ROLE OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AS A TOOL FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF KAKAMEGA COUNTY

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Abstract: **This study sets out to examine the role played by Social Accountability (SAcc) in promoting good governance in Kenya, more especially in county governments. It will examine how SAcc can be used in promoting good governance, through its focus on transparency, accountability and citizen participation. County governments are still politically young and how they manage the new system of devolved governance created under the new Kenyan constitution of 2010 will go a long way in determining the future of Kenya as a progressive state. The research was carried out at the Kakamega County head-office, and other field offices, not excluding the 12 sub-county offices. From the target population, a study sample of 246 individuals was selected using stratified random sampling method. Half of the sample comprised of county staff and the other half *wanainchi* proportionally but randomly selected from the 12 sub-counties. A study sample of Questionnaires was designed to probe the four independent variables, and analysis of data will help us establish the current lack or need for SAcc deepening. The study has shown that Kakamega County has not reached a commendable level of good governance. In order to set the County along this path, it is recommended that the county adopts and institutes social accountability mechanisms in its operations. The setting up of a liaison desk at the County Head-office, headed by an experienced SAcc champion as team leader, would be necessary since the effort needed is huge.**

Keywords: **Social Accountability and Good Governance.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study:

Social Accountability (SAcc) has become the tool of first choice for Development Economists of most third world countries (Mcgee and Gaventa, 2010). It has been in use in the developed world for over two decades, and more so in many projects and programs promoted by the World Bank since the mid- 1990s; then it was referred to as Bottom-up Accountability (Schillemans, 2008). It was mostly used and promoted by the Bretton Woods institutes to achieve higher efficiency in aid absorption, as well as to protect the vulnerable poor masses from the negative effects of Structural Adjustment programs (SAPs) of the 1980s. SAcc itself is an approach to accountability that relies on civic engagement where ordinary citizens or their organizations participate directly or indirectly in demanding accountability from service providers. Ringold (2012) defined SAcc as a set of tools that citizens could use to influence the quality of service delivery by holding providers accountable. As conceived by Technocrats at the World Bank (WB), SAcc was to have three main outputs; Good Governance, Civic Empowerment and Participation, and Development Aid Effectiveness. The later became the main focus as it presented lesser friction with governmental agencies and political regimes in the countries where the WB operated Aid programs. Demand for Good Governance and Civic Empowerment remained ignored and was only pursued by Civic Society Organizations (CSOs) and International NGOs, such as Amnesty International, Transparency International, etc.

The demand for greater democracy and good governance of the early 1990s in Kenya was rewarded by the opening up of political space to multi-party politics. These however did not solve the problem of lack of citizen participation, poor accountability structures, and access to relevant information. The adoption of the new constitution in 2010 has, to a large extent, cured these omissions. The constitution of Kenya 2010 (CK2010) and subsequent legislative frameworks legitimize certain aspects of social accountability and good governance in the devolved government processes. Public participation, the Bill of Rights, Leadership Ethics and Integrity, etc., are now firmly anchored in Law; unlike in the past, when these key tenets and many others were assumed to exist in practice yet little evidence of legal backup existed.

The CK2010 places the citizen in a sweet spot on matters of governance, especially when one reads through the Bill of Rights; and it also puts a public officer and/or service provider in an accounting position vis-à-vis the citizen. The public officer / service provider is accountable to the citizen, either directly or indirectly. This proposal aims to test whether the inherent social accountability approaches legalized in CK2010 are promoting anticipated good governance outcomes at the county level. To enable the study proposal, it was necessary to test the extent to which social accountability tools that are well recognized are used in the County. These tools include Citizen Report-cards, Community Score-Cards, Participatory Output Monitoring, Social Audits, Citizen Charter, Public Revenue Monitoring, Participatory Planning, etc. A select few of these tools were used in the study. Many studies treat SAcc as more of an approach to accountability rather than an accountability type. It is, therefore, necessary to look at the various accountability types in order to help appreciate the position of SAcc.

Statement of the Problem:

Social accountability, with its use of Vertical, Horizontal and Diagonal Accountabilities, offers the best accountability pathway compared to elections. Elections are far too expensive (Blair, 2008), and come once in a long while, and is thus not a suitable tool for ex-ante accountability. Social Accountability, on the contrary, is more issues-focused and can be refocused to projects or programs, leadership performance, and many other social challenges like crime, disease control or truancy amongst school-going youth. SAcc can be focused on each issue one at a time. Under it, various assessment and reporting tools can be used to address a particular locality and a particular concern. The leaders get instant feedback from the citizens, and corrections are made to protect citizen interests. The aim of this study is therefore sought to assess the role Social Accountability plays in promoting good governance in the counties in general, and particularly in Kakamega County.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Principal-Agent Theory:

Accountability, as stated above, requires that an account is given explaining to what extent given resources have met agreed objectives, basing the explanation on appropriate information. This account-giving can be a contract between the agent and the principal and arises from the duty of the agent and the rights of the principal (Malena and McNeil, 2010). The principal can be an active one, as is common in non-listed family owned small-businesses, or passive in the corporate world. Here, being passive does not in any way mean the principal has waived their right to receive an account or information from the agent. The duty of the agent remains that of giving an account to the principal. Gaventa and Barret (2010) have, however, argued that the agent only has the responsibility and duty to give account to principals who demand information and are willing to enforce the contract. It is this argument that has led to the abuse of principal/agent accountability relationships, some of which cases are frequently reported in the media. The provision of public goods and services can be treated as a contract between the citizen and the public servant. The public servant as agent, whether elected or appointed, is duty-bound to provide goods and services to the citizen, who is the principal and primary stakeholder; and facilitate access to appropriate information related to his service.

Malena and McNeil (2010) say that agency accountability is dynamic and more complex in large organizations than simply making agents transparent and allowing public scrutiny. They posit that agents follow the environmental cues and strategic management of the organizations they work for. Such cues come from the competing stake-holder's interests in these organizations. Most corporate organizations often choose to satisfy their primary stakeholders, customers, at the expense of secondary stakeholders, non-customers. Devoid of any other exogenous factors, this would be the best approach to apply to the public sector too, but this is not the case. The competitions for scarce resources directed at many needs means that the stakeholders in the public sector are many and require special treatment. McGee and Gaventa (2010)

have suggested that since agencies are not usually aligned with one another, they are better off prioritizing their stakeholders, and that such approach would suit the public sector. Proponents of the Principal-Agent have not come up with a plausible explanation as to why it fails in matters public service if not for the exogenous factors mentioned alluded to above.

Stakeholder Theory:

Sarah Serem, the Chairlady of SRC, once said that measuring efficiency in the public service is not easy (Daily Nation of 7th August, 2015). She further explained that Performance indices used in the private sector are ineffective in the public service due to the complex nature of government operations. In the public sector, Political and administrative accountabilities play against each in such a manner that well-planned objectives are undermined by ill-conceived counter-objectives; the latter serving purposes of a separate accountability hierarchy (Keefer and Khemani, 2011). In these circumstances, the P-A theory does not explicate fully the observed behaviour and the consequential results. The business and operational environment is too turbulent and dynamic, as the demands from various groups and varying level of stakes make it difficult to execute contracts (Robert Phillips, 2011). The Stakeholder theory explains this better than the P-A theory.

Stakeholder theory sates that an organization's success in the attainment of accountability standards is dependent upon the successful management of all the relationships that it has with its stakeholders (Freedman, 2008). Broadly put, an organization must align its policies and operations in a manner that factors in the competing interest groups in its business environment, for survival's sake.

A public office receives demands from citizens, state officers, politicians and CSOs alike. These are stakeholders in need of services, and it behooves a service provider to align both their tact and deportment to serve without prejudice. Success in service delivery is dependent on how the public office or public officer manages these stakeholders' competing interests. To solve this, Freedman (2009) proposed that stakeholders be approached from policy and planning (P&P) model, and the corporate social responsibility (CSR) model. The P&P model would be applied to non-adversarial groups, e.g., public, government, etc. The CSR model would be applied to adversarial groups, e.g., social activists, environmentalists, oversight and regulatory teams, etc. The literature on these models is extensive and needs an explicatory discussion beyond the bounds of this proposal.
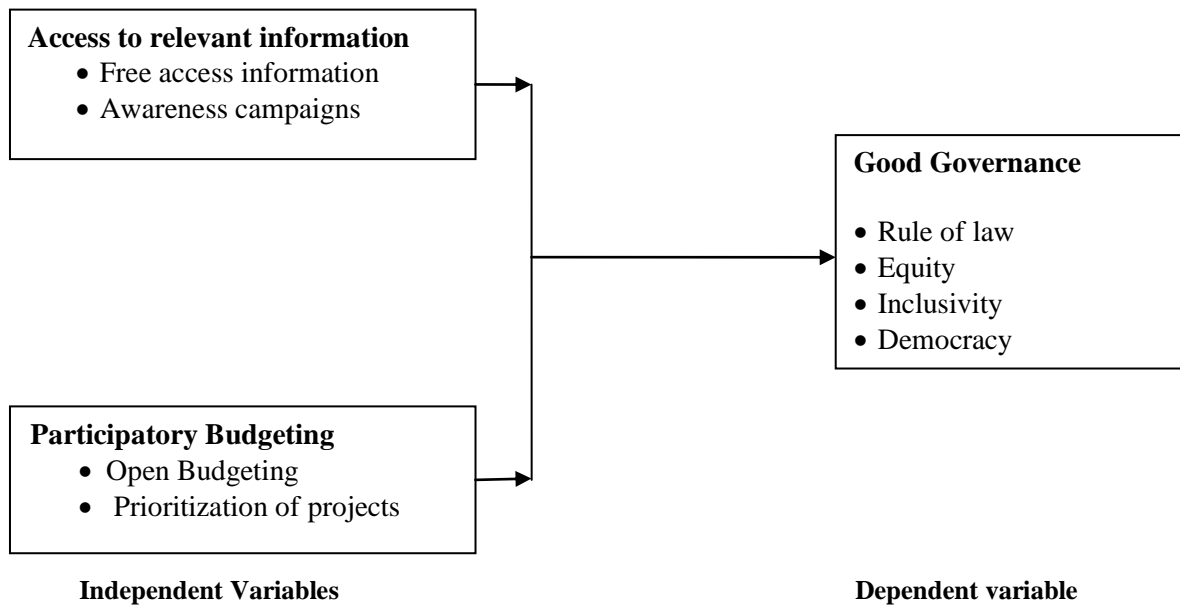
Role Theory:

A role is a set of rules or norms that function as plans or blueprints to guide behaviour within a society. Roles can be relational, as in the case of a motherly; or occupational, as in the case of doctors. The role theory places gravity on interpersonal relationships, putting greater emphasis on interpersonal expectations. This theory had several proponents, but featured most prominently in sociological discourses by George Herbert Mead and Talcott Parsons in the 1920s and 1930s. This theory filled the gap in the deficiency in existing accountability theories that left out interpersonal expectations in organizational set-ups. Thus, the proponents felt that a role systems theory perspective added value to any discourse on accountability in organizational settings.

Accountability in organizations can be viewed as involving elements of role taking and role making as these unfold in the context of a history of role episodes. Schlenker (2004) says that although accountability refers to the building of self-actions-standards perceptions, role theory also deals with such perceptions but in the form of role expectations.

Accountability, at its core, anticipates an accounting in the future by the role holder, having to report or explain actions taken in the recent past to the role sender (Keating 2009). The role theory also works on the same perspective, but the accounting cycles are shorter and the interactions between role sender and role holder are more intense and frequent (Barnett, 2007). Role theory attempts to explain the interaction between individuals in organizations by focusing on their roles. Role behaviour is influenced by role expectation for appropriate behaviour in that position (McGee, 2010). Simply, people define roles for themselves and others based on social learning or reading; people define expectations about the role they play and those that other will play; people unknowingly encourage others to act within role expectations they have for them; and people will act within the roles they adopt.

Mackey and Barney (2007) summarized role theory as a group of concepts, based on sociocultural and anthropological investigations, which pertain to the way people are influenced in their behaviors by the variety of social positions they hold and the expectations that accompany those positions.

Conceptual Framework:

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│ Access to relevant information   │
│   • Free access information       │
│   • Awareness campaigns           │
└──────────────────────────────────┘                    ┌──────────────────────────┐
                                                          │ Good Governance          │
                                                          │                          │
                                                          │   • Rule of law          │
                                                          │   • Equity               │
                                                          │   • Inclusivity          │
                                                          │   • Democracy            │
┌──────────────────────────────────┐                    └──────────────────────────┘
│ Participatory Budgeting          │
│   • Open Budgeting                │
│   • Prioritization of projects    │
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Independent Variables   **Dependent variable**

Research Gap:

A case study by Malena et al. (2004) found that participation of stakeholders in projects does not always translate into greater accountability. In this study, she identified the various modes of participation, e.g., partnership, cooptation, manipulation, etc., and found that some of these modes do not fully support accountability. This knowledge gap leaves a lacuna on how to achieve meaningful social accountability if the mode of participation used in each case may varies between projects or institutions. Literature review done by the writer found that all studies assume a monolithic approach to participation.

Over the past two decades a large body of anecdotal evidence has emerged showing the importance of Social accountability approaches in many countries that have adopted democratic system of government. This evidence suggests that these approaches have led to improved governance, reduced corruption, enhanced development, and improved service delivery, among others. Much of this evidence came from monitoring and evaluation reports of targeted social accountability approaches (Lowe, 2003; Lukwago, 2004; Smulders, 2004; Brodjonegoro, 2005; Mumvuma, 2009; Areno, 2009).

The World Bank Institute has published several reports reviewing social accountability experiences, and their results, in different regions of the world (Arroyo and Sirker, 2005; Caddy et. al., 2007; 2005; McNeil and Mumvuma. 2006; WBI, 2007). The GPSA has conducted several analyses of the impacts of applied budget work in different countries. They established that these SAcc approaches had a significant impact on governance practice (de Renzio and Krafchik, 2009).

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex University also conducted an evaluation of the impact of independent budget analysis, another social accountability approach, in six countries; which concluded that despite obstacles non-governmental public action did succeed in enhancing the accountability of decision-makers. More recently, IDS released results of a study about how citizen action has brought about change at the national level and helped to build responsive and accountable states in nine countries (Gaventa and Barret, 2012). Similarly, a recent OECD review of the experience of 25-member countries found that open and participatory policy making improved policy performance by helping government to better understand citizens' needs, address inequality, improve public services, improved cost-effectiveness and reduced delays in implementation of government-sponsored projects (OECD, 2009).

Despite all these data from the mentioned studies, there is a serious lack and need for rigorous impact assessments of social accountability, especially concerning the developmental benefits. A recent review of SAcc by the DAC group concluded that social accountability contributed to poverty reduction and sustainable development but there remains lack of evidence regarding a causal relationship between good governance and development (O'Neil et. al., 2007).

Apart from these, there is also a need to better understand the various extraneous factors that influence, as each factor impact may not be similar to another. Factors such as lack of democratic space, hostile policy and legal frameworks, weak civil society, dangers of elite capture, lack of empowerment, etc., must be treated separately in order determine how these influences the impact of social accountability on good governance. The studies conducted so far assume that the effect of these factors is the same in all cases.

3. REASEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate:

A total of 246 respondents were targeted comprising of 11 managers from the County Head-office, 15 technical institution managers and 220 instructors. From the sampled respondents, 11 Directorate managers, 11 institution managers and 201 instructors responded giving a response rate of 90.6%. There were divergent responses shows the distribution of studied by sector.

Table: Response Rate

Duty station	Personnel	Sample Size	Response rate	%
County Head-Office	Managers	11	11	4
Sub-County Office	S/C Administrators	3	2	1
	S/C Staff	54	48	22
Sub-Location Offices	Sub-chiefs	12	9	5
	Citizens	166	153	68
Total		**246**	**223**	**100**

The findings of the study were as presented in the following sub-sections:

Background Information:

This section presents general information of the respondents who participated in the research study.

a) Level of Education of Respondents:

The study sought to determine the level of education of the respondents to help in identifying citizens who would give informed opinions. The findings are shown in Figure below
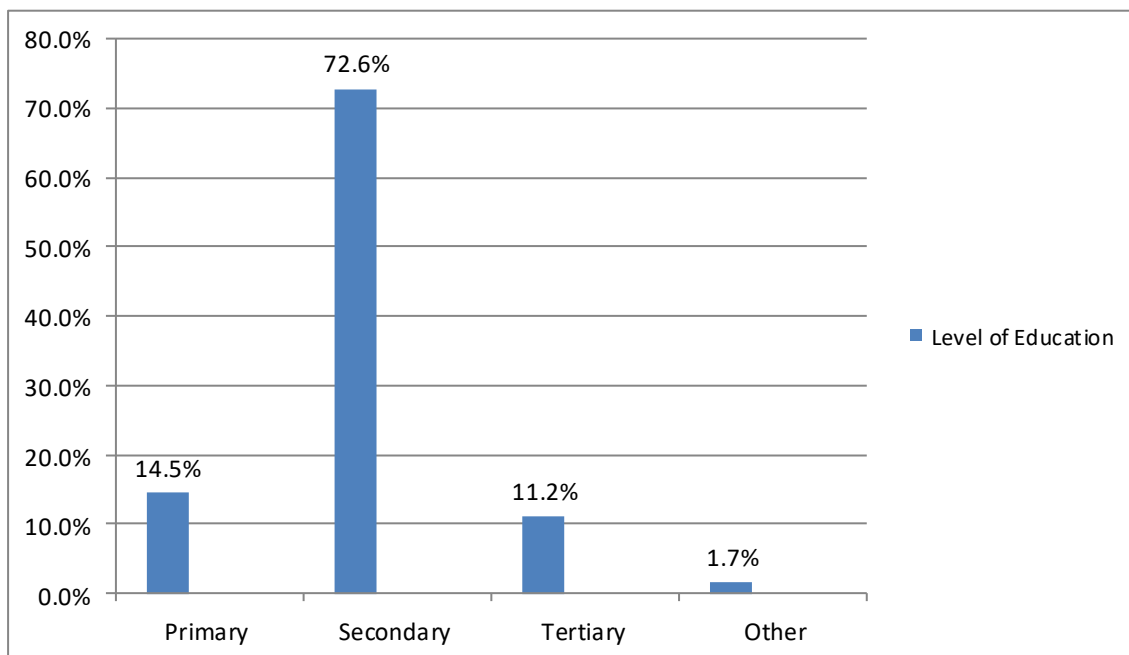

Figure above: Level of Education

The results showed that a majority of 72.6% of the respondents had attained Secondary school level of education; 14.5% of the respondents had reached Primary school level; 11.2 % had attended University, and 1.7% had indicated 'Other', meaning either that they did not feel it was necessary to state any of the above. Overall, over 84% of respondents had at least attended Secondary school. Secondary level education imparts an individual with the basic knowledge and analytical skills to comprehend contemporary issues and, where possible, play a greater role in social life (Gachukia, 2007). The majority of respondents in this study had attained secondary level education and hence their opinions can be considered worthy for the subject matter.

b) Services Usage by Respondents:

In order to gauge the interaction of the respondents with the various functions of Kakamega County, the study sought to find out which services, provided by the county, the respondents used. The results are represented here in Figure below
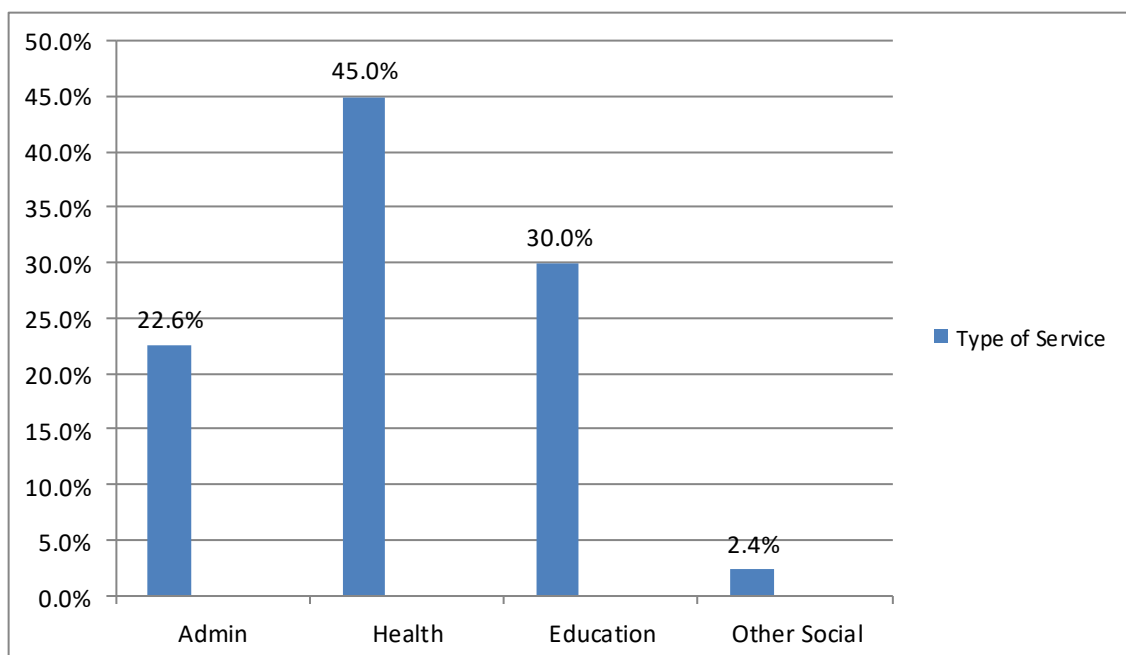
Figure below Type of Service

It can be seen that the respondents were heavy users of services provided by the Kakamega County , with Health services being the most used at 45%, followed by Educational services at 30%, Administrative Services at 22.6%, and finally Other Services at 2.4%. Sewerage, Water, and Transport services were classified as Other Services. These services are used by residents within the township areas, hence had few users. Being customers of the county government, the respondents were more likely to be well informed about the quality of services provided, and hence could understand issues related to good governance in the county.

c) Access to relevant Information:

The study sought to determine the ease with which respondents accessed relevant information from the various county institutions they interacted with. The study asked respondents to rate the frequency of civic education forums, effort expensed in acquiring information, frequency of awareness campaigns, and usage of Media to advertise. The results were as displayed here in Figures below.

i) Frequency of Civic Education Forums

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they have attended any civic education organized by the county government, and state generally how many times they have attended such forums. The results are displayed in Figure below.
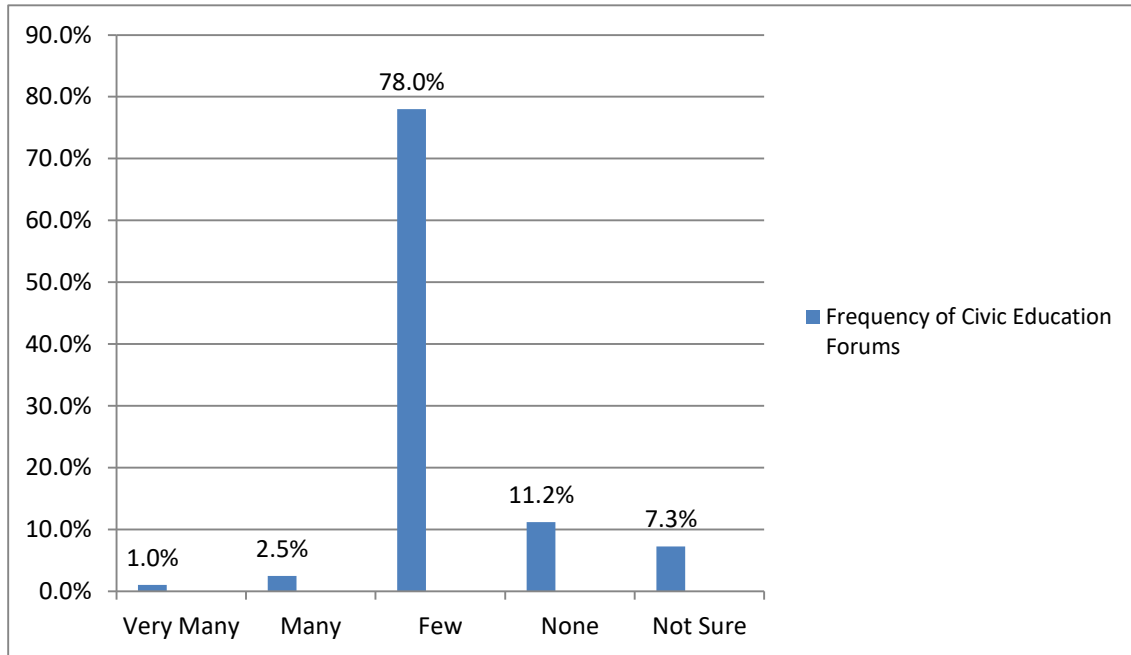
Figure below: Frequency of Civic Education Forums

The study recognized that it is during civic education forums that residents are taught about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. These Rights are enshrined and protected in the New Constitution (CK2010). The study revealed that the majority of respondents (78%) had attended few civic forums, while 11.2% had not attended any. Overall 96% had not attended a civic education forum. This means that there is insufficient Civic Education among residents of Kakamega County.

ii) Accessibility of Relevant Information

The study sought to determine the ease with which respondents had accessed any relevant information from any county office in order to ascertain whether this affected efficiency of service, thus affecting overall result of good governance. The findings are displayed below in Figure below.
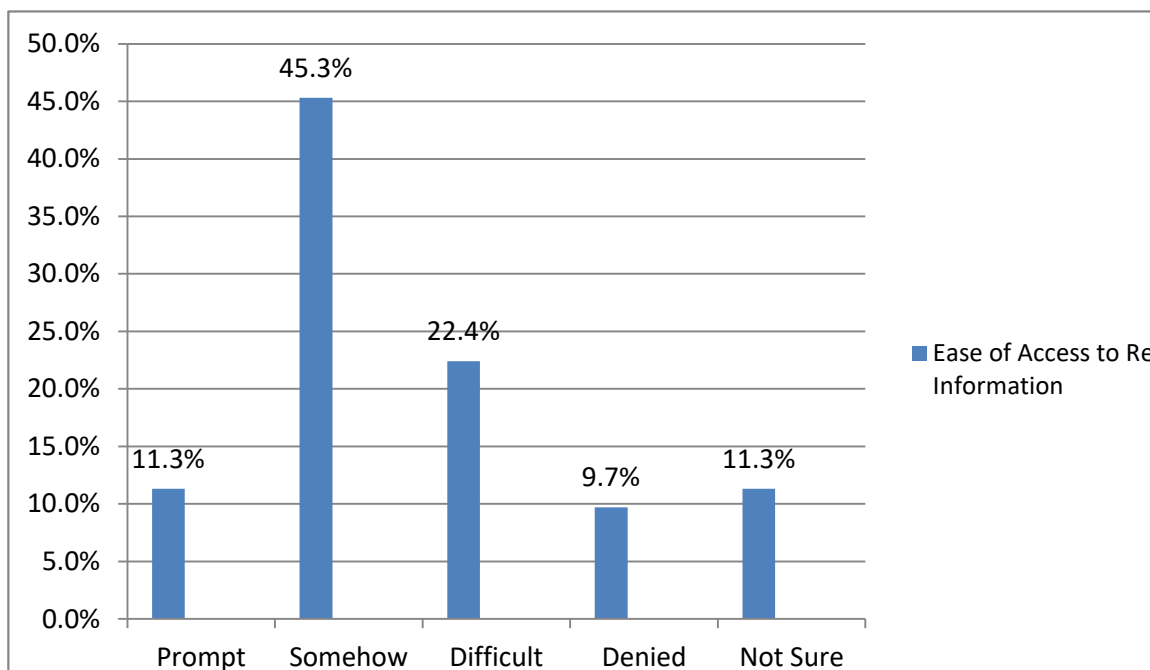

Figure above: Accessibility of Relevant Information

The results show that a majority of respondents (45.3%) felt that the access to information was somewhat prompt. Another 11.3% felt the access was prompt, 9.7% felt that access is denied, while 11.3% were not sure. Recasting the responses, it means that about 56.6% of the respondents were content with the ease with which information is accessed in Kakamega. Timely access to information was identified as a key pillar of Social accountability strategies (Adera and Waema, 2009). This was a good sign for the success of good governance in Kakamega County.

iii) Frequency of Awareness Campaigns

The study identified awareness campaigns as one another indicator for ease of access to information. Such campaigns may include information about child vaccinations, free medical services on offer, dates of public *barazas*, etc. The frequency of such campaigns was gauged by respondents as displayed in Figure below.
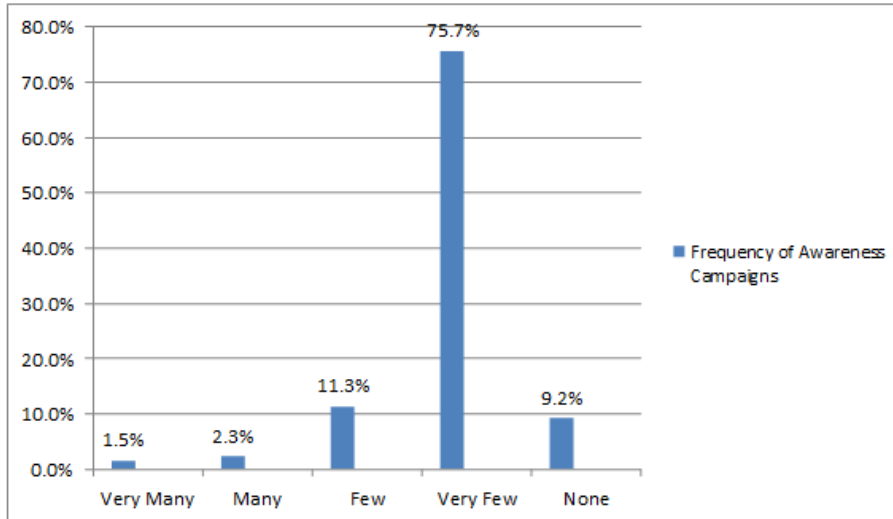

Figure above: Frequency of Awareness Campaigns

The results show that most respondents (75.7%) had witnessed very few of such awareness campaigns in Kakamega County. The few respondents who had witnessed very many awareness campaigns (1.5%) were mostly officials working for the county and residents of town centers. Overall, the majority of 84.9% had witnessed very few or no awareness campaigns at all in Kakamega County. This means that there exists a challenge to the county management as far as making public any information useful to the residents.

iv) Use of Media Channels for Advertisement

Other methods for releasing information is by use of Media, e.g., Newspapers, Radio, Television, or Internet. The study asked respondents to gauge how the County government has been using Media to disseminate information. The findings are displayed in Figure below.
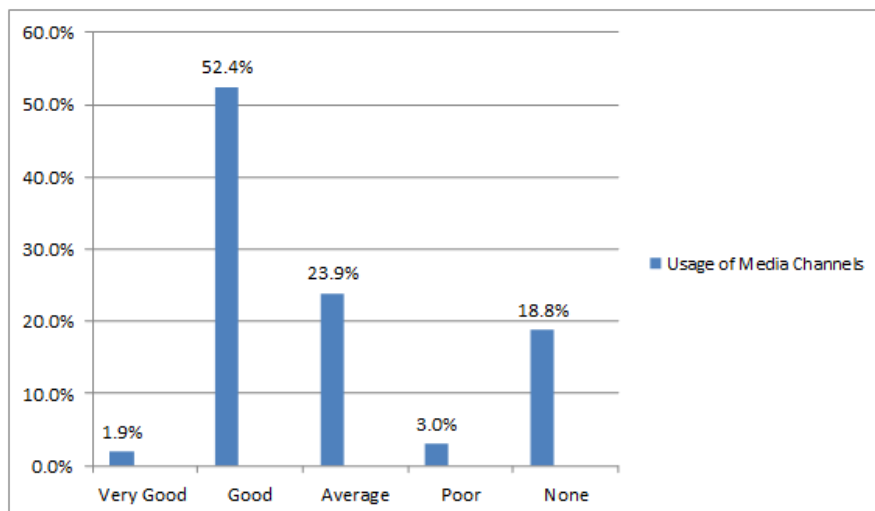

Figure above: Use of Media Channels for Advertisements

The results show that most of the respondents (52.4%) were content with how the County government has used the Media to release information. Most of these respondents said they listen to Radio a lot of the time. A small minority of them (1.9%) who were very happy with the use of Media by County government admitted that they read Newspapers, listen to radio and use the internet most of the time. Another 3% of the respondents rated the County government usage of the Media as poor, while 18.8% were not sure of their answer to the questions. Overall, the County had been rated over 54% as efficiently using the Media to disseminate information.

4. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Access to Relevant Information:

The study revealed that the majority of respondents (78%) had attended few civic forums, while 11.2% had not attended any. Overall 96% had not attended a civic education forum. This means that there is insufficient Civic Education among residents of Kakamega County. If this is the case across the county, then it may be right to say a majority of residents of Kakamega do not know their rights and obligations under the law. The study established that 56.6 % were satisfied with the accessibility of information in Kakamega County offices, and only 21% had either had difficulty obtaining information, or had been denied access. The findings also revealed that the County is not adequately using awareness campaigns, with majority respondents stating that they had seen very few awareness campaigns (75.7%). This increases to overall 97.3% who have seen few, very few or no awareness campaigns at all. The majority (52.4%) stated that the county had properly used Television, Radio or Internet to pass information, while only 21.8% were dissatisfied. Access to information is important for good governance (Goetz and Jenkins, 2014), and the county government has scored poorly on this one too.

Participatory Budgeting:

The selected indicators for participatory budgeting (PB) were frequency of PB meetings, needs identification, and accountability in funds absorption. The results of the study revealed that 86.8% of the respondents indicated that to a large extent there were few or no PB meetings held in Kakamega County. Among those who had attended PB meetings, a majority of 93.7% indicated that community needs were identified during the meetings and included on vote items. It was further established that some of the respondents (54.6%) indicated that funds allocated to community needs were mostly properly used well to cater for the needs, while 30% indicated that sometimes the funds were properly applied. A further 11.7% said the funds were mismanaged.

Conclusion:

Looking at the various indicators of good governance, this study has shown that Kakamega County has a challenge in reaching the basic requirements of this ideal, although the building blocks for social accountability already exist. Institutionalization of good governance is usually preceded by deepening of social accountability (Mohanty, 2010).

Access to relevant information held in county or sub-county offices is good. A majority indicated that access to information was free. The county effort in using media to disseminate information also got a positive response from the respondents.

However the use of awareness campaigns and civic forums to pass relevant information was wanting. In fact the use of these two mechanisms was almost non-existent.

On level of public participation, the study established that the county government sent out very few invitations to the public to attend civic forums, but the majority of attendees of such forums were happy with the feedback or outcomes from the forums. These were also supported by the few protests or public appeals that were successful, as the forums were effective in resolving disputes.

The minimum use of community scorecards, and failure to include public values in CREA meetings was a serious drawback on efforts to implement community monitoring of county operations. The results show that CREA is not successful in Kakamega County.

Finally, the study found that use of participatory budgeting is not common in the county. The frequency of PB meetings was low, perhaps due to poor efforts at inclusivity. However, the prioritization of community needs and good fund absorption in community projects was a good sign at improved governance standards, compared to the days of the County Councils.

Recommendation:

The study has shown that Kakamega County has not reached a commendable level of good governance. In order to set the County along this path, it is recommended that the county adopts and institutes social accountability mechanisms in its operations. The setting up of a liaison desk at the County Head-office, headed by an experienced SAcc champion as team leader, would be necessary since the effort needed is huge.

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