

INFLUENCE OF AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION ON GOOD GOVERNANCE IN LAIKIPIA COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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Abstract: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an important factor in the development process of nations. It has created opportunities for a revival of public discourse and improved governance efficiency. Specifically, the study seeks; determine the role of ICT in influencing availability of Information. Descriptive research design was used for this study whose target population will be the employees of Laikipia County government. A sample of 170 respondents were picked from the eight department of the County government using stratified sampling method. Primary data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires. Secondary data was also used. Analysis was done using SPSS version 23. The findings indicates that ICT makes information to be easily available and accessible. It can be concluded that ICT enhances access to government services and transactions when needed. It is necessary for the staff at Laikipia County to have experience in ICT usage and adoption in service delivery in order to better good governance. The county government should come up with developmental opportunities inform of workshops to enlighten the employees on how to benefit from ICT adoption in enhancing good governance.

Keywords: Information Communication Technology, Governance, Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, unprecedented growth of new Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) such as the internet and mobile phone have blazed a phenomenal transformation of the social, economic and political lifestyles of individuals, communities and society in general (Oloo & Kamungi. 2012). ICTs include a range of media devices such as print (such as newspapers, magazines), electronic (radio, TV), telephone (fixed and mobile), fax, video, computer and the internet. Of these, the mobile phone, computer and the internet have registered an extremely rapid expansion globally compared to older ICT tools comprising of the radio, television, fixed telephone and print media. For instance, mobile and internet connectivity has reached near universal levels in both developed and developing countries, with the highest growth rates reported in Africa. Mobile telephony has by far overtaken fixed lines in many parts of the world, including Kenya, just as internet usage has surpassed the purchase of daily newspapers (World Bank, 2006; McKenzie, 2007; Oloo & Kamungi. 2012). The availability and affordability of ICT tools and systems has made ICTs become an important part of almost all aspects of human endeavors, both at the individual level and collectively as societies; and at the national and international arenas (Ahiabienu, 2013). Yonazi, Kelly, Halewood and Blackman, (2012) indicate that ICTs offer major opportunities to advance human development – from providing basic access to education or health information to making cash payments and stimulating citizen involvement in the democratic process. Additionally, according to the Association for Progressive Communications (2009) ICTs contribute to economic development and democratization, including freedom of speech, the free flow of information, promotion of human rights and poverty reduction. They also facilitate efficient administration, citizen services, transparency, accountability and formal political participation (e-governance), and also provide the means for social movements, activist groupings or minority groups to engage with these processes on a global level (Association for Progressive Communications, 2009; Odeyemi & Mosunmola, 2015).

The current trend of ICTs development referred to as “Liberation Technology” by Diamond (2010) to mean essentially the modern, interrelated forms of digital ICT - the computer, the Internet, the mobile phone, and countless innovative applications for them, including - new social media such as Facebook and Twitter (Diamond, 2010, p.70). Diamond (2010) affirms that the Internet’s decentralized nature and capacity to reach large numbers of people instantaneously, are well suited to grassroots organizing. In contrast to television and radio, the new ICTs are two-way and even multiway forms of communication. Thus, users are not just inert recipients but, journalists, commentators, videographers, entertainers, and organizers (Diamond, 2010; Odeyemi & Mosunmola, 2015). According to the World Bank (2012) states that ‘in some developing countries more people have access to a mobile phone than to a bank account, electricity, or even clean water’ (p. 3). In 2012 there were 6 billion mobile subscriptions worldwide and 77% of these are in developing nations. One of the reasons is that they are becoming increasingly affordable for the lower-income population, mainly because of competition in the private sector and pre-paid options. Mobiles have become such a desired device that they have reached planetary levels of penetration (de Salvo, 2013; World Bank, 2012). This ubiquity in low-income countries has caught the attention of the development community, which sees mobile technology as an easier way to reach remote areas and thus to overcome all sorts of problems, from poverty to inequalities. Cell phones have turned out to be so prominent as a development tool that originated new terms, such as m-health and m-environment (de Salvo, 2013; Duncombe, 2011).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Public sector opacity and corruption have been linked to a variety of negative economic, political, and social effects, including discouraging investment, hindering poverty reduction efforts, obstructing delivery of public services (especially to the poor) and undermining the legitimacy of the state (Olabe & Kahn, 2012). Studies have indicated that not only improved access to but also effective use information (through ICTs) has the potential to; increase transparency, promote accountability, promote active participation and oversight of the government both by citizens and civil society groups, and also within the government. The compounded effect of this would be improved performance and efficiency in public administration and governance (Baena & Vieyra, 2011; Campos, 2007; Olabe & Kahn, 2012). Further, good governance must include effective citizen participation in public decision-making and management, and an open and enabling environment for addressing socioeconomic problems. This requires participatory democracy, and governmental capacity to respond to the increasing demands of development. It has been shown that access to ICT is not only the best way for citizens to effectively participate in governance but also, in its own right plays an important role in promoting good governance (Coffey Int. Development, 2007; Hellstrom, 2009).

According to Ngugi (2013), Kenya was ranked 103 out of 169 countries making it the 66th most unequal country in the world. Kenya’s Inequality is rooted in its history, politics, economics and social organization and manifests itself in the lack of access to services, resources, power, voice and agency. The fact that services are not reaching those who are most in need of them due to intentional or unintentional barriers; the governance, accountability, policy or legislative issues that do not favor equal opportunities for the disadvantaged; and economic forces (Ngugi, 2013, p. 2). The Laikipia County, development integrated development plan 2013-2017 notes that public offices, learning institutions and health facilities in the county have not fully embraced ICT as an important tool in service delivery. The offices are characterized by paper files which are voluminous and space consuming. There is need for the government institutions to embrace ICT in service delivery especially at the land registry, schools, health facilities, police service and judiciary (Laikipia County, 2013). It is therefore against this backdrop that the researcher sought to study the influence of availability of information on good governance in laikipia county government.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

By providing the right information at the right time, governments can articulate policy decisions on matters of public interest. If people have access to useful information, they can make their own choices and decisions and become more proactive regarding their rights and security. Indeed, citizens become enthusiastic and more willing to participate in both government and non-governmental programmes when they have adequate and timely information, including how they can participate (Oloo & Kamungi. 2012). Public perceptions, often shaped by the media have also been found to significantly influence government policy and practice in the management or regulation of public affairs. This is the nexus between

ICTs and democratic governance reform. Public engagement with government policy and practice fosters good governance. ICTs deepen citizens' participation in the political process and help promote a government that is responsive, effective and accountable to its people (Oloo & Kamungi. 2012). Roberts (2006) argues that providing correct and timely information goes beyond participation; it explicitly recognizes the people's right to information and the power that comes with such information. Providing information is about transparency and accountability: civil society and individual citizens use information from government organs to hold the government accountable. Therefore, access to information about policy and implementation programmes promotes accountability and reform in public service delivery. It also enhances new forms of participatory democracy that may complement the representation system of government. ICTs, including mobile phones, the Internet, social media and Web 2.0 applications, have dramatically reduced the time and costs associated with gathering, distributing, managing, and accessing government information (Roberts, 2006).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive research design. For this study the target population were Laikipia County government employees who are 1704. The study used stratified random sampling technique to allow the researcher to target the most representative sample elements that are equipped with the knowledge about the intended phenomena. The data collection tool for this study was questionnaires. The researcher sought to collect data from the staff in the targeted Laikipia County government employees. The researcher further made appointments with the respective respondents in respective respondents. The questionnaires were administered by hand to the respondents; the researcher was on standby for the respondents to fill them out and provided any clarifications whenever needed. Data was analyzed to provide an overview of respondent's perceptions on the various aspects of the research objective. Before processing the responses, the completed questionnaires were checked for completeness and consistency. After editing and cleaning up the data, Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS version 23) was used for analysis.

5. FINDINGS

The study investigated the role of ICT in influencing availability of information by probing the variables under availability of information in different departments in Laikipia County government. The findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Role of ICT in information availability

Response	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Easily available and accessible	10%	6%	10%	46%	28%
Transparent and timely	4%	18%	15%	23%	39%
Easy to obtain, interpret and encourage public participation	5%	11%	4%	46%	34%
Passed in language easily understood	9%	11%	9%	46%	25%
Disseminated via accessible media	18%	10%	9%	35%	29%
Specific to citizens' information needs	14%	33%	12%	23%	18%
Enables citizens discuss governance	18%	12%	13%	36%	22%

From the Table 1, majority (74%) of the respondents indicated that the information is easily available and accessible while (62%) indicated that there was transparency and timeliness. A large percentage (80%). of respondents indicated that it was easy to obtain, interpret and encourage public participation. Majority (71%) of the respondents revealed that the information was passed in language easily understood. A large number (64%) indicated that the information is disseminated via accessible media. The information was indicated to be specific to citizens' information needs as shown by (41%) respondents. Majority (58%) indicated that ICT enables citizens discuss governance.

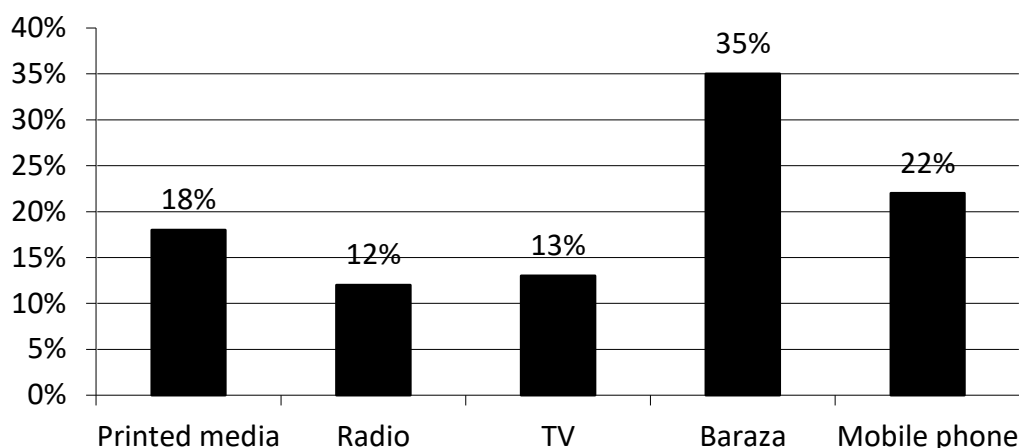


Figure 1: Effective sources of Laikipia County information

From the Figure 1, majority (35%) of the respondents indicated that the effective sources of Laikipia County information was Baraza while (22%) indicated that mobile phone. Another (18%) indicated printed media while (13%) indicated TV. A few (12%) indicated the effective source to be the radio. The respondents indicated that ICT can be integrated in the communication by introducing use of email communication and the use of social media like Facebook, Twitter and MySpace.

Table 2: Regression coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.632	0.16		3.2	0.022
Availability of information	1.271	0.541	0.52	2.286	0.01

The findings on the role of ICT in influencing availability of information showed that the information is easily available and accessible while others indicated that there was transparency and timeliness. A large percentage of respondents indicated that it was easy to obtain, interpret and encourage public participation. Majority of the respondents revealed that the information was passed in language easily understood. A large number indicated that the information is disseminated via accessible media. The information was indicated to be specific to citizens' information needs. Majority indicated that ICT enables citizens discuss governance. These findings agree with Oloo and Kamungi (2012) study which indicated that by providing the right information at the right time, governments can articulate policy decisions on matters of public interest. If people have access to useful information, they can make their own choices and decisions and become more proactive regarding their rights and security. Indeed, citizens become enthusiastic and more willing to participate in both government and non-governmental programmes when they have adequate and timely information, including how they can participate. They further indicated that public perceptions, often shaped by the media have also been found to significantly influence government policy and practice in the management or regulation of public affairs. This is the nexus between ICTs and democratic governance reform. Public engagement with government policy and practice fosters good governance. ICTs deepen citizens' participation in the political process and help promote a government that is responsive, effective and accountable to its people (Oloo & Kamungi, 2012). The findings indicates that ICT makes information to be easily available and accessible. It was also revealed that it enhance transparency and timeliness. It was easy to obtain, interpret and encourage public participation. ICT enables information to be passed in language easily understood. The information is disseminated via accessible media and specific to citizens' information needs. ICT enables citizens discuss governance.

6. CONCLUSION

From the findings, it can be concluded that ICT makes information to be easily available and accessible. It was also revealed that it enhance transparency and timeliness. It was easy to obtain, interpret and encourage public participation. ICT enables information to be passed in language easily understood. The information is disseminated via accessible media and specific to citizens' information needs. ICT enables citizens discuss governance.

7. RECOMMENDATION

It is necessary for the staff at Laikipia County to have experience in ICT usage and adoption in service delivery in order to better good governance. The county government should come up with developmental opportunities inform of workshops to enlighten the employees on how to benefit from ICT adoption in enhancing good governance.

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