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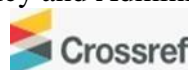
## Stakeholder's Involvement Practices and Devolved Administrative Structures in Selected Semi-Arid Counties in Kenya

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The existence of devolved administrative structures is critical in protecting public officials from abusing power. It is therefore essential to ensure that there is effective implementation and operation of these structures in Kenya now that devolution has been introduced. So far, the underlying cause of inadequate service delivery has been poor operationalization of structures in these devolved administrative entities that has been caused by ineffective managerial practices. The objective of the study intended to bridge the existing gap by establishing the scope of stakeholder involvement when it comes to devolved administrative structures; the effect of on the relationship of the stakeholder's involvement on devolved administrative structures.

**Methodology:** The study utilized Institutional Theory, which depicts an institution as networks that rely upon each other to build up unified systems that concern shared reliance. Target population was 500 participants from Taveta and Makueni counties. Purposive and Stratified Random Sampling techniques were utilized, where a sample of 223 was drawn

from the Target population. The design deployed in the study was descriptive research that sought to produce answers to phenomenon's questions. Data was presented using tables and narrations.

**Findings:** The instrument's reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha reliability of 0.7 that which was acceptably reliable. Quantitative and qualitative analytical methods were used, as data was coded in SPSS and analysed using the STATA. Multiple Linear Regression was used to test the effects of stakeholders' involvement practices on the devolved administrative structures. Objectively, it was found that, a significant relationship existed between stakeholders' involvement practices and devolved administrative structures.

**Recommendations:** The study recommends that major decision-making processes adhere to prescribed guidelines and be guided by proper behaviour and clear principles.

**Keywords:** *Strategic Leadership Practices, Stakeholder Involvement, Devolved Administrative Structures, Taveta and Makueni Counties.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Strategic leadership practices and devolved administrative structures have attracted significant attention and importance in the area of governance and public administration. Devolution, which is about allowing local or regional governments to take charge of decisions previously handled by the central government and granting them more power and responsibilities, has been adopted by many countries, including Kenya. The implementation of devolved administrative structures aims at promoting effective governance, local autonomy, and better service delivery. It seeks to address the challenges of centralized governance systems by putting power in the hands of the people directly and allowing local communities to participate in decision-making processes. Strategic leadership practices, on the other hand, concerns the actions and behaviours of leaders in formulating and implementing strategies to achieve organizational goals.

The success of an organization is heavily dependent on the strategic leadership practices employed by its leaders. These practices involve the development and implementation of effective strategies that align with the organization's goals and objectives. By carefully crafting and executing these strategies, leaders pave the way for organizational success. One notable approach that has gained traction in recent years is the devolution of administrative structures. This strategy involves the granting of subordinates the authority to make decisions within the organization. Leaders who do this encourage their subordinates to see their efforts as integral to the organization's success. This delegation of authority not only enhances employee engagement but also fosters a sense of accountability and responsibility among team members.

Furthermore, devolving administrative structures promotes organizational agility and responsiveness. By distributing decision-making power, organizations are able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Lower-level employees, who are closer to the frontlines, possess valuable insights and perspectives that can be leveraged to make informed and timely decisions. This decentralization of decision-making enhances the organization's ability to respond promptly to market trends, customer demands, and emerging opportunities. Strategic leadership practices also involve the alignment of the organization's goals and objectives with available resources, capabilities, and the external environment. Effective strategic leaders meticulously assess the internal and external factors influencing the organization's performance. They then leverage this knowledge to develop strategies that capitalize on the organization's strengths, mitigate its weaknesses, seize opportunities, and address potential threats. This approach ensures that the organization's strategic direction is aligned with its capabilities and the external landscape, thus maximizing the chances of success.

Strategic leaders have capacity to motivate other work forces to wholeheartedly pursue the organization's goals. Through effective communication, vision sharing, and leading by example, these leaders instil a sense of purpose and enthusiasm among employees. By creating a compelling vision and clearly articulating how each employee's contributions are vital to achieving that vision, strategic leaders inspire a sense of ownership and commitment throughout the organization. Strategic leadership practices are paramount in shaping the success of an organization. By employing strategies such as devolving administrative structures, aligning goals with resources and the external environment, fostering a culture of innovation, promoting collaboration and teamwork, and inspiring employees, strategic leaders create a robust foundation for organizational achievement. These methods equip even businesses to deal with ambiguity, exploit opportunities, and adapt quickly to a dynamic market.

Strategic leadership practices are crucial to the accomplishment of an organization, as they involve developing and implementing strategies to achieve organizational goals. Devolving administrative structures empower lower-level employees and enhance organizational agility, allowing quick adaptation to changes. Strategic leaders align goals, resources, capabilities, and the external

environment. They foster innovation, collaboration, and inspire employees to contribute to the organization's objectives.

Decentralised administrative arrangements in Thailand have spawned creative approaches to improving service delivery (Sudhipongpracha & Wongpredee, 2016). It was discovered that the majority of administrative organisations use co-production techniques to improve the provision of road maintenance and repair services. According to Chan (2018), kindergarten leaders in Hong Kong impressed strategic leadership as a tool towards addressing the predicaments that are facing that sector. Networking development, systematic and flexible thinking, leaders' reflective, continuous professional growth and cautious planning and management skills were strategic leadership approaches common in the majority of kindergarten schools. The Malaysian vocational schools were shown to be extremely important to strategic leadership (Bin & Zulkipli, 2019). Absorptive, strategic alignment, adaptive capacity, strategic orientation, restlessness, strategic intervention and leadership wisdom were the key practices of strategic leadership that were commonly utilized in the work place.

In the context of Africa, Jooste and Hamani (2017) conducted a research to better understand the significance of strategic resource allocation and its effectiveness for South African firms. Their findings highlighted the indispensable role that strategic leadership plays in influencing the successful allocation and utilization of resources. To this end, strategic leaders must emphasise ethical norms, foster a positive organizational culture, and set the strategic direction of their organization, among other things. In addition, other strategies suggested by the study include prudently managing the firm portfolios and implementing organizational controls. These elements put together enable businesses to operate more effectively in stormy and unpredictable, competitive environments, ultimately enhancing overall performance. Therefore, the research by Jooste and Hamani (2017) underscores the importance of strategic leadership in driving organizational motions for successful resource allocation and utilization.

These findings align with those of the research conducted by Serfontein, Kruger, and Drevin (2019), who also emphasized the central role of strategic leadership in determining firm performance. According to their study, the activities of strategic leaders play a pivotal role in fostering an environment conducive to increased productivity and effectiveness, thereby impacting firm performance. Their research demonstrated that underlying strategic leadership practices directly influence an organization's ability to achieve positive outcomes and excel in a competitive landscape.

Devolved administration has emerged as a pivotal approach with several benefits. Chigwata, De Visser, and Ayele (2021) conducted research highlighting the significance of devolved administration in Ethiopia. Their findings emphasized its capacity to recognize and accommodate ethnic diversity, instill grassroots political plurality, and foster overall development. Similarly, in Ethiopia, devolved administration has been recognized as pivotal for recognizing diversity, promoting political plurality, and fostering local development. These findings collectively emphasize the significance of effective leadership and decentralized governance in driving success and achieving desired outcomes in both organizational and societal contexts (Chigwata, De Visser & Ayele, 2021).

In South Africa, strategic leadership and its associated elements, such as ethical standards, goals, regulations, management of resources, and the corporate culture all shape the way resources are effectively utilized. Similarly, in Ethiopia, devolved administration is seen as essential in recognizing ethnic diversity, promoting political plurality, and aiding development. Various studies emphasize the importance of strategic leadership pursuits such as communication, processes, autonomy, knowledge, performance values, adaptive leadership and systems in determining firm performance. These activities help to construct a cohesive organizational environment and hold the key to unlocking potential success. The results of strategic leadership are evidenced in South Africa and Ethiopia and are indicative of the substantial importance that this type of leadership plays in the African context.

In Tanzania, the research conducted by Sirili *et al.* (2018) highlighted the role of sub-national governments in promoting accountability among public officials and addressing bureaucratic hurdles. Additionally, these structures have facilitated a bottom-up planning approach, where residents in local environs are actively participating in the orchestrating and verdict-producing activities, making sure their opinions are heard and their necessities are taken care of. One significant benefit of devolved administration in Tanzania was the independence it provides in resource mobilization and utilization. However, the research findings also highlighted several challenges associated with devolved administrative structures in Tanzania. The inadequate availability of competent personnel emerged as a major obstacle.

The success of devolution heavily relies on capable individuals who possess the skills and knowledge required to effectively manage and govern at the local level. Addressing this challenge requires investments in capacity-building programs and initiatives to enhance the skills and capabilities of personnel in sub-national governments. Another challenge identified was that disbursement of funds from Tanzania's national government was not timely. Timely availability of funds is crucial for sub-national governments to implement development projects and provide essential services to their communities.

In Kenya, the process of devolution was initiated with the enactment of the Constitution of Kenya in 2010, marking a significant milestone in the country's administrative and governance structures. This amendment has been hailed as a transformative step towards achieving decentralization within the nation's administration. The introduction of devolution led to the establishment of 47 counties as semi-autonomous units of governance, under government-appointed county executives and ward representatives. Each county serves as its own unit for service delivery, distinct from the national government in its governing style and emphasis on local needs. The aim of devolution is to bring governance closer to the people and ensure that their needs are adequately attended to and addressed at the local level.

This shift should lead to increased accountability and ultimately, improved quality of life (Kimathi, 2017). At the helm of each county's devolved administrative structure is an elected governor. These governors are entrusted with the utmost responsibility, contributing to the strategic decision-making process, foresight in resource allocation, and oversight in leadership within their respective counties.

In Kenya, the creation of decentralized government entities was undertaken with the intention of establishing leadership that is prompt, dependable, and as cost-effective as possible across the entire nation. The purpose of devolution is to solve the one-of-a-kind difficulties and exploit opportunities that are present in each county by bringing governance closer to the populace. It is anticipated that service delivery will be better as a result of the devolved units, since choices will be made in accordance with local priorities and resources will be allocated accordingly.

To fully realize the benefits of devolution, transformative strategic leadership is essential. The introduction of devolution in Kenya has reshaped the administrative and governance landscape of the country. With devolved administrative structures now in place, the role of strategic leadership becomes paramount in ensuring the successful operation of these units. Through transformative strategic leadership, Governors can drive the implementation of devolution, enhance service delivery, and foster a culture of accountability and transparency in governance at the local level (Khaunya & Wawire, 2015). However, many counties have been struggling to attract and retain competent individuals, leading to capacity gaps and hindered progress. The lack of qualified personnel has affected decision-making, resource allocation, and overall service delivery within the counties.

In addition to human resource challenges, inadequate legal and institutional infrastructure have posed a significant obstacle to the smooth operation of devolution. Counties require robust legal framework and well-established institutions to effectively carry out their mandates. However, the establishment

and implementation of these frameworks and institutions have been slow and inconsistent, creating gaps in governance structures and inhibiting the full realization of devolution's potential (Khaunya & Wawire, 2015).

Furthermore, widespread corruption has plagued some devolved administrative structures, eroding public trust and impeding progress. Instances of misappropriation of funds, bribery, and other forms of corruption have been reported in various counties, undermining the effective utilization of resources and hindering delivery of high-caliber services to the general population. This issue requires concerted effort to address at all levels of government. Another challenge faced by devolved administrative structures is the conflicting association with the national government's deliverables. The division of roles and responsibilities between the national government and county governments has at times been unclear and subject to interpretation, leading to clashes and overlapping mandates.

These conflicts have resulted in delays, inefficiencies, and confusion in decision-making processes and resource allocation, thus impeding the progress of devolution (Kimathi, 2017). The ramifications of these issues are especially obvious in fields such as health, where advancement in terms of the quality of services provided has either stalled or reversed. In a good number of counties, the anticipated gains in the provision of medical care have not been fully realised. According to Kimathi (2017), the delivery of high-quality healthcare to the general population has been hampered by a number of factors, including inadequate infrastructure, a lack of sufficient medical workers, an absence of critical medical supplies, and problems with governance. Combined efforts are necessary in order to triumph over these obstacles and realise the full potential of devolution. In summary, while twelve years have passed since the implementation of devolution in Kenya, the envisioned benefits are yet to be fully realized (Mutungi, Njoroge & Minja, 2019).

Challenges such as inadequate human resources, insufficient legal frameworks, corrupt practices, and conflicting associations with the national government have hindered the progress of devolution. These challenges have had a particularly negative impact on sectors like health, where the quality of services has stagnated or even regressed. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive effort and strategic interventions to strengthen governance structures, enhance capacity, combat corruption, and foster better coordination between the national and county governments. Only then will Kenya unlock the full potential of devolution and achieve the intended outcome of effective local governance and hence the improved service delivery that goes with it (Mutungi, Njoroge & Minja, 2019).

Recently, the personnel working in Tana River County staged a strike, bemoaning unpaid wages, rejected promotions, and an adverse environment that may risk their safety. This protest had repercussions in Nairobi County and beyond, with more County governments revealing plans to strike. Furthermore, clashes between Governors and members of the County Assembly over aspects of governance such as accountability, openness, and public presence have become the norm in Taita Taveta, Kirinyaga, Nairobi, Bomet and Laikipia Counties. As a consequence of devolution (Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis, 2016), it is now possible to question the leadership of county executives, though it is these devolved administrative units that suffer from conflict when the heads of the respective counties do not see eye to eye (Steeves, 2015). Poor management of resources is also attributed to poor government strategies in general (Mutungi, Njoroge & Minja, 2019), whereby leadership to ensure financial aspects are handled properly lacks.

However, since 2013, there have been certain counties that have registered success in implementing devolution. Machakos, Makueni, and Kakamega are some of the counties that have received a positive rating (qualified stature) from the disclaimers published in the Auditor General's report of 2019 about their judicious utilisation of public funds while carrying out devolved functions (OAG, 2019). Other counties that have received this rating include Kiambu, Kitui, and Isiolo. When choosing Makueni County for this study, its strategic leadership practice and the eventual influence on performance were

carefully compared to those of Taita Taveta County in order to determine the influence of stakeholders' involvement in each county. This was done in order to determine which county had a greater impact on how the other county performed.

Therefore, in order to reshape the trajectory of devolution's future performance, it is important to conduct a study of the influence of strategic leadership on the devolved administrative units. This is necessary in order to provide a check-on system to pre-empt corruption, graft, and the misallocation of economic resources, all of which conspire to undermine devolution in majority of the counties in Kenya (Cannon & Ali, 2018). The effectiveness of devolved administrative structures in terms of strategic leadership and practices is an aspect that was taken into account in doing this research because of its perceived impact on strategic leadership. According to Smoke (2015), there is a package of goals that devolved administrative structures ought to achieve. These goals include the enhancement of service delivery and development, achieving political stability, achieving accountability, making public resource management effective, strengthening economic development, and achieving optimal public service delivery. Transparency, public participation in political affairs, an informed citizenry, existence of groups that are social in nature and effective political institutions at the local level earned Indonesian local public services an exemplarily performance (Rusyiana & Sujarwoto, 2017).

These aspects are key in the devolution of political, economic power and authority to localized units of governance. This, in turn, has allowed previously aggrieved minorities to have greater control over their local governments, leading to more stability in political environments and a decrease in the potential for misuse of power (Faguet, 2017). This has been achieved by the transfer of many functions and authority from the national government to the local government. This research focused on the operations of County governments in which decisions made and actions taken are autonomous yet still managed by the central government, in keeping with their overarching policy at the local level. That doesn't make the national government unimportant; however, intergovernmental relations (IGR) take centre stage, providing institutions some leeway when it comes to provincial and municipal structures, thus making it possible to have significant autonomy on their own matters via different IGR forums.

Decentralization postulates devolution through the central government relieving itself some specific functions administrative, political and economic attributes to democratic grassroot entities that happen to be autonomous of the central entity within a given legal framework and geographical domain (Faguet, 2017). An evaluation was conducted regarding the transfer of authority away from central government and towards the peripheral units of governance. The problem of decentralization of control against the de-concentration of power from the national to other government levels necessitates that coordination be pursued to prevent needless power quabbles and disputes between governments at various levels. The process of devolution, which sees the national government entrusting certain powers to authorities at the local level, is a way of fostering rural development and transitioning to democracy. This, however, can lead to tensions and conflicts that complicate the devolution process. Dupas, Basurto and Robinson (2017) therefore argue that intergovernmental coordination is essential in overcoming these challenges.

The study is of the opinion that keen crafting of line of tasks and responsibilities defined a linear system of devolved governance, thus calling for short-term legislative Acts and, most importantly, a continuous refinement of these Acts. The fruits of devolution are realized when there is political goodwill and support from the central government. Entirely, devolution requires not only administrative, political and legal as prerequisites for its functionality, but also cultural, social and economic aspects that are deemed to promote accountability for utilization of government funding by responsible local leaders, participation of locals in planning, service delivery at the local level, and implementation of government programs (Banerjee *et al*, 2020). With the help of analytical

frameworks, findings on the experience on devolution was drawn from four countries: Philippines, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia.

The framework provided a description and comparison of the decentralisation type that was accepted as well as the degree and effort that led to the revelation of variety in degree and type within each of these democratic dispensations. For example, in the Philippines, there was evidence to suggest that local units had been devolved with significant roles. On the other hand, Ghana registered the least, with only health services being delegated to autonomous entities, whereas Uganda and Zambia fell somewhere in the middle of these two extremes (Alonso-Garbayo *et al.*, 2017; Resnick, 2017; Resnick *et al.*, 2019).

In addition to this, the researcher held the view that devolution should not be viewed as an end in itself, but rather a means through which other more important ends could be achieved. These ends include ensuring that the state continues to function effectively, preventing the state from dissolving, while pursuing the ideal that equal citizenship should be the norm. The Constitution provides avenues for the increased evolution of county powers and the delivery of county services in the pursuit of providing effective and practical services. In a similar vein, Section 48 of the County Government Act 2012, the Urban Areas and Cities Act 2011 and the Urban Areas and Cities (Amendment) Act 2019 obligated devolved entities to further devolve their services and powers to cities, municipalities and towns or market centers sub-counties.

### **Strategic Leadership Practices and Devolved Administrative Structures**

There is evidence in Kenya that strategic leadership practices have a positive impact on the performance of small and medium firms (Ogechi, 2016). This evidence comes from empirical research that was conducted in Kenya. In addition to this, Ogaja and Kimiti (2016) discovered that the decision-making processes of public universities in Kenya are heavily influenced by strategic leadership. The current research examined the effectiveness of strategic leadership practises by analysing them in terms of resource allocation, public accountability, and the participation of stakeholders. According to Harrison, Hall, and Nargundkar (2017), resource allocation is a tool to shift the culture of the organisation and improve areas such as performance standards, quality, teamwork, flexibility, and customer service.

Because governments significantly rely on accountability measures to protect public resources and improve service delivery (Schillemans, 2016), these measures play an important part in guaranteeing the performance and effectiveness of public sector entities and play a critical role in ensuring their performance and effectiveness. In addition, the findings of a study carried out by Said, Alam, and Aziz (2015) lend support to the idea that increased accountability in the public sector leads to enhanced quality of public services. However, in order for accountability to be useful, it is necessary to adhere to a number of overarching principles, the most important of which are responsiveness, involvement, and transparency (Van Genstel & Van Lochem, 2020).

Transparency is a fundamental meta-principle of accountability, as it involves making information accessible and understandable to the public. By ensuring transparency, governments and public sector entities promote openness and enable citizens to hold them accountable for their actions and decisions. Responsiveness is another key meta-principle, emphasizing the need for public officials and organizations to be responsive to the needs and concerns of stakeholders. This involves timely and appropriate actions in addressing issues and providing satisfactory responses to feedback and complaints. Participation is the third meta-principle, highlighting the importance of involving stakeholders in decision-making processes. Engaging stakeholders fosters their ownership and allows them to contribute their perspectives, expertise, and experiences, ultimately leading to better-informed decisions and outcomes (Van Genstel & Van Lochem, 2020).



In this particular study, strong stakeholder relationships, built through effective communication and engagement, contribute to transparency and accountability. Stakeholder involvement is also critical in the outcome of projects. Engaging stakeholders during the initiation, planning, implementation, and review stages of projects enhances the quality and relevance of project outcomes (Kobusingye, Mungatu & Mulyungi, 2017). By actively involving stakeholders, their needs, values, and concerns can be better understood, leading to more informed decision-making and project design. The creation and facilitation of workshops provide a platform for stakeholders to contribute their insights, discuss challenges, and collaboratively identify solutions. These workshops help overcome barriers to effective stakeholder involvement and foster a more inclusive and participatory approach to project development and implementation (Storvang & Clarke, 2014).

It is essential to implement accountability measures in order to guarantee the efficiency and productivity of public sector organisations. In addition, involving stakeholders in all stages of a project improves project outcomes by embracing a variety of perspectives, catering to the requirements of stakeholders, and encouraging collaboration. Governments and other entities operating within the public sector can improve their performance and the quality of services provided to the general public if they adhere to the principles of engaging with the many stakeholders (Ogaja & Kimiti, 2016).

According to Rasi, Abdekhodae, and Nagarajah (2014), stakeholders have a considerable influence on the decisions that are made during the adoption of proactive environmental practices. This influence can manifest itself in a variety of different ways. For instance, staff and customers are involved during process-based changes, and senior managers are interested in collaborating on matters relating to internal management improvements. The participation of stakeholders in the identification, execution, and monitoring of the vehicle emission control project in Nairobi, Kenya, demonstrated effect on the performance of the project (Njogu, 2016). This effect was found to be beneficial. Similarly, involvement of stakeholders in the road projects at Kenya National Highways Authority indicated that awareness, seminars, conferences and feasibility had a great positive influence on road project performance (Nyandika & Ngugi, 2014).

In contrast, there was an imbalance in stakeholders' involvement in change management in public entities (Obong'o, 2017). It was observed that stakeholders were involved in developing sound procedures for effective changes, giving feedback to management during piloting phase before rolling out the changes, and giving their feedback and views through a series of meetings. But the study established that there was little involvement of staff in the design phase of the change process. This research sought to assess stakeholders' involvement using seminars, conferences, meetings, feedbacks, needs and values.

### **Taita Taveta and Makuani Counties**

Taita Taveta County has experienced numerous incidents of mismanagement, as reported by members of the County assembly, and as evidenced by successive impeachment motions against the County Governor (Gathumbi, 2018). During the fiscal year 2018/2019, the office of the County executive was almost immobilized, with the County assembly vehemently declining to pass any expenditure bill on the assembly floor (Mberi, Sevilla, Olukuru, Mutegi & Weru, 2017). Such stand-offs between the Governor's office and the County assembly have cast a shadow on the progressive intentions of the 2010 Constitution (Kimathi, 2017). The continuous tension between the Governor's office and the County assembly in Taita Taveta makes one wonder whether public accountability, and stakeholder involvement brings about progress or regression of devolved administrative structures in County governments when it comes to resource allocation.

Resource allocation plays a critical role in determining how public funds are utilized so as to address the needs of the community in the best way possible. If resource allocation is hindered or mismanaged due to conflicts and political differences, this could result in setbacks and hinder the progress of

devolved administrative structures. Stakeholder involvement is crucial for the success of devolved administrative structures. When stakeholders, including citizens, community organizations, and interest groups, are actively involved in decision-making processes, this fosters sense of ownership, transparency, and hence better decisions and outcomes. But if stakeholders are not properly engaged or their concerns are ignored, this can lead to a breakdown in communication, increased tension, and a lack of ownership in the decision-making process.

In light of the difficulties that Taita Taveta County is currently experiencing, the influence of stakeholder involvement has become even more crucial. In order to effectively address these concerns, there must be a concerted effort on the part of all the interested parties, including the office of the Governor, the County Assembly, and the stakeholders to address the issues facing the County. It is possible for Taita Taveta County to resolve the issues and work towards the advancement and improvement of devolved administrative structures in line with the goals of the devolution process if openness, effective resource allocation, and meaningful stakeholder involvement are promoted (Barasa, Rogo, Mwaura & Chuma, 2018). The incidents of mismanagement, impeachment motions, and dysfunctional County executive in Taita Taveta County raise concerns about the effectiveness of devolved administrative structures.

The conflicts between the County assembly and the Governor have led to a paralyzed County executive and hindered the passage of expenditure bills. This situation has made people wonder whether stakeholders' involvement cause progress or retrogression in the resource allocation of devolved administrative units. The ongoing tension between the Governor's office and the County assembly raises the question whether these safeguards play the role of promoting positive development or contributing to the decline of devolved administrative units. Further examination is needed to understand their influence and their potential in the effective functioning of devolved units (Barasa, Rogo, Mwaura & Chuma, 2018).

In contrasting, Makueni County which neighbours Taita Taveta County and which is the focus of this study, has proven to be different when it comes to devolved governance. In Makueni County, there has been a progressive and collaborative relationship between the County executive and the County assembly members from 2017 until the present. This positive collaboration has yielded notable achievements, such as the successful implementation of the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) program, which was piloted by the national government and called for the allocation of County government resources (Barasa, Rogo, Mwaura & Chuma, 2018). As a result, Makueni County has garnered positive ratings its utilization of public resources and has maintained a favorable public image. For example, during the 2017/2018 fiscal year, Makueni County, alongside Nyandarua County, was rated the best in terms of efficiently utilizing public funds (Njeru, 2019).

The success and hence positive reputation of Makueni County highlight the importance of stakeholder involvement in promoting progress and good governance in devolved units. By efficiently utilizing public resources and ensuring accountability, Makueni County has been able to implement key programs and initiatives that benefit its residents. This positive track record not only reflects the commitment of the County government but also showcases the importance of coordination and collaboration between the County executive and the County assembly in achieving developmental goals (Njeru, 2019).

Other counties, such as Taita Taveta, ought to follow the example of Makueni County to improve their governance practices, promote collaboration, and thus boost the implementation of major programmes for the betterment of their residents by what they have learned (Njeru, 2019). Taita Taveta County has experienced numerous incidents of mismanagement and conflicts between the County assembly and the Governor, which have raised concerns about the influence of stakeholders' involvement on the progress of devolved units. In contrast, Makueni County has demonstrated cooperation and

coordination between the County executive and the County assembly, resulting in successful implementation of programs and positive utilization of public resources. Makueni County's achievements highlight the importance of cooperation, proper resource allocation, and accountability for the effective functioning of the devolved administrative structures in County governments (Njeru, 2019).

From the foregoing, it is clear that a grasp on the part of the County's leaders of the relationship between strategic leadership practices and the operationalization of devolved administrative structures is absolutely necessary for improving the efficiency of these structures and delivering positive results to the local communities that they serve. This research intends to shed light on the relationship between the two study constructs and provide insights for enhanced governance and decision-making at the local level in Kenya by researching the history and dynamics of strategic leadership practices and devolved administrative systems. Specifically, the research will focus on Kenya (Njeru, 2019).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Several challenges emerged in the devolution process, among them; lack of adequate resources, corruption, and ineffective leadership. These challenges raised concerns about the ability of the counties to effectively deliver services and achieve their development goals (Munene & Kanyinga, 2018). In a study conducted by Muli (2015), it was revealed that the level of implementation of devolution varies significantly, depending on the effectiveness of leaders in playing their role while implementing the processes of the devolution. The study further explored the sentiments expressed by Kenyans regarding the performance of county governments, revealing a notable level of disappointment among the population.

Over half (53% to be specific) of the residents expressed dissatisfaction with how their county governments functioned, revealing a significant lack of confidence in their effectiveness. However, 28% of the respondents neither expressed satisfaction nor disappointment, indicating a sense of uncertainty or ambivalence, whereas a mere 18% expressed satisfaction with the county government's performance. Muli (2015) identified several key factors contributing to this widespread dissatisfaction. Chief among them were the unimplemented reforms, which accounted for a significant proportion of the concerns (54%). This highlights the big gap between proposed changes and their actual implementation, leaving citizens disillusioned. Additionally, a substantial portion of the disappointment stemmed from unfulfilled campaign promises (19%), further eroding trust in the new governance system. Moreover, issues of corruption, ethnicity, and nepotism (13%) were identified as significant contributors to the overall dissatisfaction experienced by Kenyans.

Worse still, it was observed that even the objectives set out by county governments and meticulously documented in five-year strategic plans faced considerable challenges and hurdles within the same governmental bodies. This derailing of objectives by the very institutions tasked with implementation of proposals was brought to light by the study conducted by Khaunya, Wawire, and Chepng'eno (2015). These findings serve as a reminder of the obstacles and complexities involved in successfully implementing devolution and underscore the pressing need for enhanced governance practices, transparency, and accountability to address the concerns and expectations of the Kenyan population at large. The study by Muli (2015) found out that the level of implementation of devolution varied based on the way leaders played their roles in the implementation process.

Kenyan residents expressed significant disappointment with the performance of county governments, with more than half (53%) registering dissatisfaction. Only 18% expressed satisfaction, but 28% remained neutral. The main reasons for dissatisfaction were identified as unimplemented reforms (54%), unfulfilled campaign promises (19%), and issues of corruption, ethnicity, and nepotism (13%). The study also revealed that county governments as well often had a role in hindering the achievement of objectives outlined in their five-year strategic plan. Embracing strong strategic leadership practices

and establishing decentralized administrative structures within the counties is one step that will ensure the success and effectiveness of the devolution process. These two factors together with making efficient use of the resources at their disposal and adapting to the environment in which they operate play an important part in determining the path that county governments take in the direction of accomplishing their aims and objectives (Kinyua, 2017).

Effective strategic leadership practices act as a cornerstone for county governments, providing them with the essential advice and direction to align their vision, mission and strategic objectives with the prevailing circumstances. This calls for leaders with a clear vision who are able to anticipate obstacles, recognize opportunities, and make educated decisions that promote the development and progress of their particular counties (Ogolla & Aketch, 2018). Visionary leaders are therefore needed to initiate and sustain the process of devolution. Strategic leadership ensures that county governments use proactive measures to handle new issues, respond to the demands of their residents, and effectively distribute and use resources for the greatest possible impact and benefit.

In addition, the construction of decentralized administrative structures is of the utmost importance in order to promote accountability, openness, and citizen participation in the decision-making processes that are carried out by county governments. These structures encourage ownership, accountability, and active involvement at all levels of the administrative hierarchy (Kinyua, 2017). They accomplish this by delegating decision-making authority to lower-level employees, thereby empowering them. This strategy encourages a sense of collective responsibility in addition to higher levels of both efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services to the populace. Having decentralized administrative structures to provide accountability and transparency is critical to the operation of county governments.

These structures promote checks and balances to facilitate the inclusion of lower-level personnel in decision-making processes. Through these structures, it is possible to reduce the possibility of corruption, favouritism, and mismanagement of resources. Because citizens are able to witness firsthand the decision-making processes and the distribution of resources, this openness develops public trust and confidence in the governance systems (Kamau & Mbogo, 2019). As a result, the likelihood of the citizens having faith on such system is increased.

According to Kamau and Mbogo (2019), the success of the devolution process heavily relies on the adoption and effective implementation of strategic leadership practices and the establishment of decentralized administrative structures within county governments. By fostering visionary leadership, aligning objectives with resources, and promoting accountability and transparency, these structures contribute to the overall effectiveness and progress of county governments in Kenya. Furthermore, researchers established that the implementation of strategic plans by county governments has been characterized by weaknesses and various challenges.

However, it is important to note that some counties, such as Bomet, Makueni, and Kakamega, have made significant progress towards fully operationalizing and implementing the devolved administrative units, such as village units, as outlined in the 2010 Kenyan Constitution and other relevant legislation (Kinyua, 2017; Kamau & Mbogo, 2019). These counties have achieved implementation levels ranging from 70% to 90%, demonstrating their commitment to the devolution process. In summary, while some counties have made commendable progress in operationalizing devolved administrative units, others are still in the process of pursuing this goal. It is essential for all counties to prioritize and expedite the operationalization process to enhance citizen participation, improve local governance, and effectively deliver services to the local communities.

By doing so, county governments can exploit the benefits of devolution and contribute to the overall development and well-being of their respective regions. However, it is worth mentioning that there is a notable dearth of research data on this specific topic when it comes to counties in Kenya, especially concerning Taita Taveta and Makueni counties. While devolution is enshrined in the Kenyan

Constitution, the extent of the implementation of devolved administrative structures and their impact on organizational performance remains largely explored. Furthermore, the relationship between strategic leadership practices and devolved administrative structures in the counties is an area that still requires investigation (Kinyua, 2017).

According to Kinyua (2017), it is necessary to carry out sufficient research to find out the challenges, successes, and best practices associated with the implementation of devolved administrative structures if we wish to have a complete understanding of the dynamics of devolution and its effects on organizational performance in the regions of Taita Taveta and Makueni. These regions are located in Kenya. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role that strategic leadership practices have in fostering the efficient operation of these organisations and driving positive results. Through the study, researchers will be able to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and shed light on the factors that either hinder or support successful implementation of devolved administrative structures. Accurate information arising from the research will also give policymakers, county officials, and other stakeholders the ability to make informed decisions as they formulate policies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of devolution in Taita Taveta, Makueni, and other counties across Kenya.

There is a deficit in study that would help in understanding the specific consequences of devolved administrative structures and strategic leadership practices in counties such as Taita Taveta and Makueni, despite the fact that the importance of devolved administrative structures and strategic leadership practices in the context of Kenya is widely acknowledged. It is therefore necessary to do additional research in order to investigate these factors and provide insights that can be used to influence policy and practice in the ongoing efforts to promote devolution in Kenya (Kinyua, 2017).

In the context of the counties of Taita Taveta and Makueni in Kenya, there is a paucity of in-depth research on the subject of decentralised administrative structures and strategic leadership practices. There is a lack of awareness regarding the efficiency of devolved administrative structures and the effect that these structures have on the overall performance of organisations, despite the fact that devolution is an essential part of the Kenyan Constitution. In addition, there has not been a comprehensive investigation into the connection between the strategic leadership practices and the decentralised administrative systems that exist in these counties. This study is relevant because it seeks to address the existing gap in the literature on the effects of strategic leadership practices and decentralized administrative structures in the Kenyan context (Kithae, 2016). By promoting effective strategic leadership practices and decentralized administrative structures, county governments can enhance service delivery and citizen participation in county governance (Owiti & Kihoro, 2017).

While the implementation of devolved administrative structures in Kenya has brought about positive changes and opportunities, challenges and gaps still persist. The success of these structures depends on various factors, such as the equitable allocation of resources, transparent decision-making processes, effective public accountability mechanisms, and stakeholder participation (Owiti & Kihoro, 2017). Issues of corruption, power imbalances, and inadequate capacity among local leaders can hinder the effective functioning of devolved administrative structures. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the effects of strategic leadership practices and devolved administrative structures in the semi-arid Kenya's counties of Taita Taveta and Makueni. Specifically, the study examines the relationship between strategic leadership practices and devolved administrative structures and their impact on resource allocation, public accountability, and stakeholder involvement.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To establish effects of resources allocation on the devolved administrative structures in Taita Taveta and Makueni Counties, Kenya.
2. To determine effects of public accountability on devolved administrative structures in Taita Taveta and Makueni Counties, Kenya.

3. To establish the effects of stakeholders' involvement on devolved administrative structures in Taita Taveta and Makueni Counties, Kenya.
4. To determine the moderating effects of legal factors on strategic leadership practices and devolved administrative structures in Taita Taveta and Makueni Counties, Kenya.

### **Study Hypotheses**

The study hypothesized the following null and alternative hypotheses in order of the study objectives as follows;

1. H<sub>01</sub>: There is no effect of resources allocation on devolved administrative structures in Taita Taveta and Makueni counties, Kenya
2. H<sub>02</sub>: There is no effect of public accountability on devolved administrative structures in Taita Taveta and Makueni counties, Kenya
3. H<sub>03</sub>: There is no effect of stakeholders' involvement on devolved administrative structures in Taita Taveta and Makueni counties, Kenya
4. H<sub>04</sub>: There is no moderating effect of legal factors on the relationship between strategic leadership practices on devolved administrative structures in Taita Taveta and Makueni counties, Kenya

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Stakeholder Involvement Practices and Devolved Administrative Structures**

Stakeholder and public involvement play a vital role in the decision-making process and the success of organizational policies and activities. Nyang'au (2014) highlights the importance of engaging stakeholders and the public in decision-making to avoid conflicts and ensure the long-term success of planned strategies. Concerning public-private partnerships (PPPs), Forrer *et al.* (2014) emphasize the significance of clear and consistent communication with stakeholders. Effective communication helps to build trust, transparency, and understanding among all parties involved, which in turn increases engagement and collaboration. When stakeholders are well-informed and feel involved in the process, they are more likely to support and contribute to the success of the partnership (Forrer *et al.*, 2014).

Kim and Lee (2018) further emphasize the importance of communication in public-private partnerships. They argue that transparent communication fosters mutual understanding, reduces information asymmetry, and promotes cooperation between partners. By maintaining open lines of communication and providing clear information to stakeholders, public-private partnerships can establish a foundation of trust and enhance their chances of success. In the context of devolved administrative structures, involving stakeholders and the public in decision-making processes and ensuring effective communication are crucial for building accountability, trust, and transparency. By actively engaging stakeholders and promoting open dialogue, devolved units can garner support, address concerns, and achieve their goals more effectively (Kim and Lee, 2018). However, in addition to communication, this study investigated whether there existed stakeholders' engagement plans, stakeholders' involvement financing and citizen participation.

In England, UK, Prosser, Renwick, Giovanni, Sandford and Flinders (2017) while studying citizen participation and changing governance concluded that citizen consultation (involvement) had been insufficient to an undesirable extent when devolution dealings were rolled out in England. In addition, even with the desire from political leaders to discharge their mandates quickly, deeper forms of consultation in the form of mini-public deliberations would have been necessary so as to get informed public opinion on priority areas, thus legitimizing local governance reforms process (Kim and Lee, 2018).

The study by Prosser *et al.* (2017) highlights the issue of insufficient public involvement in governance processes, which is often as a result of leaders' preference for tight control. This finding suggests that public participation is limited and not given adequate attention by government leaders at both national and local levels. However, it is important to note that this study focused primarily on public participation and did not explore other forms of stakeholder engagement. In this research, in addition to public participation, the study aims to investigate the influence of other stakeholder engagements on the performance of devolved administrative structures. This broader perspective recognizes that effective governance requires engaging a range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, community groups, private sector entities, and other relevant actors (Kim and Lee, 2018).

The focus on the health sector in Uganda by Razavi, Kapiriri, Abelson, and Wilson (2019) sheds light on stakeholder participation in priority setting. Their study reveals that vulnerable groups were not adequately involved in stakeholder participation processes, and conflicting priorities, values, and interests posed challenges to effective stakeholder involvement in local priority setting. This highlights the importance of addressing these challenges and ensuring that all relevant stakeholders, including vulnerable groups, are actively engaged in decision-making processes to improve governance outcomes (Prosser *et al.*, 2017). By considering stakeholder engagement beyond public participation and exploring the role of financing of stakeholders' involvement exercises, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of stakeholder engagement practices on the performance of devolved administrative structures.

Prosser *et al.* (2017) found that insufficient public involvement in governance processes was not due to its undesirability but rather a preference for tight control by government leaders at both national and local levels. However, their study solely focused on public participation, which is deemed inadequate in this current research. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of stakeholder engagement and the availability of financing for stakeholder involvement on the performance of devolved administrative structures, in addition to public participation.

Razavi *et al.* (2019) examined stakeholder participation in priority setting in the health sector in Uganda and established that vulnerable groups were excluded from stakeholder involvement. Conflicting priorities, values, and interests were also noted as major challenges in local priority setting processes. This study ensured that different group inputs are incorporated in evaluating stakeholder involvement to find out whether it is the same case with the Kenyan context or not. The current study also incorporated all ministries under devolved government instead of focusing on health sector alone as Razavi *et al.* (2019).

In Kenya, Opano, Shisia, Sang, and Josee (2015) conducted research on devolved governments, with Kisii County government being the point of focus. The scholars concluded that key determinants in the implementation of formulated strategic plans in the County government of Kisii were financial resources and the involvement of stakeholders for proper decision making in the governance of the County. These revelations prompted the scholars to make a recommendation that, a similar study but with a wider scope be conducted nationwide in order to have clear understanding of what governance requires. As Juma *et al.* (2014) advised, all stakeholders should guard against a repeat of past governance mistakes if they are to improve Kenya through devolution.

The study by Khaunya *et al.* (2015) highlights mistrust among stakeholders as a significant challenge faced by County governments in achieving their objectives. This mistrust can hinder effective collaboration and cooperation between different stakeholders, thereby hindering the successful implementation of devolution. Muli's (2014) research on the challenges of implementing devolution in the Nairobi City County administration reveals various difficulties encountered. These are political challenges and physical environment, resistance from Members of the County Assembly, and the attitude of employees, the business community, and the electorate. These factors contribute to the

complexities of the obstacles faced in the process of implementation of devolution (Muli, 2014). The study also established the importance of stakeholder participation in reducing resistance at all levels of the implementation process. Engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes and ensuring their involvement can help address concerns, build trust, and enhance cooperation.

Additionally, Muli (2014) highlights the importance of having explicit rules and guidelines governing the execution of the devolution plan to minimize misunderstandings and conflicts. These findings underscore the significance of stakeholder engagement and clear communication in mitigating challenges and fostering successful implementation of devolution strategies. By involving stakeholders, addressing their concerns, and establishing transparent guidelines, devolved administrative structures can enhance trust, collaboration, and the overall effectiveness of governance processes (Muli, 2014).

Khaunya *et al.* (2015) noted that mistrust among stakeholders poses a significant challenge for County governments in achieving their objectives. Meanwhile, Muli (2014) conducted a study on the difficulties of implementing devolution in the Nairobi City County administration. The study revealed that challenges posed by the political and physical environment, resistance from Members of the County Assembly, employees, business community, and the electorate hindered the implementation of the devolution strategy. To mitigate resistance, stakeholder participation and clear rules governing the devolution process were deemed crucial by Muli (2014).

Research by Nyang'au (2014) on public participation and the effectiveness of strategy implementation is also illuminating, as it showed that when Kenya's Ministry of Devolution and Planning involved the public in strategy implementation, there was reduced time and resistance from stakeholders. This also ensured proper utilization of resources by scaling down corruption and unnecessary expenditure. Further, the engagement raised the morale of citizens and facilitators, increased the ease of doing work and bolstered service delivery through efficiently utilized public resources. This study sought to find out whether stakeholders' engagement plans, financing for stakeholder involvement and citizen participation have been incorporated in the governance practices in Taita Taveta and Makueni Counties.

## **Theoretical Review**

### **Institutional Theory**

Institutional theory that was proposed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1983 sees an organization as an interconnected set of entities that rely on each other to form a multifunctioning system. As Anderson (2016) explains, the theory concerned itself with examining the mutual dependence of various elements of the system, and the actions that managers should take to ensure their efficacy. Moreover, the concept builds on the idea of an organization as a social system and asserts that it should draw on the resources of its environment and contribute to it in return.

Lammers and Garcia (2017) note that part of the theory is focused on the assigning of particular responsibilities to the parts of the system, thereby streamlining productivity of the organization as a whole. Institutional theory, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of organizations within a broader social and economic system, provides valuable insights into the functioning of devolved administrative structures. The theory highlights the importance of interpersonal behavior and group dynamics in fostering collaboration and integration (Ramosal, 2014). In the context of this study, the application of Institutional theory helps to conceptualize devolved administrative structures as a result of collective strategic leadership practices.

These practices are spearheaded by the County Executive and extend to Members of County Assembly, staff, and various stakeholders. By adopting an institutional perspective, the study recognizes the significance of integration and unity among the constituent elements of an organization. This includes



promoting effective communication and establishing connections both internally among different levels of the county government and externally with external stakeholders. The goal is to align the efforts of various actors towards the realization of the organization's overarching objectives (Barasa, Rogo, Mwaura & Chuma, 2018).

In examining the effects of resource allocation, public accountability, stakeholders' involvement, and legal issues, the study acknowledges the role of institutional factors in shaping leadership practices within the county governments. Institutional theory provides a lens through which to analyze how the established norms, values, and expectations of the institutional environment influence the decision-making processes, behaviors, and relationships within the devolved structures. By considering the institutional context, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics that shape leadership practices in the context of devolved governance (Barasa, Rogo, Mwaura & Chuma, 2018).

The study draws on Institutional theory to investigate the impact of the collective strategic leadership practices within devolved administrative structures of County governments. Institutional theory emphasizes the integration and collaboration of various stakeholders within an organization and their connections to the larger social and economic system (Ramosal, 2014). The study examines the effects of resource allocation, public accountability, stakeholders' involvement, and legal factors on the leadership practices of County governments. By considering the insights of Institutional theory, the study aims to understand how these factors influence the functioning of devolved administrative structures and their ability to achieve organizational goals.

The theory posits that managers should adopt a holistic approach and concentrate on the interdependent functions performed by each component of an organization rather than dealing with them in isolation (Hannagan, 2002). It recognizes that organizations do not exist in isolation but are part of a larger system, such as the societal or economic system in which they operate. The systems approach emphasizes both the interpersonal and collective behavioral aspects that contribute to a cooperative and integrated system (Ramosal, 2014). In this study, Institutional theory serves as a framework to better understand the strategic leadership practices and their implications within the devolved administrative structures in Kenyan counties. These county governments are intricate systems that comprise the County Executive, Members of County Assembly (MCAs), staff, and various stakeholders (Barasa, Rogo, Mwaura & Chuma, 2018).

By applying Institutional theory, the study aims to shed light on how the collective behaviors and interactions within these structures contribute to the overall functioning and effectiveness of the devolved governance system. By examining the interplay of strategic leadership practices and the institutional context, the study seeks to uncover the ways in which the established norms, values, and expectations of the county government system shape the decision-making processes, behaviors, and relationships among the different actors involved. The application of Institutional theory helps to illuminate the interdependence and interconnectedness of the various components within the devolved administrative structures. It provides a lens through which to analyze the cooperative system and collective behaviors that influence the functioning and performance of Kenya's county governments (Barasa, Rogo, Mwaura & Chuma, 2018).

The study adopts a systems approach to analyze the strategic leadership practices and their impact on devolved administrative structures in Kenyan County governments. The systems approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of different components within an organization and their alignment with the larger societal and economic context (Ramosal, 2014). By utilizing Institutional theory, the study aims to gain insights into how strategic leadership practices function within the complex structures of County governments, involving the Executive, MCAs, staff, and various stakeholders. The focus is on

understanding the cooperative system and the implications of strategic leadership for the devolved administrative structures in Kenya (Barasa, Rogo, Mwaura & Chuma, 2018).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Philosophy

The study adopted pragmatism research philosophy, which emphasizes the use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods as well as analytical approaches that are deemed appropriate for social research. This choice aligns with the view of Morgan (2014) that pragmatism supports a pluralistic approach to research, taking into account historical, political, and social contexts that form the basis of inquiry. By adopting a pragmatic stance, the study aimed to produce relevant and applicable insights that could inform decision-making and practice in the field of devolved administrative structures.

This type of philosophy challenges the implicit notion that our practices are obviously inadequate and therefore requiring a backup from a given principle that is way beyond them (Rescher, 2016). The study embraced this type of research to collect data that reflected the reality of the phenomenon under study, since locally it has been used by different scholars, among them Akanga (2014) and Juma (2018). Also, pragmatism allows for the adoption of both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods (Mixed-methods).

### Research Design

The objective of descriptive study design is to determine who, what, where, when, and how much. The design aimed to answer questions pertaining to what, where, and when the phenomenon was taking place. It was deemed fit to employ a mixed-methods approach to research, involving both qualitative and quantitative analysis in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context and build an accurate profile of relevant factors, events, and circumstances (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Morgan (2014) stated that such a mixed-methods approach is believed to be essential for valid social research.

### Target population

**Table 1: Target Population for Selected Semi-Arid Counties in Kenya (Taita Taveta and Makueni)**

Designation	Total
Governor	2
Deputy Governor	2
Speaker of County Assembly	2
Member of County Assembly	83
County Executive Committee Members	17
Chief Officers	22
Clerk of County Assembly	2
County Service Board Members	13
Directors' and Managers	140
Sub County Administrators	10
Ward Administrators	65
Village Administrators	142
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>

Source: Researcher (2022)

The population surveyed was specifically drawn from Taita Taveta and Makueni Counties, with the top leadership from those two county governments being purposefully chosen to represent all 45 county governments, as seen in Table 1.

### Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

#### Sampling Techniques

A total of 223 top-level officials from the two semi-arid counties were surveyed for this study, drawn both purposefully and randomly from the target population of 500. The respondents included the Governor, Deputy Governors, Speakers of County Assembly, Members of County Assemblies, County Executive Committee members, chief officers, County Public Service Board members, Directors/Managers, Sub County administrators, Ward administrators, and the village administrators. Purposive and systematic random sampling techniques were used for selecting respondents for the survey.

The highest-ranking people that needed to be included were the Governors, Deputy Governors, Speakers of County Assemblies, and Clerks of Assemblies. These were chosen using the Purposive Sampling method. Systematic random sampling was used for the selection of Members of County Assemblies, County Executive Committee Members, Chief Officers, etc. who held leadership roles in the Taita Taveta and Makueni County governments.

#### Sample size

**Table 2: Sample Respondents Distribution for Selected Semi-Arid Counties in Kenya (Taita Taveta and Makueni)**

Leadership Position	Population	Sample Respondents $n = N/(1 + N(e^2))$
<b>Strategic Level</b>		
Governor	2	1
Deputy Governor	2	1
Speaker of County Assembly	2	1
Member of County Assembly	83	37
County Executive Committee Members	17	8
Chief Officers	22	10
Clerk of County Assembly	2	1
<b>Functional Level</b>		
County Service Board Members	13	5
Directors' and Managers	140	62
<b>Operational Level</b>		
Sub-County Administrators	10	5
Ward Administrators	65	29
Village Administrators	142	63
Total	500	223

Source: Researcher (2022)

The sample size was calculated using Yamane (1967) formula;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Whereby;

$n$  - Sample size,

$e$ —Equals to 0.05, the margin of error allowed and

$N$  - Size of the population.

The study's sample size was;

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)} = \frac{500}{1+500(0.05^2)} = 222.2 \approx 223.$$

Additionally, Table 3.2 was generated by employing Cochran's (1977) formula, which allows for proportional allocation of the sampled respondents. This ensured that it accurately represents the sample being studied. By employing Cochran's formula, the study accounted for the variability within the target sample and obtained reliable data for analysis. The formula is presented as follows:

$$n_i = \left(\frac{n}{N}\right)N_i$$

Where;

$n_i$  Sampled respondents in stratum  $i$ ,

$n$  Actual sample size,

$N$  Target population and,

$N_i$  The population in stratum  $i$ .

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In this research, the researcher employed a Likert Scale as a measurement tool for questionnaires, along with interview schedules to collect primary data. To complement the primary data, secondary data was sourced from various documented materials such as books, reports, and other published sources. To gather primary data, the researcher distributed research instruments to individuals selected from the population. These research instruments included questionnaires using a Likert Scale, which allowed respondents to rate their agreement or disagreement with statements on a pre-determined scale. This approach provided a quantifiable measure of respondents' attitudes, opinions, or perceptions.

The structured interviews consisted of both open-ended and closed questions. The closed-ended questions were specifically designed to assess and rate different qualities or attributes, thereby streamlining responses and ensuring more precise information. On the other hand, the open-ended questions allowed participants to provide additional information beyond the structured questions, enabling the researcher to gain insights and perspectives that might not have been captured through the closed-ended format alone. By incorporating both closed-ended and open-ended questions, the researcher was able to gather comprehensive data that encompassed both quantitative ratings and qualitative insights.

### **Pilot Study**

In the initial phase of the research, Kajiado County was strategically selected as a valuable resource for gaining insights into potential challenges that could arise during actual data collection. This phase aimed to assess the cost of data collection and estimate the approximate time required for the entire data-gathering process. By conducting this research in Kajiado County, valuable information was gathered, shedding light on critical aspects of the study. One of the primary objectives of this research was to understand how participants would comprehend and engage with the items presented in the research tool.

To achieve this, a selected sample of 20 individuals was drawn from the same organisation through systematic random sampling. Each participant was assigned a unique label or identifier to ensure that there was no duplication of responses within the survey. The outcomes of this phase revealed that the administered questionnaires were perceived as overly complex by the participants, leading to difficulties in providing accurate and timely responses. As a result, it became evident that a revision of the questionnaire was necessary to ensure that participants could effectively understand and respond to the survey items. This crucial feedback from the initial phase of the research allowed for adjustments to be made to the questionnaire design, enabling participants to provide more adequate and punctual responses in subsequent data collection efforts. By addressing these issues, the research process was refined, enhancing the quality and reliability of the data gathered for analysis.

### **Validity**

Ensuring that the research instrument accurately aligns with the study objectives and encompasses the relevant constructs under investigation was crucial for maintaining the validity of the research. In order to achieve this, seeking input from the researcher's supervisor and subject matter experts in the field becomes invaluable. These individuals possessed the expertise and knowledge to critically evaluate the research tool and provide valuable feedback. Following the pilot study, where a small-scale version of the research is conducted, adjustments to the research tool were necessary. This interactive process allowed researchers to identify areas where improvements were needed, ensuring the instrument remained relevant to the research topic and minimized the possibility of ambiguous responses.

By carefully analyzing the pilot study results and incorporating the feedback received, the researcher refined the research instrument to enhance its validity and reliability. If, during the evaluation process, it was determined that the instrument failed to accurately reflect the study objectives or adequately define key terms, it was crucial to rework and refine it before it was used in the actual study. By considering the feedback provided by experts and conducting a thorough pilot study, the researcher fine-tuned the research instrument to align with the study objectives, cover the necessary constructs, and accurately measure the variables of interest.

### **Reliability**

Cronbach's Alpha, was employed to assess the internal consistency of responses obtained from questionnaires and interviews. This analysis aimed to evaluate the reliability and quality of the data generated by these instruments. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.7 or higher is widely acknowledged as an acceptable threshold, indicating satisfactory reliability. This viewpoint is supported by esteemed researchers, such as Field (2017) and Cooper and Schindler (2014).

On the other hand, if the calculated Cronbach's Alpha value fell below 0.7, it would indicate potential issues with the instrument's reliability. In such cases, additional questions, modifications, or repetitions within the questionnaire would be addressed and rectified to improve the instrument's internal consistency and enhance the overall quality of data collected. This would be the point at which any extra questions, alterations, or repeats in the questions would be fixed.

**Table 3: Reliability Analysis**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Items(N)</b>	<b>Alpha</b>	<b>Comments on Results</b>
Stakeholders Involvement Practices	6	0.8158	Acceptable Reliability
Devolved Administrative Structures	10	0.8179	Acceptable Reliability

### **Source: Research Data (2022)**

Cronbach's Alpha was generated for each of the study constructs as illustrated on Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha values indicated the extent to which all items measure the same construct, that is, if there is evidence of internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha index scale ranges from 0

to 1, with the acceptable range being above 0.7. As shown in Table 3.3, the Cronbach's Alpha was employed to assess the internal consistency of responses obtained from questionnaires and interviews. This analysis aimed to evaluate the reliability and quality of the data generated by these instruments.

A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.7 or higher is widely acknowledged as an acceptable threshold, indicating satisfactory reliability. This viewpoint is supported by esteemed researchers, such as Field (2017) and Cooper and Schindler (2014). On the other hand, if the calculated Cronbach's Alpha value fell below 0.7, it would indicate potential issues with the instrument's reliability. In such cases, additional questions, modifications, or repetitions within the questionnaire would be addressed and rectified to improve the instrument's internal consistency and enhance the overall quality of data collected. This would be the point at which any extra questions, alterations, or repeats in the questions would be fixed.

In Table 3 above, the Cronbach's Alpha values for Stakeholders Involvement practices and devolved administrative structures constructs were 0.8158 and 0.8179 respectively, being evidence that they were within the acceptable range to back adequacy and reliability of data collected, data that could produce reliable information upon further analysis. Trustworthiness of research apparatus was tested by the use of the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. The summation of outcome (results) from the research is tabulated as reflected on Table 3.3.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data was gathered using questionnaires and interview schedules and data collected were restricted purely to demographic information of the respondents as was earlier indicated and the research objectives. In obtaining the data, approval of the study was issued to the researcher by Kenyatta University Graduate School and then authorization research permit from Kenyatta University.

The researcher then sought licence from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) for purposes of being safe in carrying out data collection. The researcher then visited the Counties to facilitate the process of data collection by booking appointments where necessary and securing the respondents' consent to administer the research instruments.

The questionnaires were distributed by a method that allowed participants to drop them off or pick them up, granting them a month to complete them. Individuals selected to be interviewed had face-to-face conversations while those chosen to complete questionnaires had the option to take them away and submit them later in order to provide adequate time to fill them out.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

Since the data collected were both quantitative and qualitative in nature, the quantitative data was sorted, edited and coded into SPSS, then it's later analysed in the STATA. The analysis of quantitative data had involved both the descriptive and inferential statistics. Under this descriptive statistics of the research study, the analysis involved measures of central tendency which are frequency and means, measures of dispersion which are standard deviation and the measures of association which are cross tabulation. Further, inferential statistics involved Multiple Linear regression modelling.

Multiple linear regression presented a linear relationship between the strategic leadership practices and devolved administrative structures, assessing the magnitude and nature of the relationship, whether it be direct or inverse. This allowed for the individual effects of each independent variable on the performance of devolved administrative structures (Zhang, 2017). The model's significance and the proportion of variation in the response variable was then calculated through goodness of fit statistics

(R-squared statistics). Additionally, the composite index of the variables was worked out through the harmonic mean formula (Wilson, 2019).

$$C_i = \frac{\sum f_i w_i}{\sum f_i}$$

Where,

$C$  = Represents the Composite Index.

$f$  = Represents the total respondents

$w_i$  = Represents the Relative Weight for each particular variable.

$i$  = Represents the total components.

As was recommended by Field (2027), when checking for relationships between predictor response variables, normality, linearity, multicollinearity and heteroscedacity should be used in carrying out the testing, which was done in this study. In regards to qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis and direct quotes (participants' voices) were adopted.

### **Logistical and Ethical Considerations**

The following considerations and measures in relation to the study were made before proceeding to the field. Each and every response from the respondents was treated with uttermost confidentiality. This was geared towards safeguarding the rights of the respondents and also in insulating study participants from any harm, intimidation or victimization and to protect the rights of research participants, this study guaranteed that the research process and outputs/results were going to be secret, anonymous and that unrequested informed consents were obtained. Before conducting this study in the field, the researcher got consent and introduction letters from the Graduate School and the research license from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation.

## **4.0 FINDINGS**

### **Response Rate**

The research surveyed 500 people in top leadership positions from Taita Taveta County (Coastal region) and Makueni County (Eastern region). The top tier of leaders from each County Government was chosen purposefully, including the Governor, Deputy Governor, Speaker and County Assembly Members, County Executive Committee Members, Chief Officers, and Clerk of Assembly, County Service Board Members, Direct and Managers, Sub-County Administrators, Ward Administrators, and Village Administrators. The response rate is shown on Table 1.

## Demographic Characteristics

**Table 4: Demographic Characteristics**

	<b>Category</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender	Male	134	67
	Female	66	33
Education Level	O/A Level	12	6
	Certificate/Diploma	52	26
	Bachelors	118	59
	Postgraduate	18	9
Position in the County	Director	32	16
	CO	44	22
	CECM	92	46
Years serving in the County government	0 – 3 Years	59	29.5
	3 – 5 Years	95	47.5
	6 – 8 Years	36	18

*Source: Research Data (2022)*

In terms of gender, majority (67%) of the respondents were male, while 33% of the participants were female out of all the participants. This is because men are the majority of the employees in the two county governments, reflecting a familiar gender disparity at the workplace. More than half (59%) of the participants had attained a Bachelor’s degree, 26% had attained a Certificate or Diploma level, whereas 9% and 6% of the participants had attained a Postgraduate degree and O/A level of education respectively. The participants with higher education qualifications were fewer due to difficult in accessing higher education since independence. When it comes to the position the respondents occupied in the County government, 46% were CECM’s, 22% were CO’s and 16% were Directors in the County governments of Taita Taveta and Makueni.

In terms of the years the respondents have worked in the respective County governments, 47.5% had worked for the county government for between 3- 5 years, 29.5% had worked for 3 years, while only 18% of these respondents had worked for between 6 and 8years in the County government. The descriptive analysis of demographic characteristics of the participants, ensured that all individuals’ unique characteristics and capabilities were incorporated in the study to have a representative sample for the study.

### Descriptive Statistics

To understand Stakeholders Involvement on devolved Administrative Structures constructs, this study evaluated the participants’ level of agreement with the postulated statements on Table 2.

### Stakeholder Involvement Practices

Respondents were required to show the extent to which stakeholder’s involvement in Taita Taveta and Makueni Counties. Respondents were expected to choose from 1(Strongly Agree), 2(Agree), 3(Neutral), 4(Disagree) and 5 (Strongly Disagree) as they give their view of how stakeholder involvement practices were carried out.



**Table 1: Stakeholder’s Involvement Practices**

Stakeholder Involvement Practices		Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Mean	STD
D1	There is timely communication of leadership practices and strategies to local citizens and involved stakeholders.	2	29.5	64	4.5	0	2.71	.581
D2	There exists perpetual information flow right from the top leadership, county government employees and other stakeholders.	1	25.5	67	6.5	0	2.79	.563
D3	There is timely validation of responses by the County Government leadership more especially from different administrative teams to the public.	0	22.5	73	4.5	0	2.82	.489
D4	Leaders in your County Government strategically allocate resources for stakeholder involvement.	3.5	33.5	47.5	9	6.5	2.815	.891
D5	Transparency, trust and honesty through regular communication is enhanced by county leadership within and to the Public.	2.5	31.5	47	8.5	10.5	2.93	.959
D6	Enhanced communication enables organizational leaders to establish team commitment which later benefit the citizens.	34	62	4	0	0	1.7	.539
Aggregate Value for Stakeholder Involvement Practices							2.628	.271

Source: Research Data (2022)

As shown in the table, more than half (64%) of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the assertion that there were timely communication from the top leadership and stakeholders involved 29.5% of their respondents were in agreement that there was timely communication of leadership practices and strategies to local citizens that involved the stakeholders 4.5% of the respondents disagreed that there was timely communication in public leadership practices and the stakeholders involvement. In addition, 2% of the respondents strongly agreed that there was timely communication by the leadership as part of the practices and the strategies to local citizens that involved them as the stakeholders during the time of decision making. The mean of 2.71 and standard deviation of 0.581 showed that the respondents were generally neutral that there was timely communication of top leadership which brought public accountability and strategies to local citizens and stakeholders involved. Hesitation to either agree or disagree to some extent justifies Razavi, Kafiriri, Abelson and Wilson (2019) argument that vulnerable groups were never involved in stakeholder participation and

that conflicting priorities, values and interest were among the main challenges facing stakeholder involvement.

Concerning information flow from the top leadership, county government employees and other stakeholders, majority (67%) of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the assertion that there exists a continuous information flow from the top leadership, county government employees and other stakeholders. 25.5% of the respondents agreed that there exists a perpetual information flow from the top leadership, county government employees and other stakeholders, but 6.5% of the respondents held a contrary view. The mean of 2.79 and standard deviation of 0.563 imply that respondents were generally neutral in responding to the assertion that there exists a continuous flow of information right from the top leadership, to county government employees and other stakeholders.

With regard to the timely validation of responses by the County Government leadership, majority (73%) of the respondents were neither agreed nor disagreed with the view that there is timely validation of responses by the County Government leadership, especially from different administrative teams to the public. 22.5% of the respondents agreed that there is timely validation of responses by the County Government leadership, especially from different administrative teams to the public. However, 4.5% of the respondents disagreed that there is timely validation of responses by the County Government leadership, especially from different administrative teams to the public. The mean of 2.82 and standard deviation of 0.489 imply that respondents were generally neutral when it came to the assertion that there is timely validation of responses by the County Government leadership, especially from different administrative teams to the public.

Findings show that 47.5% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the assertion that leaders in the County Government strategically allocated resources for stakeholder involvement. 33.5% of the participants were of the view that leaders in the County Government strategically allocated resources for stakeholder involvement. But 9% and 6.5% of the respondents were disagreed with the view that leaders in the County Government strategically allocated resources for stakeholder involvement. The mean of 2.815 and standard deviation of 0.891 show that respondents were generally neutral concerning the assertion that leaders in the County Government strategically allocated resources for stakeholder involvement.

The research results support Jooste and Hamani's (2017) view that leader-driven strategic resource allocation, commitment to ethical practices, establishment of organizational goals, and implementation of protocols and smart use of resources to cultivate a healthier corporate culture all positively affect the performance of a business. As for transparency, trust and honesty concerning communication between county leadership and the public, 47% of participants did not express a particular opinion, 31.5% believed it had been improved, and 2.5% agreed.

The results of the survey suggested that roughly 8.5% and 10.5% of the respondents did not consider transparency, trust and honesty between the county leadership and the public to be enhanced. The mean of 2.93 and standard deviation of 0.959 indicated that respondents generally felt neutral about this subject. These findings are in line with Opano, Shisia, Sang and Josee (2015) results which showed that key determinants to the implementation of development strategic plans in county governments were financial resources and the involvement of stakeholders. Moreover, regarding enhanced communication and team commitment, majority (62%) of the respondents agreed with the assertion that enhanced communication enabled organizational leaders to foster a sense of unity among the team, which ultimately benefits the locals. Also, 34% of the respondents strongly agreed that enhanced communication enabled organizational leaders to foster a sense of unity among the team, which ultimately benefits the locals.

However, 4% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the assertion that enhanced communication enabled organizational leaders to foster a sense of unity among the team, which

ultimately benefits the locals. The mean of 1.7 and standard deviation of 0.539 shows that respondents generally agreed with the view that enhanced communication enabled organizational leaders to foster a sense of unity among the team, thus benefitting the locals. The findings above corroborate the view of Serfontein, Kruger and Drevin (2019) that firm performance was a function of communication, processes, autonomy, knowledge, organizational performance values on self-reporting, adaptive leadership and systems. The mean score of 2.628 and the standard deviation of 0.271 indicate that there was generally a neutral response from participants from both Taita Taveta and Makueni Counties with respect to stakeholder involvement practices in the two regions.

## **5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary of findings**

In this research, generic pragmatism served as the underpinning principle when it came to the collection of data that accurately represented the phenomenon being studied. Three tiers of leadership were observed: strategic, functional, and operational. On the strategic level, the research looked at the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Speaker of the County Assembly, Members of the County Assembly, County Executive Committee Members, Chief Officers, and the Clerk of County Assembly. At the functional level, it examined County Service Board Members, Directors, and Managers. The operational tier was composed of Sub-County Administrators, Ward Administrators, and Village Administrators.

Concerning gender, majority of the participants were male. More than half of the participants had attained a Bachelor's degree level of education, 26% had attained a Certificate or Diploma level while 9% and 6% of the participants had attained a postgraduate degree or O/A level of education. In terms of the position the respondents occupied in the County government, 46% were CECMs, 22% were CO's and 16% were Directors in the County governments of Taita Taveta and Makueni. When it came to the years the respondents had worked in the respective County governments, 47.5% had worked for the County government for between 3 to 5 years, and 29.5% had worked for up to 3 years, while only 18% of the respondents had worked in the County government for between 6 to 8 years.

The findings from correlation analysis shows that the sub-constructs for strategic leadership practices (Stakeholder Involvement practices) were all positively correlated to devolved administrative structures in Taita Taveta and Makueni Counties. During the evaluation of the study hypotheses, multiple regression equation was developed. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) part in this study was used as the criterion for rejecting or failing to reject the null hypothesis. In summary, there was significant effects of the stakeholders' involvement practices on the devolved administrative structures in Counties. The findings of the qualitative survey suggest that strategic leadership has increased service delivery through devolved units, thereby providing the people in rural areas with access to what they need.

### **Conclusion**

The research concludes that there was a significant effect of stakeholders' involvement practices on devolved administrative structures in Taita Taveta and Makueni Counties. The qualitative analysis highlighted how the execution of effective strategic leadership has increased the delivery of services through the devolved units. This expansion has provided citizens at the local level with access to the county government, even though delays in fund allocation and inadequate resources have been sources of conflict.

### **Contributions of the study to the Body of Knowledge**

First, the empirical studies conducted on organizations have consistently recognized the significant impact of strategic leadership practices on the operationalization of devolved administrative structures

in Kenya. Building upon this existing knowledge, the current research specifically focused on three key aspects of strategic leadership practices, which was stakeholders' involvement, and their influence on the operationalization of devolved administrative structures in Kenya.

The research findings confirmed the constructive role played by strategic leadership practices in the operationalization of devolved administrative structures. Stakeholders' involvement, the focus of the research, highlights the importance of engaging various stakeholders, such as community members, civil society organizations and other relevant actors, in the decision-making processes of devolved administrative structures. Strategic leaders recognize the value of diverse perspectives, collaboration, and collective problem-solving, leading to more inclusive and effective decision-making.

By recognizing and examining the constructive role of strategic leadership practices in resource allocation, public accountability, and stakeholders' involvement, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how these practices contribute to the successful operationalization of devolved administrative structures in Kenya. The findings can inform policymakers, leaders, and practitioners in implementing strategies that enhance the performance and effectiveness of devolved systems of governance. Also, the present research has explored an uncharted field of study by examining the impact of strategic leadership practices on the operationalization of devolved administrative structures in Kenya. In doing so, this research provided pragmatic evidence that effective strategic leadership practices can contribute to an effective operationalization of devolved administrative structures.

The findings of this research indicate that strategic leadership practices, encompassing stakeholders' involvement, play a vital role in ensuring the successful functioning and performance of devolved administrative structures in Kenya. By highlighting the importance of strategic leadership practices, the research underscores the significance of leadership in shaping and guiding the implementation of devolved governance systems. Furthermore, this research contributes to the theoretical understanding of the relationship between strategic leadership practices and the operationalization of devolved administrative structures in Kenya. By delving into this relatively unexplored area, the study expands upon existing knowledge and adds new insights to the literature.

This divergence from previous studies, which have predominantly focused on strategic leadership practices or the perspective of devolved administrative structures in Kenya, fills a crucial gap in the literature. The research offers a comprehensive examination on the influence of strategic leadership practices on the operationalization of devolved administrative structures, shedding light on the interconnectedness and interplay between these elements. In addition, the research takes into account the propositions of Stakeholder Theory; that organizations partake associations through numerous component assemblages and must consequently endeavour to sense of balancing their appropriate safeties for purposes of preserving the sustenance after these assemblages.

### **Recommendations for Policy Implication**

The findings of the research indicate that an improvement in strategic leadership practices positively contributes to the enhanced operationalization of devolved administrative structures. Therefore, it is crucial for strategic leaders to establish structures and processes that foster executional creativity and ensure that responsibilities are connected to policies. Additionally, effective information flow and communication channels should be established to facilitate efficient and continuous exchange of information. In light of the significant role played by strategic leadership practices in the operationalization of devolved administrative structures, it is imperative for the top leadership of County Governments to recognize and reward initiatives that promote the effective functioning of these structures.

This can be achieved by acknowledging and appreciating efforts that contribute to the successful implementation of devolved governance. Furthermore, the administration and policymakers must

develop programs and initiatives that ensure strategic decision-making and actions are guided by sound judgment and practical considerations. In particular, it is important to involve experts and professionals from relevant fields to provide their knowledge and insights in the delivery of services and implementation of policies. By emphasizing the importance of strategic leadership practices and highlighting the need for appropriate structures, recognition of efforts, and expert involvement, the research offers practical recommendations for improving the operationalization of devolved administrative structures. These recommendations aim to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of devolved governance systems in Kenya, ultimately leading to improved service delivery and overall development at the county level.

The study revealed that enhancing strategic leadership practices positively impacts the operationalization of devolved administrative structures. It emphasizes the need for strategic leaders to establish supportive frameworks that encourage innovation and align responsibilities with policies. Efficient and continuous information flow is crucial in this process. The findings highlight the importance of recognizing and rewarding improvements in operationalization by County Government top leadership. The study also calls for the development of programs that facilitate the expertise and professionalism necessary for effective service delivery. Overall, the research underscores the significance of strategic leadership in optimizing the functioning of devolved administrative structures. It emphasizes the need for regular public accountability to address emerging challenges and adapt to technological, financial, and demographic changes. The study recommends that major decision-making processes adhere to prescribed guidelines and be guided by proper behavior and clear principles. Strategic leaders at the top level should actively engage and communicate with stakeholders, ensuring accountability and effective implementation of strategies.

The research emphasizes the importance of stakeholders' involvement in the operationalization of devolved administrative structures. Strategic leaders and administrators are encouraged to create opportunities for personnel to actively participate in decision-making processes and contribute their ideas and perspectives. This can be achieved through initiatives such as team-building activities, open forums for discussion, and recognition of employees' contributions. Furthermore, the research highlights the need for strategic leaders and administrators to identify and reward exemplary talent while providing opportunities for career advancement. This helps to retain skilled personnel and incentivize continuous professional development.

Additionally, the research advocates for stakeholders' involvement as a means of building human capital, which is a valuable asset for the effective functioning of institutions. By engaging stakeholders, such as local communities, civil society organizations, and other relevant actors, the devolved administrative structures can tap into their expertise, resources, and support. Overall involvement of stakeholders, coupled with the implementation of strategies that promote inclusivity, talent recognition and professional development can contribute to the success and sustainability of devolved administrative structures in Kenya.

The research highlights the importance of stakeholders' involvement in the context of devolved administrative structures. It is suggested that County Government leaders should establish conducive working environments that promote productivity and open-mindedness in leadership aspects that can service delivery. Furthermore, recognizing and rewarding talented individuals while providing career development opportunities is emphasized. Stakeholders' involvement is viewed as a means of building human capital, which is crucial for the successful functioning of institutions. The research was conducted during a period when decentralized units in the country were reaching maturity and striving for self-sufficiency, following the implementation of the 2010 constitution and the subsequent general election of 2013.

The findings of the study provide policymakers and government players in the National and County government sectors with constructive views for further research. The research provides potential beneficiaries with insights into a variety of challenges that impede the county governments' operationalization of decentralized administrative systems. The policy actors ought to use the suggested results that emerge from the study to provide solutions to the obstacles encountered by county governments. This research increased knowledge and expertise in executing the administrative systems in Counties as stipulated in the 2010 Kenyan Constitution. The research outcomes were purposely used towards the National Government by identifying findings that could stimulate execution of policies by county governments in Kenya.

In addition to enabling county governments to provide effective leadership, the study's findings served as a reference for the national government about the shortcomings of county governments in policy implementation.

### **Recommendation for Further Research**

It is prudent to explore the potential of undertaking studies like this one on other Counties in Kenya, even though doing so requires significant time and resources. Moreover, an exploration of ethical considerations should be carried out to establish potential influence on the implementation of strategic leadership practices. This research investigated the effects of strategic leadership practices across the devolved administrative structures. Nevertheless, an insignificant variation on how these structures were applied indicated that there were possible outside factors that may have impacted them. For future studies to be effective, it is essential to take these external variables into account.

The outcomes of this study could determine the focus of forthcoming academic studies on strategic leadership practices and how they can be put to use in devolved administrative structures or organizations and premeditated tactics by county governments. The resulting literature could provide valuable insight and be of great help to different scholars who could take advantage of the discoveries as a starting point in structuring their research. That way, their research could further expand existing knowledge regarding the functioning of county governments in Kenya and other nations.

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