

Journal of Public Policy & Governance



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Gloria Karambu Nthiga & Dr. Edna Moi

ISSN: 2616-8413

Public Participation Effects on Prioritization of Constituency Development Fund in Makueni County, Kenya

^{1*}Gloria Karambu Nthiga & ²Dr. Edna Moi

^{1,2}Department of Public Policy and Administration, Kenyatta University

*Corresponding author's e-mail: gloriakarambu@gmail.com

How to cite this article: Nthiga, G. K. & Moi, E. (2021). Public Participation Effects on Prioritization of Constituency Development Fund in Makueni County, Kenya, *Journal of Public Policy & Governance*, Vol. 5(1), 45-56.

Abstract

Makueni County has been touted as having the best public participation framework in Kenya and possibly in Africa. The framework has been commended to the extent that the World Bank has recommended other County Governments in the Country to embrace the model in an effort to make sure adequate involvement of the public in county development agendas. However, little research has been conducted to examine how this form of public participation framework affects the implementation of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) projects in the county considering its associated expenses. The study therefore sought to examine the effect of public participation on the prioritization of CDF projects in Makueni County, Kenya. Descriptive research design was adopted. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive statistics were used in data analysis. The results revealed that most of the participants took part in the prioritization of the projects, which included selecting projects that are publicly important to them. The participants indicated that they were consulted almost always before projects were selected. The involvement in the selection allowed the electorate to feel satisfied with the projects, an issue that was confirmed by the key informants. The study concluded that public participation influenced the prioritization of CDF projects in Mukaa Sub-County. The study recommended the need for the Makueni government to develop a framework for prioritizing on public projects. This study has showed that it is possible for the electorate to value different infrastructure projects, which could complicate prioritization and planning

Keywords: *Public Participation, Prioritization, Constituency Development Fund*

1.0 Introduction

Public participation is a vital characteristic of good governance. Through governance decisions, implementation (or lack of) for different policies is done (Jun & Bryer, 2017). Governance is considered effective if its processes are participatory, consensus and inclusion-oriented. Results-oriented governance ought to be based on the rule of law to ensure that corruption or inefficiencies are eliminated or minimized (McLavery, 2017). It ought to ensure that democratic virtues such as accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and equitability are prioritized. Incorporating public participation in governance ensures that the perspective of all people in the society is factored in public policy decision-making (Marais, Quayle, & Burns, 2017).

The western world provides importance insights concerning the vitality of participatory democracy and citizen participation in shaping a democratic society considering that they have been exercising democracy for a longer period than other countries in Africa and Asia (McGee, 2011). Based on the experience of the west, public participation can be argued from two perspectives. On the one hand, its proponents argue that public participation provides an opportunity for public opinion to be factored in overall decision-making and the contribution of a community (Jun & Bryer, 2017). On the other hand, its opponents believe that the activity is not only time consuming but also financially expensive for most societies to manage (Jun & Bryer, 2017).

In Africa, public participation is viewed as a key cornerstone to the attainment and advancement of both democracy and good governance (Fuo, 2015). In South Africa for example, the government regards public participation as a constitutional right for all, which is fundamental to its democratic efforts and service delivery (Nembambula, 2014). The country's constitution enforces the fundamental concept of public participation to ensure that democracy is effectively practiced. Community participation is considered a prerequisite for effective and successful uptake of health services in Ghana (Baatiema, Skovdal, Rifkin, & Campbell, 2013). However, the degree of public participation in the country is not well documented although past research has showed embraced of citizen involvement in an array of contexts (Baatiema, Skovdal, Rifkin, & Campbell, 2013). In Tanzania, the involvement of the public in urban planning is considered a prerequisite in the satisfaction of the urbanization of the country (Layson & Nankai, 2015). Research has showed that the more the public is involved in the planning for the nation's future, the more satisfied is the populace (Layson & Nankai, 2015). Notable, however, is that public participation is largely a hypothetical idea for a majority of African countries (Nembambula, 2014).

In Kenya, public participation is enshrined in the 2010 Constitution (Muigua, 2014). A key highlight in the 2010 Constitution is the decision to transit from a centralized government to a devolved one, which implies not only taking the power from the national to county government but also to the electorate at the lower ranks of the society. The constitution requires public participation to be exercised at all levels of government before the executives and national bodies make official choices (Kimani et al., 2012). It is important to acknowledge that public participation is rather a new process in Kenya whose complexity and essence are yet to be articulated by the citizenry and perhaps leaders (Papa, 2016). For this reason, the activity has been exercised in an unstructured approach for a protracted period.

Makueni County has been exercising public participation through several approaches. First, it informs the public by providing information to help them understand emerging issues while consulting them for their feedback on alternatives or decisions (Mbevi, 2016). The county also involves the public by factoring their concerns throughout the decision-making process (Mbevi, 2016). It has also been collaborating with the public not only in developing decision

alternatives but also in identifying ideal solutions. The county government has been empowering its electorate by placing final decision-making authority in their hands. Its participation framework has been designed to promote voluntary participation without any scheme to luring citizens to take part other than the sense of democracy and belonging (World Bank, 2018).

1.1 Problem Statement

Makueni County has been touted as having the best public participation framework in Kenya and possibly in Africa (World Bank, 2018). However, little research has been conducted to examine how this form of public participation framework affects the implementation of government projects in the county. Notably, public participation drives are expensive activities whose funding is derived from taxpayers' money, which is the case for Makueni County (Wang & Bryer, 2012). It is therefore essential to examine the effect that these activities have on the actualization of government projects in the county. Noteworthy is that the World Bank has recommended in the recent past the framework to other County Governments in the Country in an effort to make sure the public is adequately involved in county development agenda (World Bank, 2018). The embracement of the public participation framework by other counties is dependent on its success and effectiveness in project implementation in the county serving as the case study. Existing research suggests that public participation has little to no significant effect on the implementation of government projects in the county (Kasumbi, Omboto, & Nassiuma, 2017; Mutisya, 2018). This contradicts the conventional literature on the relationship between democracy and development projects (Asiedu & Lien, 2011; Baird, 2012).

Mutisya (2018) examined the impact of public participation on the development programs in the county in Ivingoni and Nzambani wards and concluded that the participation had hardly affected development programs especially in prioritization and evaluation. This was inconsistent with the current literature that champions for public participation as a component of development. The study noted that the sampled respondents were hardly involved in public participation initiatives, suggesting that the study's outcomes were largely affected by its methodology. Kasumbi, Omboto, and Nassiuma (2017) examined the role of citizen power in the sustainability of water projects in Makueni County and noted there was no significant relationship. Notably, Mutisya focused on county-funded projects and did not involve projects funded by the national government. The inconsistency of these conclusions suggest that more research is needed to examine whether citizen participation in the county influences the implementation of government projects, which would form the basis for recommending this framework to other county governments and the larger national government. The current study furthered this research direction by examining the influence of public participation on the prioritization of CDF projects in Makueni County, Kenya.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The study sought to examine the effect of public participation on the prioritization of CDF projects in Makueni County, Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by the stakeholder theory proposed by Freeman in 1994 to guide the planning of organizational affairs. The theory accentuates the idea that the consideration of all stakeholders in the planning and implementation of organizational affairs is paramount (Freeman, 1994; 2004; Freeman et al., 2010). The theory asserts that leaders ought to manage organizational activities in the interest of all shareholders. This means including all interested parties to ensure that the yields of those activities are at least felt across the board. Failure to involve all stakeholders in the management of the organizational activities could be detrimental to the overall progress of an organization (Freeman, 1994). The definition of the concept of stakeholder varies depending on context. While it may infer the employees and supplies in a corporate context, in governmental activities, stakeholders include not only the executive decision makers but also the citizenry across all the ranks of a society (Freeman, 2004; Freeman et al., 2010).

Groups and individuals who collectively form the public have a stake in good governance. This stake is exercised in either the direct use of public services or the indirect use of services according to other groups in the society (Freeman et al., 2010). The managers of public resources have an obligation of making sure that the utilization and management of those resources is conducted in the interest of the electorate (Freeman et al., 2010). County governments carry part of this responsibility in the modern-day Kenya as compared to the past where the national government was responsible for the utilization of the public resources. In the context of devolution, stakeholder involvement means including not only the perspectives of regional governments but also those of their electorates, a role that is well served by the public participation framework of Makueni. The framework empowers the public in the county to be involved in the handling and administration of affairs in the county by allowing the public to provide their opinions on matters important to the county.

The stakeholder theory provides a strong foundation for achieve progress in development by championing for the involvement of all stakeholders (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). This is vital for ensuring the satisfaction of the stakeholder and for advancing political, social, and economic goals. Critiques of the theory argue that organizational leaders hardly prioritize on the goals of other people other than self-goals especially political goals (Mainardes, Alves, & Raposo, 2013). However, this theory is closely associate is spirit with the concept of public participation, which makes it ideal for this study. Unclear from the theory is that it only suggests the benefits of stakeholder involvement. It does not provide a guide for examining the benefits yielded from seeking the opinion of all stakeholders in public planning. This leaves the theory open for use in different studies such as the present research.

2.2 Empirical Review

Kisumbi, Omboto, and Nassiuma (2017) examined the role of citizen participation in the sustainability of water projects in Makueni County. The study was conducted using a mixed research method that involved quantitative and qualitative data. The data for the study was collected through interview schedules and self-administered questionnaires. It involved 121 study participations who were selected through systematic sampling. The study found that citizen power did not have a significant correlation with the sustainability of water projects in the county. The authors attributed the observation to the fact that households in the county were not involved fully in the cycle of water projects. They suggested that more involvement could yield a significant correlation the case of which is yet to be examined. Notable about the study is that it was conducted while Makueni County was already practicing the popular

participation framework. The study therefore provides a basis for examining whether this relationship was limited to water projects or on all government projects.

Torbat (2018) in Iran analysed the influence of attitude on citizen participation in the implementation of government projects. The research design in the study was a descriptive survey. Data for the research was collected from two provinces in the country. The study established that there was a significant linear relationship between the level of participation and citizen attitude and projects performance. The study underscored the importance of focusing on measures that have a positive influence on citizen attitudes toward government projects. This study was carried in a more developed economy than the current study.

In a study on public involvement in implementation and management of community water projects, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) observed the need to fully involve the public in all the processes of implementing the project (UNICEF, 2018). The study further noted that the community can only be fully involved when adequate information on how and when to participate is clearly provided. When endowed with adequate information, community members feel empowered and the sense of projects' ownership increases.

A key challenge in examining the impact of public participation in any given context is the approach through which to document the effects. Scholars attribute this challenge to two factors. First, most stakeholders have varying understandings of the concept and essence of public participation (Harris et al., 2018). Second, the contexts in which the effects of participation are examined vary substantially. The distribution of most development issues such as health and essential infrastructure is barely even among demographics in a given region, the reason of which stakeholders tend to have varying opinions. Moreover, the perspectives of a given population concerning emotive issues such as politics are likely to vary not based on facts but rather on the inclinations among the demographics (Harris *et al.*, 2018). This makes it incumbent upon researchers to examine continually such issues as the effect of public participation on social, political, and economic issues.

Mutisya (2018) examined the effect that public participation had on the development programs initiated by the government of Makueni County. The study adopted a descriptive research design incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Participants in the study were selected through a combination of purposive and stratified sampling which allowed for the incorporation of both methodologies in the study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data in the study. The study yielded that the participation had not effectively influenced the implementation of development programs in the County. The author attributed this observation to the idea that public participation was yet to take root especially among the middle levels of the Makueni society. Rather, the participation had involved the public in lower echelons although much of the influential ground was ceded to powerful technocrats in the county. However, the study acknowledged a lack of adequate publicity of public participation in the county. The study furthers the question of whether the participation framework of the Makueni County is worth embracing for other counties considering the observations in the study.

USAID (2019) conducted a survey in 186 countries, analyzing the role of youths in projects prioritization. Countries involved in this study included the developing economies in Africa, Asia and South America. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and interview guides. The study observed that youths across the surveyed countries were limited opportunities to participate effectively in decision making processes especially at the prioritization stage. As such, the youths felt marginalized and excluded in their respective

societies. The study recommended participatory structures that accommodate youths be created and that greater trust between youth and institutions be cultivated.

3.0 Methodology

Descriptive research design was employed in this study. The study targeted an approximate population of 60,550 people in Mukaa Sub-County. It included a sample of 203 citizens from the target population who were selected randomly. A questionnaire and an interview guide were used to collect primary data. Descriptive statistics were used in data analysis.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

4.1.1 Level of public participation

The level of public participation in the County was examined in this study. As earlier pointed out, Makueni County has been commended on several occasions concerning its efforts in public participation and hence the need to explore to what extent its public was involved in public affairs. The outcomes of this assessment are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Involvement of the electorate in public participation

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
Aware of any public participation program in the sub-county	59	32	69	9	5	3.43	1.15
Respondent is consulted on different issues affecting the sub-county	45	79	33	7	0	2.96	1.05
Respondent contribution is taken seriously	34	52	56	6	0	1.67	1.08

The observation showed high levels of public participation awareness in the sub-county. Fifty-nine respondents strongly agreed that they were aware of public participation programs in the sub-county. Seventy-nine respondents indicated that they were consulted concerning the conduct of different issues affecting the sub-county. However, most of the respondents did not believe that their contribution during the participation drives was taken seriously.

Other issues concerning public participation that were examined in the study include the methods used, the coordination of public participation activities, and the perceived quality of the participation initiatives. Concerning the methods, public participation drives were predominantly actualized through local groups and barazas (67.7%) as showed in Table 2. Other highlighted methods include voting (15.5 percent), local representation (16.3 percent), and others (9.8 percent). About 49 percent of the participants indicated that public participation in the county was conducted by chief or sub-chief or member of county assembly (10.8%), county appointed administrator (11.3%), or NGOs (19.6%). The respondents felt that the level of public participation in the sub-county were commendable, with 35.8 percent deeming the initiatives acceptable or good (21.2 percent). However, some respondents felt that the initiatives were falling short, with 24.8% considering it poor or very poor (18.2%). Table 2 indicates result on the conduct of public participation activities in Mukaa sub-county.

Table 2: The conduct of public participation activities in Mukaa sub-county

Question	Response	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
Method of participating in public activities	Voting	5.5%	1.12	0.783
	Through local representatives	16.3%		
	Through local groups and barazas	67.7%		
	Others	9.8%		
Coordinator of public participation activities in Mukaa	Non-Governmental Organizations	19.6%	1.44	1.056
	County Appointed Administrator	11.3%		
	Chief or Sub-Chief	48.9%		
	Member of County Assembly	10.8%		
Rate the level of awareness or public participation initiatives in Mukaa sub-county	Very Poor	18.2%	1.6	1.018
	Poor	24.8%		
	Acceptable	35.8%		
	Good	21.2%		

The observations from the electorate were corroborated by the contribution of the key informants. For instance, they agreed (23.5%) and strongly agreed (41.2%) that there were sufficient opportunities for the electorate in Mukaa to participate in the implementation of NGCDF projects in the sub-county as showed in Figure 1.

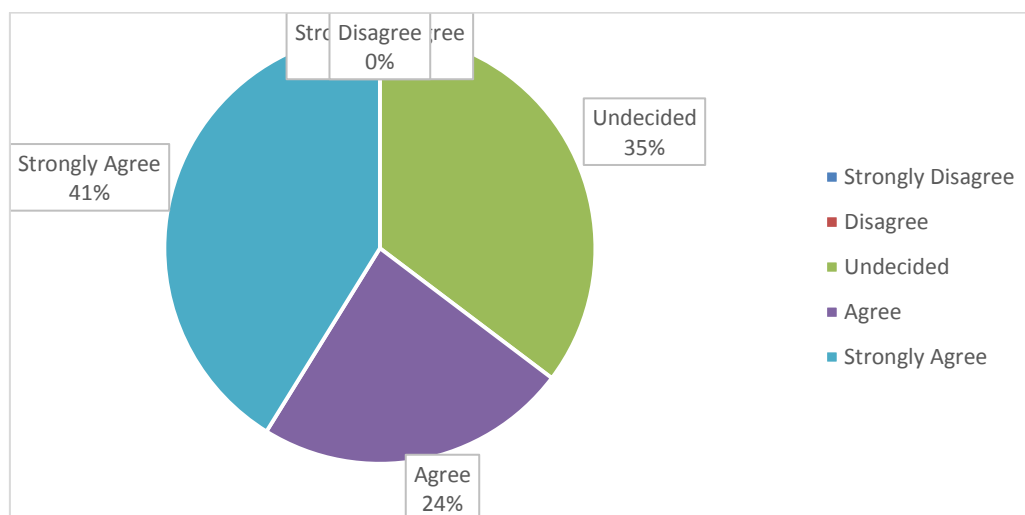


Figure 1: Availability of public participation opportunities according to the key informants

The informants also indicated that oftentimes (29.4%) or almost always (5.9%), the county government was committed towards ensuring that the public in the region was involved in governance issues. The electorate was also informed regularly concerning the opportunities

for taking part in public affairs almost always (17.6%) or often (41.2%). About 35.3% of the respondents indicated that oftentimes, the electorate was receptive to public participation initiatives in the county although 29.4% indicated that the reception was occasional. Similarly, 47.1 percent of the respondents indicated that the Mukaa citizenry agreed to take part in public participation initiatives sometimes or often (35.3%) as showed in Table 3.

Table 3: Key informants on public participation

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Mean	Std. Deviation
Committed to Participation	0.0%	23.5%	41.2%	29.4%	5.9%	2.18	0.883
Electorate is Adequately Informed	5.9%	29.4%	5.9%	41.2%	17.6%	2.35	1.272
The electorate is receptive of public participation initiatives	5.9%	29.4%	29.4%	35.3%	0.0%	1.94	0.966
The citizenry agrees to participate in public participation initiatives.	5.9%	11.8%	47.1%	35.3%	0.0%	2.12	0.857

4.1.2 Influence of public participation on the prioritization of NG-CDF projects

The first objective of this study was to examine the influence of public participation on the prioritization of NGCDF projects in Mukaa Sub-county. This objective was addressed from several perspectives as showed in Table 4. First, whether the electorate was involved in the selection and prioritization of public projects was examined.

Table 4: Public participation and project prioritization

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
I have taken part in identifying projects before development	5.7%	15.5%	20.6%	45.9%	12.4%	3.57	0.972
I understand how projects are selected	5.2%	21.1%	26.8%	42.3%	4.6%	3.20	0.995
Development projects in Mukaa sub-county matter to me	5.2%	19.1%	27.3%	43.8%	4.6%	3.24	0.985

Most of the respondents indicated that they had taken part in identifying projects before they were actualized ($M = 3.57$, $S.D = 0.972$). The participants agreed (45.9 percent) or strongly agreed (12.4%) that they had participated in the selection of public projects. The respondents also agreed (42.3%) and strongly agreed (4.6%) that they understood the criteria of selecting public project, which denoted high levels of public awareness ($M = 3.20$, $S.D = 0.995$). The

high public participation could be attributed to the fact that the electorate elevated the public projects or held them with high regard. The participants strongly agreed (4.6%) or agreed (43.8%) that development projects in the sub-county mattered to them individually. This observation was inconsistent with a USAID (2019) report that found that the electorate barely participated in the prioritization of public projects.

The study further explored the specific projects that were of interest to the electorate. The respondents were provided with a list of projects to which they were required to indicate interest as showed in Figure 2. The examined projects included schools, tarmacked roads, water projects, security projects, and youth empowerment programs.

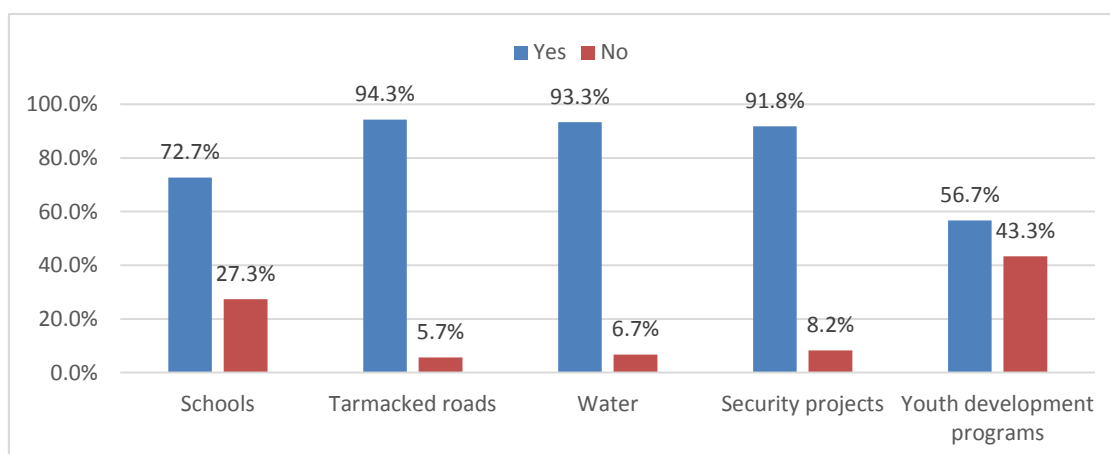


Figure 2: Priority projects to the electorate

Seventy-three percent of the participants had an interest in the school projects, 94.3% had an interest in tarmacked roads, and 93.3 percent had an interest in water projects. Ninety-two percent of the respondents had an interest in security projects while 56.7 percent indicated an interest in youth empowerment programs. The relatively lower interest in youth empowerment projects could be attributed to the idea that most of the respondents were not in the lower age-cohorts as reviewed in the previous section. That the electorate had an interest in varying projects indicates the vitality of involving them in prioritization to choose which projects would be considered urgent and which would not. Priorities among the electorate are expected to vary depending on the world view of an individual, which is the primary essence of public participation. To ensure that issues that have majority support are prioritized without sidelining the issues supported by the minority.

A further 43.3% of the respondents indicated that oftentimes they were consulted before public projects were initiated. Some participants indicated that such consultations happened almost always (5.7 percent) or sometimes (26.8%) as showed in Table 5. The study further examined the level of satisfaction among the electorate with their participation in project prioritization. The contentment among the respondents with the projects was examined. Most of the participants indicated that they somewhat (23.2%) or to great extent (51.5%), felt that their projects of interest were addressed sufficiently ($M = 2.27$, $S.D = 1.064$). This observation suggests that the involvement of the public in selection and prioritization of development project can improve satisfaction among the electorate with the development agenda of a government.

This observation was consistent with literature concerning the psychological utility of public participation, which suggests that the involvement of the public in public decision-making increases satisfaction among the electorate. This satisfaction goes beyond the outcomes of initiatives into individual lives as it invokes the sense of autonomy and relatedness among the individual members of the public (Tindall et al., 2010; Layson & Nankai, 2015). Evidence

also suggests that even the involvement of stakeholders in the private sector during planning increases overall satisfaction (Msomphora, 2015). In Torbat (2018), the involvement of the citizenry in development projects coincided with their overall attitude towards the projects upon completion and the performance of the projects. However, it is worth noting that whether the electorate is satisfied with public participation depends on their expectations from governance and the resulting experience. The electorate is unlikely to be satisfied with public participation whether the experience does not match their expectations (Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2019).

Table 5: Satisfaction and consultations in project prioritization

		Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Do you feel like your projects of concern are being addressed sufficiently	Not at All	6.7%	2.27	1.064
	Very	18.6%		
	Somewhat	23.2%		
	To a Great Extent	51.5%		
Have you ever been consulted on projects before they are undertaken	Never	5.7%	2.25	1.008
	Seldom	18.6%		
	Sometimes	26.8%		
	Often	43.3%		
	Almost Always	5.7%		

These observations were further confirmed by the key informants in the study. The research examined the extent to which the informants would concur with the idea that the electorate in the sub-county was involved in the prioritization of public projects as showed in Figure 3.

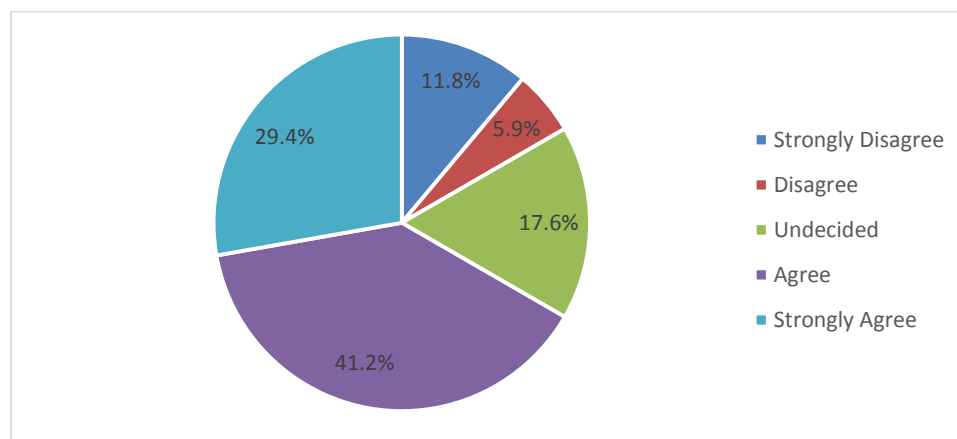


Figure 3: Key informants' perspectives concerning involvement of electorate in prioritization of projects

The participants either strongly agreed (29.4%) or agreed (41.2%) to the sentiment that the people were involved in prioritizing public projects. However, 11.8% strongly disagreed with the sentiment while 5.9% disagreed with it as showed in Figure 3. The disagreement among the respondents is an indication that not all respondents were satisfied with the level of public participation in the sub-county. The observation coincides with Kisumbi et al. (2017) who indicated that public participation efforts in Makueni County were insufficient despite the county's status as a replicable model. Insufficient involvement in of the public in participation initiatives is bound to lower the level of satisfaction individuals expected from policies and infrastructural projects as was the case in Kisumbi et al. (2017) and consistent with Li et al. (2013).

A summary of the findings in the study shows that most of the participants took part in the prioritization of the projects, which included selecting the projects that were personally important to them. The participants indicated that they were consulted almost always before projects were selected. The involvement in the selection allowed the electorate to feel satisfied with the projects, an issue that was confirmed by the key informants.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that public participation has been influencing the prioritization of NG-CDF projects in Mukaa Sub-County. The electorate is afforded the opportunity to select or voice concerns about projects they deem important to the area. The electorate in the sub-county has a commendable awareness concerning public participation initiatives. Notably, this participation is distributed across wards and age groups, albeit disproportionately. This participation has played a key role in ensuring that the public is involved in selecting projects for development in the area. In addition, the participation has ensured that the electorate is satisfied with the project planning in the sub-county.

6.0 Recommendations

The study recommended the need for the Makueni government to develop a framework for prioritizing on public projects. This study has showed that it is possible for the electorate to value different infrastructure projects, which could complicate prioritization and planning.

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