

**AN INTERPRETATION OF THE DYNAMICS OF THE PARTICIPATORY  
COMMUNICATION MODEL IN THE GOVERNANCE OF  
BUSIA COUNTY, KENYA**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

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## **DEDICATION**

To my late mother Margret Assiala who believed in meaningful education and hard work in pursuit of true happiness. To my wife Macrean Atieno who is the source of my joy in life.

## ABSTRACT

Participatory Communication Model is an essential teamwork tool for pursuit of mutual concerns through teamwork. The model was applied to explore and determine the underlying factors germane to the performance of Public Participation in the governance of Busia County. Participatory Communication Model is a Public Relations strategy that fosters collaboration through informed knowledge. Public Participation in Article 10 of the Kenya Constitution (2010) echoed in Chapter 11 under devolution was designed to integrate collaborative governance. The study questions the effectiveness of Public Participation in addressing stakeholders' inclusivity in governance of Busia County. The County has faced challenges of implementing participatory governance for the last 12 years. The study had four objectives: To determine the stakeholders' understanding of their rights in government policy formulation and development agenda in Busia County; To ascertain the development attributable to stakeholders' preferences through Public Participation in Busia County since 2013. To identify the potential factors that impedes the efficacy of Participatory Communication Model in Governance in Busia County. To develop Public Relations measures that enhances the performance of Public Participation in Governance to bolster service delivery to stakeholders in Busia County. The research questions were: To what extent do the stakeholders of Busia County practice effective Public Participation in their programs? How are the socioeconomic activities designed for effective Public Participation? Does the management of Busia County practice Participatory Communication Model for effective Public Participation in their programs? What are the challenges faced by both the County Management and the stakeholders in conceptualizing the dynamics and practice of Participatory Communication Model? Emile Durkheim's Functional Theory elucidated the systematic dynamics in organizations. Barnlund's Transactional Model of Communication clarified the communication factors responsible for collaborative engagements. The inductive nature of the research influenced the interpretivist paradigm, the choice of qualitative approach, and Case Study method. The population for the study comprised all resident of Busia County who were above 18 years by 2013. Thirty-five participants comprising 5 stakeholders from each of the 7 Sub Counties were purposively selected for the study. Key Informant Interviews and direct observation tools facilitated data collection. Data was analyzed by way of themes and content analysis as guided by the research questions. The study found that Participatory Communication Model is most effective in Public Participation forums when the actors engage in good faith. The findings showed that the leadership of Busia County lacked the goodwill to steer participatory governance. The stakeholders were strategically rendered passive partners in governance; thus limiting them from accessing their rightful empowerments. The study concluded that the effective Public Participation in governance can be achieved if Public Relations experts are made to run the collaborative functions in government. The study therefore, recommends accreditation of Public Relation Society of Kenya (PRSK) into the law to oversee the functions of participatory governance.

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**ACRONYMS**

<b>CBTS:</b>	County Budget Transparency Survey
<b>CEC:</b>	County Executive Committee
<b>KCA:</b>	Kenya Correspondent Association
<b>KLR:</b>	Kenya Law Review
<b>KNBS:</b>	Kenya National Bureau of Standards
<b>MCAs:</b>	Member of County Assembly
<b>NACOSTI:</b>	National Commission of Studies and Innovation

## OPERATIONALIZATION OF TERMS

**Chamaas:** Kiswahili word in Kenya that refers to groups formed by members of society for individual or collective support system. The chamaas groups are used to address and facilitate various social issues including Merry -go- rounds, savings and Table Banking issues amongst others.

**Communication Competence:** The term is used as deep knowledge about communication, how it is applied and effects arising from such applications. In academia, Jacobson (2004); Heath and Bryant (2013) refers to the term as the ideal speech situation.

**County Government:** These are 47 Devolved Governments making up the former colonial Districts in Kenya working collaboratively with the National Government (Urai, 2010). County Governments were created in the 2010 Constitution to address developmental needs in consultation with citizens at the grass root levels.

**Development Communication:** Top-down, asymmetrical conversation approach to change and development. The approach assumes exclusively that the intended change by the initiator has modernization solutions for recipients even without consulting them

**Devolution:** The term in the Kenya's contexts refers to transfer of power and resources from the National Government to the County Governments. It aspires to speed up equalize the citizen's development across the country.

**Harambee:** Kiswahili word coined by the Founding President Mzee Jommo Kenyatta meant to unite members of society to cooperate with each other in identifying challenges and collaborate in solving them. This study used the term as commonly applied in the society to unite members in raising funds to address certain obligations.

**National Government:** The previous Central Government that was re-defined in the 2010 constitution to cede some functions to the County Government. It is main the governing body of a state that collects taxes and guarantees cohesion, security, and development for all citizens.

**Participatory Communication Model:** Dialogic engagements supporting teamwork activities such as Public Participation. It ensures stakeholders are united and mutually involved in identifying and addressing their common interests. The members are at liberty to implement their mutually agreed upon decisions and carry out the oversight roles.

**Public Participation:** This term refers to citizens' involvement in governance decisions in democratic societies. The functions facilitate the citizens to generate their development preferences through governance for implementation.

**Participatory Governance: Democratic** Government System in which stakeholders are involved in Public Participation in governance programs to prioritize mutual concerns. According to Nyaranga et al., (2022), it is a governing system in which leaders and citizens share decision making and responsibilities toward development

**Sustainable Development:** Strategic activities and inclusive engagements that reliably sustains participants' livelihood and wellness.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Overview of the study**

Human relationships fundamentally shape institutional management paradigms, serving as critical determinants of governance styles and operational dynamics. The relational essentials from Public Relations Theory emphasize participatory engagement and the intrinsic value of self-actualization among organizational actors. These elements are engrained in the Participatory Communication Model. The model foregrounds inclusive dialogue and reciprocal accountability of stakeholders as essential components of effective public administration.

The study therefore, perceived Participatory Communication Model as a critical framework to facilitate integration and collaboration of governance stakeholders, particularly their roles, rights and responsibilities in participatory governance of Busia County. In essence, study sought to determine the factors and standards to consider in the scope, content and procedure of Public Participation for meaningful stakeholder engagement in governance space.

Busia County is designated as Kenya's 40th administrative unit (Urai, 2010). The County continues to grapple with pronounced governance deficits, particularly in stakeholder interaction and transactional inconsistency (Sorre, 2017). The resultant dissonance in governance structures has occasioned institutional mistrust, recurrent conflict, and socio-economic underdevelopment. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2017-

2024) estimates the challenges of Busia County in the form of poverty of about 70%. County Budget Transparency Survey (CBTS (2020) and Ahadi (2022) aligns poverty to marginalization thus, revealing a complex interplay between institutional design, stakeholder engagement, and developmental outcomes in contexts of devolved governance.

The persistent disarray and political contestations characterizing stakeholder engagement within Busia County Government prompted a critical inquiry into the efficacy of the existing communication and Public Relations strategies. These disruptions, largely propagated by political actors and other governance stakeholders, underscored the urgency of evaluating whether a more robust participatory communication framework could offer remedial pathways out of the prevailing administrative impasse. The study, therefore, applied Participatory Communication Model that emphasizes inclusivity, dialogical engagement, and co-creation of meaning in governance processes as the theoretical lens to explore factors critical for meaningful participatory governance in County Government

The research problem and purpose were systematically articulated to underscore the study's intent: to interrogate the communicative structures underpinning stakeholder relations in Busia County and to propose transformative interventions. Furthermore, the formulation of research objectives and questions, along with a delineation of the study's scope, assumptions, limitations, and justification, provided a conceptual and methodological support. These elements collectively offered a scholarly grounding,

positioning the study as a substantive contribution to the discourse on strategic communication in participatory governance.

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

The advent of devolution in Kenya marked a paradigmatic shift in public administration. It introduced a governance model premised on people-centered participatory management (Nyaranga et al., 2022). This transformation necessitated the application of inclusive frameworks thus, the Participatory Communication Model, to facilitate stakeholder engagement, foster co-decision-making, and enhance the legitimacy of governance processes.

In the context of Busia County, however, the transition from a centralized to a devolved system sustained substantial governance challenges established in the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2017-2024). The centralist legacy incidentally got cascaded from the previous system of government to the new administrative system. Busia County was not spared from the challenges of the confusing set of governance; with all sub-counties; including Teso North, Teso South, Nambale, Marachi, Matayos, Samia, and Bunyala experiencing the undesired impacts of monolithic governance approach.

Unlike the teamwork expected of decentralized governance, the socioeconomic challenges of Busia County suggest that new governance arrangement appeared to occasion the perceived systematic stakeholder exclusion from critical decision-making platforms. This study therefore, set out to explore the potential factors that impede the teamwork relations in the new participatory governance space.

The study adopted a constructivist position, asserting that communication is not only instrumental, but epistemological; serving as the principal medium through which individuals interpret, engage with, and shape their socio-political realities. Drawing on Payne (2001), the study underscores communication as a vehicle for social cohesion and relational meaning-making, rather than merely a conduit for media dissemination. These factors reinforced communication as the means through which to explore the study.

Miller's (2005) perspective reinforces communication's role in fostering symbiotic human-environment relations aimed at improving collective well-being. Acknowledging the intricate and evolving nature of communication, the study also invoked Lasswell's (1970) classical model that embraces meaning in the context of "Who says what, to whom, through which channel, and with what effect?" This perspective formed the underlying component of communication on which Barnlunds Transactional Communication Model was aligned to explore the strategic application of Public Participation mechanisms in uniting Busia County stakeholders.

At its core, the study interrogated whether stakeholders possess sufficient awareness of their participatory rights and obligations in shaping governance and development outcomes. The study sought an understanding of how Participatory Communication Model facilitates Public Participation in contributing meaningfully to the discourse on democratic partnership of actors towards and sustainable development.

The promulgation of Kenya's 2010 Constitution introduced a transformative shift toward participatory governance. The goal of collective teamwork in governance was driven by the need to decentralize state authority and enhance citizen proximity to government

(Ahadi, 2022). This constitutional development was not merely administrative but deeply philosophical and anchored in the recognition that sustainable institutional development hinges on the quality of stakeholder relationships. As Center (2018) posits, the increasing awareness of stakeholder interdependence has compelled organizational leaders to adopt participatory engagement models that foster accountability, transparency, and inclusive decision-making.

In this context, Participatory Communication has emerged as a critical strategy for cultivating informed collaboration and effective teamwork in the pursuit of collective goals (Cresswel, 2010). Busia County, characterized by its multi-ethnic composition and complex socio-economic realities, exemplifies a situation where inclusive models are not only relevant but urgent, more so in light of persistent poverty and rising demands for equitable representation in governance.

This study, therefore, conceptualizes Public Participation as an evolving process critical to the operationalization of participatory governance in devolved units. According to Urai (2010), the 2010 Constitution enshrined devolution as a vehicle for enhancing direct civic engagement in governmental processes, with Articles 1(2), 10(2), and 174(c) providing the legal architecture for citizen inclusion. The study aligns Public Participation with the Participatory Communication Model, positioning it as a strategic Public Relations framework that ensures stakeholders are not only informed but actively engaged in shaping governance outcomes. This model emphasizes mutual understanding and shared responsibility, which are foundational for effective collaboration.

As outlined by Kenya Law Review (2010), devolution entails the reallocation of selected state functions to sub-national units. Although devolution is a temporary process in some societies, the process is constitutionally entrenched in Kenya. Ahadi (2022) further notes that the creation of 47 devolved units marked a definitive break from the centrally controlled provincial administration. The dispensation institutionalized the citizen inclusivity as a cornerstone of county development. Accordingly, this study interrogated the extent to which Participatory Communication Model facilitates inclusive governance, particularly in addressing the diverse needs and development aspirations of Busia County's stakeholders.

National government programs in Kenya are mirrored in county-level initiatives, predominantly in key sectors such as food security, healthcare, agriculture, education, infrastructure, and energy (Uraia, 2010). The creation of County Governments under the Constitution of Kenya 2010 institutionalized localized governance through clearly delineated mandates and traditional structures. These devolved units were intended to deepen democratic governance by enhancing citizen participation in policymaking and development processes (KLR, 2010). The administrative architecture of County Governments includes Governors, Deputy Governors, County Executive Committees, Chief Officers, and their respective support staff, all of whom are integral to policy implementation and service delivery.

To further operationalize devolution, Members of County Assemblies (MCAs); both elected and nominated were constitutionally tasked with legislating policies that promote accountability and inclusivity at the county level. Senators complement this oversight

function by safeguarding devolved governance at the national level. Despite these multi-layered oversight mechanisms, the implementation of devolution in Busia County raises concerns regarding the authenticity and efficacy of citizen participation programs. Empirical reports suggest a disjuncture between participatory engagements and governance practice, undermining the ideals of inclusivity and shared governance.

The Kenya Correspondent Association (KCA, 2013) underscores the parity of leadership responsibility at both national and county levels in advocating for stringent vetting of office bearers to ensure competence. Sogom in (Daily Nation, July 13, 2021) supports this view, asserting that at minimum, a university degree, although not adequate, signifies foundational competence for public service leadership. In view of this competence Wakwabubi and Shiverenje (2003) emphasize that effective governance necessitates collaborative engagement among stakeholders as equal partners.

Despite this normative framework, Busia County has struggled to actualize its constitutional mandate of fostering self-governance and sustainable development. As documented by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2017) and Sorre (2017), approximately 70% of the county's population lives in poverty, raising critical questions about the impact and authenticity of participatory governance.

This study is thus driven by the paradox of persistent socioeconomic incongruence in the face of ongoing Public Participation efforts in Busia County. Drawing on Freire's Servaes and Malikhao (2015) likens Participatory Communication Model to transformative engagement of peeling an onion from its outer layers inward, and by which the study interrogated the depth and quality of stakeholder inclusion in governance

space. Freire's dialogical pedagogy, which frames learners and educators as co-creators of knowledge, parallels the governance context, wherein leaders and citizens ought to function as mutual partners in decision-making.

Freire's educational application of this model where teachers and learners co-create knowledge in a shared, egalitarian space illustrates a transformative pedagogy rooted in mutual respect and active dialogue. Miller (2005) further ground this theoretical lens in the Plato's philosophy of Parmenides and Weber's notion of the convergence between objectivity and subjectivity. This study, therefore, applied the principles of dialogical pedagogy to examine whether the leadership in Busia County perceives and engages stakeholders as equal contributors to the governance process.

Freire's notion of Dialogical Pedagogy in Servaes (2015) has ideal inferences for participatory governance. It underscores the need of inclusive, non-hierarchical public engagement, which this study applied to interrogate governance dynamics in Busia County. The model promotes equity in discourse, asserting that all stakeholders, irrespective of social or political capital deserve equal voice. Thus, this study draws on Dialogical Pedagogy to assess whether local leadership in Busia County recognizes and institutionalizes citizen participation as a normative aspect of governance, rather than as a procedural formality.

Globally, the Participatory Communication Model has shaped democratic devolution, as exemplified in Jefferson of America. Brennan and Schungrensky (2017) observe that President Jefferson utilized radio broadcasts to promote ward-based governance, fostering civic cohesion through micro-level deliberation. The scalability of participatory

structures in such a geographically expansive nation demonstrated the model's adaptability, empowering individuals and communities towards self-actualization.

In contrast, India's entrenched caste divisions were addressed through dialogical interventions in community-based teamwork programs, which utilized participatory communication to transcend rigid social hierarchies (Chitnis, 2005). These cases present comparative benchmarks against which Busia County's participatory mechanisms may be evaluated for inclusivity and effectiveness.

In the African context, South Africa's Thusong Service Centres exemplify localized implementation of the model. Naidoo (2010) and Msibi and Penzhorn (2014) describe these centres as focal points for dissemination of public information, fostering post-apartheid national unity. Kenya's Huduma Centres mirror Thusong model but are constitutionally embedded within a broader framework of Public Participation. This study raises critical questions regarding the efficacy of collaborative governance in Kenya. The study asks; To what extent have Participatory Communication Model substantively empowered the stakeholders they are designed to serve?

Regionally, Tanzania's application of Participatory Communication in ward-level governance-termed Participatory Governance, offers further insights. However, REPOA (2014) notes gendered and generational exclusions, with participation skewed towards young males. The study established that the absence of skilled facilitators compounds this challenge, reducing the efficacy of the model. This study posits that similar limitations in Busia County, particularly the absence of facilitative leadership may underlie persistent

developmental stagnation; despite the constitutional entrenchment of participatory structures.

Historically, Kenya's use of the Participatory Communication Model was minimal and top-down, limited to centralized governance in the 1960s–80s (Wakwabubi & Shiverenje, 2003). However, the 2010 Constitution institutionalized Public Participation as a civic right and administrative necessity. Omolo (2011) emphasizes that Public Participation aims to integrate citizen preferences into policy and development planning, a view echoed in human rights discourses where participation is foundational to democratic self-governance (Ahadi, 2020; Nyaranga, 2022). This study adopts this normative framework to investigate the extent to which Busia County's stakeholders are given a substantive voice in shaping local development trajectories.

At the operational level, participatory governance requires proactive stakeholder engagement; which the Participatory Communication Model stipulates must be dialogic, inclusive, and unhindered by structural barriers (Okwechime, 2015; Prakash, 2022). However, despite the promise of devolution, Busia County's socioeconomic realities reflect a stark disconnect between participatory ideals and lived outcomes. The County is endowed with strategic resources like international border posts, riverine access to Lake Victoria, fertile soils, and ethnolinguistic harmony, but continues to lag in development, suggesting underutilization of its comparative advantages.

This paradox invites a critical inquiry into participatory governance practices: Why has a region with such significant potential remained underdeveloped in the devolution era? A situational analysis suggests gaps and failures in translating citizen voice into institutional

action. The study applied the dialogical pedagogy perspective to explore the situations of Busia County. The underpinning of the Participatory Communication Model offers both a diagnostic lens and a strategic pathway for rethinking stakeholder engagement, especially in diverse and resource-rich contexts such as Busia County.

The situation analysis of Busia County shows further that, despite constitutional frameworks and infrastructural investments, citizen experiences is indicative that devolved governance has not translated into improved livelihoods or substantive empowerment. The region also possesses fertile red loam soils and reliable weather patterns conducive to year-round agriculture. Ethnic diversity is marked by high tolerance levels, with communities such as the Luhyas, Tesos, Luos, and Kikuyus co-existing harmoniously across seven sub-counties. In spite of the available socio-geographical endowments available in Busia County, their utilization remains unrealized.

Infrastructure-wise, the county is interlinked by a well-maintained tarmac road network—examples include the Mayoni–Nambale and Kisumu–Busia highways facilitating mobility and market access. Electrification is present in most townships and villages, albeit underutilized. Agricultural activities are largely subsistence-based, focusing on crops such as maize, millet, cassava, and vegetables. Hopes that devolved governance would channel investments into agribusiness development have been unmet. Once-thriving cash crop industries, including sugarcane, tobacco, and cotton, have collapsed due to policy neglect, delayed payments, and systemic inefficiencies. Rice and dairy farming have also dwindled, while banana farming remains largely subsistence-based due to competition from imports.

Intellectual capacity in Busia is evident in the presence of highly educated scholars, including professors active in the diaspora. However, the county continues to grapple with high dropout rates, fueled by poverty and limited access to sustainable income. The absence of social infrastructure to harness youth potential has contributed to widespread social dysfunction-manifested in rising levels of unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, and early pregnancies. These patterns reflect a broader societal malaise linked to governance deficits and underdeveloped public engagement frameworks.

In response, communities have resorted to grassroots socio-economic support mechanisms such as “chamaas” and “harambees. Chamaas” are community-based mutual aid groups that facilitate savings, table banking, and support for social emergencies. “Harambee”, a Kiswahili term popularized by Kenya’s founding president, Jomo Kenyatta, was historically a tool for collective social action. However, the current use of *harambees* has become politicized, with contributions serving as metrics for political loyalty and electoral viability, thereby distorting their original intent. This evolution undermines their legitimacy as vehicles for social empowerment and economic resilience.

Consequently, this study questions the extent Busia County’s developmental stagnation stems not from resource scarcity but a lack of effective Participatory Communication and strategic Public Relations. The use of public engagement tools and the authentic dialogue is a factor to consider in examining the quality of governance and inclusivity. The research, therefore, sought to determine the efficacy of Public Participation as practiced in Busia County and whether a recalibrated communication model could unlock the region’s latent potential.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The philosophy underpinning the Participatory Communication Model is deeply embedded in the praxis of collaborative governance, mainly in mechanisms such as Public Participation (Li, 2015). Central to the model is the emphasis on access, inclusivity, and the co-creation of governance outcomes, all anchored on mutual respect and dialogical engagement among stakeholders. The normative goal is to ensure that decision-making processes transcend top-down approaches, enabling citizens to actively shape policies that affect their socio-economic realities. In this regard, Article 174(c) in Chapter Eleven of Kenya's 2010 Constitution formally recognizes Public Participation as a corrective measure against the historical marginalization of citizens from the development agenda.

Historically, governance in Kenya was overly centralized, with Nairobi as the administrative nucleus. This geographical centralization, coupled with entrenched bureaucratic inefficiencies, significantly impeded the timely and equitable delivery of public services. The 2010 constitutional devolution framework was thus designed to reverse these systemic challenges by bringing governance closer to the people. This action was to reverse an era where the central government unilaterally determined resource allocation and developmental priorities.

However, in practice, Counties like Busia remain economically disenfranchised. According to longitudinal data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2017–2024) and supported by Sorre (2017), Busia continues to rank among the poorest counties in the country. The World Bank defines poverty as the condition in which

individuals are unable to earn a dollar per day or secure at least one meal daily (Todaro, 2022). A poverty incidence rate of 70% at Busia County implies randomly that only 3 out of every 10 residents can meet the World Bank's minimal threshold. The situation highlights the stark disconnect between Participatory Communication Model ideals of governance in which stakeholders should be empowered compared to the lived socioeconomic outcomes in Busia County.

Comparative data from other counties reveal a divergent trajectory. For instance, Counties such as Kakamega in Western Kenya and Makueni and Kitui in Eastern Kenya have demonstrated commendable progress under the devolved governance system (Daily Nation, September 27, 2019). These counties have leveraged Public Participation frameworks to align development interventions with citizen priorities, thereby fostering socio-economic advancement.

This contrast raises a critical question: why has Busia County failed to register comparable progress despite similar institutional and legal frameworks? This study, therefore, sought to explore the efficacy of the Participatory Communication Model in Busia County, specifically identifying the contextual factors that facilitate or hinder effective stakeholder engagement and collaborative governance outcomes.

### **1.3 The Purpose of the Study**

This study aimed to critically examine the relevance and practical applicability of the Participatory Communication Model within the domain of Public Participation in governance. Specifically, the study sought to identify and analyze the foundational elements of the model that facilitate meaningful collaboration, inclusive engagement, and

cohesive stakeholder participation in devolved governance systems. Central to this inquiry was the exploration of how the model enhances stakeholders' awareness, motivation, and capacity for constructive engagement through consultative and dialogical processes.

The study further endeavored to isolate the communicative and relational factors within the Participatory Communication Model. This was meant to determine what underpin participatory management in enabling citizens to engage with County Government officials, articulate development concerns, propose solutions, and co-create consensus-based strategies that reflect collective aspirations for sustainable development.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

This study was guided by the following four objectives:

- i. To determine the stakeholders' understanding of their rights in government policy formulation and development agenda in Busia County.
- ii. To ascertain the development attributable to stakeholders' preferences through Public Participation in Busia county since 2013.
- iii. To identify the potential factors that impedes the efficacy of Participatory Communication Model in Governance in Busia County.
- iv. To develop Public Relations measures that enhances the performance of Public Participation in Governance to bolster service delivery to stakeholders in Busia County.

#### **1.5 The Research Question**

The study was guided by the following four research questions:

1. To what extent do the stakeholders of Busia County practice effective Public Participation in their programs?
2. How are the socioeconomic activities designed for effective Public Participation?
3. Does the management of Busia County practice Participatory Communication Model for effective Public Participation in their programs?
4. What are the challenges faced by both the County Management and the stakeholders in conceptualizing the dynamics and practice of Participatory Communication Model?

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The study sought to explore the relevance and utility of the Participatory Communication Model within the framework of Public Participation in county-level governance. The exploration was structured around three critical dimensions: the academic scope, which involved a theoretical and conceptual analysis of participatory communication within governance literature; the geographical scope, which focused on the empirical realities within Busia County as a representative devolved unit in Kenya; and the contextual scope, which examined the sociopolitical, economic, and institutional dynamics shaping stakeholder engagement and participatory decision-making at the county level.

### **1.6.1 Academic Scope**

This study explored the philosophical underpinnings and practical applications of the Participatory Communication Model within the broader discourse of Public Participation and Public Relations. By situating communication as the fulcrum of governance, the study sought to identify the critical factors embedded in the Participatory Communication

Model that determine the functional and effectiveness of Public Participation. This scholarly engagement entailed an analytical review of interdisciplinary literature spanning communication theory, participatory governance, and public administration to establish a theoretical framework for a strategic communication model capable of remedying systemic inefficiencies in governance structures, particularly in Busia County.

### **1.6.2 Geographical Scope**

The study encompassed all seven sub-counties of Busia County comprising; Teso North, Teso South, Nambale, Matayos, Butula, Funyula, and Budalangi- to ensure a representative geographical coverage. The rationale for this comprehensive inclusion was to capture the diversity of stakeholders' experiences and to assess the equitable implementation of participatory governance practices across varied sociocultural and administrative settings of stakeholders in Busia County.

### **1.6.3 Contextual Scope**

Busia County served as the instrumental platform of this study, providing a contextually rich environment to explore the operational efficacy of Participatory Communication in enhancing participatory governance. The study explored the intentions and attitudes of County Government leadership and technical staff in facilitating inclusive and deliberative stakeholder engagement. Despite the County's resource endowments, it remains economically marginalized, with a poverty rate estimated at 70%. This paradox necessitated a deeper inquiry into the communication-based governance processes presumed to undergird participatory development.

### **1.7 Assumptions of the Study**

The study operated under the ontological assumption that communication constitutes the primary medium through which individuals interpret, influence, and navigate their governance environments. It was presumed that devolution was instituted with functional institutional frameworks, adequate resources, and qualified personnel to facilitate meaningful citizen engagement. Further, the study assumed that the leadership of Busia County possesses the requisite competencies to operationalize participatory governance. Lastly, the study presupposed that the ideals of the Participatory Communication Model underpin the design and execution of Public Participation strategies, with Public Relations practitioners playing a fundamental role in enhancing dialogic engagement and stewardship.

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

While the study was conceptually grounded in communication paradigm, its analytical lens was confined to Public Relations as a discipline due to its underlying emphasis on informed knowledge as the foundation for strategic stakeholder engagement. The ubiquitous nature of communication was delimited to governance-related messaging, with particular attention to participatory dialogue, shared decision-making, and equity in resource distribution. Geographically, the study's empirical component was constrained to Busia's seven sub-counties. Methodologically, theoretical triangulation of data collection strategies guided the identification of factors facilitating or hindering collaborative governance.

### **1.9 Justification for the Study**

This research aimed to contribute theoretically and practically to the link of Participatory Communication Model and Public Participation in governance by elucidating the model's critical success factors. Despite constitutional mandates for inclusive governance, empirical evidence suggests a disjoint between stakeholder engagement processes and developmental outcomes in Busia County. This gap underscores the need for evidence-based communication strategies that align with participatory ideals. The study's findings are intended to inform strategic planning, policy design and capacity-building for improved governance outcomes both within Busia and in comparable devolved units across Kenya.

### **1.10 Significance of the Study**

This study adopted a "Problem-Solution" framework to critically explore and evaluate the Participatory Communication Model's efficacy in facilitating Public Participation within devolved governance. As Creswell (2010) asserts, participatory paradigms are increasingly central in addressing complex group dynamics and organizational challenges. Through a communication based analysis, the study contributes to theoretical development, policy enrichment, and professional practice. The findings are expected to:

- Inform scholarly discourse by identifying gaps in the application of participatory communication in governance.
- Guide policymakers in formulating statutory frameworks that reinforce collaborative governance.

- Empower communication practitioners to adopt a more strategic and ethical approach in facilitating stakeholder dialogue.
- Support citizens' understanding by highlighting effective avenues for democratic participation and accountability in governance.

Failure to address these communication inefficiencies may continue to undermine Participatory Communication Model in Public Participation for developmental objectives, thereby rendering devolution ineffective in transforming lives.

### **1.11 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter introduced the theoretical aspect of Communication and contextual foundations of Public Relations to the study; framing Participatory Communication as a normative and imperative factor in public governance. It outlined the problem context, delineated research objectives, and presented the assumptions and delimitations shaping the inquiry. The scope of the study was clarified across academic, geographical and contextual dimensions. Justification and significance were discussed to demonstrate the value of the study in addressing both scholarly and practical governance challenges. Chapter Two proceeds to review relevant literature on Participatory Communication Model. It further elucidates its intersection with Public Relations, and empirical cases of participatory governance. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that operationalizes the model for exploration.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviewed scholarly literature, empirical studies, and theoretical perspectives related to the Participatory Communication Model, especially within the framework of Public Participation in governance. The study appreciated communication field as inherently interdisciplinary; spanning Public Relations, Media Studies, Linguistics, and Information Communication Technology (ICT) (Miller, 2005). Situated within Development Communication, the Participatory Communication Model provided the analytical lens through which this study evaluated collaborative governance. The study focused on functions of teamwork such as awareness, integration, harmony and cohesion of governance actors within County Governments, with specific focus on Busia County.

The review critically explored the structure and fundamentals of Participatory Communication Model, emphasizing its role in facilitating dialogic engagements and collaborative decision-making processes. It further interrogated its implementation in governance, highlighting both empirical successes and systemic barriers to effective participation. The chapter reviewed the foundational constructs of Participatory Communication Model to evaluate its application in participatory governance, and related theoretical frameworks. It concludes with a conceptual framework that contextualizes the interlinkages among Communication Competence, stakeholder engagement, and development outcomes.

## **2.1 Participatory Communication Model**

This study was situated squarely within the communication domain, examining Participatory Communication Model as a conceptual and functional tool for fostering organizational teamwork through dialogic stakeholder engagement. It implies that the model is a core instrument of Public Relations (PR), and that PR serves as the strategic vehicle for promoting informed and mutual understanding, behaviour change, and collective action within organizational structures. The essence of a strategy in an intervention is to foster awareness, adaptation and adjustment (Etang, 2007). In context, therefore, Public Participation in this study is thus viewed not merely as a procedural requirement, but as a communicative process of collaborative meaning-making in policy formulation and implementation.

The study held that Participatory Communication Model is a deliberate framework for examining motives, behaviours, and outcomes of stakeholder engagements in Busia County's governance processes. The underpinning rationale draws from Payne (2001) and Gamble (2002), who both assert that, communication is foundational to knowledge generation and societal organization. Miller (2005) affirms this by framing communication as the medium through which all other realities are constructed and interpreted. Building on this, Littlejohn (2007) contends that communication constitutes the epistemological bedrock upon which development discourses must be anchored.

The study further acknowledged the multidimensional nature of communication as process oriented, intentional, interactive, transactional, social and cybernetic; each dimension shaping how meaning is constructed and interpreted in contexts (Miller,

2005). Recognizing communication's complexity, cyclicity, and irreversibility, the study adopted a nuanced understanding of Participatory Communication Model as an evolving and context-specific mechanism for public empowerment. With these notions in mind, the study defines communication competence as the ability to engage with stakeholders thoughtfully, ethically, and strategically. Simply put, the concept of Communication Competence was defined as what is understood of communication, what people do with it, and the effects arising from the uses. The concept is thus central to this study's interrogation of Busia County's governance mechanisms.

Relatively, the study delved into the basic concept of communication in which Plato's classical model question "who says what to whom". The concept was refined by Lasswell (1971), who added the dimensions of channel and impact, offering a more comprehensive model for analyzing communication efficacy. In alignment with Laswell's (1960s–1970s) communication model, the study raised fundamental questions: What messages are conveyed by County leadership? Through what media and by what channels? With what sensitivity to feedback; diversity; and impact?

These theoretical questions frame Participatory Communication Model not as a static structure but as a dynamic process requiring continuous reflexivity, thus the actors' self-appraisal. By interrogating these facets, the study sought to determine whether participatory engagements in Busia County reflect the ideals of Participatory Communication Model, mainly inclusivity, responsiveness, and mutual respect. As such, drawing on Osgood and Schramm's interactive model, the research emphasizes that communication is not unidirectional but a process of co-constructing meaning.

This study therefore, adopts this framework to evaluate whether the leadership in Busia County communicates strategically, inclusively, and impact fully with its constituents; and whether they translate into meaningful socio-economic development for stakeholders. Therefore, governance actors must not only disseminate information but also ensure feedback loops to allow for reciprocal understanding and stakeholder empowerment.

At the interactional level, this study drew upon Schramm's (1954) conceptualization of communication as the "process of sharing meaning." In this framing, communication becomes the vehicle through which common understanding and collective development agendas are negotiated between stakeholders and leadership. Within the County Government context, the Participatory Communication Model is positioned as a strategic mechanism for dialogic engagement; thus facilitating mutual focus on devolution objectives and socio-economic transformation. Any deviation from this shared meaning undermines both the spirit and operational intent of collaborative governance.

In support of this interpretation, Barnlund's Transactional Model provided a theoretical anchor in the study to analyze the interactive and reciprocal nature of stakeholder engagements as postulated in governance space. To interpret the performance of interactional relations by participatory governance actors, the Functional Theory was applied to examine the interdependence of communication units within Public Participation structures. Likewise, Conflict Theory offered interpretive framework to unpack systemic communication breakdowns that hinder participatory efficacy.

The study explored the sensitivity and ethical application of communication in governance, guided by Payne's (2001) assertion that communication is central to sense-making. This view is echoed by Center et al. (2008) and Pearson and Nelson (2017), who stress the moral responsibility of communicators to engage audiences with care and moral intention. Accordingly, this study explored whether the leadership in Busia County deploys communication with the sensitivity and caution required of public servants who are contractually and ethically bound to uphold the interests of their constituents. More pointedly, the study asks: Are stakeholders treated as equal partners in governance, and are their concerns authentically prioritized in communication processes?

Nonetheless, in spite of its centrality in sharing meaning, communication itself can be problematic. As Craig (1999) alludes, communication is often oversimplified as a mere act of speaking and listening. However, it constitutes a far more intricate and multifaceted phenomenon. Heath and Bryant (2000) argue that communication is foundational not only to interpersonal understanding but also to self-awareness and organizational identity.

In this light, the limited empowerment of Busia stakeholders can be traced to communicative inefficiencies or insensitivities within participatory frameworks. As Sorre (2017) observed, the County's low development indices and persistent poverty signal either a misalignment or misuse of communication strategies meant to catalyze community development. The study sought to determine the potential factors within communication paradigm that undermine effective participatory governance in Busia County.

Drew (1998) established that meaning-making process is subjective, objective and mediated by personal paradigms, cognitive abilities, attitudes, and contextual factors. As Miller (2005) explains, these processes occur rapidly but are contingent upon environmental stimuli and intended outcomes. Littlejohn (2007) complements this by suggesting that cognition becomes actionable when the impulse is aligned with pragmatism. These dynamics, which McCutcheon (1995) refers to as “communication matters,” underscore the complexity of participatory governance and the demand for communication competence.

Ferrante (2003) underscores that effective communication occurs when ethical intent is matched with appropriate strategies in the service of collective wellbeing. This aligns with the concept of Communication Competence within Public Relations, which this study situates as the operational driver of the Participatory Communication Model. By assessing how Participatory Communication Model is applied within the governance structures of Busia County, the study sought to determine the extent to which leadership leverages communication competence to respond to stakeholders’ socio-economic concerns.

The observational evidence suggests a gap between communicative intent and developmental outcomes. In Bunyala for instance, recurrent floods remain unmitigated despite years of stakeholder appeals. Rice farmers lack extension support, while the fish economy in Budalang’i is dominated by external traders due to infrastructural neglect. Samia’s chronic water scarcity persists despite proximity to Lake Victoria, raising concerns about the prioritization of citizen concerns in public forums. These failures raise

critical questions: What is being communicated in Public Participation forums? Are these engagements performative or transformative?

Further, agricultural sectors in areas like Samia and Nambale suffer from post-harvest losses and industrial decline, respectively. The rise of sugar factories is mired in jurisdictional disputes, while regions like Marachi remain developmentally stagnant. Although Alupe University in Teso South presents an opportunity for economic revitalization, its potential remains underutilized. The collapse of tobacco farming in Teso North adds to the region's economic despondency. These realities underscore a critical gap between participatory ideals and governance outcomes.

Thus, this research is situated at the nexus of communication studies and governance, advancing the argument that strategic, inclusive, and competent application of the Participatory Communication Model is essential for sustainable development. Public Participation, when genuinely practiced, should not merely fulfill statutory obligations but serve as a transformative tool for addressing the pressing socio-economic challenges faced by the people of Busia County.

### **2.1.1 Communication for Strategic Interactions**

This study underscored the centrality of communication in advancing strategic interactions and transactional governance within Busia County's devolved administrative framework. Public Relations is conceptualized herein as the communicative conscience that stimulates stakeholder engagement (Jefkins, 1998). The potent of PR in inculcating meaningful relational engagement through governance is evident in its strategic

techniques. Jefkins emphasizes the essence of PR as a deliberate, structured, and goal-oriented communication discipline, ideally suited to foster synergistic stakeholder relations and development-oriented collaborations.

Within this context, the Participatory Communication Model aligns integrally with the PR paradigm, particularly in its emphasis on inclusivity, co-creation, and responsiveness to stakeholder interests (Etang, 2007). Given that devolution in Kenya was fundamentally designed to bring governance closer to the people, PR emerges as an indispensable medium for cultivating participatory development planning and fostering institutional trust.

Philosophically, Public Relations functions as a rational and epistemological framework through which informed discourse is cultivated among publics. According to Lausen (2007), PR sustains meaningful relationships by equipping the public with the resilience and goodwill necessary to interpret, engage, and co-manage shared social realities. Its strategic deployment reduces reliance on reactive or trial-and-error approaches in organizations and public affairs management (Center et al., 2008; Oloo, 2016).

This study thus interrogated whether the underutilization of PR frameworks constituted the missing link in achieving meaningful participatory governance in Busia County. The Mexican school of thought and definition of Public Relations provides a robust conceptualization; positioning PR as a forward-looking discipline that anticipates issues, assesses prevailing attitudes, and designs strategic communication responses (Kruckeberg, 2000). This underscores PR's primary normative commitment: to facilitate mutual benefit between institutions and stakeholders.

The conceptual framing of PR as a strategic communication mechanism is anchored in the inherent human drive to seek knowledge and understand one's environment (Pieczecka, 2006). From early cognitive development, as illustrated through children's inquisitive behaviour, to complex institutional communication, the PR instinct persists as a tool for navigating social systems (Center et al., 2008). Etang (2007) amplifies this argument by portraying PR as an elastic, context-sensitive instrument designed to inform, integrate, influence, and persuade publics toward shared objectives.

Conversely, Henslowe (2003) warns that PR's inherent flexibility often invites conceptual ambiguity, leading to its mischaracterization as a tool for reputational cover-ups. Surma (2006) and Cutlip (2010) contend that such misconceptions overshadow PR's legitimate value as a discipline with deep historical roots and ethical zeal to do the right things all the time.

Historically, PR practices can be traced to the classical Greco-Roman era. Cutlip (2006) highlights the Greek use of "semantikos" strategic persuasion through meaning-making as an early form of PR. Julius Caesar, for example, employed PR in his self-authored "Gallic Wars" to shape public perception and bolster political legitimacy (Cutlip, 2010). Likewise, St. Augustine functioned as a press secretary for the Roman ecclesiastical order, evidencing the use of PR to guide religious and political communication. These historical precedents point to the instrumental role of PR in galvanizing public support and legitimizing leadership functions. These PR concepts are equally relevant to the leadership of Busia County as it seeks to mobilize communities toward localized and sustainable development.

In its strategic application, the PR principle of selectivity, embedded within the Participatory Communication Model, advocates phased and targeted communication ideals to progressively engage stakeholders. A prominent example is Thomas Paine's 1776 pamphlet "The Crisis", which utilized PR to bolster the morale of Washington's army during a difficult military campaign (Cutlip, 2010). Such historical insights demonstrate PR's capacity to inspire resilience, align collective action, and stretch the limits of institutional collaboration capabilities that can be harnessed to address the developmental concerns of Busia County's diverse populace.

Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee, recognized as the early architects of modern PR, advanced the notion of corporate social responsibility as a core ethical tenet. Bernays notably rejected engagements with unethical clients to preserve the PR discipline's integrity. In a case involving Procter & Gamble, Bernays reversed racially insensitive messaging by initiating reforms such as the hiring of African-Americans, inclusive factory tours, and representative internal communication. These interventions not only restored corporate legitimacy but also demonstrated PR's utility in enhancing diversity, equity, and community inclusion. For Busia, a cosmopolitan county; this suggests that strategic communication should be responsive to the needs and identities of its multi-ethnic citizenry in order to foster inclusive development.

Similarly, the rehabilitation of the Columbian Rope Company's image illustrates the transformative power of PR in resolving labour disputes and rebuilding institutional credibility. Bernays' strategy involved radio broadcasts featuring joint union-management dialogue, public engagement tours, and sponsorship of vocational programs. These tactics

foreground PR's multidimensional role in mitigating conflict, promoting transparency, and enhancing corporate accountability. The principles are equally applicable to participatory governance in County Governments. Such precedents serve as a call to action for Busia County leadership to utilize PR, and by extension Public Participation, not as a performative mechanism, but as a function for inclusive stakeholder management.

This study, therefore, affirms PR's potential as a strategic leverage for managing participatory development agendas. Effective collaboration among stakeholders is contingent on shared trust that is the outcome uniquely fostered and natured by PR. Based on Center et al., (2008), beyond disseminating information, PR works to uphold societal norms, correct misperceptions, and introduce innovative ideas that advance communal well-being. Angled on this notion, Freire (1999) contends that participatory communication must be dialogic and liberator, enabling stakeholders to articulate their aspirations and co-create the pathways to change. Consequently and within Freires' framework, Busia County can derive substantial value from deploying PR not merely as a messaging tool, but as a functional participatory architecture for democratic governance and socio-economic transformation.

### **2.1.2 Communication for Transactions**

Transactional communication is inherently dialogic and collaborative, designed as a purposive and reciprocal process through which individuals or groups co-construct meaning and pursue shared objectives (Bryant and Heath 2002). This form of communication is not merely an exchange of information but a deliberative process

intended to produce mutual understanding and collective outcomes. As such, it forms the foundation of Participatory Communication, which is both a theoretical construct and a practical methodology for inclusive engagement (Freire, 1994).

Beltrán (1974) characterizes Participatory Communication as a “directed and widely participatory process of deep and accelerated socio-political change geared towards producing substantial changes in the economy, the technology, the ecology and the overall culture of a country, so that the population can be obtained within conditions of generalized quality, dignity, justice, and liberty.” This definition underscores the transformative potential of communication when it is intentionally structured to engage diverse stakeholders in meaningful discourse and action.

Similarly, the World Bank (1996:12) defines Participatory Communication as “a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.” This conceptualization positions communication not merely as a tool for dissemination, but as a participatory mechanism for co-governance and inclusive decision-making.

Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) expand this perspective, describing Participatory Communication as “an approach based on dialogue, which allows the sharing of information, perceptions and opinions among the various stakeholders, and thereby facilitates their empowerment, especially for those who are most vulnerable and marginalized.” They further assert that it prioritizes the perspectives of local communities in identifying and analyzing challenges and opportunities, thereby enabling self-mobilization and contextually grounded problem-solving mechanisms.

Applied to the context of Busia County, these models anticipate a strategic mobilization of citizens by local leadership to engage in open dialogue around their most pressing concerns. The core components of the Participatory Communication model are shared concerns, collaborative effort, dialogical interaction, negotiated compromises, strategic planning, and evaluative feedback. These factors are essential for fostering sustainable development outcomes. Conceptually, therefore, this model represents an evolution from the traditional Development Communication paradigm, offering a more inclusive, responsive, and agency-driven framework for social empowerment and transformation.

### **2.1.3 Phases of Development Communication**

The overarching goal of Development Communication has consistently been to harness communication techniques to catalyze community involvement, economic empowerment, and broader social transformation. This communicative model has undergone significant evolution, segmented into distinct phases characterized by divergent methodologies, ideological frameworks, and practical applications.

In its normative phase during the 1950s and 1960s, Development Communication was fundamentally anchored in the Modernization Theory. This theoretical underpinning posited that communication could facilitate the transformation of societies from traditional to modern states, thereby accelerating development trajectories. Nora Quebral's seminal conceptualization of Development Communication primarily envisioned the transmission of lifestyles and developmental paradigms from industrialized nations to formerly colonized societies; reflecting a unidirectional, top-down communication approach. This period privileged authoritative dissemination of

information, as highlighted by Rogers (1962), who's Diffusion of Innovations Theory emphasized the linear transmission of novel ideas and technologies as instrumental to societal progress and modernization.

The limitations of this top-down paradigm became increasingly apparent by the 1970s and 1980s, prompting a paradigm shift towards Stakeholder Involvement and Participatory Communication methods. This phase recognized the need of integrating local traditions and knowledge systems, thereby positioning community members as active agents of change rather than passive recipients. Participatory Communication embraced a bottom-up orientation, fostering dialogue and empowerment especially among marginalized populations (Freire, 1970; Servaes, 1999). This approach aligns with the expectations placed upon devolved governance structures to facilitate collaborative problem-solving and collective agency.

Angkiko's analysis, in Waisbord (2001), further conceptualizes Development Communication through a triadic lens: purposive (intentional in achieving planned change), value-laden (imbued with normative impact), and pragmatic (grounded in rationality and practicality). Alexander Flo (1995) notably identified Development Communication as the "Fifth Theory of the Press," underscoring its distinctive role in shaping social development. Servaes (2005) elaborates on this by asserting that communication and development are mutually constitutive, each necessitating the other to achieve meaningful change. During its apex in the 1960s, Development Communication was primarily sectoral, aiming to enhance industrialization and modernization while also striving to dismantle ignorance, poverty, and oppression (Msivi and Penzhorn, 2014).

The subsequent decades, mostly the 1990s and 2000s, saw the emergence of Integrated Communication Strategies, wherein development programs synergized various communication media and techniques to holistically address complex challenges. Bessette (2004) and McKee (2004) characterize this phase as the blending of mass, group, and interpersonal communication to foster behavior change especially pertinent in social and health domains.

Entering the digital era by the 2020s, Development Communication increasingly leveraged digital media platforms in social media, mobile technologies, and networked communication as tools for real-time, interactive, and participatory engagement (Castells, 2012; Gordon, 2013). This transition reflects a profound transformation in communication dynamics, enabling more immediate feedback, transparency, and inclusivity. A pertinent inquiry remains whether contemporary governance structures have effectively harnessed digital media to expedite Public Participation in devolution arrangement.

Currently, Development Communication is intrinsically linked with the realities of Social Justice and Sustainable Development (SJSD). This contemporary focus foregrounds communication as a vehicle for addressing systemic inequalities, environmental sustainability, and global justice concerns. Hemer and Tufte (2021) emphasize the durability and precision of communication in sustaining awareness and fostering actionable change. Similarly UNESCO (2022) not only highlights the integration of fairness, but also emphasizes justice within development communication frameworks.

These chronological phases collectively illustrate the transition of Development Communication from a predominantly top-down, modernization-focused strategy to a more inclusive, participatory, and technology-driven paradigm. Each phase builds upon its antecedents, refining approaches in response to emerging socio-political realities and technological advancements. Within this evolutionary trajectory, the Participatory Communication Model emerges as especially salient, supplanting earlier diffusion-centric theories by prioritizing mutual understanding, stakeholder collaboration, and localized problem-solving as the cornerstone for sustainable community development.

#### **2.1.3.1 The Challenges of Development Communication Model**

The Development Communication Model, widely embraced until the 1980s, began to attract substantial critique for its counterproductive tendencies in fostering genuine community involvement, social change, and economic growth. The challenges undermining its efficacy can be broadly categorized into ethical, socio-political, and technical dimensions.

Technological barriers, particularly the persistent digital divide, remain a significant impediment, especially in underdeveloped contexts where limited access to internet infrastructure and digital tools exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. Lloyd and L. F. (2021) emphasize that inadequate infrastructure and restricted technological access constrain the reach and impact of development communication initiatives. Furthermore, Wagner (2020) highlights that digital illiteracy compounds this issue by preventing effective utilization of available technologies, thereby limiting meaningful engagement.

Srinivasan and S. (2022) lounds the necessity of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity is paramount; communication strategies misaligned with local cultural values risk misinterpretation and reduced relevance. Consequently, McKee and M. (2022) emphasizes the requirement of equitable development mandates deliberate inclusion of marginalized groups in communication processes.

The political and institutional context further complicates Development Communication efforts. Weak institutional frameworks, pervasive corruption, political instability, and restrictive legislation undermine the integration and empowerment of stakeholders. Gordon (2021) and Castells (2023) perceive these factors as key obstacles to effective and adaptable communication initiatives. This study situates these political challenges within the socio-economic landscape of Busia County, probing their influence on communication dynamics.

Compounding these structural challenges is the proliferation of disinformation and fake news that jeopardize the integrity and effectiveness of Development Communication. The rise of social media platforms, while expanding communication reach, has simultaneously amplified the spread of misinformation, distorting public discourse and undermining development objectives. On this account, Norris (2023) cautions that malicious platforms can interfere with dissemination of accurate and evidence-based development messages from performing. Pennycook and Rand (2022) further argue that misinformation erodes trust in credible sources, complicating efforts to build consensus around development agendas. This study explored the presence and impact of misinformation on perceptions of development progress in Busia County.

Ethical considerations are equally critical. Power asymmetries between communicators that are representatives of institutional authority and recipient communities must be conscientiously managed to foster trust and sustainable outcomes. Servaes (2023) contends that ethical communication balances advocacy with respect for the dignity and autonomy of target audiences. Kumar (2023) emphasizes addressing these power imbalances as essential for optimizing communication efficacy. This ideology is elaborated further in section 2.2.5 of the literature.

One of the most significant shortcomings of the traditional Development Communication Model lies in its failure to ensure sustainability and long-term impact. Its top-down design neglected stakeholder engagement, resulting in disenfranchisement and skepticism towards development programs. Hemer and Tufte (2021) assert that sustainability requires proactive strategies addressing financial viability and social continuity; being the dimensions often overlooked in earlier models. Additionally, Miller (2024) highlights the model's inability to adequately measure and evaluate communication impacts on social change, limiting adaptive learning and program improvement.

These multifaceted challenges of communication underscore the complex nature of initiating and managing societal change. The study posits that overcoming these difficulties demands strategic, flexible planning informed by continuous stakeholder participation and education principles germane to the Participatory Communication Model. Unlike the diffusion-based Development Communication Model, that assumes a uniform receptivity among stakeholders, Participatory Communication emphasizes

mutual understanding, shared decision-making, and context-sensitive interventions (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

Moreover, the entrenched power structures and reliance on mass media in traditional Development Communication perpetuate asymmetrical communication flow of information that cascades from a single authoritative source to passive audiences. This causes marginalization of the voices of the majority (Khampa, 2019). The mass media's unidirectional communication model inherently limits dialogue and stakeholder empowerment, weakening developmental outcomes. This study critically examined whether the leadership of Busia County remains constrained by these traditional communication paradigms, despite constitutional provisions (Article 174(c)) advocating for participatory governance.

Essentially then, the persistence of asymmetrical communication strategies restricts the developmental potential of programs due to insufficient stakeholder engagement (Heath & Bryant, 2000; Creswell, 2007). The study cautions against a reliance on superficial reporting and storytelling that lacks actionable oversights. It therefore, emphasizes the necessity of participatory, dynamic communication approaches that catalyze tangible change.

### **2.1.3.2 The Exit of Traditional Development Communication Model**

The perceived decline of the traditional Development Communication Model catalyzed the emergence of the Participatory Communication Model. Rising public awareness and increasing demands for democratic engagement exposed the authoritarian and top-down nature of the traditional model, rendering it less effective in addressing contemporary

societal needs (Naidoo, 2010). The challenges delineated in section 2.1.3.1 illuminate how shifting societal priorities, evolving methodologies, and the dynamic communication landscape necessitated a paradigmatic transformation in development communication.

Historically, the traditional model emphasized unidirectional, top-down dissemination of information. However, this approach has undergone significant reconfiguration towards a multifaceted, dialogic, and participatory framework. Servaes (2019) interprets this evolution as a fundamental reappraisal of conventional roles and methods within development communication. The change marks a transition from one-way information delivery to collaborative engagement characterized by dialogue, cooperation, and active participation. This shift reflects an expanded conceptualization of development goals, transcending mere economic growth to encompass social justice, sustainability, and empowerment.

Aligned with global development realities, Hemer and Tufte (2021) observe that international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have increasingly foregrounded communication strategies attuned to environmental sustainability and social equity. UNESCO (2022) further advocates for communicative fairness, emphasizing democracy, equity, and social justice principles that underpin the Participatory Communication Model as outlined in section 2.2.3 of this study.

The advent of new communication technologies, like social media, alongside evolving development philosophies, has rendered traditional Development Communication paradigms increasingly obsolete. Pennycook and Rand (2022) concur that social media has fundamentally transformed communication dynamics, frequently circumventing the

conventional channels of development communication. Conversely, Miller (2024) argues that the Participatory Communication Model offers a more coherent and strategic framework for communication practice, prioritizing local ownership, decentralized governance, and inclusive stakeholder engagement.

This study further explored whether leadership within Busia County has embraced or neglected the participatory ethos essential for effective stakeholder collaboration. McKee and M. (2022) highlight the predominant critiques of the traditional model as being overly passive and neglectful of local agency, thereby undermining sustainable development outcomes. Castells (2023) anticipates future trajectories involving the strategic integration of emergent technologies to foster inclusive, multi-stakeholder dialogue and align development communication more closely with global communication trends.

In sum, the Participatory Communication Model emerges as a critical response to the inadequacies of its predecessor, offering a more democratic, inclusive, and context-sensitive framework essential for addressing the complexities of contemporary development challenges.

#### **2.1.4 The Emergence of Participatory Communication Model**

The societal aspiration to enhance people's quality of life and wellbeing is fundamentally conceptualized through the multifaceted lens of development. While the term development remains inherently elusive and contested, Todaro (2015) offers a comprehensive understanding by framing it as a holistic transformation process. This transformation transcends mere economic growth to include the advancement of

democracy, the expansion of freedoms, sustained growth, and improvements in education. Development manifests not only in material conditions but also profoundly shapes individuals' thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours.

Despite the complex, multilayered nature of social reality and human motivation, development has historically been narrowly equated with economic progress. Naidoo (2010) critiques this reductive view, noting that early perceptions of societal change were vague and difficult to articulate until Nora Quebral introduced the concept of Development Communication (DevCom). Quebral defined Development Communication as “the art and science of human communication applied to speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and larger fulfillment of human potential.” In a complementary view, Angkiko in Guru (1997) describes Development Communication simply as “the use of communication in development work,” emphasizing its instrumental role.

Prior to the formal establishment of Development Communication, diverse modes of communication including; oral traditions, storytelling, and ritual practices functioned as vital mechanisms for knowledge transmission and community development across cultures (Freire, 1999). Early uses of communication for development, however, were co-opted within colonial agendas, where communication was strategically deployed to impose Western values and regulate indigenous populations.

Conversely, the period from the 1940s to 1950s saw nascent efforts to employ communication in education as a catalyst for development, predominantly in the context

of decolonization following World War II. The political and social aspirations of newly independent nations intensified calls for rapid socioeconomic progress, which in turn catalyzed the emergence of development theories foregrounding communication as a key driver of social change.

Technological advancements and the proliferation of mass media such as radio, television became instrumental in reaching broad audiences with public health campaigns, agricultural extension services, and educational programming. By the 1960s and 1970s, Development Communication matured into a formalized field, supported by theoretical frameworks such as Everett Rogers' *Diffusion of Innovations* (1962), which provided a systematic understanding of how new ideas and technologies disseminate through societies. Parallel to this, participatory communication approaches began gaining prominence, emphasizing the active involvement of local communities in shaping development initiatives (Servaes and Malikhao, 2005). This study positions Public Participation as a core principle of effective development communication, underscoring the need for community agency in development processes.

Paulo Freire and like-minded scholars significantly contributed to the theoretical foundation of Participatory Communication. The scholars have been advocating for the empowerment of communities to actively participate in and direct their own developmental agendas. For instance, Freire's seminal work, *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed"* (1970), highlights the transformative power of dialogue, critical reflection, and collective learning as essential components of social change (Servaes, 2015).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the field increasingly incorporated Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), recognizing their potential to revolutionize how communities access, share, and utilize information for development purposes. The advent of the internet, mobile technologies, and other digital tools dramatically expanded possibilities for participatory development.

Given this trajectory, Busia County's prospects for achieving meaningful socioeconomic growth are closely tied to its capacity to embrace technological systems in cohesive and inclusive governance frameworks that prioritize community engagement and participatory communication.

### **2.1.5 The Development of Participatory Communication Model**

The need to enhance community empowerment has foregrounded collaboration as a fundamental mechanism for social change within Participatory Communication programs. Central to this approach is the active involvement of communities and the emphasis on the communication process as a dynamic, dialogic engagement rather than a mere transmission of information. The historical trajectory of the Participatory Communication Model is deeply intertwined with evolving social theories, communication paradigms, and development discourses. Its origins trace back to the mid-20th century, specifically the 1950s and 1960s, when nascent collaborative practices began to emerge, albeit in an embryonic form.

Naidoo (2010) alludes that during this preliminary period, although the Participatory Communication Model had yet to be fully conceptualized, early instances of collective engagement signaled a shift towards teamwork and communal involvement. The

expansion of educational discourse, predominantly in communication philosophy, subsequently clarified and solidified the conceptual underpinnings of community-driven change. This intellectual development enabled communities and practitioners to better understand and articulate their roles within the communication-development link.

A pivotal catalyst for the evolution of the Participatory Communication Model was the growing critiques of the traditional Development Communication Model, which was predominantly characterized by a top-down, linear dissemination of information. Rogers (1962) critically observed that such models frequently marginalized the active participation of local communities, thereby limiting their efficacy and sustainability. Complementing this critique, Freire (1970) underscored the necessity for communication strategies that prioritize local agency, meaningful participation, and dialogic advocacy. These critiques collectively seeded the theoretical foundations of Participatory Communication.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, participatory communication approaches were systematically formalized and expanded. The ideological cornerstone of this period was strongly influenced by scholars like Paulo Freire, who emphasized empowerment, inclusivity, and mutual respect as fundamental tenets. Freire's dialogic pedagogy framed participatory communication as a process of reciprocal learning and collective consciousness, which aligns with broader visions of holistic development (Freire, 1970). Servaes (1999) further elaborates that these changes encapsulate a commitment to social transformation, rooted in local contexts and genuine community engagement.

By the 1990s and early 2000s, the Participatory Communication Model had not only matured but also become institutionalized within numerous development frameworks and policy agendas (Rondinelli, 1993). During this period, methodologies such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) emerged as critical tools for integrating indigenous knowledge and fostering community participation in development processes (Chambers, 1994). The field of communication for development and social change increasingly adopted structured frameworks that explicitly incorporated participatory principles (McKee, 2004).

Servaes and Malikhao (2005) highlight that the limitations of traditional, hierarchical communication approach necessitated the adoption of strategic teamwork-oriented models that facilitate mutual engagement. The Development Communication Policy Science (DCPS) traces the genesis of the Participatory Communication Model to the intrinsic human desire for relational interaction and communal transaction. Freire's (1970 p. 79) assertion poignantly encapsulates this shift: "The point of departure is at the community where the conditions of living need interventions. More critical today in Participatory Communication is the Dialogical Pedagogy two-way communication approach"

The trifold concept of Participatory Development Communication captures the synthesis of participation, development, and communication, emphasizing stakeholder engagement in holistic change processes aimed at collective wellbeing (Rahim, 1994). The evolution from Participatory Development Communication to Participatory Communication foregrounds dialogue as the core element of participatory practice. Bingham (2006)

argues that participation involves active engagement and contribution towards shared goals that benefit all members or stakeholders of a group. The etymology of communication, rooted in the Latin *communis*, signifies the act of making common or sharing; be it meanings, perceptions, knowledge, resources or whatever is available for sharing.

In this light, communication is construed as the collective actions and discourses through which groups negotiate shared interests and equitable resource distribution (Ako, 2018). This study critically scrutinizes whether leadership in Busia County embodies these principles by equitably sharing information and resources for stakeholder empowerment. Conceptually, Participatory Communication aligns with Transactional Communication models, underscoring its role in facilitating integration and sustained collaboration among stakeholders.

The Participatory Communication Model is taken as essential for the success and sustainability of collective developmental endeavors. Servaes and Malikhaio (2005) argue that it fosters informed dialogue through a process Freire termed “naming the world,” which Jackson (2008) interprets as inclusive, consultative engagement aimed at reaching consensus. Freire’s notion of Participatory Communication as “Dialogical Pedagogy” reflects pedagogical strategies that transform knowledge into meaningful, shared understanding within communities. This study, therefore, explored the extent to which stakeholders in Busia County apply dialogical pedagogy to collaboratively identify, analyze, and address communal concerns for their mutual benefit.

### **2.1.6 The Definitions of Participatory Communication Model**

Creswell (2007) posits that Participatory Communication as a “New Paradigm” in development discourse, emphasizing its transformative potential in fostering inclusive dialogue and collaborative action. Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) further elucidate the model’s capacity to consolidate diverse interests, facilitate cooperation, and ensure meaningful consultation among all stakeholders through dialogic engagements. Msibi and Penzhorn (2014) reinforce this view, highlighting that the model instills a profound sense of ownership among participants, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and sustainability of interventions. In this context, the study contends that stakeholders in Busia County stand to achieve significant progress if genuinely accorded participatory rights within governance structures.

The Participatory Communication Model distinctly foregrounds the significance of communicative mediums and language in fostering stakeholder cooperation and engagement. To this extent, Mefalopulos (2009) argues that the efficacy of the model in facilitating meaningful teamwork has been recognized internationally. Notably are the landmark conferences, such as the Earth Summit (1992), and the International Conference on Population and Development (1994). These global forums underscored the essence of participatory approaches in advancing sustainable development agendas.

Specifically, in Busia County, it is incumbent upon the ethnic groups and communities to act as both participants and beneficiaries of the devolved governance system. Yet, evidence suggests that the citizens have not fully realized the potential benefits of Public Participation initiatives. Odhiambo Taifa (2009) perceives the Participatory

Communication Model to empower community stakeholders to elevate their social conditions from traditional or rudimentary levels to more modern and progressive phases. This transformation is contingent upon addressing critical development needs and employing communication strategies that foster social cohesion and collective action. Servaes and Malikhao (2005) concur that the ultimate goal of a united group is to translate individual ideas into practical, collective solutions.

The structural dynamics of development and communication approaches inherently reflect the social configurations and prevailing power relations within groups (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009). Consequently, this study explored whether the exercise of power in Busia County serves to empower ethnic communities or perpetuates existing disparities. Here, dialogical pedagogy is conceptually aligned with Communication Competence (CC), which encompasses a deep understanding of communication processes, their functional applications, and the resultant social impacts. This pedagogical approach asserts that communities possess intrinsic knowledge of their needs and that sustainable social change is most effectively catalyzed from within rather than imposed externally.

Reflecting historically, Tehranian (1985) posited that communication strategies for collaborative engagement must be purposefully designed to influence stakeholder attitudes and galvanize collective action. This study critically explored whether competence is narrowly construed as political maneuvering to attain power or more expansively understood as leadership capacity to unify diverse stakeholders in planning and shared responsibility for development outcomes. Deloitte and Nyenrode (2016) argue that stakeholder decision-making within governance contexts is profoundly influenced by

leadership's ability to balance competing interests while aligning expectations with overarching goals.

Tehrani's conceptualization of communication needs within the Participatory Communication Model emphasizes "the growing, learning, and communication capacity of a society to define, negotiate and resolve their social problems autonomously." This underlines the need for sensitive and strategic application of participatory communication for the success of collaborative interventions. The advent of social media and digital technologies has further transformed participatory communication, offering novel opportunities for enhanced community engagement and empowerment (Gordon, 2013). However, these advancements also introduce challenges, including misinformation, digital divides, and the critical need for digital literacy (Pennycook & Rand, 2022).

Synthesizing the literature, this study posits that the Participatory Communication Model fosters democratic change that is genuinely by the people, of the people, and for the people. This triadic conceptualization implies that change is determined by stakeholders, executed through their agency, and ultimately benefits them. The core components of the Participatory Communication Model include: identification of concerns; teamwork; dialogical conversation; negotiation and compromise; strategic action; and ongoing evaluation of impacts.

## **2.2 Public Participation and Governance**

The existing literature predominantly situates the Participatory Communication Model within the broader framework of Development Studies. The review on this study narrows the focus of the model to the specific core elements or fundamentals that are instrumental

in fostering meaningful cohesion in teamwork towards sustainable and desirable social change. These fundamentals constitute a constellation of unique factors that significantly influence the cultivation of positive attitudes and the maintenance of social order (Ferrante, 2003).

Fundamentally, the Participatory Communication Model hold the critical drivers that enable effective integration and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, mainly in contexts where competing interests must be prioritized and reconciled. Such informed and deliberate engagements are essential to ensuring cohesion within teams, thereby enhancing the collective capacity of stakeholders to execute strategic decisions effectively. The principal components of the model include: concern, teamwork, dialogical conversation, compromises, strategic actions, and evaluation of impacts.

Further, the foundational factors necessary for the successful application of the Participatory Communication Model especially within governance contexts can be categorized into key domains: the core functions of communication, guiding principles, varied forms of communication, enabling conditions for meaningful engagement, and the tenets or guidelines that ensure a sensitive and contextually appropriate application of the model. These domains collectively form the bedrock for effective participatory practices, which are elaborated in the subsequent sections of this study.

### **2.2.1 Participatory Communication for Community Initiatives**

Devolution as a governance framework was designed to enhance stakeholders' participation in decision-making and the initiation of resolved community issues. Prior to devolution, there was a clear need for communities to be recognized and empowered,

which catalyzed demands for collaborative governance structures. The Participatory Communication Model thus serves as a vital platform enabling stakeholders in Busia County to articulate their empowerment agenda. However, achieving cohesive integration among these diverse actors necessitates carefully formulated communication strategies that effectively bond stakeholders.

The Participatory Communication Model is distinguished by a range of functional elements. Mezzenna (1996) finds these as linkage, involvement, dialogue, and oversight. Foremost among these, the linkage function ensures that diverse community members are adequately informed about their societal roles and responsibilities. The literature consistently demonstrates that strategically disseminated information transforms scattered individuals into unified stakeholders; unity arises through shared, informed knowledge. Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) affirm that the power of stakeholder unity is underpinned by their consciousness, commitment to shared tasks, and collective ownership of decisions.

In Busia County, ethnic groups such as the Teso (North and South), Banyala, Marachi, Bukhayo, and Samia possess distinct priorities requiring tailored attention. This study posits that effective participatory communication should enable all citizens of Busia County to access comprehensive information about their civic rights and participation mechanisms, thus empowering them to address pressing governance concerns.

Stern (2011) reinforces that Participatory Communication provides stakeholders with a deliberative forum to shape their developmental trajectories. Rooted in Stakeholder Theory, Christopher (2008) contends that institutional performance is contingent upon

the diverse contributions of concerned parties, each possessing vested interests and autonomy in prioritizing these interests. Okwechime (2015) further argues that dialogic environments foster trust among stakeholders, facilitating the exchange of strategic information critical for collaborative decision-making.

Therefore, effective communication acts as an empowerment tool, enabling stakeholders to assume responsibility for their decisions. This study anticipates that Busia County's governance structures afford all political wards, regions, and socioeconomic sectors equitable opportunities for public engagement, fostering harmonious participation based on mutual trust. Importantly, the Participatory Communication Model also incorporates oversight mechanisms, granting stakeholders the capacity to monitor the progress of their initiatives.

Servaes (2015) highlights that acknowledging stakeholder diversity is essential for appreciating both similarities and differences, which underpins mutually rewarding decision-making processes. Given Busia's cosmopolitan nature, the study underscores the necessity for leadership to ensure equitable oversight opportunities for all stakeholders in the implementation of collectively determined policies.

### **2.2.2 The Principles of Participatory Communication in Governance**

The advent of devolved governance introduced operational structures that required distinct philosophies and principles intrinsic to the Participatory Communication Model. Servaes (2015) elucidates that the model is undergirded by a spectrum of principles designed to facilitate meaningful and reciprocal engagement among intervention actors. Scholars variably term these as approaches, highlighting the model's inherent flexibility

that permits actors to select contextually appropriate engagement methods, thus ensuring mutually beneficial outcomes.

This study synthesizes these principles into a conceptual framework termed the “6Cs and G”: consideration, communication, competence, consultation, collaboration, cooperation, and a general principle.

Consideration is anchored in the human rights ideology of the 1980s, advanced by Sartre and McBride, which posits communication as fundamental to recognizing and respecting human dignity and personhood. This philosophy advocates for the emancipation of individuals from unwarranted oppression. Dahl (1994) conceptualizes respect for humanity within communication as a resolution to the democratic dilemma. Jacobson and Storey (2004) extend this by emphasizing human completeness, affirming the indivisibility and wholeness of individuals, thereby necessitating equal consideration. This literature implies that Busia County’s leadership ought to embrace the principle of consideration to ensure inclusive governance where no stakeholder is marginalized.

The autonomy of communication represents a second principle emphasizing communication’s intrinsic sovereignty, recognized in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR, 1948, Article 19). This principle underscores the creation of democratic spaces that enable free expression and decision-making in participatory programs. The principle implies that citizens of Busia County need adequate civic education regarding their participatory rights in governance space.

Communication Competence constitutes the third principle, advocating for the strategic, effective, and appropriate use of communication. Rooted in UNESCO's 1980s declarations, this principle regards communication as essential to fostering self-awareness and collective responsibility (McBride, 1980; Chambers, 1986). In this study, competence is understood as profound knowledge of communication's functions, effects, and appropriate applications, which stakeholders must develop for effective participatory governance. County leadership is encouraged to engage experts to enhance stakeholders' communicative capacity rather than operate in ignorance.

The principle of consultation embodies the "Last-First" concept, popularized by Freire and extensively applied in affirmative action initiatives. Servaes and Malikhao (2005) identify this principle as prioritizing stakeholders' needs to maximize intervention effectiveness. It combats entrenched negative stereotypes and social barriers, promoting respect, dignity, and equality across all societal segments. Effective Public Participation in governance functions, including Busia County, requires stakeholders to actively engage with governance decisions by the competence ideals.

Brennan and Schungrensky (2017) praise consultation for prioritizing intervention agendas inclusively, especially advocating for marginalized groups such as women and vulnerable populations. This principle rationalizes power relations and resource distribution equitably. The study interrogated whether Busia County's citizens genuinely function as equal partners or are relegated to passive approval roles.

Collaboration, the fifth principle, is grounded in Freire's dialogical pedagogy. It prioritizes symmetric, two-way communication fostering mutual dialogue and consensus-

building. Through information dissemination, collaboration empowers stakeholders with knowledge, enabling proactive problem-solving. Mohan (2008) argues that this principle liberates individuals from various forms of oppression, with information and economic empowerment crucial in alleviating poverty and ignorance. The study critically examined the presence or absence of this principle in Busia County's governance.

Effective collaboration could, for example, empower the Banyala community to diversify their economic activities beyond fishing in Lake Victoria, enable the Samia to leverage strategic agricultural ventures, support the Bakhayo's sugarcane production via Busia Sugar Factory, and advance the Teso's industrial initiatives in sugar and tobacco.

The cooperation principle relates to Marxist-derived utopian ideals, emphasizing holistic social fulfillment beyond material needs. It posits that Busia County's communities require participatory social interactions to shape their development, rejecting externally imposed solutions. Jacobson and Storey (2004) assert that collective decision-making among stakeholders is fundamental to meaningful achievement, underscoring the benefits of teamwork.

Bingham (2006) endorses this by acknowledging development's reliance on traditional value systems, experts, change agents, and community leadership. Turfing and Triantafillon (2013) concur; emphasizing that sustainable motivation is rooted in community-driven development culture. This principle is vital for inclusive prioritization of development programs within County Governments.

Finally, the ‘G’ principle; General signifies the reflexive competence of facilitators to prudently tailor interventions to unique local contexts, respecting cultural identity and democratic participation at all levels. Busia’s ethnic diversity should be leveraged by the County Government to articulate distinctive development ideas improving livelihoods. National funding must equitably benefit all ethnic communities.

Lozare (1989) argues that citizens possess centuries of experience and intelligence, warranting respect irrespective of formal education status. Freire cited in Durose and Richardson (2016) frames this notion as stakeholders’ inherent right to voice their collective and individual destinies. Accordingly, stakeholders of Busia should be empowered to propose and influence planning and implementation of development agendas based on their genuine needs.

### **2.2.3 The Forms of Participatory Communication Model in Governance**

Devolution was predicated on the need to engage every stakeholder in interpreting and participating in governance processes. In Busia County, this translated into expectations that the governor’s office would assign personnel to mobilize communities through diverse communication channels. However, the inherent complexity and multiplicity of communication processes present challenges which the Participatory Communication Model seeks to address through its varied forms of engagement.

Servaes and Malikhao (2005), along with Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009), categorize these forms into five modalities: passive, consultancy, collaboration, empowerment, and transformative.

## **1) The Passive Approach of Communication**

While less emphasized, White (1999) clarifies that passive participation remains critical in exigent emergencies where rapid, directive responses are required to mitigate crises effectively. In its ideal application, passive communication is cautiously employed in collaborative engagements due to its inherent limitation. It suppresses stakeholder input, thus rendering participants inactive agents in the decision-making process. Yang and Callahan (2005) observe that this form disproportionately empowers facilitators while reducing stakeholders to passive recipients, or mere rubber stamps, for predetermined outcomes.

Passive approach is, nonetheless, predominantly utilized in political discourse. It is often features in electoral campaigns where candidates disseminate overstated narratives and unverified promises, primarily through mass media, to sway public perception. In governance, actors must recognize the perils of such one-way communication and adopt it with discernment, ensuring that all stakeholders are meaningfully engaged for collective progress.

## **2) The Consultancy Approach in Participatory Communication**

Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) conceptualize the consultancy approach as a variant within the Participatory Communication Model. Here, stakeholders engage professional experts to act on their behalf, implicitly acknowledging their own limitations in solving specific issues (Okwechime, 2015). This model is prevalent in domains requiring specialized technical expertise. Best practices dictate that stakeholders should consciously admit their

incapacity before initiating consultant engagement. In the context of County Government operations, it is imperative that such consultancy engagements are sanctioned by stakeholder consensus to ensure legitimacy and shared accountability.

### **3) The Collaborative Approach to Participatory Communication**

As Chambers (2015) asserts, the collaborative approach represents the most widely adopted participatory communication model, principally in addressing bipartisan or cross-sectoral concerns. It aligns with dialogic pedagogy by fostering mutual cooperation among diverse stakeholders. This model supports inclusive deliberation and is likely the paradigm envisioned in the 2010 Kenyan Constitution's mandate on Public Participation. In Busia County, such collaborative mechanisms are vital in harmonizing ethnic diversity and enabling varied communities to collectively prioritize developmental objectives.

### **4) The Empowerment Approach of Participatory Communication**

This form emphasizes stakeholders' capacity to uphold "last-first" principles, ensuring that those most marginalized are prioritized in decision-making. Consultants and stakeholders function as co-creators in the deliberative process; however, implementation responsibility ultimately rests with the stakeholders. Considering the four approaches, Yang and Callahan (2005) classifies participatory communication engagements into direct and indirect modalities. Collaboration and empowerment are classified as direct involvement strategies, while passive and consultancy forms represent indirect modalities. Each model has intrinsic value, contingent on prudent application that ensures stakeholder integration in governance discourse. Fifth is the transformative approach that

goes further to require recognition of local community beliefs, values, and context as integral to the change process.

#### **2.2.4 Conditions for Participatory Communication in Governance**

The literature underscores that the quality of participatory engagement is rooted in the relational dynamics among actors. These dynamics are contingent on the basic enabling conditions, namely: democracy, freedom, equity, and justice. Participatory Communication thrives in democratic contexts, where mutuality and dialogic exchange can flourish.

In his conceptualization of the Dissonance Theory, Festinger in Jefkins (1998) emphasized that individuals resist externally imposed ideas when excluded from the process. Freedom of expression is thus foundational for genuine interaction. Tufte and Triataillon (2013) affirm that true freedom entails equal opportunity for all, regardless of social hierarchy. Kenya's devolution framework anticipated this ethos, embedding Public Participation as a right rather than a privilege. For Busia County, this implies enabling all ethnic groups to freely engage in public discourse, without coercion or intimidation.

Equity, as discussed by Durose and Richardson (2016), underpins stakeholder trust and access to essential resources. It guarantees fairness in power dynamics and resource allocation, while also key motivator for political leadership. The study, therefore, explored whether Busia County's leadership has demonstrated a capacity for equitable development across its diverse constituencies.

Justice serves as the structural framework for governance integrity. According to Ring (1973), justice entails fair distribution and predicated on the intrinsic value of resources. Given Busia County's strategic location and resource potential, its leadership should harness local wealth for equitable economic empowerment. Chitnis (2005) posits that justice within participatory governance ensures that interventions adhere to legal and ethical standards, reinforcing accountability and inclusivity. The study sought to determine the practicability of this virtue in the governance of Busia County

### **2.2.5 Tenets of Participatory Communication**

Tenets are ethical and normative guidelines derived from community values and implemented through individuals' goodwill. Tenets aim to inform behavior and maintain social order in communities (Ferrante, 2003). The Participatory Communication Model incorporates a broad set of such tenets to enrich dialogic engagement. Lisa (2008) observes that the complexities of participatory communication necessitate tailored strategic responses. Brennan and Schugurensky (2017) suggest that the strategic application of these tenets significantly influences the depth and efficacy of interpersonal engagement.

The key tenets include: Mindfulness, Empathy, Reflexivity, and Balancing Humility with Authority, Honoring Participants' Resolutions and Context Sensitivity to; .Personal Dynamics, Power Relations and Power Distance.

### **2.2.5.1 Mindfulness and Consideration of Participants**

Participatory communication requires critical sensitivity to stakeholder perspectives. Mindfulness represents a cognitive and relational orientation characterized by intentionality and ethical awareness. Langer (1989) and Motley (1992) define it as a state of heightened awareness in communication, free from habitual or prejudiced responses. Ellinor (2005) views mindfulness as a unifying moral force, essential for cohesive social interaction. Goodall et al. (2013) argue that mindfulness enables communicators to analyze interactional contexts critically and make ethical choices. In the context of Busia County, the question remains whether stakeholders were recognized as integral participants in governance initiatives.

### **2.2.5.2 Empathy and Appreciation of Participants**

Empathy in participatory governance entails deeply understanding and valuing community experiences and aspirations. With Busia's multi-ethnic composition by Luhyas, Tesos, Luos, and Kikuyus among others; planning must reflect inclusive sensibilities. Arnett (2001) posits that empathy compels the listener not merely to hear but to act in solidarity. Johannesen (1971) classifies sincerity, accuracy, psychological presence, and positive regard as foundational to effective empathy. When practiced, empathy cultivates trust and enhances dialogic richness vital for successful civic engagements such as Public Participation for stakeholders of Busia County.

### **2.2.5.3 Reflexivity of the Leader as the Facilitator**

Effective facilitation in participatory settings demands reflexivity. It connotes the self-awareness for personal appraisal for one's biases and relational impact. Keltner (1989)

describes reflexivity as the conscious modulation of power to avoid dominating stakeholders. Based on reflexivity, Broome (2003) emphasizes that asking meaningful questions is more impactful than providing predetermined answers. Questions such as:

- Does this dialogue allow all voices to be heard?
- Are dominant narratives suppressed to foster equity?
- Does this process evoke new insights?

These awareness's enable participatory reflection in teamwork endeavours. County Governments, as mandated by the Constitution, serve as facilitators and its leadership should adopt reflexivity to drive inclusive development with stakeholders.

#### **2.2.5.4 Balancing Humility and Authority in Management**

Community development mandates a judicious balance between authority and humility. Democratic leadership empowers stakeholders while preserving facilitator discretion. In Busia County, humility in leadership must coexist with strategic guidance alongside the stakeholders to avoid dominance in deliberative spaces. Chilberg (1989) established that leaders must both direct and democratize discussions. Brennan and Schugurensky (2017) suggest that leadership in collaborative contexts includes shielding stakeholders from antagonism while ensuring balanced dialogue. Misuse of power introduces fear and resistance among the publics, undermining meaningful participation. Effective governance requires facilitators to wield authority with humility, and firm stands when necessary, but inclusive always. The leadership of Busia County ought to embrace these virtues to guide the direction of sustainable relations and development.

#### **2.2.5.5 Engaging Freely with Participants' Resolutions**

The devolution framework empowers counties to engage communities as equal development partners. Chilberg (1989) and Center et al. (2008) insist that stakeholders' resolutions should be implemented without distortion, as a sign of mutual respect. Misrepresentation or disregard for stakeholder resolutions constitutes a breach of trust. Broome (2008) emphasizes that even intuitive facilitator insights must be vetted and endorsed by participants. As well articulated by Aye (1993), the citizens are the owners of the government, this study posits that any subversion of stakeholders resolved intent compromises legitimacy of participatory ideals. The study hoped that stakeholders of Busia County have a voice in their collaborative engagements.

#### **2.2.5.6 The Personality Dynamics**

The actors' engagements and influence extends beyond verbal expression. Richmond and McCroskey (2004) and Knapp & Hall (2007) recognize that non-verbal cues manifested in posture, tone and demeanor all play a central role in communication. Matsumoto and Hwang (2013) concur that non-verbal communication is often perceived as more authentic. Gamble (2013) notes that 70% of communication is non-verbal thus forming a larger aspect of total communication. This form of communication reinforces, contradicts, or substitutes verbal messages. Nonetheless, cultural diversity further complicates non-verbal interpretation owing to unique values, symbols and signs in language. In Busia's multi-ethnic environment, non-verbal literacy is essential for inclusive governance, requiring conscious efforts to reach all demographic segments equitably.

### **2.2.5.7 The Power Relations in Teamwork**

Power factors within group dynamics significantly influence participatory success. Keltner (1989) and Handy (2016) argue that power; whether shared or monopolized shapes stakeholder engagement. Misuse can breed mistrust and disengagement. Leaders who obscure stakeholder input to evade accountability undercut participatory integrity. Hofstede (1991) introduces the concept of power distance as the psychological and institutional space between authority figures and subordinates. Luthans (2005) adds that perceived power attracts and repels simultaneously, often deterring junior members from open participation.

In practice, power relations often manifests as inaccessibility of elected officials. Knapp and Hall (2006) observe that cultural norms may suppress engagement due to reverence for hierarchy. Cultural values are tied to leadership decisions, and the study believed that the Busia County leadership is sensitive to inherent cultural dynamics. For Busia County, the implications are clear: governance must confront and mitigate power imbalances to foster genuine participation. Recognition of these dynamics is vital for fostering equitable and effective governance processes.

### **2.2.5.8 Societal Value Systems and Participatory Governance**

Societies are organized around value systems that function to entrench foundational moral codes and social norms. These structures underpin behavioral expectations and interpersonal relationships within communities (Ferrante, 2003). In Kenya, the 2010 Constitution institutionalized Public Participation as a foundational mechanism for

inclusive governance, thereby mandating equitable representation of all citizens irrespective of social or ethnic stratifications (Ahadi, 2022).

This constitutional measure was designed to remedy historical disparities and foster integration across Kenya's diverse sociocultural landscape. For instance, Busia County encompasses a complex demographic mosaic, with at least seven distinct ethnic communities coexisting. In such a pluralistic context, Public Participation emerged not merely as a legal requirement, but as a strategic communicative structure to harmonize divergent voices for collective empowerment and developmental planning. The core question that arises is thus: To what extent is Public Participation in Busia County functionally effective in unifying diverse stakeholder constituencies for sustainable development?

This inquiry necessitates a contextual exploration of high- and low-context cultural orientations- a framework advanced by Ting-Toomey (1985) to analyze how societal norms influence dialogic engagement. In high-context cultures, communication is often implicit, with individuals relying on shared experiences, non-verbal cues, and established relationships to convey meaning. Conversely, low-context cultures engage directness, explicit verbal articulation, and transparency in discourse (Gamble, 2002). These cultural constructs significantly shape the dynamics of participatory governance by either facilitating, or constraining open expression and mutual understanding.

In the ethno-cultural context of Busia County, the variations in communicative predispositions are pronounced: the Samia community is characterized by assertive discourse; the Banyala are generally forthright; the Teso display strategic reticence; the

Bakhayo exhibit a calm demeanor; while the Marachi are noted for their adaptability. Understanding these high- and low-context orientations is not merely a descriptive exercise, but a requisite competence for leadership. Effective governance demands an ability to navigate such communicative ecologies to foster inclusion, manage conflict, and drive collaborative problem-solving. Hence, Communicative Competence, particularly cultural efficacy becomes a critical leadership asset in the facilitation through Participatory Communication Model.

### **2.3 Participatory Communication and Service Delivery**

This study critically examined the Participatory Communication Model as an essential framework for enhancing collaborative decision-making within devolved governance systems. Derived from Dialogic Communication Theory; akin to Public Relations, the Participatory Communication Model posits that meaningful development outcomes are contingent on stakeholder engagement rooted in reciprocity, trust, and mutual accountability (Miller, 2005). The literature underscores that complex governance challenges are rarely resolvable through top-down interventions; instead, they demand a collective effort underpinned by shared experiences and deliberative discourse.

Freire (1999), from a sociological perspective, contends that participatory communication embodies inclusivity, empowering marginalized voices in governance processes. Giddens (2007) further affirms that stakeholder engagement through participatory mechanisms enhances policy relevance, service efficiency, and developmental legitimacy. In the context of Busia County, one would expect that more than a decade after devolution, citizen involvement would have matured into a robust institutional norm. However,

empirical observation by Sorre (2017) and KNBS (2017-2024) suggests otherwise, necessitating a critical inquiry into the operational deficits.

Broome (2009) emphasizes that communities are extremely aware of their needs and possess the latent capacity to articulate developmental priorities. Hence, governance strategies imposed without adequate stakeholder input are not only ineffective but also delegitimizing. Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) argue that participatory processes, when competently facilitated, yield outcomes that are both contextually relevant and democratically validated. This underscores a crucial premise of this study: Does the leadership of Busia County possess the Communicative Competence required to engage stakeholders meaningfully in developmental governance?

Participatory communication also mitigates the risks associated with asymmetric power relations by facilitating transparency, consensus-building, and shared accountability (Stern, 2011). Servaes (2015) argue that the Participatory Communication Model acts as a democratic safeguard, counterbalancing the centralization of power within political and bureaucratic elites. Yet, in Busia County, this study explores if the pathetic socio economic situation affecting the stakeholders is an evidence of an inversion of roles in which the executive retains excessive control. This factor reduces the citizens to peripheral participants, contrary to the constitutional vision of participatory democracy fostered in the 2010 constitution.

Todaro (2017) cautions that emerging governance systems, predominantly in the Global South, are vulnerable to bureaucratic domination and elite capture. Durose and Richardson (2016) add that participatory mechanisms, when misapplied, become

superficial rituals devoid of transformative capacity. In Busia County, persistent poverty, underutilization of local resources and stagnated development are indicators of governance disconnect between policy design and public agency. This study, therefore presumed that re-centering the Participatory Communication Model through a focus on facilitator competence and dialogical praxis, is essential for restoring developmental accountability.

#### **2.4 Systemic Constraints in Devolved Governance**

The transition to a devolved governance structure introduced both opportunities and systemic constraints. While devolution sought to democratize development planning and implementation, the operationalization of participatory governance has been impeded by entrenched administrative cultures and communication deficiencies. Malan (1998) observed that many public programs continue to be governed by the Development Communication Model, a unidirectional top-down paradigm that contradicts the dialogic ethos of Participatory Communication Model. Such misapplications retard the benefits of collaborative governance and hinder citizen empowerment aspired in the devolution.

In Busia County, this misalignment manifests in the retarded wellbeing of the stakeholders- indicative of the high poverty levels. Bessette (2006) established leadership's fear of losing control as a key deterrent to genuine participation. This study, therefore, explored whether such governance dynamics in Busia County have undermined the promise of devolution.

Jackson (2008) and Chambers (2015) argue that incompetent or self-serving actors distort participatory models, often reconstituting them as mechanisms of control rather than

emancipation. Similarly, Lugones and Spelman (1983) highlight the dangers of ethical compromise in facilitation, where participation is manipulated to achieve predetermined outcomes. This critique calls into question whether socioeconomic stagnation in Busia is a consequence of leadership deviating from Participatory Communication Model ideals in favor of expediency or political entrenchment.

## **2.5 Analytical Lenses for Participatory Governance**

The study draws on multiple theoretical frameworks to provide a robust analytical foundation for understanding the dynamics of participatory governance.

### **2.5.1 Barnlund's Transactional Communication Model**

Barnlund's (1970) Transactional Communication Model (BTCM) conceptualizes communication as a simultaneous, multi-channel process involving feedback, context, and mutual influence (Miller, 2005). In this study, the model is applied to elucidate the dynamic interactions between county leadership and stakeholders during Public Participation processes. Key transactional elements such as attitudes, internal and external influences, behavioral signals, and environmental contexts were used to interpret the extent to which stakeholders are meaningfully involved in the functional governance space in Busia County. The model underscores the principle that communication in governance should be reciprocal and adaptive, not directive and static.

### **2.5.2 Functional Theory**

Based on Ferrante (2003), Emile Durkheim's Functional Theory is meant to illustrate the systemic interdependence of governance units. Public Participation is conceptualized as a functional sub-system within the broader governance structure; any dysfunction within

this unit potentially compromises the performance of the entire system. Drawing on Etang (2007), the theory highlights how the integrity of Public Participation mechanisms is integral to the effectiveness of service delivery and democratic legitimacy and primarily in participatory governance of Busia County.

### **2.5.3 Conflict Theory**

While not an anchoring Conflict Theory as theoretical variable, the theory was applied as an evaluative lens to understand the tensions inherent in participatory governance. Conflict, as Luthans (2005) and Handy (2016) argue, is both inevitable and necessary in organizational contexts. It arises from competing interests, unmet expectations, and structural inequalities. In Busia County, the suppression of stakeholder voices, uneven power distribution, and administrative inefficiencies are potential sources of latent conflict. However, when appropriately managed through participatory mechanisms, such conflicts can catalyze constructive change (Moustakis, 1974; Hoggs, 2003).

These theoretical underpinnings and contextually nuanced analysis of Participatory Communication Model affirms that the efficacy of participatory governance in Busia County hinges not merely on institutional frameworks, but fundamentally on the Communicative Competence, ethical orientation, and strategic intent of leadership actors.

## **2.6 The Broad - Base Practice of Participatory Communication Model**

The relevance of the Participatory Communication Model is thoroughly articulated in existing literature. Within the broad literature, Lee (2015) underscores its utility in institutionalizing Public Budgets Public-Private Partnership and Public Participation as a framework for good governance. The framework is quite ideal for devolved units such as

Busia County. The model's foundational principle in collaborative engagement for empowerment is notably illustrated by Bertolt Brecht's dialogic radio theory, which advanced the radio as a transformative tool for public enlightenment and participatory discourse.

As Brennan and Schugurensky (2017) observe, Brecht's conceptualization of radio promoted a two-way communication system, enabling citizens to be active agents rather than passive recipients of information. This study thus raises the pertinent question of whether such dialogic mediums are leveraged in Busia County to cultivate informed civic engagement and stakeholder empowerment.

In this participatory paradigm, mass media, especially radio, functions not merely as a conduit for information but as a mechanism for fostering critical consciousness, community dialogue, and emancipatory action. Servaes and Malikhao (2005) contend that participatory communication programs must transcend the persuasive mode, encouraging an "action-reflection-action" model consistent with Freirean pedagogy.

The flexibility and contextual adaptability of Participatory Communication Model is further exemplified in global interventions. Roberts (2017) provides a compelling case from Guatemala where local communities resisted donor-imposed HIV/AIDS initiatives in favor of addressing more immediate concerns. This led to the adoption of a "last-first" approach, where citizen priorities took precedence. The concept elucidates an affirmation of the model's capacity to recalibrate development programs based on dialogic consensus and shared priorities.

Similarly, in Venezuela, the Wayuu community's response to an unforeseen drought, and the subsequent reallocation of program funds to water access, epitomizes bottom-up, stakeholder-led planning; an ideal enshrined in participatory communication. The case illustrates how Participatory Communication Model enables real-time responsiveness to emergent community needs, thereby reinforcing its place in governance frameworks that aspire toward democratic legitimacy. In Thailand, Khampa (2009) recounts how the introduction of a communication specialist in the CORNS initiative significantly transformed an underperforming development program into a successful endeavor. The program enlisted communication essentially as a relational and an ongoing practice with community stakeholders.

In the Indian context, Chitnis' (2005) study of the Comprehensive Rural Health Project (CRHP) highlighted how Participatory Communication Model can transcend rigid socio-cultural barriers, including caste-based segregation. Guided by Freirean principles, community peer-learning catalyzed participatory reflexivity and collective action, transforming traditionally excluded groups; especially illiterate women into effective health advocates. These insights resonate with Kenya's ethno political landscape, where ethnic affiliations are perceived to obstruct equitable participation. Collaborative communication strategies may, therefore, be instrumental in deconstructing uneven entrenched power structures and enabling more inclusive county governance.

The democratizing potential of Participatory Communication Model is also reflected in Kenya's historical trajectory. Aye (1993) highlights the correlation between participatory communication and democratic openness. Initially restricted to NGO-driven development

initiatives, as Omolo (2011) explains, Participatory Communication Model became more integrated into public governance through institutional reforms like the District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD). However, Chitere and Ileri (2004) critique this model's implementation, which prioritized bureaucratic field agents over grassroots stakeholder leadership.

The promulgation of the 2010 Constitution marked a pivotal shift by constitutionalizing Public Participation as a civic right especially under Chapter 4 on the bill of rights and chapter 11 on devolved government. Nevertheless, as Saati (2015) and Lees-Marshment (2015) argue, political interference and bureaucratic inertia continue to compromise the intended impacts of devolution. Development priorities are frequently skewed by elite interests, raising questions about whether participatory governance in Busia County suffer from elitism problems and whether it effectively channels public input into actionable outcomes.

Somba's (2017) examination of KENSUP in Kibera illustrates the limitations of participation where community voices are ostensibly acknowledged but ultimately excluded from decision-making processes. Njagi and Kirimi (2018), and Ronoh et al. (2018), reaffirm that flawed protocols, political gatekeeping, and institutional apathy have hindered citizen participation. These structural deficiencies, if unaddressed, risk entrenching a culture of disengagement and governance opacity in counties such as Busia. Yami (2018) posits that these are not aberrations but endemic features of participation when misaligned with communicative integrity.

Finally, the study by Nyaranga et al. (2022) in Bungoma County affirms the transformative potential of Participatory Communication Model when implemented with intentionality. Their findings recommend civic education and the institutionalization of rapporteurs to bridge the gap between policy formulation and stakeholder needs. This questions if there is a need of communication expertise as a strategic function of governance for participatory governance to fulfill its constitutional promise in Busia County.

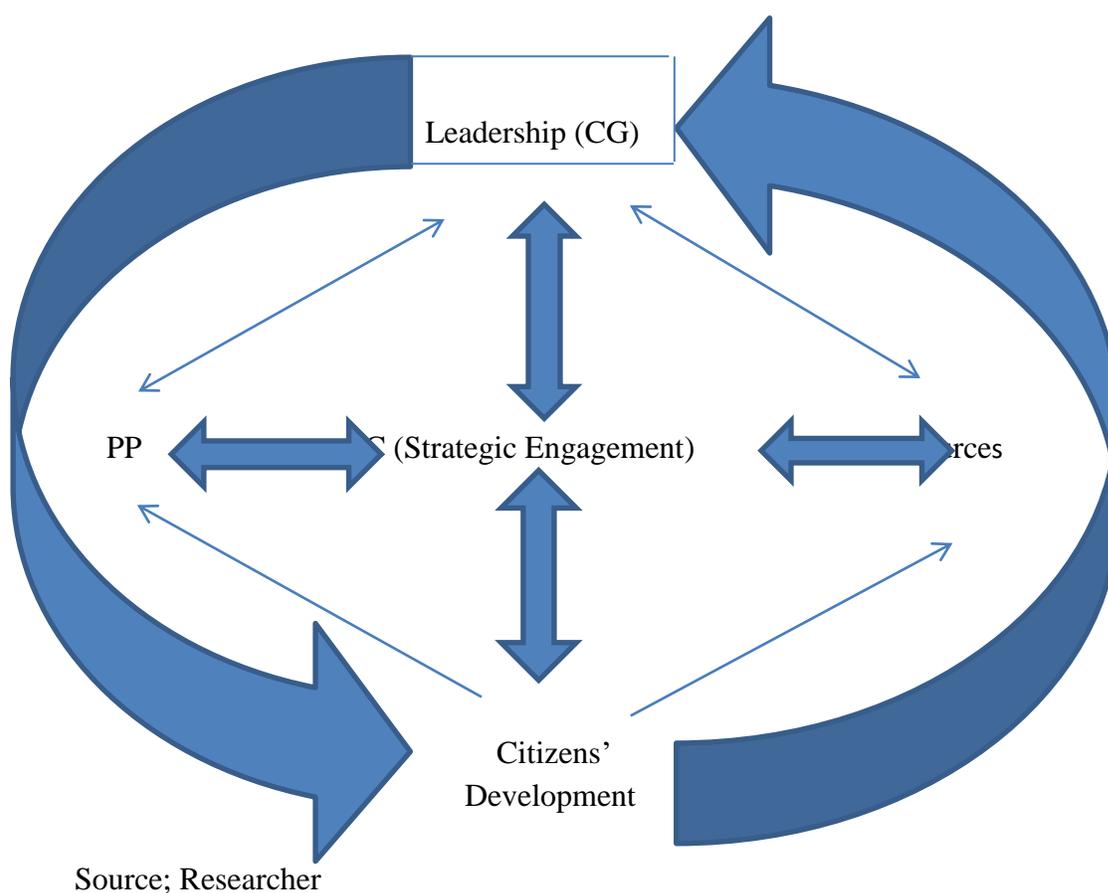
## **2.7 Conceptual Framework**

This study explored the dynamics of interaction and interdependence within transactional roles underpinning participatory governance in the County Government of Busia. The reviewed literature underscored the centrality of the Participatory Communication Model as an indispensable mechanism for structuring stakeholder engagement processes; especially in Public Participation space. The study further acknowledged the instrumental value of this model in advancing the objectives of devolved governance. Given the intricate nature of teamwork dynamics within participatory processes, the study adopted the Functional Theory to articulate how structured roles and cooperative behaviour foster systematic performance in Public Participation. Concurrently, the study introduced Conflict Theory to identify the latent tensions and potential dysfunctions inherent in the Participatory Communication Model's practical implementation.

County Government leadership is expected to exercise fiduciary stewardship over public resources, which are intended to empower citizens in collaborative development planning

In conceptualizing the study variables, the County Government was operationalized as the institutional entity mandated to manage devolution functions. Participatory governance was treated as the governing system, whereas Public Participation constituted the interactive unit of analysis. Within this unit, governance actors-namely, leadership and stakeholders were conceptualized as interdependent functional components critical to the realization of devolution ideals in Figure 1.

**Figure 2.1: The Conceptual Framework**



The concentric outer arrows on the diagram symbolize the overarching devolution agenda emphasizing inclusion, teamwork, and empowerment. The smaller inner arrows represent

assumed relational dynamics inherent in participatory governance. The model further implies that leadership, enclosed in the rectangular space, possesses discretion to initiate Public Participation, potentially with limited stakeholder inclusivity. Meanwhile, although stakeholders are presumed to possess the right to engage, such involvement is often constrained by legal, structural, or procedural limitations.

The medium arrows emphasize the pivotal role of Public Relations in the Participatory Communication Model to bridge gaps between policy intention and participatory execution. The arrow also signify implementation gap of Public Participation, thus revealing its functional salience in governance space.

## **2.8 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter delineated communication as both a process and an instrument of human interaction and governance. It explored the symbiotic relationship between the Participatory Communication Model and Public Participation, essentially within the framework of governance. The discourse contextualized Participatory Communication as a subset of Development Communication, both of which are grounded in Public Relations theory. The chapter further explored how Public Relations provide a historical and functional foundation for facilitating stakeholder engagement in policy processes.

The review identified key functions of the Participatory Communication Model namely; linkage, integration, empowerment, oversight, and evaluation. Other elements were the normative principles underpinning its effectiveness. Different forms of participatory engagement ranging from passive to empowerment were also examined. Preconditions for meaningful participation, such as democratic space, equity, and stakeholder freedom,

were critically analyzed. Conceptual and theoretical insights were reinforced with context-specific illustrations of successful participatory interventions. The chapter concluded with the development of a conceptual framework to guide the inquiry. The next chapter outlines the philosophical, methodological, and analytical approaches adopted in the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlined the interpretivist philosophical paradigm that informed the exploratory research design. Anchored in qualitative approach, the research explored the roles, rights, and responsibilities in the form of perceptions, subjective meanings, and lived experiences of Public Participation in governance among purposefully selected stakeholders in the governance trajectory of Busia County. The research was grounded in the instrumental case study method, which allowed for the in-depth investigation of stakeholder communication patterns, governance perceptions, and participatory practices within the devolved government structure.

Purposive sampling was employed to identify key participants whose perspectives were considered central to the research objectives. Data were collected using interviews, observation and media platforms and analyzed through thematic and content analysis techniques. These methods facilitated the identification and clustering of emerging concepts and patterns into theoretically grounded themes. The integration of data with conceptual and theoretical lenses enabled the development of new insights on the role of Participatory Communication Model in governance in Busia County.

#### **3.1 The Research Paradigm and Design**

This study was grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. The philosophy advocates for the understanding of reality through the subjective experiences and interpretations of social

actors (Creswell, 2015). The paradigm facilitated the adoption of an exploratory design within qualitative approach, positioning Busia County as a critical context for examining how stakeholders conceptualize governance and engage with the leadership structures of the County Government. The qualitative approach was justified by the complex and dynamic nature of human communication, more so within governance settings where meanings are constantly negotiated.

According to Creswell (2010), a paradigm is a philosophical worldview through which individuals interpret reality. In alignment with Attribution Theory, the interpretivist paradigm supports the premise that knowledge and meaning are constructed through individual perceptions (Dörnyei, 2011). Miller (2005), and Gillian and Hugo (2009), contend that this paradigm is congruent with relativist ontology and subjective epistemology, where knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participant. Additionally, the interpretivist approach is mindful of axiology; thus the influence of values on inquiry and the contextual nature of research phenomena, both of which were critical in shaping this study.

This research was premised on the understanding that Public Participation, as practiced in Busia County, is not a monolithic construct, but a lived reality expressed differently across social groups. Each participant's voice was considered integral in capturing the multiplicity of views on devolution and participatory governance. The study recognized that ethnic communities within Busia such as the Tesos, Luhyas, Luos, amongst others hold diverse interpretations of Public Participation, shaped by their socio-political

histories and geographic contexts. The qualitative approach was essential in drawing out these embedded perspectives.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

The study applied the qualitative research approach, which is broadly defined as an inductive strategy for exploring the meanings that individuals assign to social phenomena. Research approaches, as Newman and Benz (1998) observe, span a continuum from philosophical assumptions to data collection and analysis techniques. This study's qualitative orientation was essentially suited to interrogate the subjective understandings of Public Participation among stakeholders in Busia County.

Qualitative research is anchored in the desire to generate holistic accounts of complex realities. In this study, the approach enabled me to engage directly with stakeholders, eliciting deep insights into their experiences and interpretations of participatory governance. As Dörnyei (2011) notes, qualitative research is inherently flexible and sensitive to naturalistic contexts, making it ideal for studies of governance practices at the community level. Silverman (2013) further emphasizes the embeddedness of the researcher in the process as both participant and instrument. This idea aligns with the study's reflective and dialogical orientation. This dual positioning of participants enriched the depth and authenticity of the findings.

### **3.3 Research Method**

An instrumental case study method was applied to explore participatory communication engagements within the governance processes of Busia County. The choice of Busia was purposive, based on its developmental positioning, ethnic diversity, and geopolitical

relevance. Within the county, subgroups such as the Bunyala, Samia, Marachi, Bakhayo, and Luo communities amongst others; were treated as embedded clusters. Each cluster constituted a bounded case, offering distinct historical, sociocultural, and political contexts for examining participatory governance.

Stake (2005) conceptualizes a case as an issue within a real-life context, while Yin (2009) regards it as an empirical inquiry into a bounded system over time. Flick (2009) classifies case studies as intrinsic, instrumental, or multiple; this study adopted the instrumental case study, where the case (Busia County) serves to illuminate broader governance concerns. The objective was to explore how stakeholders perceive and experience Public Participation within a county that constitutionally mandates inclusive governance

Busia County, despite possessing significant natural and geopolitical resources, Sorre, (2017) and KNBS (2017–2024) found the County to face entrenched socio-economic challenges, with a poverty rate estimated at 70%. Creswell (2010) affirms that the value of a case study lies in its ability to contextualize phenomena within physical and situational settings. Accordingly, this study questioned the apparent stagnation in stakeholder livelihoods despite the constitutional promise and strategic resource allocation facilitated by devolution. The instrumental case study approach provided a robust framework for examining this paradox within the lens of participatory communication and governance.

### **3.4 Study Population**

The study targeted adult stakeholders (18 years and above as of 2013) residing in Busia County. Age was a key inclusion criterion, reflecting ethical research standards as well as

the functional threshold for civic participation and economic engagement. Residency was equally essential to ensure that participants had lived experience with governance processes under Kenya's devolved system. This ideal was crucial in assessing perceptions of Article 174 of the Constitution, which mandates public involvement in governance.

### **3.4.1 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures**

A total of thirty-five participants were purposively sampled across two stakeholder categories: residents and county leadership (Table 1). This stratification was designed to enhance data credibility through triangulation. The resident cohort comprised teachers, traders, and farmers selected for their unique perspectives on civic engagement, economic agency, and development. Teachers were engaged due to their civic literacy and pedagogical role in shaping community awareness about public rights. Traders were considered essential due to their function in linking economic activity and service delivery. Their views offered insights into the impact of governance on local enterprise. Farmers were engaged to assess the extent of agricultural support, food security planning, and market facilitation by the County Government.

The leadership category consisted of members of the County Executive, Members of the County Assembly, and county-level staff. These individuals were selected to explore institutional attitudes and commitment to participatory governance. Marshall and Rossman (2006) emphasize that appropriate sample sizes in qualitative research are small enough to provide in-depth and saturation. Creswell (2014) further asserts that qualitative sampling is theory-driven and context-specific for addressing unique issues. In adherence

to ethical standards, the identities of county officials were anonymized to protect them from potential repercussions. Table 1 below presents the participant sampling framework.

**Table 2.1: The Participants of the Study in Busia County**

	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Traders</b>	<b>Farmers</b>	<b>MCAs</b>	<b>CEC</b>	<b>SCA</b>
Butula	1	1	1	2	protected	protected
Nambale	1	2	1	1		
Matayos	1	1	1	1		
T.South	1	2	1	-		
T.North	1	2	1	-		
Funyula	1	1	1	1		
Budalangi	1	1	2	1		

**Source; Researcher**

### **3.4.2 Sampling Technique**

This study employed purposive sampling to identify participants whose experiences and perspectives were directly relevant to the inquiry. Within this framework, the Maximum Variation technique was applied to ensure heterogeneity among the 35 participants, who were purposefully selected based on diversity in gender, occupation, and geographic distribution across the seven sub-counties of Busia County. Flick (2009) characterizes purposive sampling as a non-probability approach focused on selecting individuals with shared, observable attributes aligned with the inquiry's specifications. In complement, Mason (2007) describes Maximum Variation as a strategy that selects participants based

on meeting the study criteria while exhibiting differences in variables such as gender, age, or occupation (See Table 1).

### **3.5 Data Collection Procedures**

The study's data collection procedures were shaped by the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methodology, both of which informed the selection, engagement, and structure of data gathering processes. Lucey and Luff (2001) conceptualize data collection as a continuum encompassing the identification of participants and the facilitation of meaningful interactions to elicit rich data. The study emphasized validity and reliability by adopting a triangulation approach of multiple data collection techniques and across varied sub-county contexts.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), the use of multiple data sources reduces threats to validity and enhances the credibility of qualitative research. Mason (2007) and Ritchie (2009) support this stance, asserting that triangulation fosters confirmability. Accordingly, this study employed key informant interviews, observation, document analysis, and audiovisual data collection as elaborated below.

#### **3.5.1 Interview Technique**

The study utilized Key Informant Interviews conducted in participants' natural settings using unstructured questions to enable dialogic engagement (Appendix VI). The open-ended nature of the questions allowed for spontaneous and nuanced responses, in line with the communicative dynamics of qualitative interviewing. As Numan (1992) avers, interview data constitute direct, context-specific narratives derived from participants' lived experiences.

This approach enabled direct interaction with stakeholders, affording the opportunity to interpret both verbal and non-verbal cues in real time. The technique fostered critical reflection and intellectual provocation, consistent with Kumar's (2005) emphasis on dialogic flexibility. Recordings were made with participant consent, while field notes were employed where recording was declined. The interview guide is provided in Appendix VI, and sample responses are included in Appendix VIII.

### **3.5.2 Observation Technique**

Observation complemented interviews and played a critical role in capturing non-verbal communication, which Knapp and Hall (2006) estimate to constitute approximately 70% of human interaction. Their theoretical model suggests that non-verbal cues augment, contradict, regulate, or substitute verbal messages. Cohen et al. (2007) and Jwan and Ongondo (2011) regard observation as a natural, non-intrusive, and invaluable means of collecting behavioral data.

Gillham (2000, p. 62) emphasizes that the strength of observation lies in its directness since it captures what individuals actually do, rather than what they claim or intend to do. This study used observation to analyze affective expressions associated with participants' perceptions of teamwork in governance. Observation also facilitated interpretation of the built and natural environment in Busia County, revealing socio-economic and developmental cues. Appendix II outlines the indicators and objects employed in the observation process.

### **3.5.3 Document and Content Analysis**

Document analysis was pivotal in triangulating data that informed the literature review. The study scrutinized both public and private documents, including policy papers, program reports, and media outputs (Appendix XIV). Wolf (2004b) defines documents as standardized artifacts, encompassing books, journals, newspapers, minutes, and photographs. Creswell (2009) further classifies them into private and public domains.

Newspaper articles provided topical insights into Public Participation in Kenya, while policy documents and field-based demonstrations yielded practical data on devolution. The internet facilitated access to multimedia resources that illuminated the theoretical and applied dimensions of the Participatory Communication Model, thereby deepening the study's empirical grounding.

### **3.5.4 Audio – Visual and Artifacts**

Audio-visual materials, including recorded interviews, television segments, and radio broadcasts on Public Participation, were incorporated to support data analysis (Appendix VIII). Creswell (2007) aver that such materials are integral components of mediated communication. The study extensively utilized tape recorders during interviews to capture participants' verbatim accounts for subsequent transcription and interpretation. Television and radio reports on Public Participation further enriched the data set by providing contextual illustrations of governance discourses in Busia County.

### **3.6 Data Analysis in the Study**

The study adopted thematic and content analysis to organize, interpret, and synthesize data collected through interviews, observations, and documents. Interview and observation data constituted the primary sources, while document analysis represented secondary data. These sources were integrated to capture the participants' experiential realities and to construct a coherent narrative of governance practice in Busia County.

#### **3.6.1 Thematic and content Analysis**

Thematic and content analysis is a rigorous strategy for qualitative data analysis, enabling the identification of recurring patterns within narrative and observational data (Marshall and Rossman, 2003). It supported the study in articulating participants' insights into Public Participation within Busia County's governance structure. Dornyei (2007) and Mason (2009) emphasize the researcher's active role as a participant-observer in interpreting such data.

Themes were derived inductively from the mass of data, providing a systematic structure for analysis as per (Lucey and Luff, 2009). Bryman and Cramer (2012) describe this process as cumulative and iterative, involving continuous organization, integration, and interpretation. Marshall and Rossman (2017) liken it to peeling the layers of an onion, culminating in the extraction of core meanings. The detailed stages of this analytical process are elaborated below.

#### **3.6.2 Triangulation Process of Data Analysis**

Transcription was the foundational step in data analysis, facilitating the transformation of audio and field notes into a coherent "thick data" set as per (Creswell, 2014). Flick

(2009) avers that transcription as a precursor to coding, theme development, and pattern recognition. The process involved sequencing recorded interview data, converting observation notes into narrative form, and integrating document and media content into a comprehensive data set. Creswell (2007) stresses that this perceived time-consuming step yield invaluable insights, thus enabling early analytic engagement.

### **3.6.3 Familiarization with the Data**

This phase entailed systematic immersion in the transcribed data to surface initial analytic impressions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that such familiarization enables deeper understanding and contextual framing. At this juncture, the study identified tensions between theoretical constructs of participatory communication and their practical enactment. Richards (2005) advocates for critical reading and reflection to bridge empirical data with emergent themes.

### **3.6.4 First Phase of Data Analysis**

The initial open coding phase involved reviewing the data to identify related issues and concerns as per Creswell (2009). This phase facilitated thematic categorization of participant responses on Public Participation in Busia County. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe this stage as foundational, wherein properties (content) and dimensions (context) are delineated. Key insights included the modalities and efficacy of communication practices in governance.

### **3.6.5 Second Phase of Data Analysis**

The fourth axial coding analytical phase entailed synthesizing related codes into broader thematic constructs. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define this as connecting micro-level codes into macro-level categories. Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) underscore the dual inductive-deductive complexity of this step. The analysis revealed gaps between stakeholder involvement in participatory forums and their marginalization in actual decision-making processes in Busia County.

### **3.6.6 Third Phase Coding**

The final coding stage also referred to as winnowing focused on reducing the thematic complexity by eliminating redundant or peripheral codes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that this refinement answers the “lessons learned” question. Ritchie and Lewis (2009) and Dornyei (2011) describe it as a refinement process to sharpen focus. Despite its rigor, Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) note the emotional difficulty of excluding rich but extraneous data. The phase underscored governance gaps, leadership weaknesses, and constraints of stakeholder participatory rights within the devolution framework.

## **3.7 Ethical Consideration in the Study**

The research adhered to stringent ethical standards. Formal approvals were secured from the university, NACOSTI, the County Commissioner, and the County Director of Education. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, in accordance with the principles of Hammersley and Atkinson (2007). Confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw were guaranteed. The documentation supporting ethical ideals in the study are provided in Appendices I, IV, V, VI, VII, and VIII.

Ethical integrity, as defined by Lisa (2008), governs the interaction between researcher and society. Stake (2005) emphasizes the centrality of ethics in maintaining research trustworthiness. Flick (2009) is clear that ethics reminds researcher of the balance between truth-seeking and respecting participant autonomy.

### **3.7.1 Disclaimer**

This study was not an evaluative audit of Busia County's administration or poverty levels. Rather, it explored communication dynamics as a tool for stakeholder engagement. Poverty was referenced only as an index of socio-economic development or otherwise. Busia County functioned as a contextual site to examine the applicability of the Participatory Communication Model in enhancing service delivery through Public participation, but not an investigative or audit inquiry.

### **3.7.2 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was attained through methodological triangulation and extensive literature integration. Participants were sampled from all seven sub-counties (Table 1), ensuring representativeness. The diversity of voices and contexts enriched the validity of findings, positioning the study as a credible intervention in addressing challenges related to Public Participation as a type of communication and governance.

### **3.7.3 Credibility of the Study**

Credibility was achieved by ensuring coherence and objectivity throughout the research process. Milner (2000) defines credibility as the degree to which a study is believable and dependable. This study's authenticity is supported by documentation of ethical clearance

and verbatim excerpts from participants (Appendix VIII), as endorsed by Stake (2006) and Mason (2007).

Acknowledging the researcher's dual role as instrument and participant was recognized. Stakeholder behaviours categorized as zealots, conformists, contrarians, and contrarian-conformists was instrumental in shaping the analytical lens devoid of biases. These behavioral typologies enabled informed interpretation of participant responses. As Marshall and Rossman (2003) note, analysis and interpretation in qualitative research are iterative and simultaneous.

### **3.6.6 Dependability of the Study**

Dependability in this study was assured through a comprehensive and theoretically grounded engagement with the Participatory Communication Model. The literature reviewed offered a robust conceptual foundation outlining the core principles and structural attributes of the model. These attributes were instrumental in evaluating the models' applicability and relevance to Public Participation practices within Busia County. Lincoln and Guba (2005) concur that dependability in qualitative inquiry is anchored in the provision of a detailed and consistent research framework, especially one rooted in authoritative literature that clarifies the phenomenon under investigation.

Further, this criterion was realized through my academic and professional background in communication studies, which aligns closely with the research focus. The possession of a Bachelor's degree in communication and a Master's degree specializing in Public Relations underscores my methodological and theoretical competence. As Creswell (2010) affirms, the dependability of qualitative research is significantly enhanced by the

researcher's expertise and prior engagement with the subject matter, thereby ensuring intellectual rigour and methodological precision throughout the study.

### **3.6.7 Confirmability of Findings**

Confirmability in this study was attained through the systematic triangulation of data sources and the comprehensive review of empirical cases where the Participatory Communication Model effectively facilitated intended governance outcomes. Scutt and Murdock (2007) define confirmability as the degree to which the interpretations and conclusions of a study are supported by evidence and logical reasoning. This study adhered to that standard by presenting participant narratives in verbatim form, ensuring that interpretations emerged from the data.

The inclusion of relevant government documentation, audiovisual materials, and first-hand observations further grounded the findings in observable realities. In line with Creswell (2010) and Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011), confirmability in qualitative research was upheld by employing a transparent analytical process and maintaining a clear review trail of decisions and interpretations. This methodological rigour affirms that the conclusions drawn were firmly rooted in the empirical evidence collected from the field.

### **3.6.8 Transferability of Findings**

This study conformed to established ethical standards and methodological principles that facilitate the transferability of its findings beyond the immediate context of Busia County. Transferability, as articulated by Bassey (1999) and Yin (2009), hinges upon addressing the parameters of external validity and ensuring that contextual features are sufficiently described to enable applicability in similar settings. The qualitative design,

with its emphasis on depth and contextual relevance, uncovered the latent dimensions of the Participatory Communication Model that influence the efficacy of Public Participation in county-level governance.

Although the study was context-specific, its findings offer actionable insights with broader applicability to other counties implementing devolved governance structures. The results hold the potential to inform policy and practice by enhancing collaborative frameworks and fostering inclusive public engagement. Ultimately, the study contributes to strengthening governance through communication and participatory practices that are replicable in other decentralized administrative setting.

### **3.8 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter elaborated the philosophical and methodological framework that guided the research, with a particular emphasis on the interpretivist paradigm and the qualitative research Approach. The ontological and epistemological orientation of the inquiry necessitated an inductive approach, thereby justifying the adoption of a case study method as the primary strategy for data collection. Purposive sampling was applied to identify information-rich participants, while thematic and content analysis techniques were used to organize, analyze and interpret the data.

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed, ensuring both the integrity and credibility of the research process. The study established its relevance, validity, and trustworthiness through methodological transparency and intellectual coherence. Collectively, the design and execution of the study positioned it to effectively interrogate the communicative dynamics that mediate good governance within County Governments.

The subsequent chapters provide a detailed exposition of the research findings, analysis, and policy-oriented recommendations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTEPRETATION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a comprehensive presentation and analysis of data collected through multiple research instruments. The data encompasses qualitative inputs including ideas, opinions, perceptions, observations, documentary evidence, and information sourced from internet platforms. The exploration into Public Participation within the governance framework of Busia County was anchored on the theoretical premises of the Participatory Communication Model. Busia County served as an instrumental case study for examining the collaborative dynamics underpinning the efficacy of Public Participation processes, with the ultimate objective of enhancing the delivery of public services to diverse stakeholders within the county.

#### **4.2 Data Presentation**

The findings articulated in this chapter were derived from triangulated data sources, ensuring the validity and reliability of the results. A total of thirty-five participants were purposively selected from all seven sub-counties of Busia County namely; Teso North and South, Nambale, Matayos, Butula, Funyula, and Budalangi. These participants provided detailed accounts reflecting their perceptions of Public Participation in governance. The participant cohort comprised a heterogeneous mix of residents and leadership; including teachers, traders, and farmers. The government side comprised executive officials, Members of County Assembly (MCAs) and County Government

staff- constituting the leadership cadre. The coding scheme employed for participant groups is delineated in Table 2.

**Table 3.2: A Summary of Group Codes for Participants in the Study**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Group category of participant</b>
TP 1-7	Teacher Participants from across 7 sub-counties
TrP 1-7	Trader Participants: shop attendants, market groceries, Boda- Boda from across 7 sub-counties
FP 1-7	Farmer Participants from across 7 sub-counties
MCAP 1-7	Member of County Assembly Participant –Busia County
CECP 1-7	County Executive Committee Participant–Busia County
SCAP 1-7	Sub–County Administrator Participant - Busia County
VADP 1-7	Village Administrator Participant -Busia County

Source; Researcher

In perceiving Participatory Communication Model as a critical framework to facilitate integration and collaboration of governance stakeholders, particularly their roles, rights and responsibilities in participatory governance of Busia County; the study therefore, sought to determine the factors to consider in the scope, content and procedure of Public Participation as the qualitative and quantitative standards for meaningful stakeholder engagement in governance space.

The study was guided by four specific objectives that corresponded to four research questions: To what extent do stakeholders in Busia County practice effective Public Participation in their programs? How are socioeconomic activities structured to promote effective Public Participation? Does the management of Busia County apply the Participatory Communication Model to enhance Public Participation in their programs? What challenges do both County Management and stakeholders face in conceptualizing and practicing the dynamics of the Participatory Communication Model?

#### **4.3 The Key Findings from the Study**

The study generated the following key findings:

##### **1. Participatory Communication Model**

The findings revealed that the Participatory Communication Model is theoretically ideal for steering Public Participation in governance initiatives. This model has the capacity to promote stakeholder rights and foster teamwork, thereby enhancing involvement across various socioeconomic activities. However, a significant implementation gap was identified, which undermines the model's potential to improve the effectiveness of Public Participation within governance structures. Currently, although citizens are constitutionally accorded participatory rights, these rights lack enforceability, resulting in a disproportionate empowerment of leadership relative to the citizenry.

##### **2. Public Participation and Governance**

The imbalance of power, with leadership dominating Public Participation functions, relegates citizens to passive stakeholders. This dynamic necessitates

leadership goodwill to cultivate meaningful, inclusive teamwork. The study found a notable absence of such goodwill, with leadership preferring to maintain a unitary governance status quo by withholding critical resources such as logistical support and civic education from citizens.

Consequently, citizens are systematically marginalized, limiting their capacity to engage actively and collaboratively in governance. Due to stakeholders' limited knowledge and resources, the leadership applied the traditional Development Communication Model for Public Participation interventions. This action alienating citizens further, from participatory governance and undermining collaborative commitment designed in governance.

### **3. Public Participation and Service Delivery**

Constitutionally mandated oversight roles were intended to empower citizens as active governance stakeholders. However, the findings show that these mandates were dysfunctional. Citizens were largely passive participants, contrary to the expectations outlined in Articles 10 and 174(c) of the Constitution. The oversight functions of Members of County Assembly (MCAs) were compromised as they aligned with executive interests, while Senators appeared politically motivated to maintain the existing power structure.

Furthermore, the judiciary lacked appropriate legal frameworks grounded in the Participatory Communication Model to effectively adjudicate Public Participation disputes. The National Government's limited jurisdiction under constitutional

separation of powers further constrained interventions in County governance. These structural and institutional constraints critically hindered the effective delivery of quality public services through Public Participation.

#### **4. Enhancement of Public Participation in Governance**

The study identified significant gaps in the implementation of Public Participation programs under the Participatory Communication Model. The gaps were primarily attributable to the lack of goodwill and commitment of facilitators. These deficiencies constrained the realization of participatory governance and its oversight functions within the County Government. Leadership goodwill emerged as an indispensable factor for mobilizing all stakeholders towards meaningful and sustained collaborative governance.

For instance, electoral processes were deemed overly politicized to reliably secure leaders with genuine commitment to participatory governance functions. Consequently, the study underscores an urgent need to reinterpret and operationalize the dynamics of Public Participation to foster more inclusive governance frameworks. Table 3 aligns the research objectives, questions, and the specific forms of Participatory Communication Model applied within Busia County.

**Table 3.3: Uses and Challenges of Participatory Communication in Busia County**

<b>Comm</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Effects</b>
<b>Intention</b>	Passive Citizens	Selective and Withholding Information	Irrational Decisions	Uninformed & Ignorant Citizens	Lack of Standards to Decide	Status & Quo & Poverty
<b>Interaction</b>	Consultants for Citizens	Divide & Rule Selective Engagements	Disharmony among Citizens	Sustain Citizen's ignorance	Camps & Instability	Status & Quo & Poverty
<b>Transaction</b>	Collaborative engagements	Selective Un- procedural Practices	Disorganized Society & Development	Prejudice between Citizens	Unsolicited un- Prioritized Development	Status & Quo & Poverty
<b>Social</b>	Empowerment	Selective empowerment Resources	Hegemony	Apathy among Citizens	Skewed development	Status & Quo & Poverty
<b>Cultural</b>	Norms	Whip Tribal Emotions	Resource Embezzlement	Deceitful & confusing citizens	Distrust non- accountability	Status & Quo & Poverty

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Source; Researcher

## **4.4 Data Analysis**

### **4.4.1 The Forms of Public Participation in Busia County**

The aim of this study was to explore how stakeholders interpret Participatory Governance within Busia County. The purpose sought to elucidate the underlying motives shaping the various forms of Public Participation in governance. Correspondingly, the first research question inquired: To what extent do stakeholders in Busia County effectively practice Public Participation in their programs? Central to this inquiry was an assessment of stakeholders' comprehension of their constitutional rights in policy formulation and development planning.

The findings revealed a predominantly asymmetrical communication process. Specifically, the leadership in Busia County fostered an opaque and exclusionary environment, undermining the constitutional mandate for devolution as stipulated in Article 174(c). This obfuscation reflected a leadership disposition characterized by apathy toward genuine inclusivity, which significantly hampered stakeholder engagement. The governance approach appeared deliberately disorganized, thereby incapacitating participatory functions. A critical deficiency was identified in leadership goodwill, manifested in a reluctance to collaborate transparently and act in good faith with stakeholders.

Notably, stakeholders were relegated to passive roles through systematic withholding of empowerment mechanisms, including civic education. Public meetings were predominantly advertised via newspapers, which remained inaccessible to many

stakeholders due to financial constraints, thereby excluding a substantial portion of the citizenry. This tactic resembled the traditional top-down communication approach criticized in Participatory Communication Model theory, undermining the ethos of participatory governance.

While physical attendance at public forums was often secured, stakeholders' contributions were neither solicited nor valued, reducing these engagements to performative compliance with legal mandates on budget making. Such exclusion contravened the dialogic principles enshrined in Article 174(c), which demands collaborative, equitable partnerships between government and citizens. The exclusion of stakeholders from formative stages of decision-making consequently disempowered them throughout the governance cycle, more generally weakening the oversight roles.

In comparative perspective, counties such as Makueni and Homa Bay demonstrated more effective grassroots-level collaboration, enabling stakeholders to contribute substantively to governance processes. The County Budget Transparency Survey (CBTS, 2020) (Appendix XIV) confirmed a stark contrast, reporting only 11% transparency in Busia County's budgetary process. This low transparency indicated deliberate smokescreen aimed at disempowering citizens and rendering them oblivious to their participatory roles.

Furthermore, the leadership interacted with stakeholders to position themselves as unilateral development consultants, circumventing stakeholder involvement. Rather than consolidating scattered community interests into cohesive stakeholder groups, the leadership exercised discretionary power to prioritize development initiatives. This

selective engagement empowered the executive to negotiate with privileged contractors and special interest groups, subverting the inclusive intent of Public Participation and rendering it ineffective in fostering equitable development.

The Participatory Communication Model advocates for collective, active engagement and shared responsibility among all actors. Contrary to this ideal, Busia County's leadership strategically applied their communication to transactional mechanism, selectively engaging collaborators to reinforce elite privileges. This communication strategy entrenched socio-political divides, creating a skewed system of governance accessible only to an exclusive class.

Moreover, communication was co-opted as a tool of empowerment favoring the leadership, rather than genuinely involving stakeholders in decision-making and implementation, as prescribed by the Participatory Communication Model. The resulting skewed empowerment fostered ambiguity about developmental priorities, further marginalizing ordinary citizens and reinforcing dependency on leadership for recognition and assistance.

Lastly, the executive strategically deployed communication to consolidate ethnic and business alliances for political protection, especially when confronted with governance integrity challenges. This practice contravened the principles of transformative democracy, fairness, and patriotism essential for effective public governance.

#### **4.4.2 The Benefits of Public Participation in Busia County**

The second objective aimed to evaluate the development outcomes attributable to Public Participation in Busia County governance. The corresponding research question asked: How are socioeconomic activities designed to ensure effective Public Participation? The study findings suggest that Public Participation in devolution, as a communication strategy, was conceptualized to catalyze strategic development through stakeholder engagement. However, empirical evidence indicates a lack of substantive developmental achievements directly linked to collaborative governance in Busia County.

Projects ostensibly arising from devolved governance were frequently implemented without prior stakeholder consultation. For example, road improvements resulted in destruction of private property without compensation; market stalls were constructed without stakeholder input; floodlights at community centers remained largely nonfunctional. Health services suffered from systemic inefficiencies, while ambulances transported patients to ill-equipped hospitals with chronic personnel strikes due to delayed remuneration.

Water infrastructure was unreliable, with numerous pipes lying unused and inconsistent supply exacerbated by power outages. Notably, most private developments associated with the county were linked to individuals affiliated with the County Government, reflecting a pervasive mistrust among stakeholders regarding government transparency and resource allocation. Notably though, while not all private developments are necessarily corrupt, the perceived trend underscores stakeholder skepticism toward the government's stewardship of public resources.

#### **4.4.3 Challenges of Public Participation in Busia County**

The third objective sought to identify factors impeding the effective application of the Participatory Communication Model in county governance. The research question probed whether Busia County management practiced the Participatory Communication Model to facilitate effective Public Participation. The findings indicated that Public Participation remains predominantly controlled by the leadership, with citizens having minimal opportunities to initiate or meaningfully contribute due to widespread ignorance of self-governance rights, resource constraints, and restrictive legislation.

Consequently, the Participatory Communication Model was misapplied, with the executive favouring a rigid top-down approach, rather than a dialogic pedagogical engagement strategy. This authoritarian model disenfranchised stakeholders while consolidating leadership power. Such misapplication directly contributed to the governance challenges observed in devolved units, reflecting a broader failure to incorporate stakeholder input into decision-making processes. The broad based challenges of problematic collaborative governance are manifested in stagnated development in Busia County and stakeholders' socioeconomic difficulties.

#### **4.4.4 Mitigating Challenges of Public Participation in Busia County**

The final objective aimed to generate pragmatic recommendations for enhancing Public Participation through improved Public Relations practices. The related research question examined the challenges faced by both county management and stakeholders in conceptualizing and practicing the Participatory Communication Model. The findings exposed a significant gap between legal frameworks on Public Participation and their

practical enforcement. The gap implies that Public Participation as a communication and relational governance strategy lack a legally backed institution to manage ideas, resolution and uncorrupted implementation.

This gap has allowed executives to monopolize governance regulation, marginalizing stakeholders. In this regard, scholars such as Osabwa (2020) and Saati (2015) have critiqued the functionality of Public Participation when citizens possess only nominal roles. An article in the Daily Nation August 8, 2025 p.19 by Omar Sheikh reflects similar arguments. Consequently, the study proposes proactive measures (detailed in Section 5.8) to revitalize participatory governance, emphasizing genuine stakeholder empowerment and inclusivity.

#### **4.4.5 The Emerging Issues in the Study**

Emergent findings underscore that Public Participation remains the optimal engagement strategy for County Governments. The Participatory Communication Model theoretically underpins the conceptual foundation for functional Public Participation. However, in Busia County, leadership failures to enact good governance practices have compromised the efficacy of this model.

The leadership's inability or unwillingness to engage appropriate actors effectively in doing the right things in the right way, has significantly undermined collaborative governance. A pervasive lack of leadership goodwill and commitment emerged as a critical factor impeding meaningful teamwork and governance outcomes in Busia County.

## **4.5 Data Interpretation**

The study's key findings in (Section 4.3) were analyzed in response to the research objectives and questions, with a focus on the systemic factors underpinning the performance of Public Participation within County Government.

### **4.5.1 Participatory Communication Model**

The literature consistently underscored the centrality of Communication Competence across applied domains. Majorly, Payne (2001) avers that communication is the foundational means by which individuals express interests, emotions, and concerns. On that account, Participatory Communication Model, reviewed in Chapters One and Two, is characterized as the strategy that facilitates teamwork and collaborative engagement. Servaes (2015) emphasizes the model's dialogic function in fostering collective action, but which was not realized at Busia County.

Rono et al. (2018), Nyaranga (2022), and other scholars highlight that Kenya's 2010 Constitution institutionalized Public Participation as the primary communication mechanism in public administration. Public Participation is presumed to provide the requisite framework for inclusive dialogue conducive to good governance. Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) in the literature argued that the Participatory Communication Model empowers stakeholders to identify common challenges and integrate diverse interests toward mutually beneficial solutions. However, the experience in Busia County deviates markedly from this ideal.

The County's multi-ethnic composition- including the Banyala, Samia, Bakhayo, Marachi, and Tesos communities would have benefitted from the model's effective application towards enhanced equitable participation and development. Yet, as extensively reviewed in Section 2.6, the model's efficacy was not realized, largely due to vagueness of application standards for stakeholder engagements.

#### **4.5.2 The Communication Strategy in Governance**

Raia (2010) situates Public Participation as a constitutionally entrenched communication strategy designed to foster collaborative governance in Kenya's devolved system. The underlying objective is to enable citizens to actively influence governance, primarily regarding policy formulation and development initiatives (Ahadi, 2020). This principle is anchored in Article 174(c); Chapter 11 of the Constitution, which underscores devolution's participatory intent to empower stakeholders into collaborative governance (Urai, 2010; Nyaranga et al., 2022).

The study hoped that Public Participation would empower stakeholders to overcome their socio economic challenges. This study identified poverty as the socio-economic operational indicator of stakeholders' effectiveness in Public Participation space in governance. From the literature, it was evident that citizens are unlikely to prioritize policies or development programs that do not align with their socio-economic realities. Nonetheless, the study found that Public Participation was applied strategically to circumvent the stakeholders' in Busia County. Their opinions were not considered yet policies and budgets were drawn and dispensed by the leadership. The study revealed that

Public Participation was predominantly implemented in a top-down manner, contravening the dialogic and inclusive ethos of the Participatory Communication Model.

Servaes (2005) emphasizes that the Participatory Communication Model mandates a two-way, dialogical pedagogy, which starkly contrasts with the top-down Development Communication Model critiqued by Naidoo (2010) for its failure to engender sustainable development outcomes. Consequently, development initiatives in Busia County were devised exclusively by leadership, operating under the flawed assumption that they comprehended the community's needs. This was echoed by a farmer's testimony illustrating the misapplication of Public Participation:

*“Tunasikia kwa maredio maneno ya participation...wanainchi kwende kuambiwa miradi ile imepangwa kwa maendeleo ya ma-contractors na wenye kupanga FPI” (Translated: We hear about Public Participation through the radio, announcing development projects that benefit contractors and project planners rather than the citizens).*

On empowerment that is an essential goal of devolution, Public Participation was selectively employed, perpetuating a divide-and-rule agenda within the county. Freire's (1999) critique of the Diffusion Theory highlights that leadership-driven development agendas, without meaningful consultation, inevitably marginalize stakeholder concerns. In Busia County, this translated to an appropriation of Public Participation by county leadership to legitimize predetermined development plans, thereby excluding genuine stakeholder input. This is exemplified by an MCA's statement:

*“...hii ndio serikali tulitaka...ili tupangie wanainchi maendeleo kamili.. bado tunataka tuongezewe pesa za kuimarisha maendeleo kama barabara na miradi mengine mingi...” (Translated: This is the government we wanted... to plan complete development for the citizens... and we still need more funding to improve roads and many other projects).*

Governance functions vary contextually, with Public Participation envisioned as a platform for civic education and stakeholder empowerment. However, findings revealed that in Busia County, it was used to marginalize stakeholders by restricting access to empowerment resources. The arrangement sustained their passivity and ignorance regarding their participatory rights. Had Public Participation been genuinely operationalized, distinct ethnic communities such as the Banyala, Samia, Bakahyo, Marachi, and Teso would be empowered to modernize their traditional farming and fishing practices. The youth would benefit from incubation programs, and health services could advance more effectively. Yet, these potentials remain unrealized due to systemic flaws in public participatory arrangements in governance.

Osabwa's (2020) findings on Public Participation align with this study, illustrating the emptiness of constitutionally enshrined self-governance rights in practical terms. Citizens lack agency to initiate participation activities, as devolved power remains concentrated within the executive branch. This corroborates earlier conceptual critiques by Saati (2015), which framed Public Participation as largely illusory, contingent on the goodwill of leadership. The absence of robust tools for checks and balances in participatory governance critically undermines accountability of stakeholder inclusivity in the governance of Busia.

Consultancy, the second mode of the Participatory Communication Model, aims to emancipate citizens through civic education and active involvement. Contrarily, Busia's leadership, including MCAs, often assumed the role of unilateral consultants or

outsourced this role, sidelining genuine stakeholder engagement. This practice contravenes the model's emphasis on inclusivity and dialogue. A trader lamented,

“PP forums in this county are used to stamp ready-made plans, with no room for citizen input except to create a false compliance façade...” (TrP1).

Freire (1999) underscored the importance of participant oversight in development decisions, while Aye (1993) emphasized citizens' rightful ownership and active involvement in governance. Broome (2008) argued facilitators must seek participant consent before altering initiatives, underscoring respect for stakeholders' sovereignty.

In Busia County, stakeholder alienation rendered citizens powerless partners in governance, consistent with Legakane's (2007) assertion that meaningful development requires inclusive consultation. Lowndes and Paxton (2018) underpin that governance should promote interdependence, yet Busia's leadership appeared to compete against rather than collaborate with stakeholders, aggravating governance dysfunction.

The findings also revealed leadership reluctance to engage collaboratively, as evidenced by recurring floods in Bunyala and food insecurity in the county, that are symptomatic of strategic neglect and poor stakeholder inclusion. Statements from County Executive and Sub-County officials revealed only symbolic roles devoid of meaningful authority or resources, reinforcing governance inefficacy.

### **County Executive Committee Participant**

“...We have an imaginary portfolio that we cannot execute...we simply go to the office to sit and fulfill the law. We are hardly assigned meaningful duties and if any, they are largely political to raise money than to assist in any development. We are held captive ..... we do not receive money to run CIDP programs captured in the annual budgets....” **CECP1**

CIDPs are county-integrated development programs that capture both short and long-term developmental plans of action.

### **Sub-County Coordinator**

“...We are here to be seen and not be heard...we do not have specific duty except to represent the governor in local functions....We thought we had a development role .....but that was taken over by MCAs and senior brokers who pull the shorts. The brokers have a say on what is done where and not us...too bad for now, what to do!” **SCCP1**

On these accounts, the study revealed that ethnic loyalties influenced communication dynamics, shielding leaders from accountability despite performance failures. This undermines the Participatory Communication Model’s core principle of collective empowerment (Satre and McBride, 1980). The selective application of communication strategies perpetuated disempowerment, as voiced by a teacher participant:

“Devolution brought a lot of money and tribal ethnicity... It is a political tool for elites to increase wealth... nothing common to show for it...” (TP1).

### **4.5.3 Leaders in Public Participation and Governance**

The leaders and stakeholders are considered the actors of participatory governance. This section discusses the leadership that was categorized into the political and administrative employees. The political wing consisted of Governors, Senators, and MCAs. Omolo (2009) conceptualizes political leaders as stewards mandated to unify society and drive collective development. In Busia County, citizens expected leadership to create an

enabling environment for sustainable livelihoods. Leaders possess positional power capable of influencing stakeholder behavior through access to government systems and resources. However, difficulty in accessing leaders for inclusive planning perpetuated poverty and socioeconomic challenges at the grassroots level.

The findings in this study linked socio-economic hardships to leaders' competitive and exclusionary practices. The 2010 Constitution envisaged leadership as partners with stakeholders to collaboratively address common concerns. Yet, the study found that the leadership did not delegate power to stakeholders. The leaders acted as authoritarian figures, making unilateral development decisions and excluding citizen participation. A trader participant encapsulated this:

“PP forums in this county are used to stamp ready-made plans... to create a false sense of compliance...” (TrP1).

Oversight functions were compromised, with MCAs prioritizing personal gain over safeguarding public interest. Another trader noted the entrenchment of vested interests:

“Most developments belong to MCAs, county employees, or their cartels... contractor ‘Y’ monopolizes contracts and shares proceeds with ‘boss Z’ undermining fairness...” (TrP3).

Senators intended as senior governance custodians, initially engaged in power struggles with National Assembly members and later focused on gubernatorial ambitions, neglecting oversight responsibilities. At the administrative level, sub-county employees expressed frustration over lack of clear mandates and resources. One coordinator stated,

“We are here to be seen and not heard... development roles were taken over by MCAs and senior brokers...” (SCCP1).

The findings indicate that the governor's office held de facto veto power over devolved units, setting the tone for Public Participation. The study found that the centrality of power still being vested in the executive, the stakeholder empowerment depended on the leaderships' goodwill to do the right things the right way. Essentially therefore, leadership goodwill emerged as pivotal tenet for effective collaborative engagement. To address this power misallocation, the study essentially found a need for legislative reforms to clarify Public Participation's institutional and procedural frameworks and responsibilities towards a meaningful inclusive governance.

#### **4.5.4 Citizens in Public Participation and Service Delivery**

Citizens as actors are stakeholders and equal partners in participatory governance. Public Participation was meant to give them powers of inclusive governance but in vain. The study found that the participatory power is still vested in the executive. This political arrangement disempowers the citizens in decision making arrangement in governance. Subsequently, Busia County's persistent socio-economic challenges, including poverty level of approximately at 70% (KNBS, 2017–2024) indicate that the majority of citizens subsist below the poverty line. The indicator also points at limited County Government support for empowerment initiatives.

The study found a challenge of not advancing industrialization projects that could enhance livelihoods due to inadequate governmental support framework and facilitation. This collaborative challenge left stakeholders substantially disempowered and unable to promote ideas that foster their development. Yang and Callahan (2005) emphasize that citizens are both stakeholders and sovereign owners of governance structures. Omolo

(2009) argue there is a need to promote participatory awareness for stakeholders to exercise these rights effectively. Informed knowledge is critical for harmonizing individual needs into collective priorities towards sustainable development.

Todaro (2015) links poverty reduction to citizens' productive capacity. This argument is reflected in the declining rice farming in Bunyala due to exploitative brokers who take advantage of stakeholders' inability to advance rice production, yet this challenge could be mitigated through the county interventions. A lack of meaningful development in the county is also highlighted by a pattern of political rhetoric lacking substantive stakeholder input and follow-through. This situation is exemplified by the stalled cassava factory project in Teso North. White (1994) contended that political rhetoric must translate into tangible outcomes to catalyze meaningful change. The persistence of empty promises erodes trust and fuels citizen disengagement.

The findings reveal that citizen' constitutional participatory rights as per the 2010 constitution remain largely theoretical and impeded by a lack of enforceable mechanisms. Moreover, politically aware citizens face intimidation from powerful county brokers, undermining advocacy for good governance. A trader and farmer participant observed pervasive ignorance and dependence, limiting transformative participation:

“...many citizens are so ignorant that no information or participation can change their mindset... most men are addicted to changaa alcohol and rely on the government to decide everything...” (TrP4).

Functionally, service delivery and development are predicated on citizen emancipation from ignorance and powerlessness. The failure of participatory governance to address socioeconomic hardships in Busia County has created distrust, with stakeholders

increasingly demanding incentives to attend Public Participation forums. This phenomenon was similarly observed by Nyaranga et al. (2022) in a study on Public Participation in Bungoma County.

#### **4.5.5 The Devolution System in Busia County**

Systems are fundamental to organizational existence. They provide the structures, frameworks, and processes essential for coordinating activities towards defined objectives (Ferrante, 2003; Handy, 2016). Applying Functional Theory, this study conceptualizes Busia County as an organization, with the devolution arrangements constituting the system. Within this system, Public Participation serves as the unit for engagement mechanism, and the actors represent the components through which governance interactions are actualized.

Central to the effective operation of this system is communication, which is identified as the critical enabler in planning and operation of participatory governance. The study's findings underscore that system performance is contingent upon sensitive, deliberate, and contextually appropriate engagement by the actors involved. Consequently, the Participatory Communication Model is provided as the optimal framework for facilitating meaningful stakeholder interactions. This model holds functional primacy by setting the standards that enhance the efficacy of Public Participation processes.

However, the study revealed existence of a systematic vagueness in participatory governance. Whereas Public Participation provision was an affirmative action to unite leadership with stakeholders in governance, the study found a lack of provisions to make this hope a meaningful reality. Owing to absolute power they hold, the leadership in

Busia County has largely undermined the dialogical and inclusive principles inherent in the Participatory Communication Model.

This has manifested in stakeholder alienation, with decision-making increasingly monopolized by the executive. These actions undermine the performance of Public Participation as a unit of collaborative engagement thus failing the functions of collaborative governance. A teacher participant articulated this disconnect, highlighting how devolution has been politicized and co-opted for elite enrichment rather than broad-based development:

“Devolution brought a lot of money and tribal ethnicity to our county. It is a political tool for political leaders and elites of the society. They use it to reduce friends but increase their wealth....nothing common to show for it.....do you see any” (TP1).

Further, the study pointed at flawed electoral procedures as the root cause of these challenges. The study found the porous election policies and overt politics as undermining the selection of leaders genuinely committed to public stewardship. The study found that poor election procedures allow candidates with integrity problems since they lack leadership goodwill to foster good governance. The findings demonstrate a pronounced power asymmetry in the governance system. The gap enables exclusionary practices, whereby governance becomes the preserve of the leadership and a select few stakeholders despite constitutional mandates for inclusive of all actors.

In this regard, robust Public Participation structures would explicitly mitigate governance deficit through a proactive oversight framework to rebalance power and responsibility between leadership and stakeholders. Osabwa (2020) critically argue that constitutional

provisions on current participatory governance amount to nominal rights that the anticipated all-inclusive governance. The study found that leadership frequently resists delegation of authority to maintain power dominance, corroborating earlier findings by Aye (1993) and Bessette (2006). This leadership apathy allows for covert manipulation of governance processes, yet with no room for remedy, as illustrated by a farmer participant's vivid testimony:

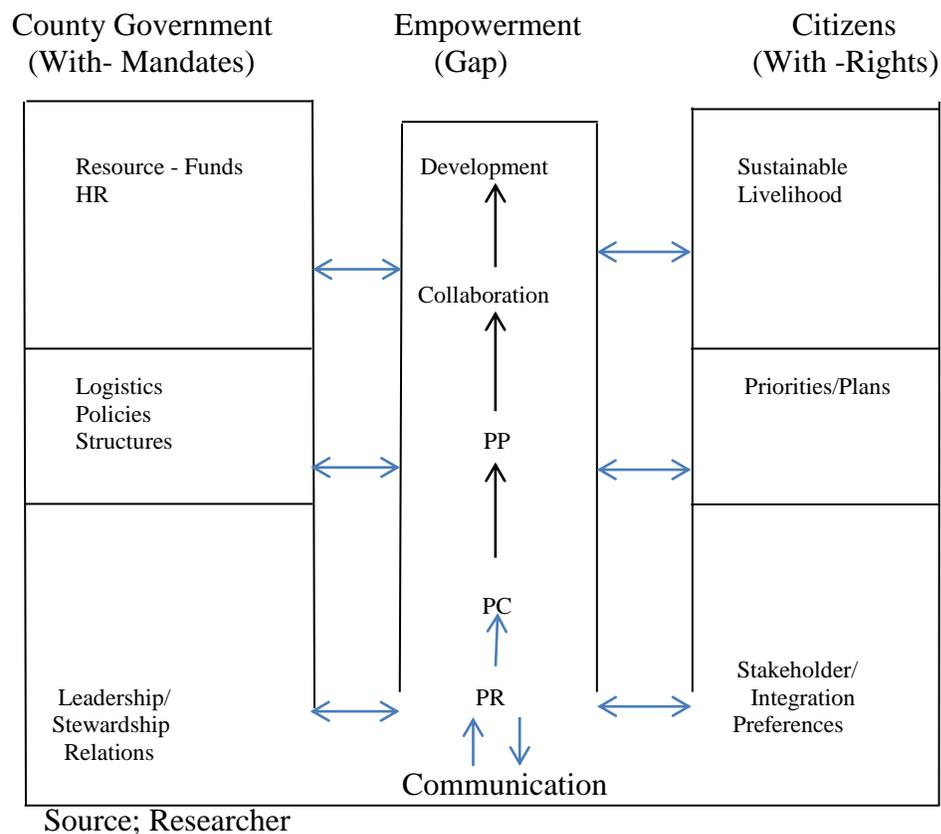
“Seeking justice in the courts is like provoking bees and inviting disaster. The brokers collude with courts and auctioneers to seize your land and possessions, even a bicycle... Justice belongs to the wealthy elites who will do anything to increase their wealth” (FP3, translated).

Another critical dimension in the system is the constitutional separation of powers between National and County Governments (Urai, 2010). Whereas it is intended to safeguard devolved governance, it can hinder intervention in cases of bad governance, especially if leadership lacks empathy and commitment to stakeholder empowerment. These structural and operational gaps raise pertinent questions about the governance of Public Participation, a challenge also highlighted in the review by Musumba (2022). The absence of a precise legal definition on Public Participation protocol, conditions the judiciary to fill or seek clear fundamentals and operational criteria to adjudicate on the matter (Katiba Institute, 2023).

The study therefore, avers that effective governance depends on the goodwill of the actors to apply Communication Competence of doing the right things the right way. Communication Competence refers to a profound understanding of communication practices and their impacts as detailed in (Chapter Two). This study therefore, contributes to body of knowledge by identifying and addressing the operative gaps in Public

Participation by proposing a comprehensive framework in Chapter Five. Table 3 details the dynamics of Public Participation in Busia County governance. The details in (figure 2) reinforce the need to institutionalize communication expertise in managing goodwill challenges in governance.

**Figure 4.2: The Remedy of Public Participation in Governance**



#### 4.6 Benefits of the Study to Stakeholders

Figure presents a model for enhanced teamwork communication in governance. The model underscores the need to institutionalize Public Relations professionals within County Governments to operationalize the Participatory Communication Model in

governance. The insights generated from this study hold significant value for diverse stakeholders towards enhancing meaningful participatory governance.

#### **4.6.1 The Academia Fraternity**

This study contributes theoretical and rationalized knowledge by delineating Public Participation as a distinct mechanism for teamwork engagement in governance. The functional gaps raises pivotal questions about whether Public Participation serves as a genuine instrument for citizen empowerment or is manipulated by executive interests. The study identified the impediments of Public Participation in governance and clarifies factors underlying its Performance.

The study therefore, emphasizes the essence of Participatory Communication Model as the transactional tool for inclusive and dialogic governance. It advances an understanding of the functional relationship between the Participatory Communication Model and Public Participation, positioning the former as the theoretical foundation underpinning the latter's effective performance. Notably, this study substantiates Public Participation's dependency on Public Relations frameworks as shown in the conceptual model in the literature review and (Figure 2).

#### **4.6.2 The Policy Makers**

Findings affirm that effective governance is contingent upon the strategic and genuine deployment of Public Participation. This is the sure way to enable stakeholders to influence governance processes substantively. However, a discernible disconnect exist within Public Participation in the administrative execution of participatory governance.

The gap prompts the recommendation for amendment of devolved governance statutes to institutionalize the inclusion of Public Relations professionals within county executive structures.

The literature identified Public Relations practitioners as the custodians of the goodwill for societal communication conscience, and for facilitating balanced stakeholder engagements. The study advocates for formal recognition and accreditation of the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) in law to administer Public Participation programs to enhance the efficacy of governance.

#### **4.6.3 The Professionals and Practice**

This study proposes that the Public Relations Society of Kenya develops a professional framework that differentiates Public Relations experts from other communication practitioners. Such professional demarcation would enable purposive certification, conferring a recognized mandate for Public Relations Experts (PRE) to practice with accountability and indemnity in public administration space. This professional distinctive empowerment is essential to ensure the competence required for effective Public Relations intervention in Public Participation functions. The findings reinforce existing literature on Public Relation's pivotal role in organizational management, as illustrated in Figures 3 and 5.

#### **4.6.4 The Citizens at Large**

Embedding Public Relations experts in senior County administrative positions would bolster the institutional conscience of devolved governments. The action would promise

sustained collaborative participatory governance irrespective of political leadership. This proactive strategy would facilitate the transformation of negotiated abstract policy directives into tangible development outcomes that enhance the livelihoods and wellbeing of the citizens, as illustrated in Figure 3.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter synthesizes the study's findings contextualized within the theoretical and empirical foundations in chapters one through four. Chapter one set the study's background and purpose, chapter two benchmarked Participatory Communication Model globally to the best practices, while the essence of Public Relations to bolster Participatory Communication model is emphasized.

Methodological rigour is elaborately detailed in chapter three. The discussion focuses on the application of the Participatory Communication Model in Public Participation, the stakeholders' benefits, challenges, and mitigation strategies relevant to Busia County governance. Emphasis is highly placed on the emergent role of goodwill as a critical virtue for effective governance, the risks posed by passive stakeholders, and the theoretical implications culminating in the study's thesis, conclusions, and actionable recommendations.

#### **5.2 The Purpose of Study**

The study sought to identify impediments and remedial pathways of Public Participation in governance given the persistent critiques regarding its underperformance in governance. The research embedded Participatory Communication Model as the theoretical lens to explore the underlying determinants of Public Participation's efficacy within Busia County. The socioeconomic challenges aligned to governance inefficiencies

need a reliable communication strategy that facilitates clear conceptualization and empowerment of stakeholders through participatory processes.

### **5.3 Discussion of Findings**

This research responds to the socio-economic challenges linked to County governance in Busia. Prior studies on Public Participation by Rupo (2014); Mwangi (2009) and Nyaranga et al., (2022) identified theoretical and practical ambiguities in its application. This study therefore, extends those insights by revealing strategic leadership disengagement and citizen disempowerment through systematic maneuvers.

The study found that strategic actions by the leaderships- including withholding of basic resources relegated citizens to passive governance participants. The occasioned strategy of exclusion enabled leadership to circumvent accountability and manipulate governance outcomes, as evidenced by the Auditor General's report (Daily Nation; April 11, 2024). Consequently, Public Participation failed to meet its intended developmental mandates, primarily due to violations of the Participatory Communication Model's core fundamentals.

#### **5.3.1 Stakeholder Engagements in Governance of Busia County**

The spirit of participatory governance required that the citizens MCAs, and executive of County Governments collaborate with the citizens to address common socioeconomic concerns. The senate was to perform the oversight functions. Conversely, the findings reveal that county executives did not share the power of teamwork with the citizens. Instead, the leadership predominantly employed the Development Communication Model

during Public Participation forums. The model is characterized by top-down dissemination of pre-formulated plans rather than genuine dialogue. This approach reflected a deficit in leadership goodwill and contradicted Freire's (1994) dialogical pedagogy, which advocates reciprocal engagement.

In contrast, an exemplary practice is reported of Homa Bay County by the (Daily Nation December 23, 2024). Homa Bay County is said to practice the Participatory Communication Model by engaging with the citizens at the village-level. However, in the absence of compelling framing to direct ideal participatory procedures, the study corroborates Serveas (2005) on the necessity of expert facilitation in this communication processes. This idea positions Public Relations professionals as critical actors in bridging the practice gap in Public Participation activities. The idea is also noted by Rupo (2014) and Nyaranga et al. (2022). The findings affirm goodwill as a fundamental Public Relations virtue. Center et al., (2008) and Etang (2007) concur about PR as indispensable for sustaining informed knowledge and ethical stakeholder engagement in organizations.

### **5.3.2 The Impacts of Public Participation in Governance**

Contrary to expectations that Public Participation activities would yield impactful outcomes, the study found that Busia County's leadership failed to harness it for positive socio-economic outcomes. Leadership apathy of collaborative governance and disempowerment resulted in muting and strategically silencing the stakeholders' voices. This action relegated the stakeholders' role as equal partners in development planning. This misapplication aligns with findings by Lee Marshment (2015), Wampler (2015), and Somba (2017), who document similar governance dysfunctions. Based on Wood (2012),

planning processes devoid of meaningful stakeholder input undermines accountability, but entrenches unilateral executive decision-making.

The lack of tangible socioeconomic development in Busia County illustrated by persistent healthcare deficiencies and inadequate infrastructure prioritization- all underscores the failure to realize the goals of participatory governance. This situation contravenes the foundational principles of dialogic pedagogy and inclusive governance underscored in assumptions elucidated in Chapter One. This study exposes a disjunction between formal leadership qualifications and the requisite goodwill competence necessary for effective governance.

Mitigating these participatory governance deficiencies requires addressing the standards in the practice gap and by institutionalizing Public Relations expertise in managing public dialogue within County Governments. Center et al., (2008) is clear that Public Relations maintains ideal norms in the society, promotes desired ideals while managing undesired behaviours.

### **5.3.3 Challenges of Participatory Communication Model in Governance**

Every institution or organization inevitably encounters challenges. In the context of devolution, the collaboration challenges were anticipated and ostensibly addressed through Public Participation mechanisms. However, in practice, these challenges remain largely unresolved, reflected in astounding stakeholder socio economic problems.

This study found that leadership apathy of teamwork critically eroded their goodwill and commitment towards meaningful and inclusive governance. Etang (2007) argues that

apathy is serious form of disinterest. The study signifies the leaders' apathy as manifested in their lack of interest; thus the goodwill to alleviate stakeholder's socio economic problems. Aye (1993) affirms that leaders often prefer unchecked governance as a means to impose their un scrutinized agendas on stakeholders.

Such unchecked governance effectively limited the oversight capacity of stakeholders in Busia County. Furthermore, Bessette (2006) established that leader frequently resists Public Participation due to fears of losing power to the subjects and perceiving teamwork as a waste of time. Correspondingly, leadership in Busia County has been found to resist genuine Public Participation to maintain stakeholders as subordinate partners in governance. This resistance contravenes the constitutional spirit of devolution articulated in Article 11:174-C that affirms citizens' rights to self-governance.

On their part, Njagi and Murimi (2018) observed that leaders often manipulate Public Participation processes to serve their personal interests, undermining transparency and accountability. The study corroborates this by showing that Busia County leaders strategically marginalized stakeholders to expedite unilateral decisions favoring selected business associates, thereby misdirecting development resources. This claim is argued from the outstanding stakeholder socioeconomic suffering despite funds often disbursed annually to counties for stakeholder development

Wampler (2015) supports this view by indicating that leaders misuse Public Participation as a façade for corrupt practices. Against Wampler notion, the Daily Nation February 28, 2024 cites Kenya's Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) documented instances where executives deliberately misallocated development resources. Such

patterns raise pertinent questions regarding the utilization of county development budgets. Corruption cases are documented as early as October 7, 2015, underscoring a systemic betrayal of collaborative governance ideals.

Collectively, these factors explain the persistence of underdevelopment and high poverty levels in Busia County. The stakeholders continue to grapple with socioeconomic challenges despite supposed resource allocations aimed at their welfare. A significant underlying issue is the inadequate provision of civic education, compounded by a lack of private sector investment to generate sustainable employment opportunities. The findings further reveal that infrastructural projects, such as road construction, were strategically prioritized to benefit the leadership rather than serve broader developmental interests, thereby undermining oversight mechanisms. For instance the citizens are yet to receive compensation amounts for road expansions that did not only stretch into their land but also destroyed property.

More glaringly, procurement of ambulances appeared primarily as a financial maneuver. The emergency vehicles were purchased to ferry patients while the hospitals suffered from critical shortages of resources and essentials. Youth unemployment has led to widespread idleness, fostering social vices including alcoholism, drug abuse, and theft. The emergence of "disco-matanga" culture epitomizes this social malaise, contributing to increased teenage pregnancies and school dropouts, intensifying community despair.

Additionally, non-functional floodlights in community centers have compromised traders' security, forcing premature closure of businesses. In contrast, Kakamega County presents a comparatively positive scenario, with sustainable community infrastructure,

contracted ambulance services via the Red Cross, and well-resourced hospitals staffed by empowered medical personnel.

#### **5.3.4 Measures to Enhance Public Participation in Governance**

This study explored the factors impeding effective Public Participation in Busia County's governance and explored potential mitigating strategies. Central to these findings is a practice problem where the promise of devolution that citizens would actively shape their development choices has been undermined by leadership. The stakeholders were meant to be governance partners and functionally included in their constitutionally participatory rights as per Article 11:174-C (Urai, 2010).

This study therefore, provides a broad insight to Public Participation challenges. While prior studies identified challenges of Public Participation e.g., Nyaranga et al., (2022), they fell short of diagnosing the root causes. Notably, some studies recommended the recruitment of facilitators in governance without clarifying the specific deficiencies in Public Participation that warranted such roles. This study, however, pinpoints the leadership apathy and criticality of facilitators' goodwill as the key determinant for commitment of collaborative governance. The findings in this study form the basis for addressing gaps identified in earlier research such as RUPOA (2014); Saati (2005) and Nyaranga (2022).

Goodwill here is understood not as a person but as a cultivated virtue; fundamental to the discipline of Public Relations. Public Relations was substantially reviewed in section 2.1.1 of this study. Based on the findings, the study advocates for constitutional

institutionalization Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) to mandate the oversight of participatory governance functions, including Public Participation.

This proposition aligns with the practice of assigning specialized and competent professionals to institutional roles in organizations. For instance, medical doctors run the health services, lawyers navigate the legal affairs, and educators manage schools functions. In this manner, Public Relations professionals, equipped with communication expertise and ethical standards would facilitate genuine stakeholder engagement. Public Relations thrives in informed knowledge and mutuality at the center of stakeholder engagements, and this is the way to advance the participatory governance outcomes.

#### **5.4 Emerging Issues in the Study**

The study revealed stakeholders' skewed perceptions of Public Participation in governance, alongside associated benefits and challenges. Central to these findings is the emergence of goodwill as a pivotal virtue and the critical missing element in effective stakeholder collaboration. The following section discusses goodwill within the context of organizational management.

##### **5.4.1 Goodwill Virtue in Organizational Management**

As pointed out in section 5.3.1, goodwill is a virtue embodying genuine concern for others' welfare. From a Public Relations perspective, Jefkins (1998) characterizes goodwill as arising from sincere interest in people, embracing diversity, and fulfilling commitments. Lesly (2002) situates goodwill within positive psychology frameworks, highlighting its role in fostering relational engagement and mutually acceptable outcomes.

Goodwill comprises two interrelated dimensions. Center et al. (2008) identify it as encompassing benevolent intentions and a proactive commitment to realize for mutual benefit. Graham (2003) and Etang (2007) further describe goodwill as a purposeful alignment of the right people to the right tasks in the right manner to achieve shared objectives.

In Public Relations practice, goodwill is foundational. Programs are deliberately designed to foster inclusivity and serve the collective good. This ideology is reflected in nearly all PR definitions emphasizing goodwill and commitment as central to stakeholder engagement (Lesly, 2002).

Ferrante (2003) contends that humans are intrinsically self-interested, with socialization processes cultivating humane attitudes necessary for cooperation. Handy (2016) and Luthans (2005) concur that value systems, positive attitudes, and rational motivations are essential to managing inevitable social conflicts. Center et al. (2008) affirm that such value systems encourage normative coexistence, a point echoed by Grunig (2018), who attributes social cohesion to collective goodwill and cooperative commitment.

From an entrepreneurial lens, goodwill represents the intangible asset value tied to an organization's reputation for trustworthiness and reliability (Christopher, 2018). Salemi (2018) reinforces this by associating organizational goodwill with staff sensitivity and service quality. Fundamentally, goodwill correlates positively with commitment and willpower that are key components of Communication Competence. The study recommends integrating these insights into Busia County's management practices.

Derived from the Oxford Dictionary, ‘commitment’ that coexist along goodwill involves conscious choice and determination to act purposefully and willfully toward goals. Cole (2004) and Handy (2016) elaborate that commitment entails cognitive control and purposeful behaviour. Christopher (2018) aligns commitment to willpower and frames it as inner strength motivating perseverance despite obstacles. It enables empathy and effective engagement even under stress. Neuroscientific findings support this duality of commitment: impulsive versus reflective cognition (Christopher, 2018). The study shows that the leadership in Busia County exemplifies low commitment, driven by short-term self-interest and disregard for collaborative governance principles.

Positively, strong willpower fosters foresight, rational problem-solving, and resilience, that are traits not only embedded within Communication Competence but also inherent to Public Relations. Luthans (2005) and Christopher (2018) separately argue that effective leadership manifests through decisiveness, persistence, and the ability to resist distractions. These qualities are validated by Murdock and Scutt (2016); they concur that success is deliberate and strategic. Kenya’s National Assembly Speaker Hon. Muturi in (Daily Nation April, 2019) aptly encapsulates this, emphasizing that leadership success hinges on positive attitude and commitment translating ideas into actionable outcomes.

Theologically, goodwill and commitment parallels the biblical notion that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26; Ephesians 2:10). This implies that desire alone is insufficient without committed action. This theological metaphor reinforces the study’s proposition that Public Participation should be stewarded by Public Relations professionals committed to informed knowledge, inclusive and mutual governance.

In relying on good faith and commitment, the study believes that Counties like Kakamega, Makueni, and Kitui exemplify development driven by leadership goodwill. Kakamega's infrastructural improvements, Makueni's fruit processing investments and Kitui's garment industry attest to leadership commitment fostering stakeholder wellbeing (Daily Nation, September 27, 2019). Such development contrasts plainly with Busia's neglect of resources such as mango fruits in Samia and untapped entrepreneurial opportunities at the border posts, symbolizing missed opportunities.

Hence, the study concludes in section 5.7 that good governance in Busia hinges on institutionalizing goodwill, ensuring the right people undertakes the right tasks in the right way, as mandated by proposed legal frameworks in section 5.8.

#### **5.4.2 Danger of Ignoring Goodwill and Passive Citizens in Governance**

Political leadership positions are coveted for their power and resource control, motivating aspirants to make wide-ranging promises during campaigns (Malan, 1998). However, leaders frequently renege on these promises once in office. Bessette (1996) observes that leaders resist delegating authority or involving stakeholders, fearing loss of dominance. This reluctance stems from concerns that educated and empowered stakeholders might become ungovernable.

Nonetheless, this study highlights the peril of neglecting stakeholders in governance. Aye (1993) argues that passive citizens remain the ultimate owners of government by virtue of their numbers and sovereign status. Luthans (2005) elucidates the danger of irresponsible governance in corporate domain in which the Enron scandal illustrates consequences of leadership apathy and disregard for stakeholder goodwill. According to Ciuri Daily

Nation, January 11, 2023, Enron's leadership concealed financial malpractices by withholding stakeholder engagement, fabricating reports to mask failures that ultimately culminated in systemic distrust and collapse.

Similarly, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, and Nepal Prime minister convinced of their indispensability, marginalized citizens until mass protests forced their ouster. Kenya's own "Gen Z" youth activism demonstrates growing civic awareness demanding transparency and accountability, successfully influencing policy decisions such as the withdrawal of the controversial 2024 finance bill. These cases collectively underscore that ignoring goodwill and committing passive citizenship jeopardizes governance legitimacy and sustainability.

### **5.5 The Benefits of Theories to the Study**

The theories used in the study were not subject of any test, but applied as conceptual lens that elucidate factors which facilitate or impede the performance of systematic functions. The Functional Theory formed the core, conceptualizing Busia County Government as an organization; with participatory governance in devolution as the systemic context. Public Participation was the key governance unit, with actors constituting its parts.

Within this framework, the Participatory Communication Model was positioned as the principal enabler of stakeholder engagement. Barnlund's Transactional Communication Model supplemented this by explicating the interactive cues essential for participatory governance. Conflict Theory provided critical lens to analyze dynamics facilitating or obstructing effective teamwork in governance.

The findings revealed leadership apathy and self-interest as critical barriers eroding goodwill essential for inclusive governance. From the perspective of Barnlund's Model, leaders' withholding of goodwill represents the 'private cues; thus their intention of undermining open and collaborative communication. This strategy deviated from the ideals of the Participatory Communication Model resulting in dysfunctional Public Participation. The dysfunctional Public Participation sustained the socio-economic challenges experienced by Busia stakeholders.

The study further demonstrates that leadership conflicts with stakeholders over county resources represent negative competition, detracting from collaborative development efforts. Theories thus clarified relationships and boundaries within governance roles, informing the proposed mitigation strategies to enhance the functional efficacy of Public Participation in County Governments.

### **5.6 The Thesis of the Study**

Effective communication within devolved systems of governance must be both context-sensitive and strategically oriented to facilitate mutual benefits among stakeholders. This study adopted the Participatory Communication Model as the central theoretical lens for exploring governance dynamics in Busia County. The model's foundational premise on prioritizing dialogue, inclusion, and shared agency was applied as a basic framework for evaluating actors' engagement in devolved governance structures. In this context, the study scrutinized stakeholders' comprehension of Public Participation and the modalities through which they engage in collaborative governance in Busia County.

The impetus for this exploration stemmed from persistent public discourse and critique concerning the performance of Public Participation in county decision-making arrangements. Despite the devolutions' substantial financial resources, Busia County continues to experience entrenched socioeconomic stagnation, with poverty levels reportedly at 70%. This condition implies that only three out of every ten residents access a dollar or a basic meal daily, leaving a majority living in conditions of basic deprivation.

Such a grim developmental profile suggests a disjuncture between the promise of participatory governance and its actual outcomes in the county. Consequently, the study applied the communication perspective to explore whether these challenges were symptomatic of structural deficiencies in governance, leadership inertia, limited participatory space, or the absence of robust communicative linkages among stakeholders.

Anchored within the interpretivist paradigm, this study applied an exploratory design underpinned in the relativist and subjective of qualitative research approach. The study was specifically guided by the instrumental case study, facilitated inductive insights into stakeholder experiences and governance dynamics.

Four guiding research objectives informed the study: first, the stakeholders' understanding and the operational forms of participatory communication in governance; second, the communicative benefits derived from participatory approaches; third, the inherent challenges in the application of Public Participation mechanisms; and finally, the critical factors of Public Relations necessary for enhancing participatory communication in county governance.

A purposive sampling strategy was applied, targeting two primary stakeholder categories: the leadership and the citizenry of Busia County. The sample comprised thirty-five participants drawn from diverse demographic and professional backgrounds including executive officials, Members of County Assembly (MCAs), and county staff. The citizenry side was the teachers, traders, farmers- from all seven sub-counties. Data were collected using Key Informant Interviews, participant observation and document information. The thematic and content analysis methods facilitated data triangulation, analysis and interpretation process. Robust ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality amongst others, were rigorously upheld throughout the research process.

The study yielded critical findings, foremost among them being a deficit in leadership goodwill, limited citizen awareness, and systemic weaknesses in the structure and operationalization of Public Participation frameworks. Notably, leadership apathy emerged as a central inhibitor of goodwill in participatory governance. The study observed that the executive wielded disproportionate influence, empowered both by legislative instruments and resource control, thus assuming the role of gatekeepers rather than collaborators in participatory initiatives.

This asymmetry marginalized citizen agency and undermined inclusive governance. Furthermore, the politicization of electoral processes appeared to compromise leadership accountability, thus obstructing the transformative potential of Participatory Communication Model in governance.

Based on these insights, the study advanced several recommendations. It proposed constitutional amendments to institutionalize the role of Public Relations professionals as managers of Public Participation portfolios in devolved units. Additionally, it advocated for a structured certification process by the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK), culminating in a postgraduate diploma for governance-bound practitioners.

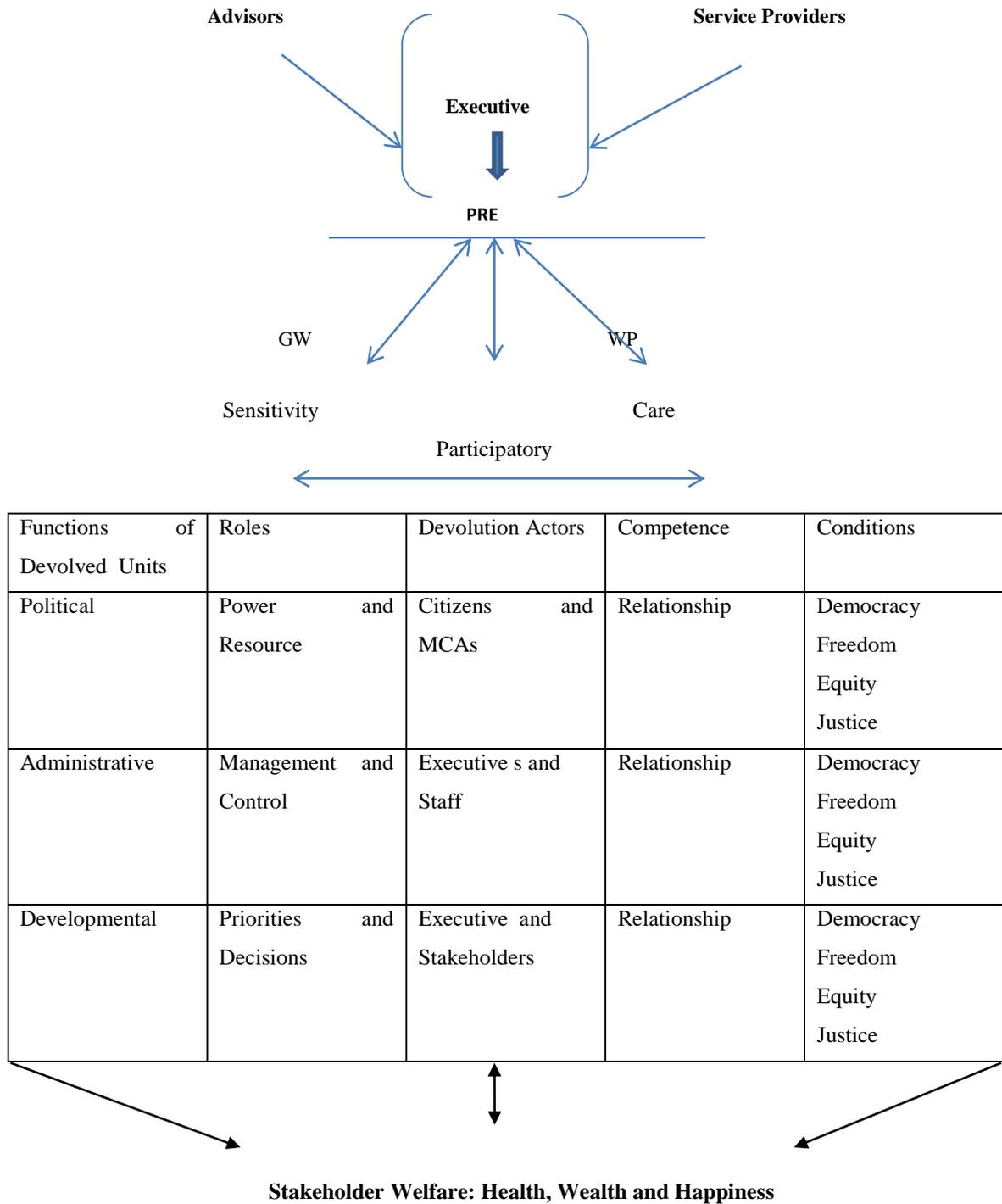
Such certification would facilitate access to professional indemnity and reinforce accountability standards. Lastly, the study recommended the formal institutionalization of annual celebrations to showcase development achievements arising from participatory governance. These symbolic and procedural reforms are intended to entrench participatory norms and bolster compliance with good governance practices, as illustrated in Figures 4 and 5.



**Figure 5.3: *The Cycle of Participatory Governance in Counties***

**Source: Researcher**

The diagram in figure 3 represents the place and essence of PR in a collaborative governance system. The diagram, therefore, depicts a conditional cycle with a provision of Public Relations experts to facilitate the illusive participatory governance towards the citizens' development and wellness. In it, the leadership is conditioned to work with the Public Relations expert to empower the stakeholders' involvement in governance arrangements. The goal of devolution was to get the stakeholders foster their sustainable development with reliable livelihood. Figure 4 is an elaborate illustration of figure 3 showing integral elements of Participatory Communication Model.



**Figure 5.4: An Illustration of the Thesis of the Study**

## 5.7 Conclusions

The study critically examined the application of the Participatory Communication Model in the governance structures of Busia County. Notably, Busia has consistently recorded socio-economic underperformance, evidenced by its high poverty rate of 70%. This indicates that seven out of ten residents cannot access a dollar or single meal daily, despite the devolved fiscal and administrative mechanisms established since 2013. In response, this study embedded Participatory Communication Model to explore the performance of Public Participation on whether these persistent socio-economic difficulties emanate from structural governance flaws, leadership deficiencies, or limited civic awareness on participatory rights.

Guided by the interpretivist paradigm, the study used an exploratory design, underpinned by a qualitative methodological orientation. A relativist ontological stance supported the use of the case study method in addressing the four research questions. The objectives were concerned with the nature and form of participatory communication in governance, the communicative benefits it yields, the challenges it encounters, and the essential factors of Public Relations necessary to optimize its function in Busia County.

Purposive sampling was applied to identify 35 participants from across the seven sub-counties of Busia, comprising residents (teachers, farmers, traders) and government officials (MCAs, executive members, and county staff). Data were collected via Key Informant Interviews and structured observations and secondary data with ethical principles such as informed consent and confidentiality strictly adhered to. The

triangulated data were analyzed through thematic and content analysis, which informed the study's conclusions.

First, the study found the Participatory Communication Model to be a potent framework for structuring Public Participation in governance. The model promotes dialogical engagement, mutual respect, and shared problem-solving. Its various modes including passive, consultative, collaborative, empowerment and transformative participation support context-specific applications. The model's emphasis on empathy, goodwill, inclusivity, and mutual respect fosters environments conducive to deliberative democracy. However, the study identified a gap in professional facilitation, necessitating the involvement of communication experts to actualize the model's potential within governance frameworks.

Second, the study found that the leadership in Busia County largely lacked the political goodwill required to ensure meaningful inclusion of citizen in governance. This leadership deficit was compounded by widespread civic ignorance, which effectively neutralized the potential of informed citizens to challenge non-inclusive practices. The deliberate strategic of citizens was evidenced through the withholding of participatory resources and logistical support. Ethically, these actions contravened both the participatory ideals of the model and constitutional provisions, notably Article 174 (c, f, and g), which affirm citizens' rights to equitable development and resource sharing. Again, this challenge needs an intermediary between leadership to facilitate empowerment of the citizens.

Third, the study established that systematic governance lapses enabled the leadership to manipulate Public Participation spaces. The existing legal frameworks, including electoral statutes, fall short in ensuring the election of leaders committed to delegated and inclusive engagements for accountability in governance. The top-down approach adopted by the leadership served to impose rather than consult on decisions for development priorities. Furthermore, opaque and selectively administered systems impeded transparency and disenfranchised stakeholders, rendering them passive and voiceless within the governance process. As such, the study identified an urgent need to reconfigure participatory protocols and enhance the model's institutional legitimacy.

Fourth, the study observed a significant vacuum in the institutional oversight of Public Participation. Ideally, oversight would emerge from three key sources: the citizens themselves, the Members of County Assembly, and the Senate. However, the incapacitation of citizens due to disempowerment, the co-option of MCAs by the executive, and the Senate's conflicted political interests rendered these mechanisms ineffective. These gaps call for independent and institutionalized Public Relations experts to run the functions of participatory governance in public space.

Lastly, Article 74 (1) of Chapter 11 of the Constitution outlines the separation of power between national and County Governments, yet implementation remains problematic. The judiciary, too, has struggled to enforce participatory provisions due to structural ambiguities. These gaps necessitate comprehensive institutional remedies, which are elaborated upon in the study's specific recommendations in 5.8.

## **5.8 Specific Recommendations**

In light of the fundamentals of Participatory Communication Model and the findings, the study recognized a need to re-conceptualize Public Participation and reorganize its operative protocols to enhance functional participatory governance. To this end, three major recommendations are made:

To policy makers, the study recommends statutory amendments to the electoral laws to introduce mechanisms that ensure the election of leaders who demonstrate goodwill, competence, and integrity. Significantly, a constitutional amendment should explicitly entrench Public Participation as a professional function within devolved governance. Specifically, the study recommends the integration of the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) into the legal framework to enable credentialed Public Relations Experts (PREs) to manage Public Participation portfolios within county administrations.

To this effect, upon professionalized Public Relations practice, the function should be distinguished from general communication disciplines. The study proposes that Public Relations practitioners undergo a mandatory postgraduate diploma in participatory governance, leading to the acquisition of a practicing license and professional indemnity insurance. These professionals would be responsible for establishing structured participatory programs that facilitate authentic citizen engagement in governance.

Further, the study recommends legislation to national calendar of an annual celebration of devolution milestones. Such an event would serve not only as recognition of leadership excellence, but also as a symbolic oversight mechanism to enhance accountability and

transparency in County Governments. Ultimately, the celebration would offer measurable indicators of devolution progress across counties.

### **5.9 Recommendation for Further Studies**

This study has offered critical insights within the communicative underpinnings of the Participatory Communication Model in county governance. It identified a deficit in leadership goodwill as a principal contributor to dysfunctional governance and resultant socio-economic hardships in Busia County. However, it remains necessary to broaden the analytical scope. Therefore, the study recommends a comparative survey-based study to identify the determinants of good governance in counties that have demonstrated improved socio-economic outcomes. Such a study would generate comparative data to inform more balanced, context-specific strategies for enhancing Public Participation and governance performance across the devolved units and departments in National Government.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I: MOI UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CONSENT



**MOI UNIVERSITY**  
*ISO 9001-2008 Certified Institution*  
**SCHOOL OF INFORMATION SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

P.O Box 3900  
 Eldoret, Kenya

Fax: 053 – 43153/43047  
 Tel: 053 – 43103 Direct line  
 053 – 43620 Ext: 2460

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REF: MU/SIS/CMM/PGS/1 7th<sup>th</sup> March, 2019

The executive Secretary,  
 Kenya National Council of Science and Technology,  
 P.O. Box 30623,  
 NAIROBI.

Dear Sir,

**RE: MICHAEL OTIENO OLOO – CMM/PHDC/02/2017**

The above named is a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) student in the Department of Communication Studies, School of Information Sciences, Moi University.

Mr. Oloo is intending to carry out research work entitled “Participatory Communication as Tool for Effective Governance of Counties in Kenya: A study of Busia County”.

We are kindly requesting you to issue him with a research permit to enable him proceed with his research.

Yours faithfully,




Abraham K. Mulwo, PhD.  
 Head, Department of Communication Studies  
 Cell Phone - +254-713201327; E-mail: Abraham.mulwo@gmail.com

**APPENDIX II: NACOSTI RESEARCH PERMIT**

**THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:**

**MR. MICHAEL OTIENO OLOO**

**of MOI UNIVERSITY, 3012-30100**

**ELDORET, has been permitted to conduct**

**research in Busia County**

**on the topic: PARTICIPATORY**

**COMMUNICATION AS A TOOL FOR**

**EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE OF COUNTIES**

**IN KENYA; A STUDY OF BUSIA COUNTY,**

**for the period ending:**

**20th March, 2020**

**Permit No : NACOSTI/P/19/8775/29009**

**Date Of Issue : 20th March, 2019**

**Fee Recieved : USD 19**



**Applicant's Signature**

**Director General**

**National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation**

## APPENDIX III: NACOSTI AUTHORIZATION LETTER



### NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Telephone: +254-20-2213471,  
2241349, 3310571, 2219420  
Fax: +254-20-318245, 318249  
Email: dg@nacosti.go.ke  
Website: www.nacosti.go.ke  
When replying please quote

NACOSTI, Upper Kabete  
Off Waiyaki Way  
P.O. Box 30623-00100  
NAIROBI-KENYA

Ref: No. **NACOSTI/P/19/8775/29009**

Date: **21<sup>st</sup> March, 2019**

Michael Otieno Oloo  
Moi University  
P.O. Box 3900-30100  
**ELDORET.**

#### **RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION**

Following your application for authority to carry out research on *“Participatory communication as a tool for effective governance of Counties in Kenya; a study of Busia County”* I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Busia County** for the period ending **20<sup>th</sup> March, 2020**.

You are advised to report to **the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Busia County** before embarking on the research project.

Kindly note that, as an applicant who has been licensed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 to conduct research in Kenya, you shall deposit a **copy** of the final research report to the Commission within **one year** of completion. The soft copy of the same should be submitted through the Online Research Information System.

**GODFREY P. KALERWA MSc., MBA, MKIM  
FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO**

Copy to:

The County Commissioner  
Busia County.

The County Director of Education  
Busia County.

## APPENDIX IV: COUNTY COMMISSIONER RESEARCH PERMIT

REPUBLIC OF KENYA



THE PRESIDENCY  
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND CO-ORDINATION OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Email: [ccbusia@gmail.com](mailto:ccbusia@gmail.com)  
Telephone: 055 - 22598  
Fax No: 055 - 22231  
When replying please quote  
REF No. ADM 15/4/ VOL.VI/ 19

COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE  
BUSIA COUNTY  
P.O. BOX 14-50400  
BUSIA (K)

8<sup>th</sup> April, 2019

All Deputy County Commissioners  
**BUSIA COUNTY**

**RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION**

Following research authorization vide letter Ref.No. NACOSTI/P/19/8775/29009, dated 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2019, by National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation on "*Participatory communication as a tool for effective governance of Counties in Kenya; as study of Busia County*" This is to inform you that **Michael Otieno Oloo** has been authorized to carry out research in Busia County for the period ending 20th March, 2020.

Kindly accord him the due co -operation.

  
Samuel Kimani  
For: County Commissioner  
**BUSIA COUNTY**



**Copy to:**  
Michael Otieno Oloo  
Moi University  
P.O. Box 3900 - 30100  
**ELDORET.**

COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE ,BUSIA COUNTY

Page 1

## APPENDIX V: COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION PERMIT



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EARLY LEARNING AND BASIC EDUCATION**

**Telephone: 055-22152**  
**Fax: 055-22152**  
**When replying please quote**  
Email: cdebusia@gmail.com

COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION  
BUSIA COUNTY  
P.O. BOX 15 - 50400  
BUSIA (K)

8<sup>th</sup> April, 2019

**Ref No.**  
**MOEST/BSA/CDE/RCT/6/6/(355)**

Sub-County Directors of Education  
**BUSIA COUNTY**

**RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION**

This office is in receipt of letters from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation dated **21<sup>st</sup> March, 2019** authorizing research on "**Participatory communication as a tool for effective governance of Counties in Kenya; a study of Busia County**". The research period is expected to end on **20<sup>th</sup> March, 2020**.

This is to inform you that Michael Otieno Oloo has been authorized to conduct the research. Kindly accord him necessary assistance.

**AWUOR T.A.**  
COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION  
**BUSIA COUNTY**

## **APPENDIX VI: RESEARCH TOOLS**

### **A Sample of Interview Guide Research Questions**

1. To what extent do the stakeholders of Busia County practice effective Public Participation in their programs?
2. How are the socioeconomic activities designed for effective Public Participation?
3. Does the management of Busia County practice Participatory Communication Model for effective Public Participation in their programs?
4. What are the challenges faced by both the County Management and the stakeholders in conceptualizing the dynamics and practice of Participatory Communication Model?

### **B County Government**

1. How do you understand of Public Participation in governance ?
2. Whos' opinion holds in prioritization development plans from participatory dialogues?
3. What significant development has Busia County made since 2013?

### **C Teachers**

1. What do you understand about devolution and Public Participation?
2. In your opinion, who generates the county development Agendas?
3. As teachers, how do you engage in the County development programs?
4. How would you rate the achievement of devolution for the County?

5. What is your take on enhancement of Participatory governance?

#### **D Traders**

1. What do you understand about devolution and Public Participation?
2. How have traders benefited from decisions of Public Participation?
3. Whose opinion counts in the structures and processes of Public Participation?
4. What sustainable economic development has the county achieved since 2013?
5. What remedy do you have if your development aspirations are not met as traders?

#### **E Farmers**

1. What does a farmer of this county think about devolution?
2. How are methods of farming in this county since devolution commenced?
3. How are farmers' views used in planning for development?
4. What development has this county achieved through PC?
5. Given a chance, what would farmers wish to change in this county?

#### **A. Interview Sessions**

Emphasis of verbal's	-repetition of words /facial expressions/gestures
Reinforcement of verbal's	-Hand Gestures/Head gestures
The contradiction of verbal's	- silence/ head gestures/ hand gestures
Complement verbal's	-vocalizations/ facial expressions/ hand gestures
Replacement of verbal's	- Hand Gestures/ Eye expressions
Emotional expression	-vocalization/ silence/ tears/ridiculous later



## Appendix VIII: PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES

### Teacher Participant

#### Q. What do you understand about devolution in the Kenyan context?

*Devolution brought a lot of money and tribal ethnicity to our county. It is a political tool for political leaders and elites of the society. They use it to reduce friends but increase their wealth....nothing common to show for it.....do you see any” TP1*

### MCAs Participant

*“... hii ndio serikali tulitaka....ili tupangie wanainchi maendeleo kamili.. bado tunataka tuongezewe pesa za kuimarisha maendeleo kama barabara.na miradi mengine mingi...”MCAPI*

Translated; we cherish this government it has enabled us to plan development for the citizens...we even need more money for the development of roads and many more...

#### What role do you think public participation plays in County Government?

### FP1

*... Tunasikia kwa maredio maneno ya participation ...wanainchi kwende kuambiwa miradi ile imepangwa kwa maendeleo ya ma-contractors na wenye kupanga FP1*

Translated- we hear about PP through the radio as announcing development plans that benefit the contractors and the project initiators- thus the county leadership.

### Teacher participant

*“...Maneno ya Public Participation in PR ya abnuasi kutufunga macho yetu na ili wakubwa watekeleze mipango yao wenyewe....moreover; politicians are not genuine, they engage sideshows, and whip ethnic emotions to confuse every one whenever they are subjected to accountability. This action helps them to escape from any responsibilities ....most of these leaders are shameless and protect looters- you know...!” TP3*

Translated; in-fact these leaders are never honest with us, they use PP deceitfully as PR strategy to achieve their selfish ends

### **Trader Participant**

*... “PP forums in this county are used to stamp the ready-made plans, yet with no room for citizens’ input whatsoever, except to create a false sense of compliance with the law for a good image of the CG...” TrP1*

### **Q. What could you do to implore the CG to improve good governance?**

*“...firstly, for good change to come soon and get the citizen’s proper involvement, serious civil education has to be conducted- both to the citizens and County Government. This has to be done by the national government and NG to help them recognize and understand one another. Eventually, when such a moment comes and if the environment will be friendly, the teachers will engage politics appropriately...”TP4*

### **Trader Participant**

*“...I’m a drunkard and jobless because my university education has not helped me. I waste the whole day thinking about my failures -when the less educated but influential individuals get decent jobs and incomes. Furthermore the kind of lies these leaders tell us even kill our survival spirits. How can a leader say loosely that everyone is at liberty to come and perform their skill just like that but even without formal engagements- uongozi hii bure na nafik kabisa...”*

Translated; this is a useless and bogus leadership for being insensitive to the plight of its citizens.

### **Farmer Participant**

*“Kuenda mahakamani kutetea haki yako ni kama kuchokoza nyuki na tena kualika hawa wadudu kwako mlamgoni pako. Hawa mabwenyenye watakuangamiza kwa kupanga njama na korti na kutuma madalali kwako kunyakua shamba lako na chochote kidogo uko nacho hata baisikeli..... Haki ni ya matajiri na matapeli pekee yao ambao wanaongezea mali kwa mali nyingine”FP3*

Translated - seeking the intervention of the county assembly or the courts to be heard is equivalent to provoking bees and courting disaster. It is also like inviting auctioneers to your doorsteps, to sell your land and all property including the bicycle.....This is because the justice belongs to those powerful cartels, elites, and wealthy individuals who have a lot of money and who will do possibly anything to seek more money and add to the much they already acquired

**Q.** What sustainable development have the citizens attained through IPG?

**Trader Participant**

*“Most of these so-called new developments in the county today belong to MCAs, County employees, or their cartels and not ours. The MCAs take most of the contracts from the county. Apart from the MCAs, the most visible development belonged to county employees- mostly those in the finance sectors. Above all - there is this notorious contractor ‘Y’ who takes ninety percent of the total development contracts in the county. He shares his loot with the boss ‘Z’, and these actions are undermining fairness and accountability of development in this county... we meet in the next election”* **TrP3**

**Trader Participant**

*“...quite many citizens here are so ignorant that there is no amount of information or participation that would help them or even change their mindset..... nearly all the men and half the women are addicted to changaa alcohol to think anything useful to anyone. She retorted that these so-called husbands and modern men are so naïve about development that the government should decide everything for them....”* **TrP4**

**County Executive Committee Participant**

*“....We have an imaginary portfolio that we cannot execute...we simply go to the office to sit and fulfill the law. We are hardly assigned meaningful duties and if any, they are largely political to raise money than to assist in any development. We are held captive ..... we do not receive money to run CIDP programs captured in the annual budgets....”* **CECP1**

CIDPs are county-integrated development programs that capture both short and long-term developmental plans of action.

**Sub-County Coordinator**

*“....We are here to be seen and not be heard....we do not have specific duty except to represent the governor in local functions....We thought we had a development role .....but that was taken over by MCAs and senior brokers who pull the shorts. The brokers have a say on what is done where and not us...too bad for now, what to do!”* **SCCP1**

## APPENDIX IX: INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant,

I'm thankful and privileged to have you in this interview session. My name is Oloo Michael Otieno, a student from Moi University, conducting research on the dynamics of Participatory Communication in governance in Busia County. The study is concerned with how the county leadership incorporates the citizens in Public Participation to dialogue and plan mutual development obligations.

My attention is on how the leadership of the County Government empowers your inclusivity in governance by educating you on participation and collaborative engagements in the county. The study is mostly concerned with how the communication between the citizens and the government assists them mutually to identify the unique and pressing problems in society, and how your preferences are prioritized. Lastly, the study wishes to understand if your preferences are implemented and how they sustain your livelihood.

The study has no known prior knowledge about your governance relations with the leadership of Busia County. However, the study was triggered by the high poverty levels in the county which is a manifestation of severe human suffering in the County. The questions raised are generally concerned with how Public Participation is applied in Busia county, the benefits arising from the use, challenges arising from the use and how to enhance its use. Accordingly, your views will assist my study in finding and formulating strategic solutions that can be in planning and improving your relations and government leadership towards your sustainable livelihood.

You are therefore free to raise questions about the topic or your general concerns if you find any reason for it. I also assure you of anonymity and confidentiality on your participation. Your names will not be recorded anywhere in this document. More importantly, I assure you that the information from this interaction will not be shared with anyone else except for the purpose stated only.

You are also at liberty to use any language between Kiswahili, English, Luo, or Luhya, as for Iteso, I might need an interpreter. Meanwhile, I may record the interview sessions on tape if you allow, apart from scribbling the information. I'm therefore, most grateful for the time taken away from your cherished schedule to contribute to this study. Lastly, I shall request that you sign this form as a way of confirming that we shared freely in this study.

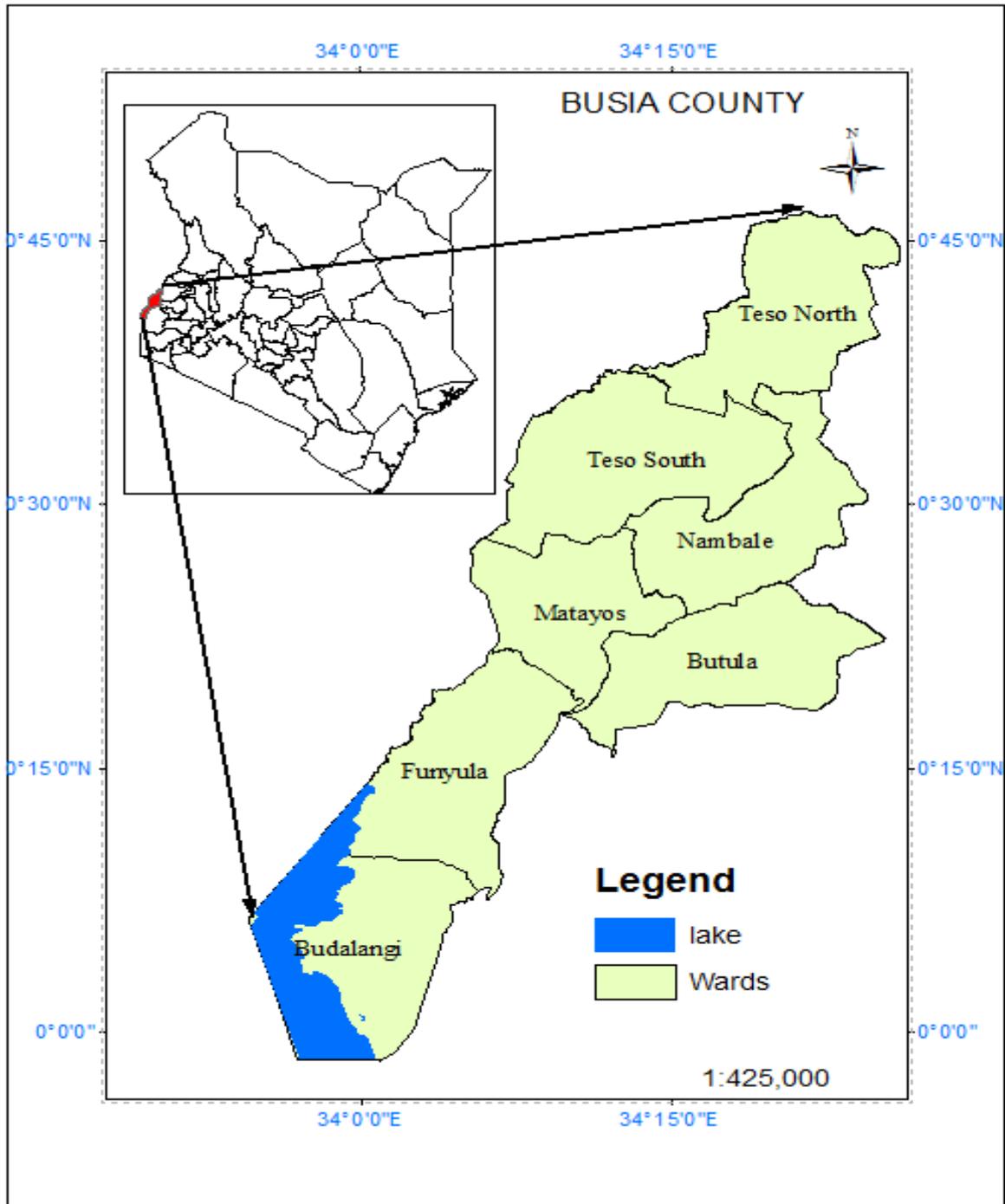
Signature.....

Date .....

**APPENDIX X: Map of Busia County with Neighbouring Counties**



**APPENDIX XI: Map of Busia County showing Sub-Countries**



**APPENDIX XIV: County Budget Transparency Survey (CBTS) 2020**




## KENYA COUNTY BUDGET TRANSPARENCY SURVEY (CBTS) 2020

### BUSIA COUNTY SUMMARY

Budget transparency is the provision of timely and comprehensive government budget information to the public that can allow effective dialogue on the priorities, revenues and spending for the delivery of services to the people. The CBTS 2020 assessed the public availability of 11 key budget documents, out of which eight were evaluated comprehensively using 33 equally weighted questions and scores each County on a scale of 0 to 100 points. Busia County has a transparency index of 11/100 points in CBTS 2020.

#### Availability of Budget Documents

In the last three rounds of CBTS from 2016 to 2020, Busia County continues to decline in making the budget documents publicly available as shown in Figure 1 where in 2016 CBTS, the County published half of the budget's documents assessed and in the current CBTS 2020, it only published one budget document representing 9 percent of the budget documents assessed.

**Figure 1: The Level of Budget Documents Made Available to the Public - Busia County**

Busia County - The Progression of the Budget Documents Made Publicly Available in the Five-Year CBTS 2016-2020



Year	Percentage of budget documents
2016	50
2017	50
2018	80
2019	60
2020	9

#### Comprehensiveness Section CBTS 2020

How comprehensive is the content of the key budget documents that Busia County makes available to the public?

Busia County published only one budget document within one of the eight categories in the comprehensiveness section in the CBTS 2020 and obtained 14 out of 100 points in the County Integrated Development Plan.

**Table 1: The Level of Information Provided by Busia County in the Published Budget Documents**

Busia County Key Budget Documents	Year Published/Provided/Available and Year Published	Level of Information Provided in Budget Documents (out of 100 points)
1. County Integrated Development Plan	2014-2022	14
2. Annual Development Plan	2019/20	Not Published
3. County Budget Review and Outlook Paper	CBRCIP 2019 - 20th October 2019	Not Published
4. County Fiscal Strategy Paper	CFSP 2019 - 21st March 2019	Not Published
5. Programme-Based Budget	2019/20 - 25th July 2019	Not Published
6. Citizens Budget	2019/20 - Anonymous TSB	Not Published
7. Finance Act	Finance Act of 2019	Not Published
8. County Quarterly Budget Implementation Report	FY 2019/20 (for the Latest Available Quarter Published)	Not Published

CBTS 2020 - Busia County Summary

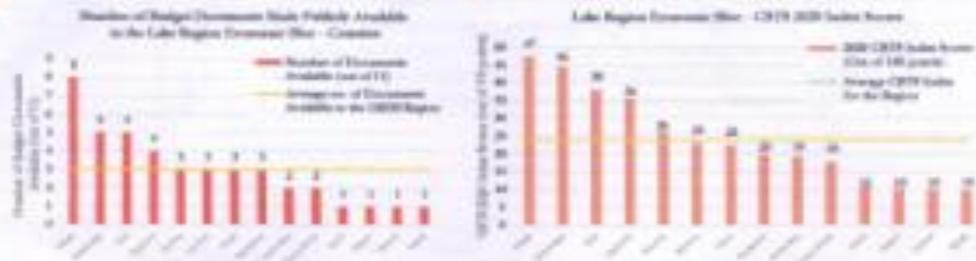
Based on the published CDS, the County performed better in disclosing its Revenue Information. In all the three questions in the CDS, Butte County disclosed full revenue details with breakdown by various revenue items, non-revenue revenues, and conditional grants. Butte County disclosed partial information on the non-financial details as implemented in the previous CDS.

**Documentation of public participation.**

Butte County does not provide any information on the public's participation space on the CDS based on both questions used in the assessment. Overall, Counties disclosed 15 out of 100 points of information on public participation in the published CDS.

**New Butte County Compares with Neighboring Counties Under the Lake Region Economic Bloc**

**Figure 2: Lake Region Economic Bloc - County Budget Transparency Performance**



Butte is one of the five Counties that published only one budget document in the CDS 2020 under the Lake Region Economic Bloc and scored 10 out of 100 points in the transparency index.

**To improve budget transparency and citizens engagement, the following are recommendations to Butte County:**

- 1. During the CDS 2020 period, the Butte County Assembly website was indicated as suspended. Butte County should ensure the website site always working and content is publicly accessible to the citizens.
- 2. The County had the CDSF labelled FY 2019/20, but when opened, it is for FY 2020/21 and only covers Butte Municipality. Previously, Butte County had made the Approved Programs-Based Budget, County Fiscal Strategy Paper, Annual Development Plan and County Budget Review and Outlook Paper online but failed to publish them to the CDS 2020. The County should continuously publish the budget documents.
- 3. Previous surveys from 2016-2020 show that Butte County has never published the Citizens Budget, published by 17 Counties in CDS 2020. Besides, Butte County should publish the Quarterly Budget Implementation Reports across all four quarters, which has consistently been done by Butte, Lodi, and Elgin-Middlesex Counties. The County needs to also publish the Finance Act.
- 4. Also, the county should ensure that published budget documents disclose non-financial information comprehensively.
- 5. Butte County should ensure they disclose information on public participation spaces. This comprises information on the disaggregation of participants at specific levels, input from the public and the feedback and the list of

decision the participation informed. The County should have mechanisms to engage the public during budget formulation and to monitor budget implementation. Parties actively engaging with vulnerable and underserved communities, directly or through budget facilitators and other CSOs, is of utmost importance. Besides, the County should introduce opportunities for citizens input and a public budget debate during the formulation phase of the official budget calendar and ensure feedback is provided to the public.

- 6. Despite the efforts in sharing results with Butte County, there was no feedback from the County in both Availability and Comprehensiveness. It is recommended the County have a point person who can respond to the survey results and the information that CSOs are seeking, as it was done by two Counties that responded to the Comprehensiveness survey.

*Results*

Butte County has a transparency index of **11/100** Points in CDS 2020.

**APPENDIX XV: Ant-Plagiarism Report**

SR686

*ISO 9001:2019 Certified Institution***THESIS WRITING COURSE***PLAGIARISM AWARENESS CERTIFICATE*

This certificate is awarded to

**OLOO MICHAEL OTIENO****CMM/PHDC/OO2/2017**

In recognition for passing the University's plagiarism

Awareness test for Thesis entitled: **AN INTERPRETATION OF THE DYNAMICS IN THE PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION MODEL IN THE GOVERNANCE OF BUSIA COUNTY, KENYA** similarity index of 3% and striving to maintain academic integrity.

Word count:52621

Awarded by

Prof. Anne Syomwene Kisilu

CERM-ESA Project Leader Date: 17/09//2024