

Stakeholder Engagement Strategies and Judicial Service Delivery: Evidence from Kenya's North Rift Region Courts

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ABSTRACT

Case backlogs, lack of staffing and growing public distrust persist and hamper service delivery in Kenya's judiciary, particularly in the North Rift region's rural courts. The impact of stakeholder engagement tactics on the provision of services in Kenya's North Rift division's courts was investigated. The study was based on Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory and used a convergent parallel mixed methods design consisting of a descriptive cross-sectional survey and semi structured interviews. Using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula and Neyman (1934) optimal allocation, a stratified sample of 221 respondents (172 judicial staff, 27 judicial officers and 22 justice consumers) was taken from the target population of 495 spread across 10 court stations in 6 North Rift counties. In SPSS version 27, the data were analyzed using multiple linear regression, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and theme analysis for qualitative data. In a model that explained 71.6% of the variance in service delivery ($R^2 = 0.716$, $F(4,207) = 130.157$, $p < 0.001$), stakeholder involvement was the third strongest of the four change management predictors ($\beta = 0.312$, $t = 5.938$, $p < 0.001$). Collaboration between the judiciary and lawyers was rated the highest ($M = 4.25$), feedback mechanisms were the lowest ($M = 4.10$) but were unevenly distributed geographically with court stations in the periphery having lower levels of engagement with court stations in towns like Eldoret. This study finds that stakeholder engagement is a strategic, not just a procedural, instrument for judicial reform, and suggests institutionalized, geographically balanced feedback and consultation processes.

Keywords: stakeholder engagement, service delivery, change management, judiciary, regression analysis, Kenya.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the developing world, judiciaries are under increasing pressure to transform with pressure from the courts from case backlogs, limited resource, and loss of public confidence (Akech, 2022; Akivaga, 2021). The successive reform agendas in Kenya, such as the Sustaining Judiciary Transformation (SJT) and the Social Transformation through Access to Justice (STAJ 2020-2024) have aimed at modernizing the operations of the courts. However, the results of reform have been variable by region, with peripheral court stations and rural areas performing less efficiently than urban centres, and less well received by the public. Access to Justice Survey (2022) results indicate that court services are not as satisfactory in North Rift as in the rest of the country, with only 31% reporting satisfaction compared to a country average of 47% and therefore warrant further investigation of change management strategies being implemented.

In the current list of strategies used in judicial reform, stakeholder engagement is seen as one of the most crucial as it legitimises reform, minimises resistance, and ensures that institutional

activity is in line with what its stakeholders expect (Freeman, 1984; Bryson, Quick, Slotterback & Crosby, 2013). While there is a body of empirical literature on stakeholder engagement and service delivery, it has come from outside of the judiciary and non-Kenyan contexts, such as global health programming (Lavery, 2018), South African local government and education (Ncede, 2023; Twum-Darko, Ncede & Tengeh, 2023), or has focused on small, non-representative samples (Kimutai & Kwambai, 2018). This gap on an empirical and contextual level is unexplored as to how stakeholder engagement does affect judicial service delivery in a devolved, resource-constrained Kenyan region like the North Rift.

This paper fills that void by isolating and testing the first objective of a much larger study on change management: to evaluate how stakeholder involvement tactics affect the provision of legal services in Kenya's North Rift region. The null hypothesis was H01, which states that stakeholder engagement tactics have no statistically significant impact on the justice courts' ability to provide services in Kenya's North Rift region.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Stakeholder Theory

Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory is used as a foundation for this study because organisations are able to perform better when they recognise, involve and address the legitimate needs and interests of all those who influence, are influenced by, and manage them. The theory applied to the judiciary suggests that courts that involve judicial staff, legal practitioners and the public in the process of reform prior to and during the process are more likely to gain legitimate, cooperation and lasting enhancements in service quality than courts that impose change from above. Phillips, Freeman and Wicks (2003) explain that the engagement should be substantive, not symbolic, and this will become a significant finding in the empirical findings of the present study in regard to feedback mechanisms. Bryson (2018) also claims that it is through a continuous participation process, and not from one-off consultation, that stakeholders become 'owners of the reform'.

2.2 Empirical Review

SWE and service delivery have been found to be positively correlated in a few reports, but this study sought to examine the contextual limitations. Lavery (2018) theorized a framework for creating an evidence-based stakeholder-engagement strategy for global health programming, but did not conduct primary field work, and their stakeholder-engagement framework was not judiciary-specific. Ncede (2023) in his mixed-method case study of education in the Western Cape in South Africa has worked out that a lack of stakeholder involvement resulted in a misalignment between the service delivery processes and the expectations of the stakeholders; Twum-Darko et al. (2023) extended this work to illustrate that engagement helps in addressing gaps in service delivery in relation to strategy formulation and implementation, but in relation to an education context in South Africa, and not a judicial context in East Africa.

In the immediate context, Fatuma (2020) carried out a cross sectional design survey with 165 respondents to establish the most influential factors in implementing Judicial Performance Improvement Project (JPIP) in Kenya, the factors being stakeholder participation, organizational structure, project management competence and monitoring and evaluation. This is also consistent with the finding of Kimutai and Kwambai (2018) who reported positive and significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and organisational effectiveness at the University of Eldoret but noted that the study's sample of 65 out of 1100 staff members and the non-judgemental approach taken to the study limited the findings applicability to other organisations. The closest judicial case to the present study was found by Awuor and Njuguna (2022) who found that the stakeholder engagement strategies significantly enhanced efficiency and satisfaction of the public in Milimani High Court in Nairobi.

Overall the literature reviewed shows the theoretical and practical significance of stakeholder engagement, but also identified three gaps which need to be addressed: an empirical gap (small and non-representative samples, and lack of field data); a contextual gap (exclusivity in the field of education, county government and non-Kenyan legal systems); and a methodological gap (inadequate transparency of instruments and analytic strategy). This study investigated these

gaps in a rigorously sampled ($n = 221$), judiciary-specific, mixed methods study in the North Rift region of Kenya.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study used convergent parallel mixed method approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), which involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and independently, and subsequently combining the data during interpretation. The quantitative method adopted was descriptive cross-sectional survey which was suitable for describing the existing practice of stakeholder-engagement, and its statistical association with service delivery without variable manipulation. Semi-structured interviews with justice consumers were used in the qualitative strand to describe the mechanisms and lived experiences of the quantitative patterns, and triangulation was used to enhance the validity of the overall findings.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population included 495 respondents from ten court stations in six counties in North Rift (384 judicial staff, 61 judicial officers and 50 justice consumers (litigants and legal practitioners)). The sample size was determined using a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level Taro Yamane (1967) formula, which resulted in a sample size of 221. The optimal allocation formula of Neyman (1934) was then used to allocate the sample to the strata proportionately: 172 judicial staff, 27 judicial officers and 22 justice consumers. Judicial staff and officers were sampled randomly, convenience sampling was employed to sample justice consumers, who are easier to move around and harder to track than judicial staff and officers.

3.3 Instrumentation, Validity and Reliability

Structured questionnaires (Likert scale items) and semi-structured interview guides were used to collect data. The level of stakeholder engagement was assessed through six items related to stakeholder consultation practices, communication of process changes, public participation, consultation with legal practitioners, feedback mechanisms and overall influence on service

delivery, based on Freeman's (1984) stakeholder identification framework. Face and content validity was determined by experts with CVC 0.82, which exceeds Polit and Beck (2012) recommended value of 0.80. Construct validity was achieved by clearly linking items of the instruments to theory. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability in a pilot study; the subscale for stakeholder engagement recorded an alpha of 0.81, which was pleasingly over the benchmark of 0.70 for social science research (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

3.4 Model Specification and Analytical Procedure

The study's hypotheses were tested using multiple linear regression and descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) in the analysis of the quantitative data using SPSS version 27 software. The following is how the regression model was configured:

Y is equal to $\alpha + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \varepsilon$.

Y stands for service delivery, X1 for stakeholder engagement, X2 for technology adoption, X3 for leadership strategy, X4 for training and development, α for constant, β_1 - β_4 for regression coefficients, and ε for error term. The model's underlying assumptions linearity, normalcy, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and autocorrelation were previously assessed. Following its transcription and thematic analysis in NVivo 12, the qualitative interview data were themed around the four study objectives and contrasted with the quantitative results (Creswell, 2014).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Findings on Stakeholder Engagement

The 212 valid respondents were asked about perceptions of stakeholder engagement using six items. The average scores of all the items recorded were more than 4.10 on a five point Likert scale, demonstrating that the North Rift justice courts' stakeholder engagement strategies were continuously regarded favorably.

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	% Agree/ Strongly Agree	Rank
Judiciary effectively consults stakeholders before reforms	4.15	0.78	86.8%	4
Court users are adequately informed of process changes	4.20	0.72	89.7%	3
Public participation in reforms has improved service delivery	4.17	0.79	86.3%	5
Collaboration with legal practitioners enhances efficiency	4.25	0.71	91.5%	1
Stakeholder feedback mechanisms are effectively implemented	4.10	0.84	83.5%	6
Stakeholder engagement has positively influenced service delivery	4.23	0.74	89.2%	2

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on stakeholder engagement strategies (source: field data, 2026).

Since interprofessional partnerships are essential to the functioning of the courts and the flow of cases, they received the highest rating ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.71$; 91.5% agreement). Feedback mechanisms were rated lowest ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.84$), and included the highest number of neutral responses (10.4%) and disagreeing responses (6.1%) - suggesting that feedback systems, although present, are not shared equally at court stations. This was reiterated by qualitative interviews which revealed that a magistrate said that reforms were now discussed 'not just imposed', and a litigant from Kakuma noted that peripheral areas sometimes felt left out of the consultation process, with most of the consultation taking place in Eldoret. The geographic

disparity is likely to explain the lower levels of public satisfaction in the North Rift (31% compared to 47% nationally).

4.2 Diagnostic Tests

The model assumptions were tested and met before the regression estimation. Linearity was confirmed by scatterplots and Pearson correlations (r ranging from 0.58 to 0.74) for all of the predictors, including stakeholder engagement with $r = 0.74$. Residual normality was confirmed by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p = 0.112 > 0.05$) and inspection of P-P plots. All four predictors were well below the threshold of 10 for Variance Inflation Factors (1.822 to 2.451) and the tolerance indices (0.408 to 0.549) did not suggest any problematic multicollinearity between the four predictors. The Durban Watson statistic (2.08) was within the acceptable range (1.5 to 2.5), demonstrating that there was no significant autocorrelation present and that residual-versus-predicted plots did not reveal any pattern, suggesting homoscedasticity. As a result, the regression model's assumptions were met, and the following inference's findings were reliable.

4.3 Regression Results

The model summary is given in Table 2. The four change management strategies jointly explained 71.6% of the variance in service delivery ($R = 0.846$, $R^2 = 0.716$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.710$, $SE = 0.384$).

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE of Estimate
1	0.846	0.716	0.710	0.384

Table 2: Model summary. Predictors: involvement of stakeholders, acceptance of technology, leadership approach, and development and training. Service delivery is a dependent variable.

The overall model was significant, $F(4, 207) = 130.157$, $p < 0.001$ (Table 3), demonstrating that the set of predictors together accounted for a substantial amount of variance in service delivery over and above chance.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	76.842	4	19.211	130.157	.000
Residual	30.548	207	0.148		
Total	107.390	211			

Table 3: ANOVA. Dependent variable: service delivery.

The standardised and unstandardised regression coefficients are shown in Table 4. All four predictors (stakeholder engagement) were statistically significant at the 5% level.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.624	0.186	-	3.355	.001
Stakeholder Engagement	0.285	0.048	0.312	5.938	.000
Technology Adoption	0.342	0.052	0.361	6.577	.000
Leadership Strategy	0.248	0.051	0.268	4.863	.000
Training & Development	0.296	0.049	0.325	6.041	.000

Table 4: Regression coefficients. Dependent variable: service delivery.

The fitted model is:

$$\text{Service Delivery} = 0.624 + 0.296 (\text{Training and Development}) + \varepsilon + 0.285 (\text{Stakeholder Engagement}) + 0.342 (\text{Technology Adoption}) + 0.248 (\text{Leadership Strategy})$$

Objective 1, the unstandardized coefficient for stakeholder engagement, shows that for each increment Service delivery rises by 0.285 in stakeholder involvement of a unit, when the other predictors are held constant. The third strongest of the four predictors, with a standardised coefficient of 0.312, is stakeholder engagement with a t value of 5.938, $p < 0.001$, followed by training and development, which has a standardised coefficient of 0.325, followed by leadership strategy, with a standardised coefficient of 0.268. At the 5% level of significance, the alternative hypothesis, Ha1, which states that stakeholder participation has a statistically significant impact on service delivery in North Rift justice courts, is accepted.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of stakeholder engagement having significant and positive impact on service delivery are further findings that support Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory and are aligned with findings made by Awuor and Njuguna (2022) in a judicial sector environment for the first time in a rural multi-county environment. The high rating for collaboration with legal practitioners ($M = 4.25$) reveals that engagement is felt most strongly and is more effective when it involves professional intermediaries whose collaboration has direct impact on the flow of cases, in line with Bryson et al.'s (2013) focus on engaging with the process of engagement rather than one-off consultation.

The most significant aspect of the study is the relatively low and inconsistent rating of the feedback mechanisms ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.84$). It suggests that consultation is not everywhere well institutionalised in the North Rift, a finding that was explained by the interviews to be due to a geographical focus of the consultation activities in Eldoret, while peripheral stations like Kakuma and Lodwar were only less well served. This is also reminiscent of Phillips et al's (2003) warning that the involvement of stakeholders must be substantive and not symbolic, which seems to be the case in the evidence presented here, when it comes to urban and rural court users in the same court. It can also provide a useful partial explanation of the North Rift's lower than average public satisfaction with court services (31% compared to 47% across the country, Access to Justice Survey 2022): where there is little feedback, reform benefits are unlikely to be felt by the people they are supposed to benefit.

The impact of stakeholder engagement is strong, but less immediate than technology adoption and training and development. This is aligned with the theory that participatory strategies are more about slow moving mechanisms such as trust building, legitimacy and less resistance than about operational efficiencies (Bryson, 2018). Rather than this reducing its strategic relevance, stakeholder engagement implies that it can be considered a complementary, legitimizing mechanism that is independent of the more operationally direct measures taken (technology and training).

6. CONCLUSION

Although less practically meaningful, stakeholder participation has a statistically significant and favorable impact on service delivery in North Rift judiciary courts through the processes of establishing legitimacy of institutional change and dampening resistance to institutional change. The findings corroborate Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory and concurs with past judicial findings from Kenya (Awuor & Njuguna 2022), adding a multi-county, rural setting that has not been widely explored in the literature. The unexpected poor and fragmented feedback mechanism performance, however, suggests that the involvement and engagement achieved so far has been mostly in urban centres like Eldoret while the court stations in the periphery lag behind. Stakeholder engagement should be seen less as a one-off procedural obligation and more as a strategic engagement that is geographically balanced and a key element of creating public trust and institutional legitimacy in the judiciary.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that there should be structured, trackable feedback mechanisms at all court stations, and particularly at the peripheral and remote stations which are under-serviced in terms of consultation, this should be institutionalised, and that Court Users Committees should be reshaped with clear mandates and be guaranteed the presence of stakeholders from the rural and remote stations instead of being confined to the urban stations such as Eldoret, that future studies should use a longitudinal design for the reasons that the study findings indicate a widening of geographic gaps in engagement over time, and that engagement effectiveness across

a broader sample of Kenyan judicial regions should be examined, testing the extent to which these findings are generalizable.

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