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Factors Influencing Performance of Devolved Government Units in Kenya: A Case of Department of Agriculture, Meru County, Kenya

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Abstract:

The international unresponsive approach by centralized governments to the social, cultural and economic needs of the citizenry at the grassroots did inform the devolution of both political and administrative powers to sub-national levels of governments. This was with the view that bringing government officers closer to the people would improve public services delivery. This study investigated the factors influencing the performance of devolved government units in Kenya, a case of the department of agriculture in Meru county. In particular, it examined the influence of employee motivation, staff training and development, resources mobilization and staff accountability on the performance of devolved government units. The study was hinged on three theories; Agency, Stakeholders and Contract theories. The study made use of a correlational survey research design since it was interested in unearthing the influence of each of the independent variable factors on the performance of the devolved units of government in Kenya, a case of the department of agriculture in Meru county. The target population for the study were all employees of the department of Agriculture in Meru county, that is 68 employees, a census was therefore conducted. Questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative primary data in the study locale, while secondary data was gotten from the agriculture department in the county government of Meru offices. Quantitative data was coded into SPSS v23 for analysis using correlation and regression techniques, while qualitative data was put into themes so as to get patterns which were used to beef up the quantitative output. Data was presented in frequency tables. The study found out that the following; that there is a very strong positive correlation between employee motivation and performance of devolved units of government in Kenya, a case of the department of agriculture in Meru county, a positive and significant correlation was established between staff training and development and performance of devolved units of government in Kenya, a case of the department of agriculture in Meru county, as well as a positive and significant correlation between resources mobilization and performance of devolved units of government in Kenya, a case of the department of agriculture in Meru county, and lastly, a very strong positive correlation was established between accountability and performance of devolved units of government in Kenya, a case of the department of agriculture in Meru county. In conclusion, the performance of the agriculture department which is a devolved unit of government is positively and significantly influenced by employees' motivation, staff accountability, staff training & development and resource mobilization. Based on the findings, the research recommends that emphasis should be put on staff accountability and employee motivation, as they are considered to be the greatest influences of performance of devolved units of government in Kenya, a case of the department of agriculture in Meru county. Since 79.4% of the variations in the performance of the devolved government units was explained by the four independent variables chosen, a study should be carried to find out which other variables influence the performance of devolved units of government. This study will therefore be useful to the national government and other 47 county governments in their quest to fulfill their mandates within their jurisdictions

Keywords: Resource mobilization, devolution, decentralization, employee motivation, leadership, organizational culture, training and development, staff accountability, performance of devolved units

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of Study

Devolution has been defined as a system where national governments devolve functions to sub national government. In a devolved system, sub national governments often have clear and legally recognized geographical boundaries over which they exercise authority and within which they perform these functions. Devolution may involve constitutional law reform as well as law reform to formalize the devolution of powers, roles and accountabilities (World Health Organization, 2018). Stephanie and Stephen (2007) defined devolution as the transfer of jurisdiction and

authorities to territorial and Indigenous and self-governments from the federal government. In Africa, devolution has been practiced in South Africa, Nigeria and Ethiopia (World Bank, 2012). South Africa, and Nigeria have relatively implemented devolution with some degree of success, however Tewfik (2010) in his study on Transition to Federalism; The Ethiopian Experience established that Ethiopia faced several challenges at the onset of the implementation of the devolved governance, similarly Bardhan and Mookherjee (2000) in their study on Capture and governance at local and national levels, observed that improved access of local elite to public resources increase opportunities for corruption in Ethiopia. In his study on the impact of devolution on economic development potentialities in Kenya, Ndung'u, (2014) established that Kenya as a country has not had a good experience in devolution, an examination of Kenya's history discloses that Kenya has for the better part of its independent life been a unitary state with a highly centralized government that has, had an imperious control over the sub – national governments and the other arms of government, namely the legislature and the judiciary. The country has, therefore, not had any real experience with devolution for two reasons. From the foregoing it is evident then that Devolution is at the heart of the new Constitution and a key means for addressing spatial inequities of the past. It is generally doubted that a more decentralized government makes important sense given Kenya's diversity and past experience with political use of central power as well as presenting an opportunity to address the diversity of local needs, choices and constraints. County government may be better placed than the national centralized government to deliver on social services since each county has specific challenges that required an institution that has local knowledge on how to go about providing more realistic solutions having considered all the factors within the locality (Mukabi, et. al., 2015).

1.2. Statement of Problem

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 upon enactment and promulgation changed the Governance structure from a centralized unit to devolved sub-units known as the County Governments. It was expected that the onset of these devolved system of governments, after the 2013 Elections and enactment of subsidiary laws, would address development challenges of the centralized governance that Kenya has had since independence. While there has been greater public awareness in matters of accountability, transparency and prudent use of resources and at the same time the growth and strengthening of institutions charged with supervision and over sighting of those implementing the projects at county level, a lot needs to be done to meet the spirit and the letter of the constitution and public expectation. The Auditor General's reports of 2018, indicate massive impropriety in many counties in Kenya. The allegations range from improper use of financial resources, flouting procurement rules and procedures or outright misappropriation.

Another concern is the lack of coordination between county and national government. It is still not clear who is responsible for what in the agriculture sector. While agriculture has been devolved, the truth is that the national government through the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), is still a key player in the sector. The third is a breakdown in support services to small holder farmers and poor early warning systems; both of which should sit in the county government. It has been noted that extension services that rural farmers in particular used to enjoy are no longer there. Aside from subsidies in fertilizer for example, small holder farmers on whom most Kenyans rely for food, need continuous support to make their farms more productive, limit post-harvest loss and make sure their products reach markets. County governments seems to be having difficulty in playing their role in the sector and it is not clear why.

There are substantive challenges, which if not addressed will severely compromise the success of the system of devolved government. Some of the primary threats to the effective implementation of the system of devolved government identified in Meru are: politicization of the process as in delay in salary payments, whereby it's a big challenge cutting across in all 47 counties, delays in undertaking number of critical transitional activities, poor staff remuneration, lack of skilled manpower in county units, lack of carrier progression (Meru County Government 2018). It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to find out the factors affecting the performance of devolved government units, a case of Department of Agriculture, Meru County.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following research objectives:

- To establish the influence of employee motivation on the performance of department of agriculture, Meru County.

1.4. Research Questions

This research sought to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does employee motivation influence the performance of department of agriculture, Meru county?

1.5. Significance of the Study

Agriculture plays a dominant role in Kenya's economy as reflected by its contribution to income generation, employment creation, food security and raw materials for industrial development. Any factor which leads to low productivity has very strong implications to the whole nation and to the individual people hence the study will help the 47 county Governments to look into issues affecting productivity of the employees and improve on them to increase productivity.

The study also helped the management to promote positive action at workplace by encouraging training and development of employees and be able to remunerate them accordingly and deploy according to ones' qualifications to improve on productivity and service delivery. The study will be an eye opener to the management to see the effects of shortage of funds allocation, promotion can affect performance hence productivity. It will also help the management in

decision making such as MBO (management by objectives). Finally, the study will aid/motivate researchers to do carryout research in the area and also apply the recommendations put in place.

2. Conceptual Framework

To carry out this inquiry, the study assumes the argument that employee motivation, staff training and development, resource mobilization, and accountability by staff at the department of agriculture in Meru county influence performance of devolved units of governments in Kenya, a case of Meru county. It particularly shows how each factor individually influences the performance of devolved units of government in Kenya, a case of the department of agriculture in Meru county. These are conceptualized as shown in below.

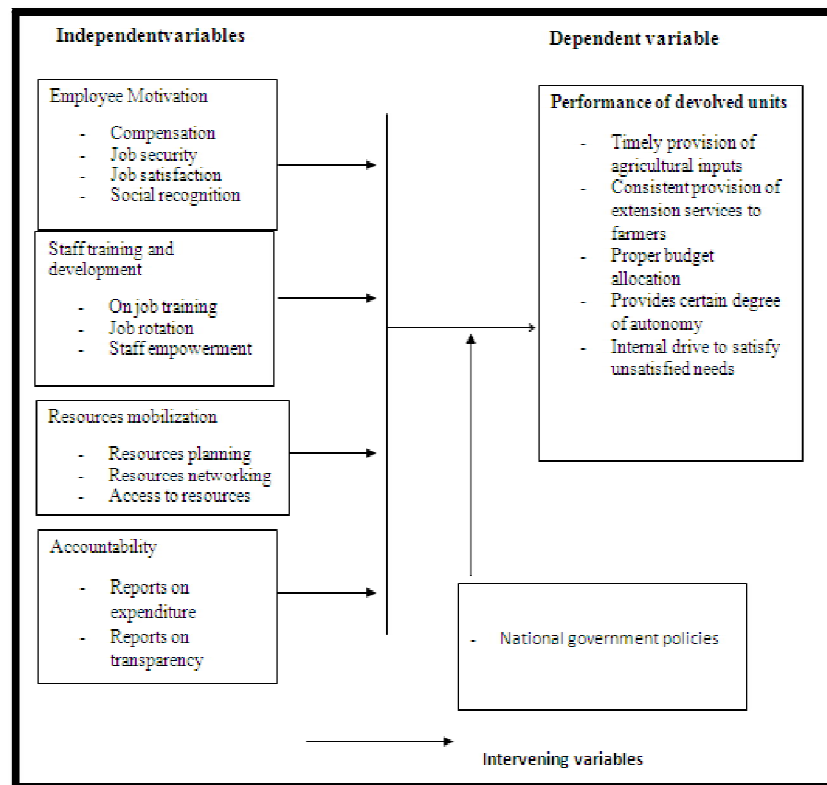


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the study.

2.1. Research Gaps

Kalimullah (2015) suggested, that a motivated employee has his/her goals aligned with those of the organization and directs his/her efforts in that direction. In addition, these organizations are more successful, as their employees continuously look for ways to improve their work. Getting the employees to reach their full potential at work under stressful conditions is a tough challenge, but this can be achieved by motivating them, while Whitley (2012) observes that some aspects of employee motivation such as compensation may not necessarily boost productivity on the long term and money does not improve performance significantly. This indicates an inconclusive feedback on employee motivation, this research study sought to fill the gap on motivation.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Research design is defined as the comprehensive strategy that is chosen to integrate the dissimilar components of a study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring that the research problem is addressed effectively (Babbie, 2010). It constitutes the blueprint for the gathering, measurement, and analysis of data. This study is guided by a correlational research design to carry out an investigation into factors influencing the performance of the devolved government units in Kenya, a case of department of agriculture in Meru County. The design facilitated the gathering of qualitative and equally quantitative data on the relationship between variables under research establishing the association between study variables and study problem (Christensen, Johnson and Turner, 2011). A correlational research design was also adopted because it facilitates the process of information gathering on the current state of affairs and thoroughly depicting the relationships between the variables (Salaria, 2012).

3.2. Target Population

Population has been illustrated as the complete group of individuals or items under consideration in any discipline of investigation and has a common characteristic (Kombo and Tromp, 2009). The target population of this study are all 68 employees of the department of agriculture in Meru county.

Category	Population	Rate %
Top Management/CDA/CO	4	6
Sub-County/SCAO (SMS)	8	12
Ward/WAO (SMS)	24	35
FEO	24	35
Supporting Staff	8	12
Total	68	100

Table 1: Target Population

3.3. Sample Size

The sample size for the study was all the 68 employees of the department of agriculture in Meru county.

3.4. Sampling Procedure

Steven (2012) defined sampling as the technique by which a comparatively small number of persons or measures of individuals, objects or events is selected and analysed in order to observe something about the entire population from which it was selected. For this research study, a census was conducted due to the small population size.

3.5. Research Instruments

For this study, the researcher made use of questionnaires in the gathering of primary data. Bell, (2010) defines a questionnaire as a well-constructed research tool that enables researchers to obtain information from respondents on their traits, current and past behavior, code of conduct or perspectives and their convictions and or rationale behind their action in relation to the current research study topic. The choice of this instrument is informed by its advantages such as; it is free from the bias of the interviewee and respondents will have ample time to give well thought out answers. The questionnaires also provide both a logical flow of information and an opportunity for the researcher to analyze data more objectively than any other forms of research instruments (Acharya, 2010). The questionnaire has equal proportions of closed as well as open ended questions.

3.6. Data Collection Procedures

The researcher conducted the collection of primary data through the use of the research tool of choice in person and the drop and pick later method to the sampled respondents. The study also adopts structured questionnaires due to their design nature which presents each item with a set of choice answers and are also economical in terms of time and money (Archarya, 2010).

3.7. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is the procedure adopted to build categories, form and meaning to the bulk of data gathered during a research study (Steven, Brady & Patricia, 2010). The researcher sorted data and enter for completeness, comprehensibility and reliability. Tabulation for each of the study's research questions quantitative data was done for purposes of providing the researcher with a comprehensive picture of how the data would look like and also assisting the researcher in identifying patterns. The researcher used SPSS version 23.0 to analyze collected data and present it by applying descriptive statistics. Data from open ended questions was analyzed through the use of content analysis and the result from this analysis was presented in themes as per the study's objectives. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize

4. Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation of Findings

4.1. Employee Motivation and Performance of Devolved Units of Government

This sub section investigated the influence of allocation of economic resources on the performance of Devolved System of Governance.

The study attempted to substantiate the extent to which final sampled subjects concurred with the following diverse statements on components of employee motivation that influence the performance of the devolved unit of government in County government of Meru. Results are presented in Table 2.

	Mean	Std Dev.
Compensation	4.048	0.733
Job security	4.071	0.747
Job satisfaction	3.435	0.554

Table 2: Employee Motivation and Performance of Devolved System

The study revealed that compensation as demonstrated by the obtained mean of 4.048, and job security by the obtained mean of 4.071 had a greater influence on the performance of the devolved government units in the County government of Meru. This indicated a vast majority of respondents attached greater importance to the compensation they receive from their place of work, followed closely by the security of the job they do. The study further showed that job satisfaction as shown by a mean of 3.435 had a moderate influence the performance of the devolved units of government in the County government of Meru.

4.2. Performance of Devolved Units of Government

Further, the current research study attempted to determine measures of the performance of devolved units of government. The study attempted to substantiate the extent to which final sampled subjects concurred with various statements on performance of devolved units of government.

Statement	Mean	Std Dev.
The county government has allocated enough acreage of arable land for cultivation.	3.482	0.997
The county government allocates enough money during the budget to the agriculture department.	3.886	0.676
The county government consistently provides farmers with extension services.	4.266	0.735
The county government provides agricultural input to the county farmers in time.	3.738	0.592

Table 3: Statements Related to Performance of Devolved Units of Government

The respondents agreed that the county government of Meru consistently provides farmers with extension services as expressed by a mean score of 4.266, this could be due to the fact that Meru county is a known agricultural area, allocation of enough money to the agriculture department by the county government was also seen to be a factor of performance of the agriculture department with a mean of 3.866.

They also agreed that the county government provides agricultural inputs at a subsidized price to farmers in time with a mean score of 3.738 and lastly was the allocation of arable land to the farmers for cultivation with a mean of 3.482. In general, all the indicators were relevant to performance of devolved units of government with means of above average.

4.4. Inferential Statistics

4.4.1. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation

A Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was conducted to establish the strength of the relationship between the variables. The findings are presented in Table 4.

		Performance of devolved system of governance	Employee motivation	Staff training and development	Resources mobilization	Staff accountability
Performance of devolved units of government	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
Employee motivation	Pearson Correlation	.814	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	.000			
Staff training and development	Pearson Correlation	.724	.523	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.016	.000		
Resources mobilization	Pearson Correlation	.612	.743	.597	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.031	.012	.028	.000	
Staff accountability	Pearson Correlation	.879	.533	.720	.531	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	.009	.002	.014	.000

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

Table 4 shows that there is a very strong positive correlation between employee motivation and performance of devolved units of government ($r = 0.814$, $p \text{ value} = 0.039$). This implies that if the employees in the county government are well motivated then the result will be an improvement in the provision of services in the county.

4. Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.899	0.808	0.794	2.561

Table 5: Summary of Regression Model Output

The study found that independent variables selected for the study (i.e. Employee motivation, Staff training and development, Resources mobilization and Staff accountability) accounted for 79.4% of the variations in Performance of devolved units of government in Meru County. According to the test model, 20.6% percent of the variation in performance of devolved units of government in Meru County could not be explained by the model. Therefore, further studies should be done to establish the other factors that contributed the unexplained (20.6%) of the variation in Performance of devolved units of government in Meru County.

5. Summary of Findings, Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations and ends with suggestions for further study. From the analysis and data collected, the following discussions, conclusion and recommendations were made. The responses were based on the thematic objectives of the study.

5.2. Summary of Findings

In line with the first objective, the study revealed that a vast majority of respondents mean of 4.048 attached greater importances to compensation, which means majority of them had a feeling that if the county government compensated its staff commensurately then performance of the devolved units would be enhanced. Similarly, job security with a mean score of 4.071 was also recognized as key factors that drives the performance of devolved units in the county government of Meru, it is imperative that the county government makes the employees feel they have security of tenure for them to work without fear and hence improving on performance. Job satisfaction with a mean of 3.435 was seen to moderately influence the performance of devolved units, therefore the need for the county government to address the satisfaction aspect of its employees in their places of work so as to enhance performance.

5.3. Discussion of the Findings

5.3.1. Employee Motivation and Performance of Devolved Units of Government

Based the current research field analyzed findings, a substantial number of the studies reviewed concurred that employee motivation is a greater influencer of performance. The findings are in line with the research by Kalimullah (2015) who indicated that motivated employees have their goals set and aligned with those of the organization and they direct all their energy towards achieving those goals, hence resulting to successful organizations. Proper remuneration of employees is considered an aspect of job satisfaction, this is in agreement with Sara et al. (2014) who argue that financial rewards have the capacity to maintain and motivate individuals towards higher performance. Pay has a significant impact in establishing employees' commitment, being a key motivator for employees. This is in contrast to a study by Whitney (2012) who indicates that pay might deteriorate employees' attitude, as they might only pursue personal gains.

Respondents agreed to a great extent that there was need to address issues related to job security of employees so as to improve performance of devolved units of government. These findings are in line with Towers Watson (2010) who found evidence among Malaysian employees that to ensure effective performance, organizations have resolved to create a friendly environment by focusing on employees' job security, knowing fully well that employees perform better when they are assured of their jobs and this will be reflected in the overall performance of the organization. Despite all these, the most recent study conducted by Subramaniam et al. (2011) on the linkage between resource practices and organizational performance of small and medium firms (SMEs) in Malaysia provided a different result. Although, job security was considered as a dimensional or sub variable, it was found that job security is not significantly related to organizational performance. However, the study noted that SMEs seems not to consider job security as a viable strategy due to the fact that employees tend to give less attention to job security in searching for a job.

Further, a substantial number of the studies sampled concurred that job satisfaction influenced the performance of devolved units of government. The findings are in line with the research by Squires, Hoben, Carleton and Graham (2015) argued that though, dissatisfied employees may not quit their jobs, but such feeling of dissatisfaction can impact on them, their colleagues as well as their quality of performance and the service they deliver in the sense that such dissatisfied employees have tendencies of displaying hostility on other employees in the workplace

5.4. Conclusions

In Meru county, the performance of the agriculture department which is a devolved unit of government is positively and significantly influenced by employees' motivation. It is clear that the aspects of compensation (pay), social recognition, job satisfaction and job security play a significant role making the employees stay motivated hence making them work hard and thus increasing the performance of the devolved units of government.

5.5. Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the study makes the following recommendations; First, employees' motivation should be emphasized by devolved units of government so as to achieve greater performance.

The various Government Training and Management Development Institutes will be especially useful in developing training programmes that focus on the requirements of the transformed public service. Currently there are plans to construct Kenya school of government at Kaguru Agricultural Centre (Imenti South Sub-County) to train its staff. These programmes will not only be on the development of transformative leadership and change management but also the development of technical and professional skills necessary in the realization of the mandates of the public service.. 1997).

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