Status of Youth Participation in Governance in Kenya: A Case of Tharaka-Nithi County

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Abstract: Youth involvement in governance in Kenya is an issue of great concern because there have been claims that they are not engaged adequately yet they constitute the greatest percentage of the population. This study sought to investigate the status of their involvement in the country, and specifically in Tharaka Nithi County. The study will be guided by the Positive Youth Development Theory which focuses on young people's capabilities and potentialities with an aim of influencing positive behaviours and attitudes through daily engagements. The study used a concurrent triangulation mixed method research design. In this design, the researchers conducted both quantitative and qualitative data collection phases simultaneously, then analyzes the results. Intepretation and analysis of the data was conducted using the Hoteling T Test. The findings of the research were: that majority of the respondents (more males as compared to females) admitted to have participated in governance processes for an average of three years, they had recieved some training on governance and understood its mechanisms, and that these trainings are open for all and frequently attended by youths, members of the civic society and local administrators in each of the subcounties where the study was conducted. This notwithsatnding, the youth are not suffiiently engaged in education about decision making processes by government agencies, rather, literacy on govrnance and civic matters was attained through trainings, mostly by the private sector. This research recommends that the government should be more involved in these trainings and make relevant information easily accessible to the youth and any other person who may need to access it. Finally, the drafting and implementation of governance policies should be done when all members of the society, especially the youth, are involved in all processes.

Keywords: Youth Participation, Governance, Civic Training, Education

1. Introduction

Perceptions of citizens matter. Clear patterns always emerge from the analysis of the experiences of large numbers of people, when citizens identify specific factors of service as problematic, and they are able to articulate them as feedback through either appropriate government channels or the mass media [2, 7]. It offers the government the opportunity to investigate and resolve the problems, if they are real, or, if they are not to take steps to change public opinion if the perceptions are based on misunderstandings.

Citizens' perceptions on status of governance can be accessed on the three aspects of governance: civic engagement, accountable-decision making and quality of public service. Citizen Satisfaction surveys refer to methods that have been established so as to asses and evaluate the quality of local government services by the various public administration researchers and local governments [24].

Regardless of their age, young people must always be involved all democratic processess to ensure that they make decisions that impact on their lives and wellbeing. To ensure this is achieved, the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life formulated principles recommnded practices, as well as guidelines which were to be adopted by European countries seeking to empower their youth in matters of governance [22].

In most countries in the world, the youth make up the greatest percentage of the population and in some instances, they find themselves marginalized. They do not contribute to social, political and economic matters in their countries and on occasion struggle to demonstrate that they can contribute to positive change in the society. According to Kitanova, in

contemporary times, youth involvement in political matters has been observed to decline in many countries in Europe [13]. The youth are assumed to be disengaged as their turn up for voting during elections is significantly lower than the population of registered youth voters [3, 28]. For instance, during the 2017 elections in Bulgaria, only 14.9 percent of youth voted. There, however, are exceptions in countries such as Scotland where youths aged between 16 and 17 years were allowed to vote and 89 percent of these youths showed up during the Scottish Independence Referendum [13].

Various studies found out that civic activities such as voting (which is important in ensuring youth participation in determining their involvement in governance) have been shunned by the youth, and instead, other forms of participation such as protests, demonstrating, signing petitions, joining movements fighting for inclusivity, and writing and sharing online forums (such as twitter) have been adopted in an attempt to ensure youth participate in their own governance [8, 20, 25, 26].

According to the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics, young Kenyans (those under the age of 35 years) constitute 71 percent of the entire population while the elderly of ages above 65 years account for 3.9 percent [10]. This means that there should be more involvement of youth in matters governance, policy making as well as leadership. In order to ensure that all social, economic and political systems are properly constituted, all diverse groups in the society must be involved in decision making [1, 14, 21]. If the majority of the population is sidelined in these processes, then policies formulated will be discriminatory. In Kenya, the youth have been ignored for decades due to the assumption that they may be ignorant or have no experience in matters of governance, hence, their opinions are not necessary [4, 11]. Consequently, this neglect leads to inadequate planning and implementation of policies and decisions that affect them.

The youth are and will remain a significant share of Kenya's population for the foreseeable future. Developing and implementing appropriate strategies to mitigate the risks and challenges they face must be more of a priority for the government than it currently is [12, 30]. Engaging the youth fully in development process is recognized by the government of Kenya. Youth marginalization in Kenya has persisted since independence in spite of various policies formulated and even implemented to assist them [17].

2. Methodology

The study was carried out in Tharaka Nithi County which is a typical representation of other counties in Kenya. The County has four sub counties: namely, Meru South, Maara, Tharaka South, and Tharaka North. This area was purposively selected since it is a typical representation of the other 46 counties in Kenya.

2.1. Research Design

The study used a concurrent triangulation mixed-method research design. In this design, the researcher conducts both quantitative and qualitative data collection phases simultaneously, then analyzes the results. The purpose of this design is to validate the findings generated by each method through evidence produced by the other [6, 16]. In this study, quantitative data were collected using survey questionnaires while qualitative data was collected through interviews after which integrated analysis was done.

2.2. Population of the Study

Kenya has a population of 47, 564,296 (KNBS, 2019). Tharaka Nithi County has an population of 393,177 (Maara 114,894, Igamba 53,210, Tharaka North 58345, Tharaka south 75,250) [5, 10]. The accessible population of the study was the 3,698 politically active youths in the counties.

2.3. Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Cluster sampling was used to select respondents for the quantitative phase and purposive sampling was utilized to select respondents from each of the sub counties for focus group discusisons and interviews (qualitative phase).

From the accessible population of 3,698, a sample size was drawn using Nassiuma's formulae [18]:

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

$$n = \frac{3,698 \times 0.25^2}{0.25^2 + (3,698-1)0.02^2}$$

$$n = \frac{231.125}{1.5413}$$

$$n = 149.9546$$

Thus, the sample size was 150 respondents. An addition of six respondents was added to cater for any technical issues that might have invalidated data from neglible number of respondents. The sample size was therefore be 156.

Where: n = Sample size,
N = Population,
C = Coefficient of variation,
e = Standard error.
C=25% is acceptable according to Nassiuma [18], e = 0.02 and N= 3,698.

In each of the four subcounties thus, 39 respondents were selected. 2 of the respondents were interviewed, 7 were engaged in a focus group discussion and the other 30 answered the questionnaires.

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

The study used standard questionnaires, semi-structured interview schedules, and a focus group discussion guide to collect data. The researchers used questionnaires to collect data from respondents. The questionnaires contained a 5-point Likert-Scale, closed-ended as well as open-ended questions. Section A contained questions on personal information and Section B and C captured data on youth participation in governance. The questionnaire sample was

formulated after the reception of funding.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study to collect information. Specifically, an interview schedule was used to collect qualitative data from key informants. The researchers made appointments with 2 key respondents in every sub-county and conducted the interviews at a place of their convenience. The interview schedule sample was formulated after the reception of funding.

Focus group discussions were conducted with a selected number of youths. The researchers made an appointment with these selected youths and conducted the discussions in an area that was convenient for them. Discussions were tape-recorded with the permission of the respondents. The focus group discussion guide sample was formulated after the reception of funding.

2.4.1. Validity

To ensure internal, construct and content validity of the research instrument, the research instruments were examined for expert judgement and thereafter corrections were made as necessary. This was done by checking the instrument items against the study objectives. Data source triangulation was also ensured by objective selection of different people for the discussions. Triangulation enriched the study and ensured shortcomings of using only one method of data collection were mitigated. Validity ensures research that outcomes truly reflect the phenomenon the study is trying to measure [27].

2.4.2. Reliability

Pilot testing was done to test the reliability of the questionnaire and its internal consistency gauged. Cronbach alpha value of 0.86 was attained which is acceptable since it is above 0.7, thereby indicating reliability. Reliability denotes the degree to which findings can be reproduced by another researcher [9].

2.5. Data Collection Procedure

The lead researcher sought permission from NACOSTI to conduct the research. When the permission was granted the researchers visited the county commissioners and presented a copy of the letter and also informed them of our intention. Thereafter the sampled respondents were contacted with the help of the various chiefs. The data collection was conducted over 6 days. The interviews were recorded with permission from the participants. The recordings were transcribed and then analyzed.

2.6. Data Analysis

The status of youth participation was analysed by the help of STATA software using descriptive statistics. Qualitative analysis was done by the help of MAX QDA software.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was sought from Tharaka University College in order to facilitate the acquisition of a research permit from NACOSTI as per the legal requirements. The entire research process was conducted with due respect to ethical considerations in research. The researchers obtained informed consent of the respondents to participate in the study and were careful to avoid causing physical or psychological harm to these respondents by asking embarrassing or irrelevant questions, using threatening language or making them nervous. The researchers treated the respondents' views with respect and utmost confidentiality. In general, a high degree of openness regarding the purpose and the nature of the research was observed by the researchers.

3. Findings and Discussions

This chapter presents the results and discussions of the collected data as per the objective of the research.

SECTION A: BIO-DATA

***Table 1.** Bio-data of Respondents according to sex.*

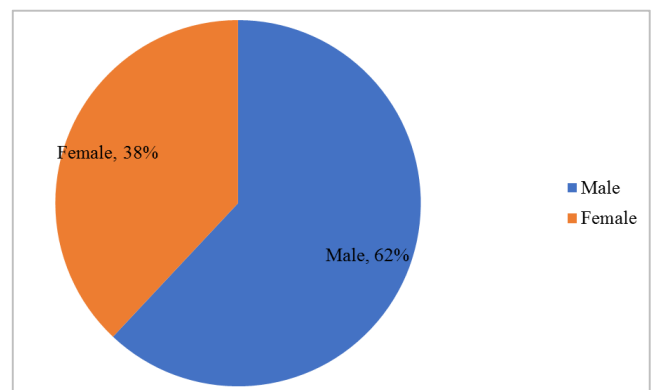|		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Male	74	62.0	62.0
	Female	46	38.0	38.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0

***Figure 1.** Bio-Data of Respondents according to Sex.*

It can be noted that the number of male youths outweighs that of women youths i.e. the percentage of the male youth participants is 62% while that of women youth is 38%. This means that the majority of male youth tend to engage more in governance issues compared to their female counterparts.
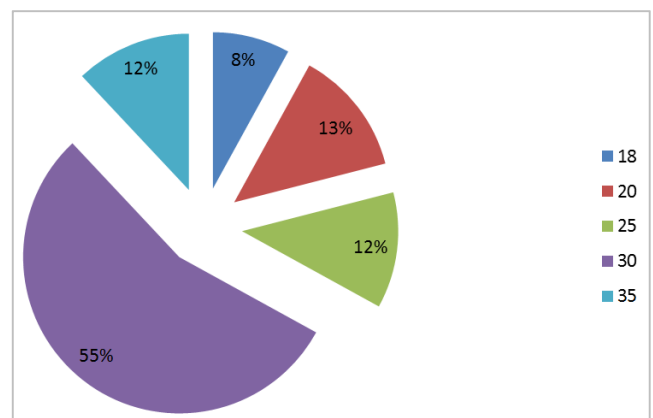

***Figure 2.** Bio-Data of Respondents according to age.*

It is noted that the majority of those who took part in the governance issues were youths aged 30 years. The average age of youths engaging in governance was also found to be 26.56 years. This means that those who engage in governance are middle aged youths. The junior youths are not engaged in governance issues as was noted.

Table 2. *Bio-data of respondents according to level of education.*

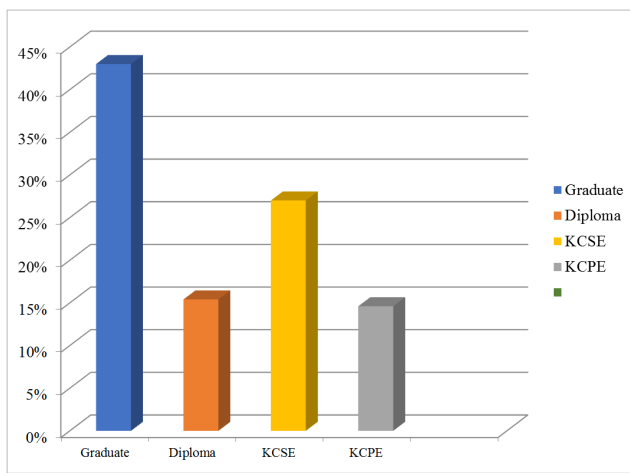|		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	Graduate	52	43.0	43.0
	Diploma	18	15.4	15.4
Valid	KCSE	32	27.0	27.0
	KCPE	18	14.6	14.6
	Total	120	100.0	100.0

Figure 3. *Bio-data of respondents according to level of education.*

The majority have high academic qualification since the majority had attained the level of graduate. This has an implication that the majority of the youths were able to make informed decisions on matters governance due to their high academic abilities.

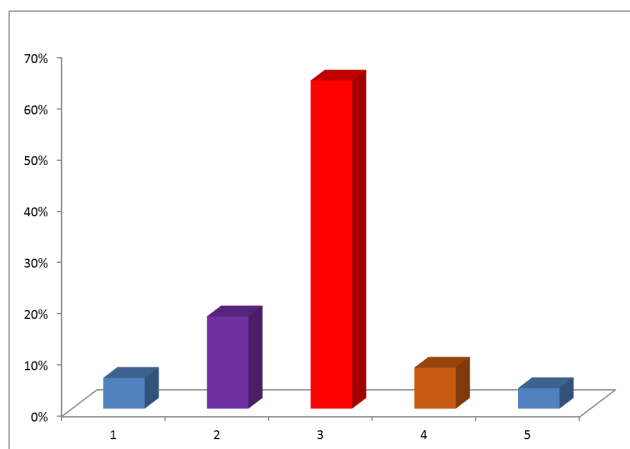*SECTION B: STATUS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE*

Figure 4. *Number of years of participation in governance.*

It is noted that the average participation of the youths in governance matters is 3 years according to the figure above.

It means that the majority had engaged or been involved in governance matters for at least three years.

Table 3. *Training in matters governance.*

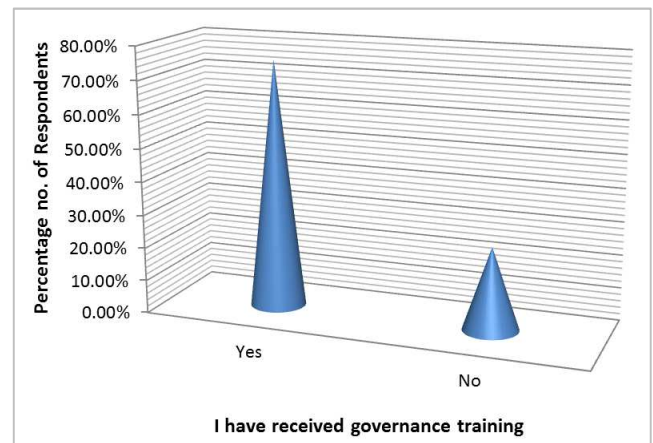|		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	No	30	25.0	25.0
Valid	Yes	90	75.0	75.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0

Figure 5. *Training in matters governance.*

It can be deduced that the number of those who have received governance training is much more (three quarters of all the participants) than those who have not received governance training. This implies that the majority who engage in governance matters clearly do understand what it entails, its mechanisms as well as how it is supposed to be practiced.

I have been trained how to participate in governance

Table 4. *Training on how to participate in governance.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	No	46	38.4	38.4
Valid	Yes	74	61.6	61.6
	Total	120	100.0	100.0

The participants who said that they had not been trained on how to participate in governance matters were 38.4% while those that said they had been trained were 61.6%. This has an implication that the majority had the requisite training and knowledge on how to participate in governance matters such as asking questions about bad governance or demanding for accountability on the same.

These quantitative findings were also supported by some of the following statements:

1) Some of the youths here have been trained on how to participate in governance issues. In fact, most of them being between 20 and 30 years (Discussant A; Male, Tharaka North).

2) Truth be told, the youths in this county have at least some basic training that has been done by some volunteers mostly some NGOs and even at times the mass media that traverse the county in an attempt of providing civic education on good governance

(Discussant C; Male, Maara).

3) We are having harmonious working relationship with our leaders to be honest. In other words, our leaders are working in unison with different agencies to bring the requisite trainings that we need on governance and this has really opened our minds in terms of what we need to look for when demanding accountability and much more (Discussant G; Male, Tharaka North).

4) We are succeeding as a team. We are a big team. There are different agencies involved with the training of the youths on how to specifically participate in governance. We have our own chains of command consisting of our

representatives who often engage and inform the youths whenever there is an opening regarding such trainings in the county (Discussant F; Male, Tharaka North).

5) You see, if I was to be very honest. The private sector has really been of great help to the youths not only in this sub-county but also in the entire county. They have ensured that illiteracy in terms of inability to conceptualize good governance is eradicated among the youths by a big margin. I however would like to appeal on the government to also take the same steps and do the same (Discussant D; Female, Maara).
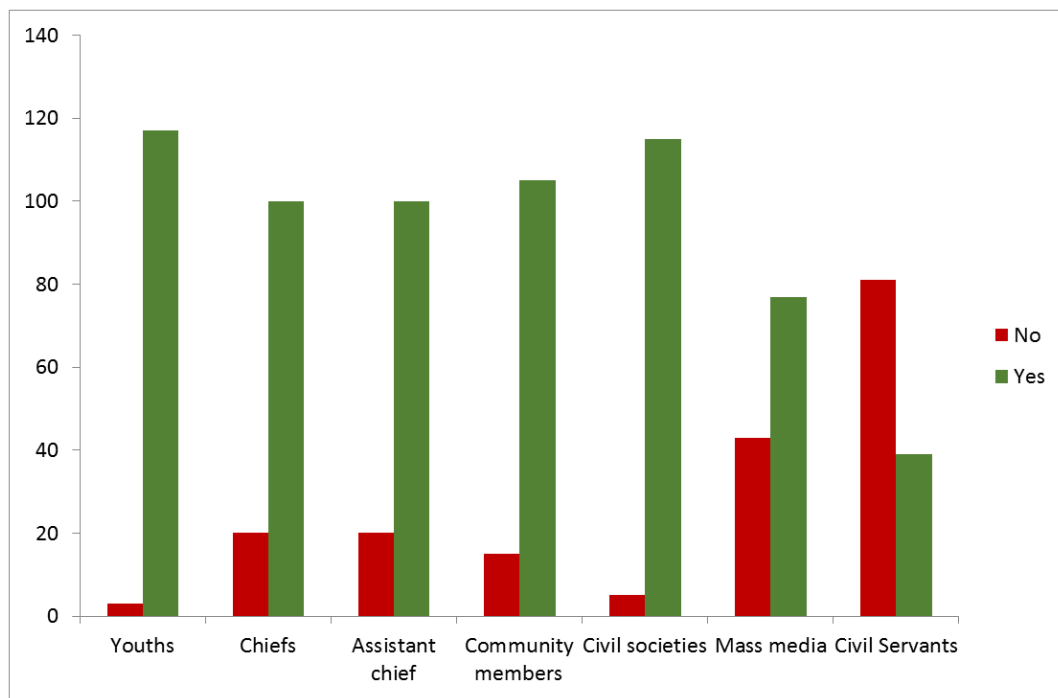
Who attends governance trainings?

Figure 6. Participants in governance trainings.

It is noted from the Figure above that the majority of the people who attends the trainings encompassed the youths, chiefs, assistant chiefs, community members, civil societies, mass media and few civil servants. Very few people noted that politicians normally attended these trainings. This has an implication that the majority people were allowed to attend these trainings while only few times did politicians attend the trainings as either participants or trainers in Tharaka Nithi County.

These quantitative findings were also supported by some of the following statements:

1) Governance training meetings are quite often attended by different people across various divides. In fact, I have seen the youths, members of the community including the chiefs being part of such trainings. I thinks the chiefs often have automatic tickets to joining the meetings because they have to be informed whenever such meetings are to take place in their jurisdictions (Discussant B; Male, Igamba).

2) Those who often attend the trainings are majorly the

youths, the organizer, the chiefs and their assistants and at times very few politicians and civil servants alike (Key Informant 1; Female, Igamba).

3) Just as my colleague have said, those often in attendance are majorly consisting of the youths, mass media or those who people call members of the press, there are always the chiefs and the assistant chiefs, we have seen other community members, at times these meetings are also attended by the politicians and those who have formal employments in offices or those who are known as the civil servants. So your can see Mr. Nzioka virtually everyone attends or can attend these meetings (Discussant D; Female, Tharaka South).

4) There are a myriad people attending the trainings. There are the organizers themselves who are the civil societies, the mass media, the youths as well as the community members. By extension, any other person is often allowed to attend provided they want to. There is no restrictions on who is supposed to attend (Key Informant 2; Female, Tharaka South).
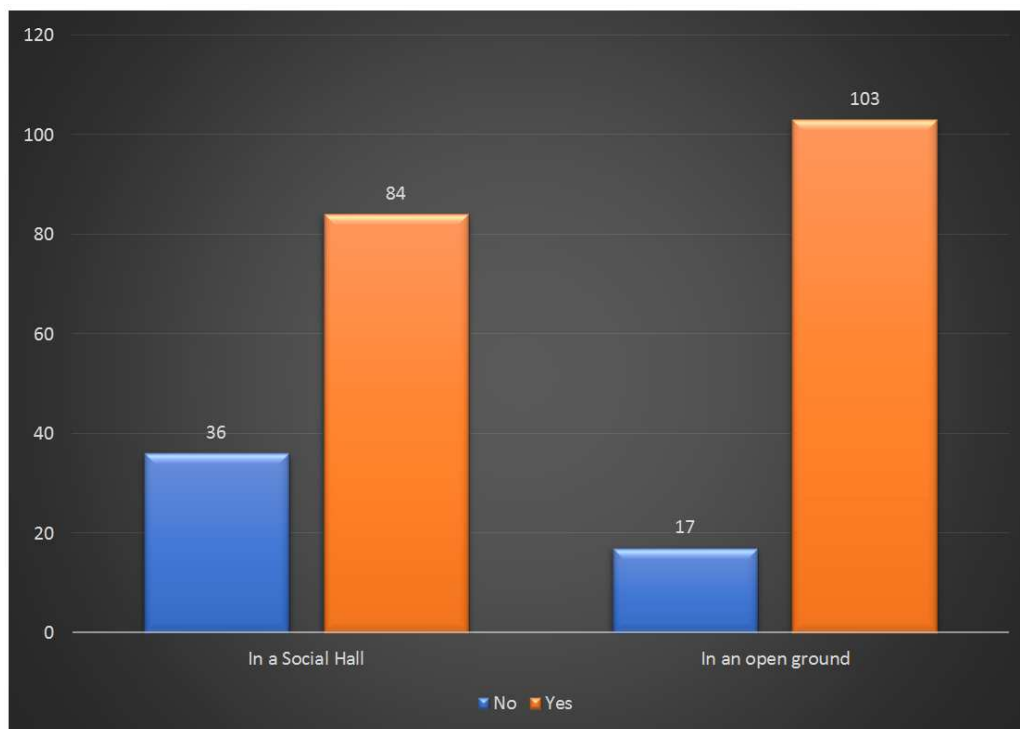
21. Where do you meet to train?

***Figure 7.** Venues for governance training.*

It is noted from the Figure above that the majority of the participants actually outlined that they received their training in a social Hall as well as in an open ground. This implies that the majority mostly attended their trainings in social halls within their in localities (sub-county level).

These quantitative findings were also supported by some of the following statements:

1) There is no much doubt Mr. Researcher, all the meetings that I in person has attended have been carried out in an open place and at times in the chief's compound. I also heard that there are a times that they are held at our social hall in the sub county (Discussant E; Female, Tharaka North).

2) The trainings are often carried out either in the sub-county social hall, in the county social hall or in many occasions under trees in open grounds or fields (Discussant B; Male, Maara).

3) I have in many occasions attended the trainings in open grounds more than in buildings such as the social hall here in our county. Mostly, there are held in the open fields and especially with the upsurge of corona virus (Key Informant 2; Female, Tharaka South).

4) The organizers often carry out governance trainings within the social development offices compound while at times at the chiefs' compounds in open fields (Discussant F; Male, Igamba).

4. Conclusions

This chapter presents the research summary and conclusions which are arranged logically as per the research objectives. It also presents the policy recommendations as well as suggestions for further research.

4.1. Summary

The following were the salient findings of this study:

The objective was to establish the status of youth participation in governance in Kenya, in particular, Tharaka Nithi County. After the research, it was noted that the number of male youths outweighs that of women youths i.e. the percentage of the male youth participants is 62% while that of women youth is 38%. This finding is consistent with a research conducted in Pakistan, South Asia, which determined that female youth had significantly less participation in governance as compared to male youth in the country [15]. It was also established that the majority of those who took part in the governance issues were youths aged 30 years. The average age of youths engaging in governance was also found to be 26.56 years. In terms of academic qualifications, the majority had high academic qualification since the majority had attained the level of graduate. Studies demonstrate that education, both advanced academic as well as at the technical level are important in improving the participation of youth (especially those in rural areas) in governance[19, 29]. Further, it was noted that the average participation of the youths in governance matters was 3 years.

With regards to receiving governance training, it was determined that the number of those who have received governance training was much more than those who have not

received governance training. The participants who said that they had not been trained on how to participate in governance matters were 38.4% while those that said they had been trained were 61.6%.

With regards to who attend the trainings, it was established that the majority of the people who attends the trainings encompassed the youths, chiefs, assistant chiefs, community members, civil societies, mass media and few civil servants and that very few people noted presence of politicians in these trainings. The trainings were carries out in a social Hall as well as in an open ground.

4.2. Conclusions of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were arrived at in line with the study objective.

i. The majority of male youth tend to engage more in governance issues compared to their female counterparts. Those who engage in governance were middle aged youths while the junior youths were not actively engaged in governance issues as was noted. The majority of the youths were able to make informed decisions on matters governance due to their high academic abilities. It means that the majority had engaged in governance matters for at least three years.

The majority who engaged in governance matters clearly did understand what it entails, its mechanisms as well as how it is supposed to be practiced. Similarly, the majority had the requisite training and knowledge on how to participate in governance matters such as asking questions about bad governance or demanding for accountability on the same. The majority people were allowed to attend and actually attended these trainings while only a handful of did politicians attend the trainings as either participants or trainers. These trainings were carried out in social halls within their in localities (sub-county level).

ii. Majority of the youths depended on civil societies to train them on governance issues while at the same time owned mass media vessels such as the radios, televisions among others as important source of training. The majority had no ability to ask questions on issues pertaining governance in the county and only participated in governance matters whenever there was need to. The youths were taught more of civic engagement, accountable decision making and effective public service delivery in the whole Tharaka Nithi County. The content and relevance of youth participation training offered amongst the three sources of training was in tandem with one another in Tharaka Nithii County except for the ones offered by politicians.

The majority preferred using means where they do not get to meet up with the departments that they demand accountability for fear of being victimized in Tharaka Nithi County. The trainings offered by various sources had significantly improved the youths understanding of participation in governance in Tharaka Nithi County.

iii. The youths were not involved in designing, planning and implementation of policies that do affected them directly was the pot most challenge while inadequate education was found to be the least challenge in Tharaka Nithi County.

iv. The youths lacked opportunities to participate in governance.

v. The majority of the youths preferred being granted the training by the government as well as being included in political and leadership participation.

5. Policy Recommendations

i. The County and the national government should be able to conduct governance trainings rather than leaving the responsibility to the private sectors.

ii. The county and the national governments should be able to avail the requisite information whenever anybody, youths included demand of the same as right to access information is a constitutional right.

iii. Strict adherence to policies that demand that all groups, including the youths should be engaged right from the onset in planning, designing and implementing policies that directly affects them as such will make the acquainted with what is expected and hence participate in governance matters.

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