mamuli & Wafula, 2024). The theory was used to establish the relationship between inclusivity and representation and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a diagram showing the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. In this study, the independent variables include; citizen engagement and inclusivity and representation while the dependent variable is performance of Machakos county government, Kenya

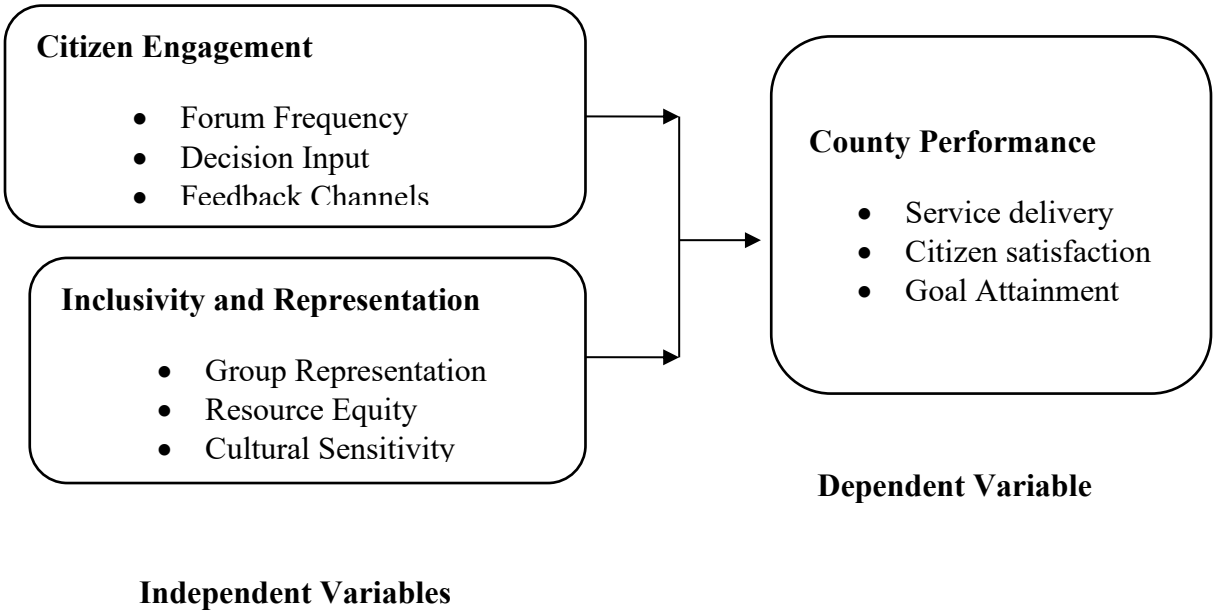


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Citizen Engagement

Citizen engagement refers to the active participation of individuals and communities in governance processes, particularly in decision-making, policy development, and service delivery (Chulwoo, 2021). It goes beyond voting and includes activities such as attending public forums, giving feedback on government projects, and collaborating with public institutions to address local issues. Effective citizen engagement fosters a sense of ownership, improves the relevance of public policies, and strengthens democratic accountability. In devolved units like Machakos County, citizen engagement ensures that local development reflects the real needs and priorities of the people, leading to more effective and efficient performance by the county government (Waka, Onyancha & Okendo, 2024).

Forum frequency, decision input, and feedback channels are essential dimensions of citizen engagement, which directly influence the effectiveness and responsiveness of county governments like that of Machakos (Mudachi, 2023). Forum frequency refers to how often structured public meetings—such as town halls, barazas, or stakeholder consultations—are held to engage citizens in governance processes. Regular forums create consistent opportunities for interaction between government officials and the public, allowing for ongoing dialogue, monitoring of progress, and input on development priorities. In counties where such forums are infrequent or irregular, citizens may feel disconnected from governance, leading to reduced participation and diminished trust in leadership. Frequent forums, on the other hand, promote

transparency, increase civic awareness, and foster stronger relationships between citizens and county officials (Wafula, Mamuli & Wafula, 2024).

Decision input involves the extent to which citizen opinions, needs, and preferences are actively considered in government decision-making processes (Madubwe, 2022). It reflects not just participation, but influence—whether the feedback shared by citizens actually shapes policies, budgets, and development plans (Chulwoo, 2021). Feedback channels refer to the mechanisms through which citizens can express concerns, give suggestions, or report issues related to service delivery and governance (Waka, Onyancha & Okendo, 2024). These may include digital platforms, suggestion boxes, hotlines, ward administrators, or community liaison officers. Effective feedback channels are accessible, responsive, and user-friendly, enabling citizens to voice their experiences and hold the government accountable (Mudachi, 2023).

Inclusivity and Representation

Inclusivity and representation refer to the equitable involvement of all societal groups—regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, ability, or socio-economic status—in governance processes and public decision-making (Jerab, 2025). Inclusivity ensures that historically marginalized or underrepresented populations have equal opportunities to contribute to and benefit from government policies and services. Representation, on the other hand, involves having diverse voices and identities reflected in leadership and institutional structures, such as county assemblies, executive appointments, and public committees.

Group representation, resource equity, and cultural sensitivity are foundational elements of inclusive governance, particularly in a diverse society like Kenya's and within counties such as Machakos (Nyakoi, 2020). Group representation refers to the fair and proportional inclusion of different social groups—such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and marginalized communities—in decision-making bodies and governance structures. When these groups are represented in county assemblies, executive appointments, public committees, and planning forums, it ensures that a wider range of perspectives and needs are considered (Muthoni, 2020).

Resource equity focuses on the fair distribution of county resources across different regions, population groups, and socio-economic classes (Ndunge & Deya, 2022). It ensures that no group or area is systematically disadvantaged in terms of access to services, infrastructure, and development opportunities (Jerab, 2025). Cultural sensitivity entails the recognition, respect, and integration of diverse cultural values, beliefs, and practices into governance and service delivery (Ifeyinwa, 2025). It requires that county programs, communication strategies, and development plans reflect and honor local traditions, languages, and ways of life.

Empirical Reviews

Citizen Engagement and Organization Performance

Chulwoo (2021) conducted a study on the factors influencing public citizen engagement and its impact on organizational performance in Korea. The study also examined the mediating role of citizen engagement between the three contextual variables and organizational performance. The results indicate that participative leadership support and supportiveness of organizational context predict citizen engagement. The conclusions on the relationship between the antecedent variables and citizen engagement are similar to the findings of earlier studies

Waka, Onyancha and Okendo (2024) conducted a study on the effect of relationship between citizen engagement and organization performance at Tanzania Plantation Company in Moshi, Tanzania. A correlational design was used in this study employed quantitative methods for data collection and data was collected through self-administered questionnaires. The study revealed that the engagement factors such as career growth, rewards, and recognition have an impact on organization performance. Likewise, the study concluded that there is a good relationship between citizen engagement and organizational performance

Mudachi (2023) conducted a study on the effect of citizen engagement practices and organization performance of African economic research consortium in Kenya. Target population comprised of 455 employees who work at African Economic Research Consortium. A sample size of 138 was selected using stratified random sample. Self-administered questionnaires delivered over email were used to gather data. The findings revealed a strong and positive correlation between organizational culture and performance. Additional findings demonstrate a positive and significant relationship between career development and firm performance. Additionally, there is a positive and significant relationship between communication and organizational performance. This study concludes that to improve organizational performance, organizational culture must support and be in accordance with the planned strategy and performance of employees' daily activities

Wafula, Mamuli and Wafula (2024) conducted a study on the influence of citizen engagement on organizational performance: a case study of the county government of Kakamega, Kenya. This study examines the influence of citizen engagement on organizational performance in the County Government of Kakamega, Kenya. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, targeting a population of 2,913 employees. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between citizen engagement and organizational performance. The study concluded that employees reported relatively high levels of engagement, and engagement was found to be a significant predictor of performance, even after controlling for demographic factors.

Madubwe (2022) conducted a study on the influence of citizen participation on the performance of county governments: a case of Makueni County in Kenya. The sample size for the study was 530 respondents. This comprised of Makueni County Ministries, The Public service board,

constituencies, Sub-county wards. For the 10 County Ministries, 10 respondents were sampled from each ministry. The study finds that Human Development Index factors; health, income and education where ill health, poverty and lack of education respectively are a hindrance and therefore demotivating factors in determining the level of participation in governance by members of the county. The study further concludes that individual related factors such as ignorance, lack of individual interest and initiative, lack of time, communication barriers and lack of confidence on the county leadership hinder their participation in governance

Inclusivity and Representation and Organization Performance

Jerab (2025) conducted a study on the effect of diversity and inclusion in leadership positions in Turkey. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights. The findings from this research indicate that organizations with diverse and inclusive leadership teams outperform their peers in various metrics, including financial performance, innovation, and employee satisfaction. In conclusion, promoting diversity and inclusion in leadership positions is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic advantage

Ifeyinwa (2025) conducted a study on the effect of diversity and inclusion initiatives and organizational performance of public universities in rivers state in Nigeria. Data was collected through structured questionnaires, and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was employed to analyze the relationship among the variables. The findings indicated a significant positive relationship between diversity and inclusion initiatives dimensions and organizational performance. The study concludes that diversity and inclusion initiatives relate with organizational performance of public universities in Rivers State.

Nyakoi (2020) conducted a study on the effect of workforce diversity management and employee performance in regulatory institutions: a case of pharmacy and poisons board, Kenya. The study targeted a population of 200 employees working at PPB. The study conducted a simple random sampling to select the respondents who participated in the study i.e. a sample size of 134 employees. The study findings and results also indicated that the Pharmacy and Poisons Board do practice fairness in treating its employees without considering of their backgrounds. The study concluded that ethnic, gender and education level significantly affect the employee performance in regulatory institutions

Muthoni (2020) conducted a study on the effect of workforce diversity management and employee performance in national biosafety authority, Kenya. The target population was 38 employees of National Biosafety Authority who included the senior management, middle management, and general staff. Since the population was small, a census study was adopted whereby the entire population was considered for the study. The study found out that workforce diversity management such as education background, gender diversity, marital status and age diversity affect employee performance. The study concludes that education background, gender

diversity, marital status and age diversity are critical workforce diversity management that determines employee performance in an organization.

Ndunge and Deya (2022) conducted a study on the influence of diversity management strategies on performance of national security institutions in Kenya. The target population was the 710 senior and middle managers targeted from the national security institutions in Kenya. The study found that target recruitment, career-focused leadership, inclusion training and diversity needs assessment are great contributors to the performance of national security institutions. The study concludes that target recruitment indicators have a great contribution to the performance of national security institutions in Kenya

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a descriptive research design. The descriptive research design is a type of research study design that is used to collect information on the current status of a person or on object (Mugenda, 2019). Information is collected without altering anything in the in the area of study; also known as observational studies. It can be either qualitative or quantitative in nature. This design was preferable for this study because it enabled the researcher to undertake a breadth of observations on phenomenon under study.

Target Population

The target population was employees working in the Machakos County government, Kenya. The study targeted the heads of department and their assistants, the County Executive (governor, deputy, and County Executive Committees, Members of County Assembly (MCAs), and the County Public Service Board. The total target population was therefore 126 respondents

Table 1: Target Population

Category	Target Population
Heads of department and their Assistants	22
County Executive	25
Members of the County Assembly (MCAs)	23
County Public Service Board	56
Total	**126**

Sample Size and Sample Technique

The study employed a census approach to collect data from the all the 126 respondents. In a census survey, data are collected for all units in the population, if the population is small, a census may be preferable. This is because to produce estimates with small sampling error it may be necessary to sample a large fraction of the population. In such cases, for minimal additional cost, data can be available for the entire population instead of just a portion of it (Statistics Canada, 2019). The approach involved gathering information from every member of the target population. A sampling frame includes every member of the study population from which a sample is to be taken (Cooper & Schindler, 2019). This method is appropriate because it reduces on biases in research since all the respondents were given an equal chance to participate in the study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2018).

In addition to the census approach, the study applied stratified sampling to ensure that all key categories of respondents are adequately represented. The target population was divided into strata consisting of Heads of Departments and their Assistants, the County Executive, Members of County Assembly (MCAs), and members of the County Public Service Board. Stratified sampling ensured that each group is proportionately represented in the study.

Additionally, purposive sampling was used when selecting respondents for interviews. This technique allows the researcher to intentionally select individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience regarding the study variables. The method is appropriate because the selected respondents are directly involved in county governance and decision-making processes and therefore can provide detailed and reliable information relevant to the study.

Data Collection Instruments

This research used multiple data collection instruments including questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis in order to enhance triangulation and improve the reliability of the findings. According to Patton *et al. (*2019), a questionnaire is appropriate in gathering data and measuring it against a particular point of view. It provides a standardized tool for data collection. Structured questions were used to collect primary data from the field. Questionnaires were preferred because they are effective data collection instruments that allow respondents to give much of their opinions pertaining to the research problem (Dempsey, 2019). According to Kothari (2018), the information obtained from questionnaires is free from bias and researchers' influence, and thus, accurate and valid data were gathered. The preference for the questionnaire is based on the premise that it gives respondents freedom to express their views or opinions more objectively.

In addition to questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected respondents such as Heads of Departments, Members of County Assembly (MCAs), members of the County Executive, and members of the County Public Service Board. Interviews enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth information and clarification on issues related to the study

variables. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility while ensuring that the key research questions are addressed.

The study also made use of document analysis, including county government reports, policy documents, strategic plans, and official records. Document analysis provided secondary data that helped validate and complement the information obtained from questionnaires and interviews. The use of multiple data sources enhanced the credibility of the study through methodological triangulation.

Pilot Test

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2019), a pilot test is a small-scale preliminary study conducted to evaluate feasibility, duration, cost, adverse events, and improve upon the study design prior to performance of a full-scale research project. The study carried out a pilot study to pretest and validate the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha methodology, which measures internal consistency, was used. The main aim of the pilot test is testing how reliable the data collection tool is. The study used a total of 13 individuals in the pilot test which represent 10% of target population. The pilot sample was not included in the final study.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data from questionnaires was coded and analyzed using the latest Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software. The study used descriptive and inferential statistics for data analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, mean (measure of dispersion), standard deviation, and percentages were used. Descriptive statistics therefore enables researchers to present the data in a more meaningful way, which allows simpler and easier interpretation (Singpurwalla, 2019). Inferential data analysis was conducted by use of Pearson correlation coefficient, and multiple regression analysis. Inferential statistic is used to make judgments about the probability that an observation is dependable or one that happened by chance in the study.

The relationship between the study variables was tested using multivariate regression models.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$$

Whereby;

Y = performance of Machakos county government, Kenya

β_0 = Constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2,$ = Coefficients of determination

X_1 = Citizen Engagement

X_2 = Inclusivity and representation

ε = Error term

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Response Rate

The sample size of the study was 126 respondents. Out of 126 respondents, 13 respondents were selected for the pilot test. The remaining 113 respondents were administered with questionnaires during the main data collection exercise and 95 were completely filled and returned. The drop-off and pick-up-later method yielded the high response rate of 84.1%. According to Babbie (2019), a response rate of 75 per cent is adequate for analysis as well as making conclusions and inferences about a population. This implies that the response rate of 84.1% was adequate for analysis, drawing conclusions and reporting.

Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Citizen Engagement and County Performance

The first specific objective of the study was to establish the relationship between citizen engagement and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to citizen engagement and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 2.

From the results, the respondents agreed that public participation forums in their area are held regularly by the county government (M=3.845, SD= 0.783). In addition, the respondents agreed that they are usually aware of when and where citizen engagement forums are taking place (M=3.823, SD= 0.874). Further, the respondents agreed that they have been given the opportunity to contribute ideas or opinions during public decision-making (M=3.808, SD=0.776).

From the results, the respondents agreed that the county government considers citizens' views when making key development decisions (M=3.798, SD= 0.792). In addition, the respondents agreed that there are clear and accessible channels through which they can give feedback to the county (M=3.783, SD= 0.586). Further, the respondents agreed that Machakos County Government responds effectively to feedback or concerns raised by residents (M=3.776, SD=0.862).

Table 2: Citizen Engagement and County Performance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Public participation forums in my area are held regularly by the county government.	3.845	0.783
I am usually aware of when and where citizen engagement forums are taking place.	3.823	0.874
I have been given the opportunity to contribute ideas or opinions during public decision-making.	3.808	0.776
The county government considers citizens' views when making key development decisions.	3.798	0.792
There are clear and accessible channels through which I can give feedback to the county.	3.783	0.586
Machakos County Government responds effectively to feedback or concerns raised by residents.	3.776	0.862
Aggregate	**3.806**	**0.779**

Inclusivity and Representation and County Performance

The second specific objective of the study was to establish the relationship between inclusivity and representation and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to inclusivity and representation and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 3.

From the results, the respondents agreed that marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities are well represented in county forums and decision-making processes (M=3.836, SD= 0.779). In addition, the respondents agreed that County leadership ensures equal participation of all community groups in public engagements (M=3.826, SD= 0.637). Further, the respondents agreed that public resources are distributed fairly across different wards and interest groups in Machakos County (M=3.799, SD=0.866).

From the results, the respondents agreed that development projects in their area reflect an equitable consideration of diverse community needs (M=3.784, SD= 0.587). In addition, the respondents agreed that the county respects and incorporates local cultures and traditions in its service delivery and governance (M=3.764, SD= 0.773). Further, the respondents agreed that County programs and communications are sensitive to language and cultural differences among residents (M=3.755, SD=0.665).

Table 3: Inclusivity and Representation and County Performance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities are well represented in county forums and decision-making processes.	3.836	0.779
County leadership ensures equal participation of all community groups in public engagements.	3.826	0.637
Public resources are distributed fairly across different wards and interest groups in Machakos County.	3.799	0.866
Development projects in my area reflect an equitable consideration of diverse community needs.	3.784	0.587
The county respects and incorporates local cultures and traditions in its service delivery and governance.	3.764	0.773
County programs and communications are sensitive to language and cultural differences among residents.	3.755	0.665
Aggregate	**3.794**	**0.719**

County Performance

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. The results were as presented in Table 4.

From the results, the respondents agreed that the county government delivers essential services (e.g., health, roads, water) efficiently and reliably (M=3.746, SD= 0.724). In addition, the respondents agreed that they are satisfied with the quality of services provided by the Machakos County Government (M=3.723, SD= 0.833). Further, the respondents agreed that County projects and programs are completed within the planned time and budge (M=3.698, SD=0.512).

From the results, the respondents agreed that the county government meets its annual development goals and objectives consistently (M=3.682, SD= 0.632). In addition, the respondents agreed that the services provided by the county have improved their quality of life in the past three years (M=3.665, SD= 0.735). Further, the respondents agreed that the county regularly evaluates its performance and communicates results to the public (M=3.632, SD=0.755).

Table 4: County Performance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The county government delivers essential services (e.g., health, roads, water) efficiently and reliably.	3.746	0.724
I am satisfied with the quality of services provided by the Machakos County Government.	3.723	0.833
County projects and programs are completed within the planned time and budget.	3.698	0.512
The county government meets its annual development goals and objectives consistently.	3.682	0.632
The services provided by the county have improved my quality of life in the past three years.	3.665	0.735
The county regularly evaluates its performance and communicates results to the public.	3.632	0.755
Aggregate	**3.691**	**0.699**

Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics in the current study focused on correlation and regression analysis. Correlation analysis was used to determine the strength of the relationship while regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between dependent variable (performance of Machakos county government, Kenya) and independent variables (citizen engagement and inclusivity and representation).

Correlation Analysis

The present study used Pearson correlation analysis to determine the strength of association between independent variables (citizen engagement and inclusivity and representation) and the dependent variable (performance of Machakos county government, Kenya) dependent variable. Pearson correlation coefficient range between zero and one, where by the strength of association increase with increase in the value of the correlation coefficients.

Table 5: Correlation Coefficients

		County Performance	Citizen Engagement	Inclusivity and Representation
County Performance	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	95		
Citizen Engagement	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003		
	N	95		
	Pearson Correlation	.836**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	95	95	
Inclusivity and Representation	Pearson Correlation	.823**	.314	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.022	
	N	95	95	95
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.023	.067
	N	95	95	95

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

From the results, there was a very strong relationship between citizen engagement and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya (r = 0.836, p value =0.000). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings conform to the findings of Chulwoo (2021) that there is a very strong relationship between citizen engagement and county performance.

Further, the results revealed that there is a very strong relationship between inclusivity and representation and performance of Machakos county government, Kenya (r = 0.823, p value =0.001). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.001 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings are in line with the findings of Jerab (2025) that there is a very strong relationship between inclusivity and representation and county performance

Regression Analysis

Multivariate regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between independent variables (citizen engagement and inclusivity and representation) and the dependent variable (performance of Machakos county government, Kenya).

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.798	.637	.636	.10129

a. Predictors: (Constant), citizen engagement and inclusivity and representation

The model summary was used to explain the variation in the dependent variable that could be explained by the independent variables. The r-squared for the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable was 0.637. This implied that 63.7% of the variation in the dependent variable (performance of Machakos county government, Kenya) could be explained by independent variables (citizen engagement and inclusivity and representation).

Table 7: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	88.017	2	44.009	80.603	.000[b]
	Residual	50.264	92	.546		
	Total	138.281	94			

a. Dependent Variable: performance of Machakos county government, Kenya

b. Predictors: (Constant), citizen engagement and inclusivity and representation

The ANOVA was used to determine whether the model was a good fit for the data. F calculated was 80.603 while the F critical was 3.095. The p value was 0.000. Since the F-calculated was greater than the F-critical and the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05, the model was considered as a good fit for the data. Therefore, the model can be used to predict the influence of citizen engagement and inclusivity and representation on performance of Machakos county government, Kenya.

Table 8: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	**(Constant)**	0.248	0.065		3.815	0.000
	citizen engagement	0.348	0.091	0.349	3.824	0.000
	inclusivity and representation	0.335	0.088	0.334	3.807	0.001

a Dependent Variable: performance of Machakos county government, Kenya

The regression model was as follows:

$$\mathbf{Y = 0.248 + 0.348X_1 + 0.335X_2 + \varepsilon}$$

According to the results, citizen engagement has significant effect on performance of Machakos county government, Kenya, β1=0.348, p value= 0.000). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.000 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings conform to the findings of Chulwoo (2021) that there is a very strong relationship between citizen engagement and county performance

Furthermore, the results revealed that inclusivity and representation has significant effect on performance of Machakos county government, Kenya β1=0.335, p value= 0.001). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.001 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings are in line with the findings of Jerab (2025) that there is a very strong relationship between inclusivity and representation and county performance

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study concludes that citizen engagement has a positive and significant effect on performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. Findings revealed that forum frequency, decision input and feedback channels influence performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. Further, the study concludes that inclusivity and representation have a positive and significant effect on performance of Machakos county government, Kenya. Findings revealed that group representation, resource equity and cultural sensitivity influences performance of Machakos county government, Kenya.

Recommendations

The study recommends that county governments in Kenya should strengthen citizen engagement by providing regular and accessible platforms for citizens to participate in planning, budgeting, and monitoring county projects. This would enhance public participation, improve responsiveness to citizens' needs, and contribute to better county government performance. Further, the study recommends that county governments in Kenya should strengthen inclusivity and representation by ensuring that diverse groups, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities, are adequately represented in county planning and decision-making processes. This would promote equitable participation, improve responsiveness to diverse needs, and contribute to better county government performance.

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