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POLICY EVALUATION IN KENYA: METHODS, IMPLICATIONS IN PUBLIC GOVERNANCE, AND CHALLENGES

Robert O. Maosa[1], Dr. Shadrack Kipkoech Sitienei[2]
[1]a PhD Candidate at Moi University, Kenya
[2]Lecturer at Egerton University, Department of Philosophy, History, and Religion, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Policy evaluation is a critical component in public governance, providing a systematic approach to assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of public policies. Despite its significance, the evaluation process faces methodological, political, and institutional challenges that hinder its ability to provide accurate and actionable insights. This study examines the policy evaluation in Kenya by analysing various methods and approaches used, assessing its broader implications for public governance and decision-making, and identifying the challenges that constrain the evaluation process. The study adopted a qualitative approach by reviewing analysing the secondary data to arrive at a conclusion. The findings reveals that Kenya uses a mixed approach of policy evaluation, while policy evaluation enhances transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making; it is often constrained by political influence, resource limitations, and methodological complexities. The study underscores the need for strengthening institutional capacities, promoting stakeholder engagement, and adopting more rigorous evaluation methodologies to improve policy effectiveness. Ultimately, the research contributes to the discourse on governance by emphasizing the pivotal role of policy evaluation in shaping public administration, informing policy reforms, and enhancing overall government performance.

KEY WORDS: *Policy Evaluation, Governance, Public Policy*

1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Policy evaluation can be broadly be defined as the systematic application of social science research procedures to assess the conceptualization, design, implementation and utility of public policies (https://www.rand.org). It is a crucial aspect of public governance, as it provides a systematic framework for assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of public policies. Governments across the world implement policies to address complex socio-economic and political challenges, but without proper evaluation mechanisms, it becomes difficult to determine whether these policies achieve their intended objectives (Dunn, 2018). Policy evaluation serves multiple functions, including enhancing government accountability, improving policy design, and promoting evidence-based decision-making (Rist, 2006). In addition, it also plays a fundamental role in ensuring that public resources are utilized efficiently and that policies contribute to sustainable development (Bovens, Goodin, & Schillemans, 2014).

In developed democracies, policy evaluation is often seen as a critical tool for improving public governance. A study by Kusek and Rist (2004) examined the use of performance-based evaluation in the United States, focusing on the implementation of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993. The study found out that though GPRA encouraged greater accountability and transparency, it also revealed significant challenges in aligning performance measures with policy outcomes. The authors highlighted that evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of policies in complex governance environments requires the use of multiple methods, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Similarly, Bovens, Hart, and Kuipers (2008) conducted a study on the use of performance measurement systems in European Union member states. They found that while performance evaluation frameworks were widely adopted, the complexity of policy goals and the lack of clear causal links between policies and outcomes posed significant challenges. The study concluded that a combination of outcome-based and process-based evaluations is essential for capturing the full impact of public policies.

In Latin America, policy evaluation has been a central focus in the efforts to improve public governance and accountability. A study by Gomez and Ponce (2010), examined the use of policy evaluation in Brazil, particularly in the context of social policies aimed at poverty reduction. The study found that while Brazil had established a strong institutional framework for policy evaluation, the political environment often influenced the evaluation process. The authors noted that political elites sometimes used evaluation findings to

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legitimize their policies, while downplaying negative results. The study highlighted the importance of ensuring the independence and objectivity of evaluation processes to enhance their credibility and impact on policy reform.
In a similar vein, Santos and Andrade (2015) conducted a study on the effectiveness of policy evaluation in Argentina, focusing on the evaluation of health policies. They found that while the government had made significant strides in institutionalizing policy evaluation, the lack of coordination between different government agencies and the insufficient use of evaluation findings in policy design and implementation limited the impact of evaluations. The study emphasized the need for better coordination and communication between policymakers and evaluators to ensure that evaluation results are used effectively in the policy process.

In Africa, most countries are developing their monitoring and evaluation policies to systematize structure and institutionalize evaluations and use of evaluative evidence across the government sector. The pace at which evaluations are institutionalized and systematized across African governments is progressing relatively slowly (https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/items/15171d2e-d8db-4fe5-964f-0001db690c7a).
This study adopts New Public Management (NPM) theory as propounded by (Hood, 1991). This theory emerged in the 1980s, and stresses on the importance of efficiency, performance, and accountability in public administration. NPM advocates for the use of market-driven approaches in the public sector, including the use of performance-based evaluations to measure the effectiveness of policies and programs. In this framework, policy evaluation is seen as a tool for ensuring that government actions are accountable to the public and that resources are used efficiently. NPM emphasizes the need for evidence-based decision-making and the importance of using evaluation results to drive continuous improvement in public governance.

1.2 METHODS OF POLICY EVALUATION IN KENYA

Policy evaluation methods vary significantly across different countries and sectors. According to Rower and Frewer (2013), common methods include; *Quantitative Approaches*: this approach holds that a significant number of respondents indicated that cost-benefit analysis**,** statistical modeling, and impact assessment are frequently used in evaluating the effectiveness of policies, particularly in developed countries like the United States and the United Kingdom. These methods are valued for their ability to provide measurable, data-driven insights into the outcomes of policies. It focuses on understanding the question who, what, where, how many and how much (Downy and Ireland, 1979).

The second is the Qualitative Approaches: this used mostly in developing countries, qualitative methods such as case studies**,** focus group discussions, and expert interviews are more commonly used. These methods are oftenly employed due to limited data availability and the need to understand the socio-political context of policy implementation. It focus on the question how and why of a policies effect by gathering non-numerical data (downy and Ireland, 1979).

Participatory Evaluation: In some developing countries, particularly in Africa and Asia, there was a growing trend toward participatory evaluation, where local communities and stakeholders are involved in the evaluation process. This approach aims to ensure that the voices of marginalized groups are considered in the evaluation of public policies.

In the context of the Kenya, engaging beneficiaries and local communities in project monitoring and evaluation can provide valuable insights into how resource management and project outcomes can be improved. For instance, involving community in development in the planning and evaluation process can help ensure that the development projects meet their needs and preferences, leading to higher satisfaction and better project outcomes (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) processes can also enhance transparency and accountability in project implementation. By actively involving stakeholders in monitoring project progress, identifying issues, and suggesting improvements, PM&E can help ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively (Estrella & Gaventa, 1998). This approach can be particularly beneficial in addressing the challenges of resource mismanagement and project delays that have historically plagued public housing projects in Kenya (Wafula, 2019).

Finally, is the Mixed-Methods Approaches: Many countries, especially those with more advanced policy evaluation frameworks, employ mixed-methods approaches that combine both quantitative and qualitative techniques. For instance, the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (2022), in the Technical Oversight Committee Guidelines on Strategic areas provides among other roles that both qualitative and quantitative data to be collected and analysed to help in assessing and evaluating the government policies (GOK, 2012). These approaches allow for a more holistic understanding of policy outcomes and the underlying factors that contribute to success or failure.

1.3 IMPLICATIONS OF POLICY EVALUATION ON PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

The findings of the study highlight several key implications of policy evaluation for improving public governance:

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Kenya provides an interesting case of how policy evaluation can affect public governance in an emerging democracy. A study by **Mugenda and Mugenda (2013)** analyzed the role of policy evaluation in Kenya's devolved governance system, introduced under the 2010 Constitution. The study found that while policy evaluation frameworks are established at both the national and county levels, the implementation of these evaluations faced significant challenges, including inadequate funding, political interference, and a lack of technical expertise. The study concluded that for policy evaluation to contribute effectively to public governance, it must be integrated into the policy formulation process, and there must be strong institutional support for evaluation practices.

A more recent study by **Ochieng (2020)** examined the role of policy evaluation in Kenya's education sector, focusing on the implementation of the Free Primary Education policy. The study found that while the policy had achieved significant improvements in enrollment rates, its impact on quality education was less clear. The study attributed this to the lack of a robust evaluation framework to assess the long-term outcomes of the policy. The findings suggested that for policy evaluation to improve governance, it must be aligned with the goals of the policy and should include mechanisms for continuous monitoring and feedback.

1.4. CHALLENGES IN POLICY EVALUATION

The study identified several challenges faced by governments in conducting effective policy evaluations, which include:
Political Interference**:** One of the most significant challenges identified was the politicization of policy evaluation. In many cases, policymakers was found to use evaluations to justify pre-determined political agendas, rather than to objectively assess the outcomes of policies. This issue was particularly prevalent in countries with weak democratic institutions, such as in parts of Africa and Latin America. In a study by (Sambu, 2011), on Water Reforms in Kenya: A historical Challenge to Ensure Universal Water Access and Meet The Millennium Development Goals, agrees that political interference is a great stabling block toward realization water reforms in Kenya.

Lack of Data and Resources: Many developing countries, especially those in Africa and Asia, faced challenges in obtaining reliable data for policy evaluation. Data gaps and insufficient resources for conducting thorough evaluations w frequently cited as barriers to effective policy assessment (Nash, et al 2009), (kawonga, 2012).

Institutional Capacity: The study found that the institutional capacity to conduct rigorous evaluations was often lacking in developing countries. This includes insufficient trained personnel, inadequate evaluation frameworks, and a lack of coordination between government agencies responsible for evaluation (Kombo, 2024).

Time Constraints: In many cases, evaluations were found to be conducted too late in the policy cycle, often after policies had already been implemented. This resulted in delayed feedback and limited opportunities for policy adjustment. The pressure to deliver quick results also led to a short-term focus in evaluations, rather than a comprehensive, long-term assessment (Nash, et al 2009).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study on "Assessing the Effectiveness of Policy Evaluation: Methods, Challenges, and Implications for Public Governance," the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of policy evaluation and improve public governance. Governments, particularly in developing countries, should invest in strengthening the institutional capacity for policy evaluation through; Training and capacity-building for government officials and evaluators in modern evaluation techniques and methodologies.; Establishing dedicated evaluation units within government ministries or agencies to oversee and coordinate evaluation efforts; Creating specialized evaluation bodies that can conduct independent assessments and provide objective feedback to policymakers

Improving Data Collection and Management Systems to overcome the challenges of data gaps and data quality. This can be done through; investing in robust data collection systems and ensure that data is consistently collected, stored, and analysed in a transparent manner. In addition, encouraging the use of technology and digital tools to streamline data collection, monitoring, and reporting processes, and finally, ensuring that data is disaggregated by gender, income, and other demographic factors to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of policy impacts.

Enhancing Political Will and Support for Evaluation. There needs to be a strong political will to support and act on evaluation findings. For this to be achieved, authors suggests that: Raising awareness among political leaders, encouraging political commitment to using evaluations as a tool for evidence-based decision-making rather than as a tool for political justification, and Engaging political leaders in the evaluation process to ensure that they understand its value and are committed to addressing the findings.

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Promoting Participatory Evaluation: To ensure that policy evaluations reflect the needs and concerns of all stakeholders, especially marginalized communities, governments should: adopt participatory evaluation methods that actively involve citizens, community organizations, and other stakeholders in the evaluation process, create mechanisms for feedback loops so that citizens can engage with the evaluation results and contribute to policy adjustments, and to foster a culture of public participation in policy-making and evaluation, ensuring that all voices, particularly those of vulnerable populations, are heard.

Governments should prioritize long-term evaluations that assess the sustainability and impact of policies over time. This can be realized by: moving away from short-term assessments and focusing on longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of policies, encouraging evaluations that assess the unintended consequences of policies, not just their intended outcomes, to provide a more comprehensive view of their effectiveness.

Given the complex nature of public policies, evaluation should draw on a variety of disciplines to ensure that all aspects of a policy assessed. This include: collaboration between disciplines such as economics, sociology, political science, public administration, and social work to design and implement more comprehensive evaluations, and Cross-sectorial evaluations that assess the interaction between different policy sectors, such as education, healthcare, and social welfare, to understand their combined impact on public governance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, for policy evaluation to have a meaningful impact on public governance, governments must invest in strengthening their evaluation frameworks, improve data collection and management systems, and foster political will to support evidence-based decision-making. By addressing the challenges identified in the study and implementing the recommended strategies, governments can enhance their policy evaluation processes and ultimately improve governance outcomes for their citizens.

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