

ENHANCING STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING FOR SERVICE DELIVERY IN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FUND, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Since the formation of National Government Affirmative Action Fund (NGAAF), most of the departments, including program department, corporation secretary and legal services department, publication awareness and capacity building department, and internal audit and risk assurance department, continue to report operational inefficiencies attributed to gaps in leadership. The aim was to establish how data-driven policies, bureaucratic decisions, and ethical considerations influence efficiency, accessibility, transparency, and public satisfaction of NGAAF's programs. The study examined the role of strategic decision-making in enhancing service delivery outcomes among marginalized groups supported by the Fund. The study employed a descriptive research design targeting staff of the National Government Affirmative Action Fund (NGAAF) drawn from headquarters and county coordination offices across Kenya. A census approach was adopted since the target population was small and directly involved in strategic leadership and service delivery functions. The study targeted 58 participants, comprising 12 staff at the NGAAF headquarters and 46 county coordinators. Data were collected using semi-structured interview guides and observation schedules. The instruments were reviewed by experts to ensure content validity and were pretested to confirm clarity and relevance. Ethical clearance was obtained from Kenyatta University and authorization granted by NGAAF headquarters. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, which involved organizing responses into patterns that reflected key aspects of strategic decision-making and service delivery. The findings were presented narratively to capture both institutional and contextual perspectives. The findings collectively showed that strategic decision-making at NGAAF is participatory, visionary, and adaptive, contributing positively to service delivery. However, implementation bottlenecks, resource limitations, and centralized control reduce efficiency and responsiveness. Strengthening decentralized decision authority, maintaining ethical standards, and ensuring consistent resource allocation were identified as necessary to enhance service quality and public satisfaction.

Keywords: Strategic Decision Making, Service Delivery, Ethical Leadership, Participatory Governance, Public Value Management

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INTRODUCTION

The efficient delivery of services remains a cardinal principle of public administration, incorporating the provision of essential public goods and services efficiently, transparently, and in a manner responsive to citizens (Kulal, Dutta, & Balen, 2024). The challenge within public administration lies in ensuring that services are delivered equitably and that policies translate into tangible advantages for all citizens, especially underserved groups, through mechanisms such as digital transparency and participatory governance (Zhao & Rodriguez, 2023). Agranat (2024) states that public policies are instrumental in setting minimum service standards, promoting accountability and transparency, empowering communities, and enhancing the professionalism of service delivery mechanisms. These measures collectively contribute to significant improvements in procedural efficiency, accessibility, accountability, and public satisfaction in public service programs. Strategic decision-making is a key factor influencing outcome translation because it is through strategic choice that the Fund designates, allocates, and utilizes resources to fulfill its mandate (Al-Hashimi, Andrews, & Pollanen, 2022).

Globally, nations that have established formal and inclusive decision-making processes tend to achieve better results in public service delivery. Countries such as Norway and Singapore have set forefront examples of policy decision-making that are evidence-based with accountability frameworks to back up their goals operational efficiency and public trust (World Bank, 2022). Through proper planning and community engagement, the governments were able to mitigate risks of bureaucratic bottlenecks and deliver quality services that address the needs of an ever-diverse citizenry.

Service delivery still remains uneven across Sub-Saharan Africa, often being constrained by differences in institutional capacity, governance, and resource allocation. South Africa and Rwanda, for example, have registered a great deal of progress in sectors such as education and health through deliberate investment, capacity building, and decentralization (African Development Bank, 2021). Yet, many countries in the region still suffer from infrastructure bottlenecks, weaknesses in monitoring, and unnecessary bureaucratic requirements that slow the implementation of programs, thus leading to public dissatisfaction. Such dimensions have further emphasized the need for efficient decision-making systems that will promote coordination, inclusiveness, and accountability.

In Kenya, service delivery remains fundamental to national development policy established in Vision 2030, which emphasizes equity, inclusive growth and Corporate Social Responsibility (Munyaka and Njoroge 2024). Public institutions and development agents are working better to extend access to basic services as systems of transparency and efficiency (Joshi, 2013). Progress has been made in health, education, and financial inclusion through government-driven and community-driven initiatives. Yet the misappropriation of resources, poor coordination, and lack of infrastructure continue to weaken optimal service delivery outcomes (Loitareng'an, 2023).

In 2015, NGAAF was introduced to enable the government to combat socio-economic inequalities and foster inclusive progress. Through financial support and technical guidance, the Fund promotes initiatives that assist women, youth, and disabled persons, in line with Kenya's Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (Loitareng'an, 2023). Nevertheless, the Fund faces obstinate challenges in planning, implementation, and accountability. According to the Auditor-General's reports, delays caused by bureaucracy, centralized decision processes, and inadequate monitoring often hinder the prompt provision of services and the successful completion of funded projects (Wasike & Yusuf, 2018).

This study examined the influence of strategic decision-making on service delivery within the National Government Affirmative Action Fund. It examined the role of data in charting policies, the bureaucracy behind these processes, and issues of ethics that influence the NGAAF program's efficiency, transparency, accessibility, and where public satisfaction rests. The study demonstrates through empirical data how a

broader view of governance and institutional performance can assess whether decisions that are organized, inclusive, and ethical enhance the quality of services delivered by public institutions.

Statement of the Problem

The National Government Affirmative Action Fund is key in promoting social inclusion and economic empowerment of women, youth, and persons with disabilities (Kimemia & Kungu, 2021). Despite its strategic intent, multiple evaluations and auditor-general reports have documented recurring service-delivery challenges that constrain the fund's effectiveness. These include delays in project implementation, lack of proper coordination between headquarters and county offices, and poor monitoring of the projects funded (Office of the Auditor-General, 2024).

The Auditor General's performance audits from 2021 to 2023 highlighted recurring issues such as unfinished projects, overburdened staff arrangements, and insufficient follow-up processes. Moreover, departments such as Program Management, Legal Services, Capacity Building, and Internal Audit still experience a shortage of staff, with procedural overlaps causing bottlenecks in decision-making and reduced responsiveness to the needs of beneficiaries. Together, these weaknesses have hindered the NGAAF's ability to offer timely, transparent, and fair services according to its constitutional mandate.

Governance and performance factors affecting public service delivery have been studied broadly. Keitany, Kiplagat, and Cheprkilot (2025) examined stakeholder participation, fiscal transparency, and accountability mechanisms in sub-Saharan Africa's local governments, finding that participatory planning improves efficiency but that weak decision structures reduce responsiveness. Nyawira, Molyneux, and English (2023) assessed health sector coordination under devolution in Kenya and observed that while national policies guide strategic direction, poor intergovernmental alignment and weak decision structures often reduce service delivery effectiveness. Similarly, Otieno, Magutu, and Obosi (2023) found that fragmented coordination mechanisms and procedural rigidity in Kenya's water services undermine responsiveness and hinder the timely execution of devolved programs. While these studies contribute to the broader understanding of governance and service performance, they did not address the internal decision-making processes that shape implementation efficiency within devolved affirmative action funds such as NGAAF.

There remains a significant gap in empirical research regarding the effect of data-driven policies, ethical considerations, and bureaucratic decisions on service delivery performance in NGAAF. The effectiveness and responsiveness of NGAAF to beneficiary needs are often hindered by poor data utilization in planning, inadequate ethical oversight, and rigid bureaucratic procedures. This study, therefore, investigated how strategic decision-making influences service delivery in NGAAF, Kenya. The results offer evidence-based insights for enhancing institutional accountability, coordination, and performance in implementing affirmative action programs nationwide.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section consists of relevant literature and theories related to the study's objectives, focusing on how strategic decision-making affects service delivery at the National Government Affirmative Action Fund (NGAAF), as well as the conceptual framework.

Theoretical Framework

The research was anchored upon transformational leadership and public value management theories, which build a framework for examining the relationship between strategic decision-making and service delivery in NGAAF.

The Transformational Leadership theory was first presented by James Burns (1978) and later developed by Bass (1985) as a major theoretical framework. The emphasis of the theory is on leaders who, through their own example, inspire and motivate their subordinates to great things, thus, the leaders and the led together

reap the benefits of the accomplishments. Transformational leadership means the bringing in of new ideas, the setting of a high standard in ethical practices, and the aligning of the values of both leaders and followers with the values of the organization (Northouse, 2021). The theory was relevant to this study because it clarified how NGAAF's leadership affects choices through data-informed action, ethical guidance, and participatory motivation. Transformational leaders are the ones who support virtue and creative thinking in such a way that they find the new-efficacious way of doing things, the ones that make the organization more responsive and efficient than it was previously. The theoretical viewpoint discussed above emphasizes the point that ethical and evidence-based decision making can lead to higher quality service if they are supported by motivated personnel, very clear communication, and citizen-oriented operations.

The public value management (PVM) theory, proposed by Mark Moore in 1995, advocates for government agencies to transcend traditional bureaucratic control and instead emphasize accountability, participatory processes, and innovation to generate value for the citizens they serve. The theory claims that the public service, which is of the highest quality, will be delivered when the decision-making process is responsive to the needs of society, is morally sound, and involves the public (Bovaird & Löffler, 2020).

The theory was applicable for the present research, as it provided a foundation for analysis of the interaction between strategic decision-making in NGAAF and the outcomes of service delivery. According to PVM, data-driven policies are considered measures for improvement of the decision-making process, assuring its efficiency and transparency by making it evidence-based and being in tune with the actual community needs. The issue of ethics is likely to be an integral part of the process through which fund allocation becomes accountable and fair; hence, they would be playing a role in the development of public trust and legitimacy. In contrast, easing the path through bureaucratic steps has a beneficial effect on participation being inclusive, as it reduces the time spent on administrative matters and ensures that the right people are served without any unnecessary delays.

The two theories explain the connection between strategic decision-making and service delivery in a complementary manner. Transformational leadership focuses on the behavior and ethics of decision-making, as well as the ways in which leaders foster data use, moral accountability, and teamwork, whereas PVM theory narrows down the focus to the institutional and structural factors and demonstrates that voluntary and open decision-making seeded public value that can be measured. The two theories combined made a unified theoretical framework that associates decision-making in public administration, characterized by data-driven policies, moral considerations, and bureaucratic decisions, with the corresponding service delivery, i.e., the NGAAF, which is assessed in terms of efficiency, transparency, accessibility, and citizen satisfaction.

Empirical Review

Strategic Decision-Making and Service Delivery

Cantarelli, Belle, and Hall (2023) conducted a global synthesis of 162 empirical studies to examine how strategic decision-making and information use affect public sector performance. Their findings revealed that data-informed decision structures enhance institutional effectiveness by improving coordination, accountability, and policy implementation. However, their meta-analysis largely focused on developed economies where institutions possess advanced technological and managerial capacities, limiting the applicability of the findings to emerging economies like Kenya, where devolved governance and administrative fragmentation pose unique implementation challenges.

Hossin (2023) investigated big data-driven decision-making processes in public policy across developing regions in Africa and Asia. The study found that data analytics and digital systems improve responsiveness, transparency, and forecasting accuracy in public administration. Nonetheless, institutional weaknesses such as poor data integration, low technical skills, and inadequate infrastructure limit the effectiveness of such systems. While the study offers useful information about digitalized decision processes in the area, it falls

short of exploring the local institutional frameworks of Kenya's NGAAF, where decision-making is centered on collaboration between national and county offices and is largely dependent on this coordination. Kirui (2023) studied the strategic planning practices and their impact on service delivery in Nairobi County, Kenya. It was found that through these methods, strategic analysis, policy formulation, and regular performance reviews, the overall efficiency of the service being delivered in the devolved units was raised significantly. However, the research was limited to the various departments of the Nairobi city county and did not consider how intergovernmental linkages and national-level policy guidance affect local implementations; thus, a gap in relation to NGAAF's governance model was created.

According to Ochenge and Maina (2025), there was a positive relationship between strategic planning practices and service delivery within the Nairobi City County. Stakeholder engagement, continuous monitoring, and policy alignment were seen as very significant in improving both the quality and timeliness of the service provided. Yet, their study focused only on the urban-based institutions that already had advanced planning structures, not taking into account the differences in service delivery conditions in rural and marginalized counties where NGAAF's empowerment programs are often most active.

Walubengo, Olang'o, and Kiongera (2023) analyzed the effect of strategic procurement planning on service delivery in Western Kenya counties. Their findings indicated that transparent procurement systems, timely disbursement, and participatory budgeting explained 40.5% of service delivery variation ($\beta = 0.636$, $p < 0.05$). Yet, the study did not consider how hierarchical decision-making or coordination between central and local offices affects procurement efficiency, a factor critical to understanding service delivery delays in NGAAF-funded projects.

Onyoni (2018) studied strategic factors influencing service delivery within Nairobi County Government. The research identified strategic leadership, stakeholder inclusion, and environmental scanning as major determinants of effective service delivery. While the study provides valuable insights into how leadership shapes decision outcomes, it was undertaken prior to full devolution and thus does not reflect the post-2013 governance context under which NGAAF operates.

Collectively, these empirical studies affirm that well-structured, data-driven, and participatory decision-making practices enhance service delivery efficiency and accountability in the public sector. However, most focus on general county governance or sectoral departments, with limited attention to how strategic decision-making, specifically through data-driven policies, ethical considerations, and bureaucratic decisions, affects service delivery in devolved empowerment funds. The current study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by investigating how these dimensions of strategic decision-making influence service delivery outcomes in the National Government Affirmative Action Fund (NGAAF), Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was used in the study that was especially suitable for surveying the impact of strategic decision-making practices on the service delivery of the National Government Affirmative Action Fund in Kenya. The design enabled the researcher to gather detailed experiences, perceptions, and insights from participants who were engaged in both decision-making and implementation processes. This method enabled the research to capture real-time leadership behaviors and evaluate their effects on public service provision without the need to manipulate any variables.

The study included a target population of 58 respondents, among whom were 12 staff members from the NGAAF Nairobi headquarters and 46 coordinators at the county level who were selected from different parts of Kenya. The headquarters staff members were from the departments of Finance, Legal Affairs, Program Implementation, and Monitoring and Evaluation, which all play a vital part in the strategic decision-making and delivery of services. County coordinators were taken into account due to their real-world experience in the customer-facing part of the NGAAF programs. A census method was used as the target population was small

in size. Thus, the participation of all the 58 eligible respondents, comprising top, middle, and lower-level managers, was secured for the research. The use of a census eliminated sampling bias and ensured comprehensive data collection from all key organizational levels.

Data were gathered through a semi-structured interview guide and qualitative observation. This approach enabled the interviewees to share their personal recollections and express their opinions regarding how NGAAF's decision-making frameworks influence customer service. The direct observation complemented the interviews by documenting workplace interactions, communication patterns, and leadership behavior at the headquarters, offering contextual depth to the interview responses.

A pilot study was conducted with 29 fund managers from the offices of the National Government Constituencies Development Fund (NG-CDF). The purpose was to test the clarity, structure, and flow of the interview guide. The input from the participants was used to reword the questions and change the order of asking them so as to make it clearer and easier to follow logically.

To validate the content and the relevance of the constructs, the research guide was examined by academic experts and then specialists in public administration. Triangulation was used to correlate the data from interviews, field notes, and observations, which added more strength to the findings in terms of credibility and authenticity. The study's reliability was enhanced through the use of triangulation and comprehensive transcription of all interviews. The complete audio recording was transcribed word for word with the participants' consent and later checked for accuracy. The contradiction between the interview data and the observations conducted in the field led to a reduction of bias and a guarantee of the same quality for the results.

The data was analysed through the thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke, which consists of six levels (Byrne, 2022). The transcripts of the interviews and the field notes were always under scrutiny so as to pinpoint the themes that were increasingly appearing and connected to strategic decision-making and the provision of services. Thematic analysis has largely contributed to the discovery of the frameworks and significances that were brought out of the participants' encounters, giving a view of how the spaces of decision-making, moral conduct, and red-tape practices are influencing the service delivery outcomes in NGAAF.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Service Delivery in NGAAF

The analysis disclosed that service delivery under NGAAF has the highest value when programs are based on community needs rather than imposed from above. Some respondents gave priority to the programming that is for the community. They said that acknowledging and then working with the needs in the very bottom of the society, especially with the underprivileged groups like women, the young, and the disabled, are the main points in the service delivery that has true significance. One of the informants stated, *"In this situation, service delivery does not only mean program implementation. It is a matter of how far we go to the grassroots and if women, youth, and the disabled think of the services as really theirs."*

Leadership commitment turned out to be a vital factor, too. Participants showed their eagerness to see such senior leaders' active involvement not only through project management but also in community participation. The presence of leadership was considered both a motivating factor and a measure of accountability for the staff working in the field. One of the participants said, *"Normally, our director pays the projects a visit on his own, and this bond makes us put in more effort, as we are aware that management is worried about the result."* Moreover, the outreach and inclusiveness were also considered to be the major factors that contributed to the effectiveness of the service delivery, along with the leadership visibility. The participants described the scenario of service delivery that was not only restricted to the structures built but also the level of the poor

people's awareness and access to the services. The officers argued that mere presence should go hand in hand with actual reach and usability for the targeted beneficiaries.

The accountability mechanisms, which include structured reporting and monitoring visits, were seen as the ways of ensuring transparency. Nevertheless, some of the participants warned that these mechanisms might still turn into bureaucratic obstacles that slow down the process of implementation at the same time. One of them pointed out, *"We are expected to submit very elaborate reports after every project is completed, which, by the way, is a good thing in terms of transparency, but sometimes it prolongs the service delivery."*

The practice of being responsive to the local feedback was deemed to be another major aspect. The participants related instances where management acted promptly to solve the issues that had arisen in community forums. For instance, one officer told the story, *"When women's groups in our area expressed concerns about accessing loans, the leadership immediately revised the criteria to ensure that the new policy would be inclusive."* This kind of responsiveness was perceived to enhance both the relevance and the acceptability of the interventions.

Bureaucratic delays were among the main complaints raised in a number of responses, especially with regard to the approval of funds and the very lengthy decision-making processes. It was pointed out that the delays in service delivery were most serious in the remote areas, where the local people were supplied with assistance very late after their needs had changed. A participant put it this way, *"There is a lot of frustrating bureaucracy around approvals. Some of the needs undergo changes by the time the funds reach the communities."*

Overall, the findings point to a service delivery model at NGAAF that is highly dependent on leadership commitment, community engagement, and responsiveness to feedback. However, the inefficiency of program execution is still affected by bureaucratic rigidity and logistical delays. These findings align with the results of Haug (2024), who pointed out that the impact of strong leadership and bottom-up feedback loops on service legitimacy in public institutions is often moderated by bureaucratic constraints. Likewise, Madaki, Kamsuriah, and Singh (2024) concluded that the mechanisms of accountability are necessary but should be weighed against the demand for flexibility and innovation in the delivery of the program, especially in areas with limited resources.

Strategic Decision-Making and Service Delivery

The study showed that NGAAF's strategic decisions are affected by the national policy frameworks and the development needs expressed by the county offices. The respondents also indicated that the fund requires effective management and a long-term strategic vision to offer the services and remain operational. One of the main themes was policy alignment, highlighting the existence of a strong personality in this area. This research examined the effect of NGAAF's strategic decision-making on the quality of its services. It indicated that NGAAF's strategic decisions are influenced by national policy frameworks and the counties' development priorities. A respondent stated, *"No big program is implemented without going to the local people first, and their contribution really impacts the final decision."* The participatory method was believed to create ownership and relevance to the context, thus increasing the trust in the service delivery results. Challenges in implementation were also highlighted. Inclusion in planning was recognized by some participants as a key aspect, but in the end, some of the constraints, such as competing priorities and limited resources during execution, hindered the process of achieving the intended outcomes. One participant expressed his disappointment, saying, *"We consider everybody while planning, but during the execution, the situations change or the resources are used up, and that affects the delivery."*

Another influence of the long-term strategy was the effect of the long-term strategic planning. The respondents mentioned that the leaders of NGAAF frequently referred to five-year strategic plans to lead programming and budgeting decisions. This long-term view was considered very important for keeping the fund's core mandate, especially in the case of women and youth empowerment, through consistency, resource

alignment, and gradually building up the fund. One officer, in fact, said, *“The leadership often reminds us that our mandate is long-term transformation, not just short-term fixes.”* While the participatory and visionary leadership had its advantages, centralization of power emerged as a prominent drawback. Area officers claimed that the decision-making process was often dragged on because of the circumstances that made it necessary to get the approval from the management at the main office, which, in turn, had a negative impact on the responsiveness of the program at the county level. A participant narrated how they were subjected to the delay by saying, *“We are always waiting for the approval from the headquarters, and by the time it comes we have lost a lot of time that could have been used to address the urgent problems.”* This kind of rigidity that comes with hierarchies was thought to diminish the grassroots movement’s power and adaptability. The research also pointed out that the ability to change and adapt was an important feature of NGAAF’s strategic leadership. The respondents provided various cases of how the leaders were quick to react in the face of social or environmental issues. For instance, the ongoing drought situation resulted in some funds being diverted from other projects and being used for the most urgent requirements of the community. One of the participants said, *“Funds were shifted during the drought to supply water tanks for women’s groups, thus demonstrating flexibility to pressing community needs.”* The positive aspect of this flexibility was recognized by the respondents, but at the same time, some of them warned that the constant change in priorities could weaken the strategic focus of the organization and the continuity of the program. The findings indicate that the NGAAF's strategic decision-making process is a battle among the four forces, which include alignment with policy, participatory planning, adaptive leadership, and model bureaucratic constraints.

The extended approach, common in inclusive procedures, does support service delivery at this point, but only to a limited degree, since static, rigid hierarchies and obstacles persist and remain a concern. The results corroborate those of Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen (2021), who pointed out that the application of procedural rationality and participation in decision-making are the two factors that contribute to the successful execution of public programs. Axelsson (2024) has pointed out that public agencies with the characteristics of strategic clarity and responsiveness are the ones that will survive in the difficult governance situations, and this has made the need for decision frameworks that are in line with the realities on the ground more pressing.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study explored how service delivery at NGAAF in Kenya was affected by strategic decision-making. Results revealed that including data-driven tactics, ethics, and inclusiveness in the strategic decision-making process led to better service delivery outcomes. Thematic analysis revealed that when decisions are made freely and people at the bottom are involved in policy-making, the policies become owned, open, and accountable. Nonetheless, the inflexible nature of bureaucratic procedures and the necessity for centralized approval were acknowledged as persistent barriers that caused fund disbursement delays, thus reducing general responsiveness. Adaptability in leadership and ethical oversight became essential facilitators of prompt and citizen-responsive interventions. The study further established that while long-term strategic planning gives direction and consistency, over-centralization constrains flexibility at the county level.

The study concluded that strategic decision-making plays an enormous role in influencing efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness within NGAAF's service delivery mechanisms. Where data-based policies increase coordination and monitoring, ethical considerations enhance accountability and trustworthiness, and inclusive decision-making opens the floor to the community itself as participants and owners.

Nevertheless, bureaucratic procedures and insufficient decentralization persist in hindering prompt execution and are only marginally successful in achieving goals. Flexibility in leadership, especially when it involves reallocating resources in times of crisis, underscores the crucial role of adaptability in responding to the shifting needs of the community. Therefore, the study concludes that ensuring that decision-making remains decentralized, institutionalizing data analytics, and embedding an ethical leadership modality form part of the solutions for improving NGAAF's performance in service delivery.

The study recommends that NGAAF strengthen its data-based decision frameworks by integrating digital monitoring and performance tracking systems to foster greater accountability and quicker responses. To promote inclusivity, structured community participation should be facilitated through platforms like public forums and feedback mechanisms, ensuring that the intervention aligns with the priorities and needs of the local beneficiaries.

The study also suggests giving county coordinators more power to make decisions in order to cut down on the bureaucratic rules that slow down project implementation. Continuous leadership capacity building in strategic planning, ethical governance, and adaptive management may enhance managerial competence and accountability. A monitoring and evaluation framework that links performance indicators to strategic goals. This will make sure that service delivery stays open, effective, and focused on results.

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