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# INFLUENCE OF EQUITY AND INCLUSIVENESS ON SERVICE DELIVERY OF SELECTED DEVOLVED FUNCTIONS IN COUNTY GOVERNMENT OF VIHIGA IN KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

*This study determined how Equity and Inclusiveness affect service delivery in the county government of Vihiga, Kenya. The study's independent variable was its governing principles. To identify, analyze and characterize the relationship between Equity, Inclusiveness and service delivery of a few devolved tasks in the Vihiga County government of Kenya, the study used a descriptive survey research approach. There were 800 village administrators in the study population. 260 village elders in Vihiga County was sampled using both the stratified random sampling technique and the basic random sampling technique. To identify the flaws in the data collection instruments and design, a pilot test was carried out. The sample for the study was determined using Fishers' formula. The study made use of political, stewardship, and social contract theories. Data for the study was gathered through interviews and questionnaires. Regression analysis was used to analyze the data that has been gathered. Other county governments, scholars of governance and ethics, the federal government, and other stakeholders including non-governmental organizations and civil society all benefitted from the study. The study concluded that equity and inclusiveness are fundamental factors influencing service delivery within the County Government of Vihiga, Kenya. The findings underscored the need for the county government to prioritize initiatives aimed at fostering equity and inclusiveness in governance processes. Furthermore, decentralizing financial resources to empower local authorities and enhance their capacity for effective resource management is crucial for optimizing service delivery effectiveness. Therefore, the study recommended the implementation of comprehensive equitable resource distribution strategies to enhance service delivery within the County Government of Vihiga, Kenya. These recommendations aim to promote efficient governance, address community-specific needs, and foster sustainable development at the local level.*

***Key Words:*** *Equity, Inclusiveness, Service Delivery*

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## INTRODUCTION

By redistributing power along geographical and community-based lines, devolution enhances collaboration and administrative efficiency within local governance units. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain have implemented such frameworks, transferring fiscal, administrative, and political responsibilities from central to subnational governments to strengthen participatory governance and improve service delivery outcomes.

Decentralization refers to the transfer of power, authority, and responsibility from the central government to subordinate or semi-autonomous institutions within the public or private sectors. It allows lower-level entities to plan, implement, and oversee public functions that were previously managed centrally. The transfer can take different forms, including devolution, delegation, privatization, or deregulation, encompassing administrative, fiscal, political, and economic dimensions of governance (Steiner, 2005). Common public services that are typically decentralized include education, healthcare, water and sanitation, transport infrastructure, road maintenance, housing, and social protection initiatives (Robinson, 2007).

However, devolution does not automatically guarantee improved governance or economic outcomes. The capacity of national governments to redistribute resources and support less developed regions may be constrained under devolved systems. Moreover, decentralization may empower local elites who exploit political structures for personal or partisan gain. Without well-established accountability mechanisms, local leaders can use devolved resources to strengthen patronage networks and consolidate political dominance. In some instances, central governments may still exert indirect control over decentralized administrations through administrative officers.

Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda are among the African nations that have successfully implemented devolution as a governance framework without significant internal conflict. Nevertheless, the similarities between Kenya and Zimbabwe's political evolution are noteworthy. Both nations introduced constitutions that endorsed devolution of power, each emerging from power-sharing arrangements. Following the Lancaster House negotiations, Kenya and Zimbabwe gained independence and enacted new constitutional orders that emphasized shared governance.

Uganda operationalized devolution in 1997 through the Local Government Act, focusing primarily on the management of natural resources and agricultural extension services. Despite these efforts, the decentralization of education and health functions has not substantially enhanced citizen accountability or community engagement (Patrick, 2013).

Over time, Kenya has attempted to promote decentralization through several frameworks, including the District System, Local Government System, and Constituency Development initiatives. The central government has also introduced multiple devolved funds under these systems to support local development, often channeling resources through one or more of these administrative units simultaneously.

While Kenya, like most sub-Saharan African states, upholds the principles of good governance primarily at the national level, local-level governance remains essential to translating these principles into tangible development outcomes. Effective decision-making, community participation, and collaboration among local actors are key to ensuring that governance ideals are realized at the grassroots. In the absence of local accountability, many development programs fail to achieve sustainability or produce lasting results — a reality reflected in the persistent challenges of poverty and food insecurity across the continent.

### Statement of the Problem

Devolved governance refers to the division of duties and obligations between the federal government and local governments. According to the county government Act No. 17 of 2012, which defines steps to ensure the implementation of the public service commitments, including the values and principles established within the Kenyan Constitution, county governments have a duty to provide public services.

Different Kenyan counties have enjoyed different levels of the benefits of decentralized governance. Devolution has resulted in the development of infrastructure, better service delivery, and the creation of more regional development plans. The benefits of devolution are especially apparent in these counties, as it has enabled the growth of formerly marginalized counties, including rural areas that were severely undeveloped. Residents can interact with their legislators and the people who execute policies thanks to accessibility and proximity, which also gives them a platform to petition or push for the fulfillment of their most pressing demands. However, not all counties have continuously adopted the benefits of decentralized governance. Even counties that were deemed to be doing well have difficulties. Due to the lack of public engagement possibilities and elite capture, growth has also stopped in a number of Counties, resulting in low inputs into County Integrated growth Plans (CIDP). Potential improvements in service delivery and development progress are hindered, among other things, by corruption and the misappropriation of funds. The national and county governments' lack of cooperation has resulted in procurement delays, which have suspended or delayed project implementation.

Empirical investigations examining the link between governance principles and service delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa remain scarce. Only a limited number of studies (Balunywa et al., 2014; Tshukudu, 2014) have explored the impact of decentralization on service provision within the region. Furthermore, some research findings indicate that decentralization can, under certain circumstances, have adverse effects on service delivery efficiency and quality (Eithiraika, 2007; Frerikmann & Plekhanov, 2009; Olatuna & Olomona, 2015).

Following the enactment of the 2010 Constitution, Kenya transitioned to a devolved system of governance anchored at the county level. Despite this significant structural reform, there remains a shortage of empirical evidence on how key governance principles influence the performance of devolved functions. The limited scholarship in this field underscores the need for further research to understand how governance frameworks—rooted in transparency, accountability, participation, and equity—affect local service delivery outcomes.

Accordingly, this study sought to fill that gap by examining how equity and inclusiveness shape the effectiveness and efficiency of service provision within the County Government of Vihiga, Kenya. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on devolution and inform policy and practice aimed at enhancing governance-driven service delivery across county administrations.

### Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of equity and inclusiveness on Service delivery of selected devolved functions in County government of Vihiga in Kenya.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Equity and Inclusiveness

Since ancient times, equity has been regarded as a cornerstone of justice and fairness in human society. Across civilizations, philosophers and political theorists have emphasized equality as a moral foundation for distributive justice and governance. The principle of equality in public administration rests on the belief that all individuals are entitled to fair access to opportunities and resources managed by the state. Article 10(2)(b) of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) upholds this notion by requiring that every citizen enjoys equal treatment in the distribution of public goods—such as infrastructure, employment, and capacity-building—irrespective of gender, tribe, religion, region, or socioeconomic background.

Equity in governance ensures that every member of society can participate meaningfully in decision-making processes regardless of their social status, ethnicity, or gender. It is a guiding value that promotes fairness, inclusion, and justice in the management of public affairs. Devolution, as practiced in Kenya, was designed to foster this inclusivity by enhancing access to public resources and strengthening the representation of historically marginalized populations. To achieve this, counties are expected to observe the two-thirds gender rule, involve youth and persons with disabilities in governance, and implement targeted policies that ensure equitable access to opportunities and resources (Mwangi, 2016).

Beyond representation, equity also implies the creation of a level playing field where citizens can enjoy the same social and economic benefits. Effective mechanisms for affirmative action—such as fair recruitment procedures, gender-sensitive budgeting, and targeted development funds—are vital to promoting inclusiveness in devolved units. When these principles are actively practiced, they not only reduce inequality but also enhance community cohesion and strengthen social trust between citizens and local authorities.

Strong and impartial legal frameworks are central to upholding equity and inclusiveness. According to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA, 2013), fair laws, consistently enforced by independent judicial systems, protect citizens' rights and promote public confidence in governance. Such systems safeguard individuals from discrimination, ensure timely access to justice, and provide remedies for those wronged by administrative or legal injustices. The impartial enforcement of laws further curbs corruption, reinforces accountability, and guarantees that governance structures function transparently and equitably.

Inclusive governance also depends on the rule of law, which ensures that every citizen is treated equally before legal institutions. It extends beyond formal equality to include protection from violence, coercion, and arbitrary decision-making. As Mwangi (2016) notes, societies that observe the rule of law cultivate environments where human rights are protected through robust legal systems and strong institutional frameworks. These conditions are essential for building trust in government and sustaining long-term social stability.

Ultimately, the principle of the rule of law binds all individuals—regardless of their social standing or gender—under the same legal standards. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) identifies equality, inclusiveness, and non-discrimination as integral components of national governance values. Promoting equity and inclusiveness not only strengthens the legitimacy of government institutions but also ensures that public resources and opportunities are distributed in a manner that advances collective welfare and national cohesion.

**Service Delivery**

Empirical studies across different regions demonstrate mixed outcomes of decentralization on service delivery. In India, Nayak and Samanta (2014) found that citizen participation—through speaking out and contributing in local meetings—had a positive influence on the effectiveness of public service delivery. A study conducted in Brazil by Conçalves (2014) revealed that municipalities practicing participatory budgeting allocated a greater share of funds to health and sanitation, resulting in notable reductions in infant mortality rates. Similarly, Gaventa and Barrett (2010) concluded that participatory governance significantly improved access to education and healthcare services by fostering transparency and responsiveness.

Conversely, some studies highlight the limitations of decentralized service delivery. Kihehere's (2013) research in Uganda reported that citizen participation in health service provision did not always yield positive results, largely due to limited capacity and weak accountability structures. In Kenya, Macharia (2014) examined public participation in Nyandarua County and found that while devolution enhanced allocative efficiency, the overall effectiveness depended on institutional coordination and community engagement. Likewise, Olatona and Olomona (2015) noted that while fiscal decentralization improved education service delivery in Nigeria, it had adverse effects on the health sector, demonstrating that the benefits of decentralization can vary across service areas.

Freinkman and Plekhanov (2009) evaluated fiscal decentralization and service quality in Russia, finding that greater fiscal autonomy led to improved education outcomes, as reflected in higher average test scores and more efficient regional spending. However, as Nayak and Samanta (2014) also point out, mere attendance at local meetings is insufficient—meaningful participation, characterized by active dialogue and informed engagement, is crucial to influencing decision-making and improving service outcomes.

From a historical perspective, Hope (2000) explains that post-independence African nations prioritized state-building, which led to the formation of highly centralized, bureaucratic, and rigid administrative systems (Jacobs & Chauhunduka, 2003). These structures often undermined efficiency and excluded citizens from meaningful governance participation. Recognizing this, countries like Kenya have pursued devolution as a corrective measure to enhance local accountability and service responsiveness.

According to Wangari (2014), citing a World Bank (2003) report, decentralization is driven by two core motivations: first, to address the consistent failure of centralized systems to deliver essential services effectively; and second, to strengthen local ownership of service provision where services are primarily consumed. Evidence from developing economies such as Chile, China, and Nepal demonstrates that decentralization has contributed to improved governance and economic growth (Balunywa et al., 2014). Similarly, Abe and Monisola (2014) argue that governments have a fundamental obligation to provide citizens with efficient public services—including healthcare, education, clean water, transportation, and stable macroeconomic conditions such as low inflation.

Overall, decentralization has proven to be a vital mechanism for enhancing service delivery and promoting local development. As Robinson (2007) emphasizes, many governments continue to adopt decentralized governance frameworks to improve efficiency, transparency, and public accountability in service provision. Nevertheless, the success of decentralization ultimately depends on the capacity of local institutions, the inclusiveness of citizen participation, and the strength of mechanisms that safeguard transparency and prevent elite capture.

**Health Services**

Kenya's 2010 Constitution established a rights-based framework for health governance, guaranteeing every citizen "the highest attainable standard of health," including access to reproductive and medical care (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). To operationalize this constitutional mandate, four essential components must be in place: a functional network of well-equipped healthcare facilities, adequately trained and motivated medical personnel, reliable supplies of essential drugs, and sufficient, timely funding for facility operations and maintenance. As Mwangi (2013) emphasizes, these pillars are particularly critical for the 62 percent of Kenyans who depend primarily on the public healthcare system for essential services.

Nevertheless, Kenya's devolved health sector continues to face multiple structural and managerial challenges. The transition from a national to a county-based health system has been marred by inconsistencies, weak coordination, and limited understanding of the new governance framework among health administrators. Media reports and public audits have highlighted issues such as mismanagement of resources, ethnic bias in staffing and appointments, poor working conditions, and frequent salary delays—all of which have triggered health worker strikes and widespread dissatisfaction. These disruptions have negatively affected the continuity and quality of healthcare delivery across several counties.

A further challenge lies in county-level management capacity. Although county health officials possess significant professional and technical expertise, many lack the strategic management and financial planning skills necessary to effectively navigate devolved governance (Center for Health Solutions in Kenya, 2013). As a result, local health facilities often struggle with inefficiencies in budgeting, procurement, and human resource management. Strengthening managerial capacity, improving coordination between national and county governments, and institutionalizing accountability frameworks are therefore essential for realizing the goals of Kenya's devolved health system.

Ultimately, decentralization offers a promising pathway toward a more equitable and responsive healthcare system, but its success depends on strong leadership, adequate funding, community involvement, and coherent intergovernmental collaboration.

**Water and Sanitation**

Water governance is also closely tied to human rights. The World Health Organization (2003) emphasizes that the right to water obligates states to ensure access to sufficient, safe, and affordable water for all citizens, as well as protection against disease and dehydration. This right also incorporates principles of non-discrimination and equality, ensuring that vulnerable groups are not excluded from essential water and sanitation services.

Mwebaza (2007) highlights that participatory and transparent decision-making is a hallmark of democratic governance and an essential element in achieving the MDGs related to water and sanitation. Genuine public participation goes beyond electoral representation—it requires continuous dialogue between governments and citizens, ensuring that policies are informed by community priorities and lived experiences. Establishing forums for civic engagement allows the government to understand public concerns and adapt policies to meet local needs effectively.

Kenya's 2010 Constitution strengthens this democratic foundation. Article 56 specifically mandates the state to implement affirmative action measures that guarantee equitable access to basic infrastructure, healthcare, and clean water for minorities and marginalized groups. This provision reinforces the principle that access to water and sanitation is not a privilege but a fundamental right. Effective implementation of these constitutional guarantees therefore demands inclusive governance mechanisms, strong institutional frameworks, and collaborative partnerships between government, civil society, and local communities.

Sustainable water and sanitation governance relies on a combination of participatory decision-making, institutional accountability, and respect for human rights. Countries like Kenya are progressively integrating these principles into their legal and administrative systems to ensure that water resource management not only meets developmental goals but also upholds social justice and environmental sustainability.

**Education**

Despite these achievements, challenges remain in ensuring sustained efficiency and effectiveness within the education system. High levels of absenteeism among teachers, school heads, and students continue to hinder learning outcomes. Moreover, weak incentive structures for teachers and administrators, coupled with insufficient accountability to parents and local education offices, undermine the quality of educational service delivery. De Grauwe (2001) argues that while Uganda's decentralized model has increased openness and responsiveness, it still struggles with performance-related inefficiencies that stem from inadequate supervision, limited motivation, and weak institutional enforcement mechanisms.

To strengthen effectiveness and efficiency in decentralized education governance, there is a need for robust monitoring systems, performance-based incentives, and greater community involvement in school management. Empowering local education boards, enhancing teacher professional development, and promoting data-driven decision-making can further ensure that resources are used optimally and that education outcomes align with national development goals. Ultimately, the effectiveness of decentralization depends on how well local institutions balance autonomy with accountability to deliver high-quality and equitable services to all citizens.

**Agriculture**

Kenya has only slightly advanced in the fight to end hunger, according to the 2009 Global Hunger Index. The paper links gender inequality and poverty to hunger vulnerability. The objectives of every program and project carried out in Kenya are the eradication of poverty, the improvement of food security, and the abolition of hunger. However, the amount of progress made in achieving the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) has been modest or negligible (Kamau et al., 2013).

The Controller of Budget (2014) asserts that Vihiga County has a wide range of economic possibilities. There is a sizable quantity of forest cover in Vihiga County, including the Kakamega forest extension known as Maragoli forest and the Kibiri forest. The County's primary economic activity, agriculture, generates around 64% of its revenue. Tea, maize, beans, millet, bananas, avocado, papaya, sweet potatoes, cassava, and mushrooms are among the crops that have been cultivated. In the County, raising livestock is also practised, particularly dairy and Zebu cattle and poultry.

According to GOK (2005), Vihiga County in Kenya is one of the counties with the highest population density and the lowest food production. According to GOK (2004), the County's typical household land size is less than 0.4 hectares. The difficulty in addressing these issues stems from the population's constant growth and the limited amount of available land. According to Nyanweso et al. (2000), 57.6% of people in Vihiga County are considered to be poor.

**Theoretical Literature**

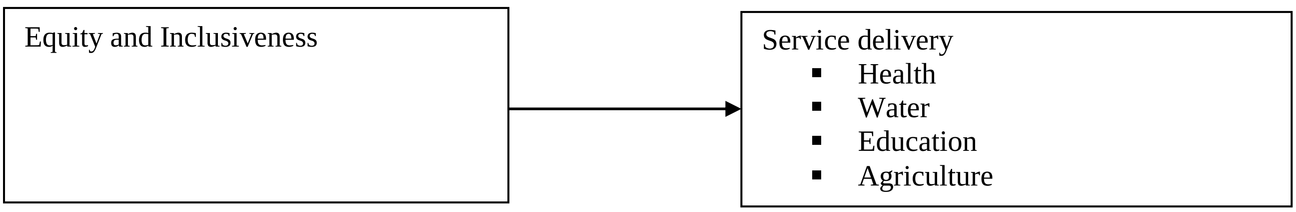
**Stewardship Theory**

In contrast to traditional management theories, stewardship theory views managers as good stewards who acted in the owners' best interests (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). Stewardship theory's foundations are in social psychology, which emphasizes executive behavior. Compared to individualistic self-serving behavior, stewards' behavior is more organizationally supportive, collectivist, and advantageous. It won't stray from the organization's goals either since the stewards are driven by those goals (Davis, Schooorman, & Donaldson, 1997).

According to Smallman (2004), when shareholders' wealth is maximized, stewards' utilities are also maximized since they had a defined purpose and organizational success met the majority of their wants. He claims that stewards arbitrate disagreements between diverse beneficiaries and other interest groups. Stewardship theory is thus an argument provided in firm performance that meets the needs of all stakeholders involved and leads to a dynamic performance equilibrium for fair governance.

According to stewardship theory, there is a close connection between managers' success and that of the company. As a result, stewards work to maximize shareholder value through company performance. A steward who successfully raises performance is liked by most organizational stakeholder groups. Whenever the interests of these groups may be effectively addressed by boosting organizational wealth Davis, Schoorman, and Donaldson (2007). Stewardship theory therefore takes a more lenient stance against the separation of the roles of Chairman and CEO, favoring the appointment of a single person as Chairman and CEO as well as the majority of specialized executive directors as opposed to non-executive directors (Clarke, 2004).

**Conceptual Framework**




Independent Variable Dependent Variable

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the relationship between governance principles and service delivery within the County Government of Vihiga. The design enabled the researcher to systematically collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data to determine how governance practices influence the effectiveness of devolved service provision. Similar approaches have been utilized by Abe and Monisola (2014) and Macharia (2014), who employed descriptive survey designs to explore the link between decentralization and public service delivery.

The study was conducted in Vihiga County, situated in Kenya's Western Region within the Lake Victoria basin. The target population comprised all individuals and entities directly involved in local governance and service delivery within Vihiga County.

Sampling involves selecting a representative subset of a population to obtain information about the entire group without examining every member (Burns & Grove, 2003). The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure fair representation across the county's five sub-counties: Vihiga, Sabatia, Emuhaya, Luanda, and Hamisi. Stratification was necessary to capture variations in demographic and administrative characteristics within the county. Each sub-county was treated as a stratum from which respondents were drawn proportionately.

Within the 25 wards of Vihiga County, village administrators were further selected using simple random sampling, which gave each participant an equal chance of inclusion. Out of the total 800 village administrators, 260 respondents were selected as the study sample. This number was considered adequate for ensuring reliable representation while maintaining feasibility in data collection.

As shown below, Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) used the Fisher et al. (1998) formula to calculate the study sample size.

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1-p)}{d^2}$$

The ideal sample size for a target population of more than 10,000 people is

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$
$$= 384$$

If the target population is fewer than 10,000, according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), the correct calculation is

$$n_f = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n}{N}}$$

Where

$n_f$ = intended sample size for a target population greater than 10,000;

$n$ = desired sample size for a target population less than 10,000; (384);

$N$ = present study's estimated population size (800).

Consequently, the study's sample size was,

$$n_f = \frac{384}{1 + \frac{384}{800}} = 260$$

The study employed a combination of structured questionnaires and interview guides as the primary research instruments for data collection. Both tools were designed to obtain comprehensive and reliable information from the 260 selected village administrators in Vihiga County. The questionnaires consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended items to facilitate the collection of quantitative and qualitative data respectively. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), questionnaires are highly effective data collection tools because they are economical, easy to administer, and allow for the efficient handling of large amounts of information within a limited timeframe.

According to research findings, instances must be accurate and significant to be considered valid (Kothari, 2004). If the data reflect what they are meant to reflect, then they are valid. The tools were created and given to university supervisors for constructive critique in order to determine face validity.  After then, it was amended in light of their observations.

According to Burns and Groove (2003), data collection is the meticulous, exact collection of information important to the study problems through approaches such as participant observation, focus group discussions, narratives, and case studies.  The data collection strategy for this study included obtaining authorization from the Assistant Chiefs' and Governor's offices to collect data from the village administration.

The study adopted a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques to ensure a comprehensive interpretation of the findings. Data obtained from the questionnaires were first sorted, cleaned, and coded before being entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. SPSS was chosen due to its reliability and efficiency in handling large datasets and its capacity to generate both descriptive and inferential statistics relevant to social science research.

To test the internal consistency and reliability of the research instruments, the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was computed. This measure helped determine the degree to which items within each scale were positively correlated, reflecting the consistency of the independent variables. A high Cronbach’s Alpha value was interpreted as an indication of a strong internal relationship among items measuring the same construct.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Responses from the open-ended sections of the questionnaires and interviews were systematically coded and categorized according to recurring patterns and emerging themes relevant to the study objectives. Repetition of similar concepts and responses was used as an indicator of thematic saturation (Jennings, 2001). The process involved identifying, classifying, and interpreting key ideas to provide deeper insights into respondents’ perceptions of governance and service delivery.

Finally, the results from both quantitative and qualitative analyses were integrated and triangulated to enrich interpretation and strengthen the validity of conclusions. This mixed analytical approach ensured that the study provided not only numerical summaries but also contextual explanations that reflected the lived realities of governance and public service delivery within Vihiga County.

The study employed both bivariate and multiple regression analyses as part of its inferential statistical procedures to examine the nature and strength of the relationship between governance principles (independent variables) and service delivery (dependent variable) within Vihiga County. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), which enabled the generation of robust regression outputs and diagnostic statistics essential for model validation and interpretation.

Regression analysis was chosen because it provides a systematic way of exploring whether variations in the independent variables significantly influence changes in the dependent variable, as well as determining the direction and magnitude of such relationships (Marson, Lind, & Marchal, 1999).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research study had a sample size of 260, the researcher issued 260 questionnaires from which 242 (93.07%) were returned whereas 18(6.93%) were not returned. The study therefore, had a respond rate of 93.07%.

### Descriptive Statistics

### Influence of Equity and Inclusiveness on Service delivery

The study also sought to determine how equity and inclusiveness influence the delivery of selected devolved functions within the County Government of Vihiga. Findings from the analysis show generally low levels of agreement regarding whether equitable and inclusive governance practices are consistently applied across county functions.

Results indicated that a mean of 2.1116 with a standard deviation of 1.48574 suggested that respondents disagreed with the view that the County Government distributes financial resources equitably across devolved projects and services. Similarly, a mean score of 2.6446 (SD = 1.71331) showed that respondents felt that the funds allocated to individual projects were often insufficient for their completion.

The findings further revealed that citizen inclusion in budget-making processes remains limited. A low mean of 1.8512 (SD = 1.35218) showed that respondents perceived little encouragement for public participation in budgeting for devolved functions. Additionally, a mean of 2.1860 (SD = 1.51976) indicated that the views of citizens are seldom incorporated into legislation concerning local taxation and business licensing.

Despite these shortcomings, the study established some efforts toward promoting consultative planning. A mean of 2.8058 with a standard deviation of 1.79426 suggested moderate agreement that the County has established a County Budget and Economic Forum to facilitate meaningful engagement in the budget process. Transparency in financial disclosure, however, was rated poorly: a mean of 2.1736 (SD = 1.53886) indicated that the county rarely displays financial information on funds received and expenditures for devolved functions. Likewise, a mean of 2.2314 (SD = 1.58709) suggested that user fees for devolved services are not consistently posted on notice boards.

In contrast to the low ratings on inclusiveness, the findings showed more positive perceptions regarding the impact of fiscal decentralization. A mean of 3.9339 (SD = 1.53377) indicated that respondents agreed that key budget documents—such as budget estimates, fiscal strategy papers, audited accounts, and annual reports—are published and publicized.

Perceptions of how decentralized funding affects sectoral service delivery were highly positive. A mean of 3.6860 (SD = 1.68239) revealed that decentralization of funds has improved service delivery in the agricultural sector. Even stronger agreement was noted for health services, with a mean of 4.0537 (SD = 1.49453). A higher mean of 4.2314 (SD = 1.40987) showed that respondents strongly believed that decentralized funding has enhanced water and sanitation services. Furthermore, a mean of 4.0041 (SD = 1.41274) indicated that the education sector has also benefited from fiscal decentralization.

The findings demonstrate that while equity and inclusiveness in governance processes remain weak, respondents widely acknowledged that decentralization of funds has significantly improved service delivery, with the greatest gains observed in the water and sanitation sector.

**Table 1: Influence of Equity and Inclusiveness on Service delivery**

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The County Government distributes equally finances to the projects and services of the devolved functions | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.1116 | 1.48574 |
| The amount of money allocated to each project are sufficient for its completion | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.6446 | 1.71331 |
| The citizens are encouraged to participate in the budget making process of the devolved functions | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 1.8512 | 1.35218 |
| The views of the citizens are included in the enactment of laws for levying local taxes and business licence | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.1860 | 1.51976 |
| The County has formed a county budget and economic forum where they provide meaningful consultation over the budget process of the devolved functions. | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.8058 | 1.79426 |
| The county government displays funds received and expenditure details of the devolved functions | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.1736 | 1.53886 |
| The county government displays user fees charged on devolved functions on notice boards | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.2314 | 1.58709 |
| Various budget documents (Budget estimates, fiscal strategy, audited accounts and annual reports) of the devolved functions are published and publicized in the media | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.9339 | 1.53377 |
| Decentralization of funds has improved service delivery in the agricultural sector | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.6860 | 1.68239 |
| Decentralization of funds has led to improved delivery of health services | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.0537 | 1.49453 |
| Decentralization of funds has led to improved delivery of water and sanitation in the county | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.2314 | 1.40987 |
| Decentralization of funds has led to improvement of educational standards in the county | 242 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 4.0041 | 1.41274 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 242 | | | | |

## Discussions

### Equity and Inclusiveness

The study's exploration of the influence of equity and inclusiveness on service delivery within the County Government of Vihiga in Kenya resonates with existing literature emphasizing the importance of equitable resource distribution, participatory governance, and adherence to legal frameworks for ensuring fairness and accountability. The observed mean of 2.1116, with a standard deviation of 1.48574, indicating respondents' perception of equal financial distribution to projects and services of devolved functions, aligns with the literature's assertion that equity in resource allocation fosters inclusivity and ensures that all segments of society have access to public goods and services (Mwangi, 2016).

The study's findings regarding the sufficiency of allocated funds for project completion (mean = 2.6446, standard deviation = 1.71331) and the inclusion of citizen views in the enactment of laws for levying local taxes and business licenses (mean = 2.1860, standard deviation = 1.51976) underscore the importance of participatory governance in promoting equity and inclusiveness (Mwangi, 2016). These findings highlight the correlation between citizen engagement in decision-making processes and the promotion of equitable outcomes within governance structures.

The study's identification of mechanisms such as the County Budget and Economic Forum for meaningful consultation over budget processes (mean = 2.8058, standard deviation = 1.79426) and the display of funds received and expenditure details (mean = 2.1736, standard deviation = 1.53886) aligns with literature emphasizing transparency and accountability as essential components of equitable governance (Mwangi, 2016). These findings suggest that transparent financial management practices and mechanisms for citizen engagement contribute to fostering inclusivity and ensuring that all stakeholders have access to information and opportunities for participation.

The study's focus on the decentralization of funds and its positive impact on service delivery across various sectors, particularly in health (mean = 4.0537, standard deviation = 1.49453) and water and sanitation (mean = 4.2314, standard deviation = 1.40987), reinforces the literature's argument that devolution promotes equity by bringing decision-making closer to the people and allowing for tailored responses to local needs (Nyanjom, 2011; Onyango et al., 2012). These findings suggest that decentralized governance structures contribute to more equitable resource allocation and improved service delivery outcomes at the local level.

The study's findings align with existing literature on the importance of equity, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability in promoting effective service delivery within governmental frameworks. By corroborating established theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which governance principles influence equity and inclusiveness within the County Government of Vihiga, Kenya.

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study assessed the influence of equity and inclusiveness on service delivery. The findings indicated that equity and inclusiveness initiatives, such as equitable distribution of resources and citizen participation in budgeting processes, contribute to improved service delivery outcomes. Decentralization of funds plays a pivotal role in enhancing service delivery in agriculture, health, water, sanitation, and education sectors, underscoring the positive impact of equity and inclusiveness on service provision.

The study findings underscore the significance of promoting equity and inclusiveness in driving positive service delivery outcomes within the County Government of Vihiga. Notably, efforts to ensure fair resource distribution, such as providing equal opportunities for marginalized communities and allocating funds based on project needs, have contributed to improved service access and delivery across sectors. Additionally, initiatives aimed at fostering citizen participation in decision-making processes, particularly in budget formulation and project prioritization, have facilitated greater inclusiveness and responsiveness to community needs. Thus, it can be concluded that prioritizing equity and inclusiveness is essential for enhancing service delivery effectiveness and promoting social cohesion within the county.

The study recommended that efforts should be made to ensure equitable distribution of resources across all sectors and prioritize the inclusion of marginalized communities in decision-making processes. This can be achieved through targeted interventions and policies aimed at addressing disparities and promoting social equity. Further decentralization of financial resources to lower levels of government should be pursued to empower local authorities and enable them to address the specific needs of their communities. This should be coupled with capacity-building efforts to ensure effective management and utilization of resources at the local level.

### Recommendations for further Studies

Regular monitoring and evaluation of service delivery initiatives should be conducted to assess their impact, identify areas for improvement, and ensure accountability. This should involve the active participation of stakeholders, including citizens, civil society organizations, and development partners, to ensure transparency and effectiveness in service delivery processes.

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