

STAKEHOLDER ACCOUNTABILITY ON THE PERFORMANCE OF DEVOLUTION IN HOMA BAY COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: Devolution under Kenya's 2010 Constitution promised accountable governance, equitable resource sharing, and enhanced citizen participation. Despite these aspirations, Homa Bay County has persistently underperformed: successive Auditor-General reports flagged over KES 678 million in stalled projects (2018/2019), KES 84.69 million in unsupported expenditure (2020/2021), and 516 voided transactions worth KES 1.4 billion (2022/2023). This manuscript focuses on the fourth specific objective of a broader mixed-methods study: to evaluate the role of stakeholder accountability on the performance of devolution in Homa Bay County, Kenya. Using an explanatory sequential design, quantitative data were collected from 160 respondents across Homa Bay Town and Kabondo Kasipul sub-counties via structured questionnaires, and qualitative data from five key informant interviews (KIIs) with ward administrators, civil society representatives, and a county auditor. Multiple linear regression, Pearson correlations, and thematic analysis were employed. Stakeholder Accountability recorded the lowest composite mean among the four participation dimensions ($M = 3.014$), indicating the greatest perceived deficit. Yet it was the strongest bivariate correlate of devolution performance ($r = 0.665$, $p < 0.01$) and the only statistically significant individual predictor in the multiple regression model ($\beta = 0.398$, $\beta^* = 0.462$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 44.2% of the variance in performance on its own. Three accountability sub-items fell below the neutral midpoint: timely response to complaints ($M = 2.956$), regular reporting on resources ($M = 2.919$), and effective grievance mechanisms ($M = 2.969$). Key informant interviews corroborated these findings, linking weak accountability directly to project stalls, fund misappropriation, and citizen disengagement, while also documenting cases where active accountability through citizen litigation and CSO monitoring improved governance outcomes. The study concludes that accountability is the binding constraint on devolution performance in Homa Bay County the mechanism through which engagement, involvement, and management translate into tangible governance outcomes. Recommendations include strengthening ward-level grievance desks, instituting quarterly public reporting in accessible formats, scaling community scorecards beyond the health sector, and supporting citizen monitoring programmes.

Keywords: stakeholder accountability, devolution performance, Homa Bay County, social accountability theory, citizen participation, Kenya

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Devolution in Kenya was constitutionally designed to promote equitable development and improved service delivery by bringing governance closer to the people. The 2010 Constitution established 47 county governments (Article 176(1)), mandating enhanced stakeholder participation in planning, budgeting, and oversight (Articles 10, 174, and 201). Article 174(c) explicitly names citizen participation as an object of devolution, while Article 201(a) requires openness and accountability in public finance.

Despite this constitutional framework, Homa Bay County, one of Kenya's 47 counties located in the Nyanza region with a population of approximately 1,131,950 (KNBS, 2019) has consistently underperformed. Successive Auditor-General reports document serious governance failures: KES 678 million in stalled projects (2018/2019), KES 84.69 million in unsupported expenditure and KES 238.5 million in irregular manual payroll (2020/2021), and 516 voided transactions worth KES 1.4 billion alongside a stalled Assembly office block contracted at KES 348.9 million (2022/2023). In FY 2024/2025, the County Executive spent only 70% of its development budget while personnel costs consumed 49% of revenue, far above the statutory 35% ceiling. Citizen dissatisfaction with services stood at 45%.

Stakeholder accountability, the mechanisms of public reporting, feedback, grievance redress, and oversight through which county officials are held answerable for their decisions and use of public resources is constitutionally mandated but empirically weak. Only 35% of Homa Bay residents participate in county forums against a national average of 50%, and the county scored 10/100 on participation transparency (International Budget Partnership Kenya, 2024). This study evaluates the specific role of stakeholder accountability in these governance outcomes.

1.2 Research Objective

The specific objective addressed in this paper is:

To evaluate the role of stakeholder accountability on the performance of devolution in Homa Bay County, Kenya.

The corresponding research question is: What is the role of stakeholder accountability on the performance of devolution in Homa Bay County?

The null hypothesis tested is: H1: Stakeholder accountability does not significantly affect the performance of devolution in Homa Bay County.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it validates Social Accountability Theory (Fox, 2020) in the Kenyan devolution context by demonstrating empirically that accountability mechanisms are the primary pathway through which stakeholder participation influences governance outcomes. Practically, it identifies accountability as the binding constraint on devolution performance in Homa Bay County and offers actionable recommendations for county government officials, civil society organisations, and development partners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Social Accountability Theory

Social Accountability Theory, developed by Fox (2015, 2020) and Joshi (2017), provides the primary theoretical foundation for this manuscript. The theory focuses on the role stakeholders play in holding public officials and institutions to account for their decisions, actions, and service delivery. Unlike traditional accountability that relies on formal state bodies such as auditors and courts, social accountability emphasises active stakeholder participation in monitoring performance and demanding responsiveness.

Fox (2020) distinguishes between ‘tactical’ and ‘strategic’ approaches to social accountability. Tactical approaches involve bounded, localised interventions such as single-issue campaigns or one-off social audits. Strategic approaches coordinate multiple tactics across governance levels, building coalitions between civil society organisations, media, and reform-minded government actors. Strategic approaches are more likely to produce sustained governance improvements, as they address systemic barriers rather than isolated incidents.

The theory identifies four dimensions bearing on stakeholder accountability: (1) informed and organised stakeholders voicing needs and monitoring public resources; (2) diverse group involvement across the governance cycle; (3) systematic stakeholder management and engagement strategies; and (4) accountability mechanisms, community scorecards, social audits, public hearings, and grievance redress systems through which stakeholders can demand explanations and corrective action. Kenya’s constitutional framework directly reflects this theory, with Article 10 listing the participation of the people as a binding national value and the County Governments Act (2012) requiring participatory county planning and budgeting.

2.2 Empirical Review

The empirical evidence consistently links accountability mechanisms to improved governance outcomes. Fox (2020) argues that social accountability mechanisms community scorecards, public expenditure tracking, and social audits allow stakeholders to hold officials to account and improve governance. Gaventa and McGee (2013) reviewed evidence on accountability and transparency initiatives and concluded that they work best when citizen voice is matched by institutional responsiveness.

In Kenya, Danhouno et al. (2018) studied citizen scorecards in Nakuru County and found they made county officials noticeably more responsive to citizen needs. Civil society organisations using social audits similarly improved service delivery, demonstrating how structured accountability mechanisms provide citizens with routes to demand explanations and corrective action.

In Homa Bay County specifically, Gaventa (2023) found that engagement in budget forums was positively associated with greater accountability among county officials and, in turn, better services in health and education. However, the same study noted that accountability often breaks down at the follow-up stage when citizen feedback is not enforced. County records show that grievance redress systems remain largely ineffective, with little evidence that complaints lead to corrective action. Peixoto and Fox (2016) added that ICT-based feedback channels in Kenyan counties remain underused, limiting their potential for real-time accountability.

The literature consistently points to a gap between formal accountability structures and their functional implementation. Where accountability mechanisms are designed but not enforced, the benefits of stakeholder

participation fail to translate into governance outcomes (Fox, 2015). This ‘design-implementation gap’ is directly relevant to Homa Bay County’s experience.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study used a mixed-methods, explanatory sequential design. This approach first collected and analysed quantitative data, then used qualitative findings to explain and contextualise the quantitative results (Creswell, 2014). This design was appropriate for evaluating the role of stakeholder accountability in devolution performance, as quantitative regression analysis identified the statistical significance of accountability as a predictor, while qualitative key informant interviews explained the mechanisms, barriers, and contextual factors behind this relationship.

3.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in two purposively selected sub-counties of Homa Bay County: Homa Bay Town (population 139,207; 48.63% of target population) and Kabondo Kasipul (population 147,053; 51.37% of target population), with a combined target population of 286,260. These sub-counties were selected to capture variation in participation and devolution performance across administrative units. Three respondent groups were targeted: county government officials, civil society organisation (CSO) representatives, and residents.

3.3 Sampling and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across sub-counties and respondent categories. Cochran’s (1963) formula for finite populations determined the sample size of 171 respondents ($Z = 1.96$, $p = 0.5$, $e = 0.075$). Sample allocation was proportional to sub-county population share: 83 respondents from Homa Bay Town and 88 from Kabondo Kasipul.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The stakeholder accountability scale comprised five items measuring: clear feedback channels (SA1), timely response to complaints (SA2), regular reporting on resources (SA3), effective grievance mechanisms (SA4), and officials being held accountable (SA5). A pilot study with 15 respondents established instrument reliability, with the accountability scale achieving Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.915$ in the pilot and 0.884 in the main study.

Qualitative data were collected through five key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted between 31 March and 10 April 2026, lasting 50–115 minutes each, with two ward administrators, two CSO representatives, and one county government auditor. Interviews were guided by a semi-structured protocol aligned with each research objective.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) characterised accountability perceptions. Pearson product-moment correlations assessed bivariate relationships between accountability and devolution performance. Simple linear regression isolated the total effect of accountability on performance, and multiple linear regression (controlling for stakeholder engagement, involvement, and management) assessed its independent predictive power. Regression diagnostic tests

confirmed all classical OLS assumptions were satisfied (normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals; Durbin-Watson = 1.650; VIF for accountability = 2.771, well below the 10.0 threshold).

Qualitative data were analysed thematically using a deductive framework tied to the accountability research objective, with inductive sub-themes drawn from the interview transcripts. Quantitative and qualitative findings were triangulated to provide a comprehensive account of accountability’s role in devolution performance.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Response Rate and Demographic Profile

The study achieved a 93.6% response rate (160 valid questionnaires from a target of 171), well above the 70% threshold recommended for social science research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012). The sample was equally distributed across sub-counties (50% each), with a gender split of 56.2% male and 43.8% female. The dominant age bracket was 36–45 years (37.5%), and most respondents held tertiary (33.8%) or secondary (28.7%) education. Respondent composition comprised residents (88.8%), county officials (9.4%), and CSO representatives (1.9%).

A critical contextual finding was the participation deficit: 68.1% of respondents reported never or rarely participating in county governance processes. This low baseline participation rate underscores the importance of accountability mechanisms in making the participation that does occur meaningful for governance outcomes.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics: Stakeholder Accountability

Table 1: presents the frequency distribution of the five stakeholder accountability items

Item	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	SD
SA1: Clear feedback channels exist	4.4	25.6	31.2	36.2	2.5	3.069	0.946
SA2: Timely response to complaints	5.6	29.4	31.2	31.2	2.5	2.956	0.967
SA3: Regular reporting on resources	4.4	31.9	33.1	28.7	1.9	2.919	0.925
SA4: Grievance mechanisms effective	5.0	28.1	33.1	32.5	1.2	2.969	0.928
SA5: Officials held accountable	4.4	21.9	30.6	40.0	3.1	3.156	0.949
Composite						3.014	0.779

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Stakeholder Accountability Items (n = 160). Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.

Stakeholder Accountability recorded the lowest composite mean of the four independent variables (M = 3.014, SD = 0.779), barely above the midpoint. Three of five items fell below 3.0: regular reporting on resources (SA3, M = 2.919), timely response to complaints (SA2, M = 2.956), and effective grievance mechanisms (SA4, M = 2.969), indicating respondents lean toward disagreement on how well these accountability mechanisms

function. For SA3, 36.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed versus 30.6% who agreed—the most negative rating of any of the 25 questionnaire items. Only officials being held accountable (SA5, M = 3.156) and clear feedback channels (SA1, M = 3.069) remained above the neutral midpoint, and even then within the neutral zone.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 2: presents the Pearson product-moment correlation between Stakeholder Accountability and Devolution Performance

Variable	Stakeholder Accountability (X4)	Performance of Devolution (Y)
Stakeholder Accountability (X4)	1.000	0.665**
Performance of Devolution (Y)	0.665**	1.000

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients (** p < 0.01, two-tailed). Note: Full correlation matrix shows X4 also correlated with Engagement r=0.712, Involvement r=0.761, Management r=0.770.

Stakeholder Accountability had the strongest bivariate correlation with Devolution Performance of all four independent variables (r = 0.665, p < 0.01), representing a strong positive relationship. This means that counties where respondents perceived stronger accountability mechanisms also perceived significantly better devolution performance.

4.4 Regression Analysis

4.4.1 Simple Linear Regression

Simple linear regression isolated the total effect of Stakeholder Accountability on Devolution Performance without controlling for other variables. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression – Stakeholder Accountability predicting Devolution Performance

Statistic	Value
R	0.665
R ²	0.442
Adjusted R ²	0.438
β (unstandardised)	0.573
β* (standardised)	0.665
t	11.195
p-value	< 0.001

Stakeholder Accountability alone explains 44.2% of the variance in devolution performance ($R^2 = 0.442$), the highest individual R^2 of all four predictors. The unstandardised coefficient ($\beta = 0.573$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that each one-unit increase in perceived accountability corresponds to a 0.573-unit improvement in devolution performance.

4.4.2 Multiple Linear Regression

Multiple linear regression assessed the independent contribution of Stakeholder Accountability while controlling for Stakeholder Engagement (X1), Involvement (X2), and Management (X3). Tables 4, 5, and 6 present the model summary, ANOVA results, and regression coefficients.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate
0.683	0.466	0.452	0.497

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Source	Sum Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	33.323	4	8.331	33.806	< 0.001
Residual	38.194	155	0.246		
Total	71.517	159			

Table 6: Multiple Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	Beta (β^*)	t	Sig.	Decision
(Constant)	1.192	0.178	—	6.715	< 0.001	
Engagement (X1)	0.026	0.075	0.037	0.350	0.727	Not significant
Involvement (X2)	0.098	0.116	0.117	0.838	0.403	Not significant
Management (X3)	0.098	0.111	0.114	0.881	0.380	Not significant
Accountability (X4)	0.398	0.084	0.462	4.730	< 0.001	Significant***

Fitted equation: $Y = 1.192 + 0.026X_1 + 0.098X_2 + 0.098X_3 + 0.398X_4$

The overall model was statistically significant ($F(4, 155) = 33.806, p < 0.001$), explaining 46.6% of the variance in devolution performance. Crucially, Stakeholder Accountability (X_4) was the only statistically significant individual predictor ($\beta = 0.398, \beta^* = 0.462, t = 4.730, p < 0.001$). A one-unit increase in accountability corresponds to a 0.398-unit improvement in devolution performance when controlling for all other variables.

Stakeholder Engagement ($p = 0.727$), Involvement ($p = 0.403$), and Management ($p = 0.380$) were not significant individual predictors in the full model. This is partly attributable to multicollinearity among the variables (VIF range 2.771–5.636); their shared variance with accountability means their unique contributions cannot be independently distinguished. The null hypothesis H_{40} is rejected: stakeholder accountability significantly affects the performance of devolution in Homa Bay County.

4.4.3 Hypothesis Testing Summary

Table 7: Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Simple β	Simple p	Multiple β	Multiple p	Decision
H1: Accountability does not significantly affect Performance	0.573	< 0.001	0.398	< 0.001	Reject H1

4.5 Qualitative Findings: Key Informant Interviews

4.5.1 Accountability Mechanisms

Informants identified several formal accountability mechanisms, though their effectiveness was consistently questioned. The ward administrator (KII-002) described community scorecards but noted they are “used only in the health sector,” limiting their broader governance impact. Multiple reporting channels were identified, including the CIDP implementation report, County Budget and Implementing Report (CBIR) published on the county website, public barazas, and the Governor’s annual state of the county address. The county auditor (KII-004) estimated that existing accountability tools are “not fully” effective, at approximately 60% effectiveness. A ward administrator (KII-001) offered a more critical assessment, stating that “*politicians use their influence to thwart stakeholders that are critical of them.*”

4.5.2 Grievance Mechanisms

KII-002 described a structured grievance redress mechanism with a 24-hour response target, where “*complaints can be raised at the County headquarters, Sub-County offices, Ward offices, online or physically.*” However, this account was not universally shared. KII-001 was unaware of response times or resolution rates. KII-004 reported that “*response is slow and many complaints are not resolved,*” while KII-005 stated that “*many citizens do not know where to report issues, and responses take long.*” This gap between the formal design of grievance systems and their perceived functionality aligns precisely with the quantitative finding that

SA2 (timely response, M = 2.956) and SA4 (grievance mechanisms effective, M = 2.969) received the lowest accountability ratings.

4.5.3 Accountability’s Impact on Performance

Informants provided direct testimony linking accountability to performance outcomes. KII-002 stated that *“stakeholder accountability has positively affected service delivery in devolved units. By demanding accountability, county officials are more careful with public resources and efficiently direct funds towards intended development projects.”* Two residents were cited who *“continuously ensure accountability by suing the County Government of Homa Bay for gross breaches of the law”*, fostering positive governance outcomes through legal advocacy. Conversely, KII-004 provided an example where *“some projects stall due to misappropriation/misuse of funds by contractors eluding the PMCs”*, illustrating how weak accountability directly undermines performance.

When informants were asked about the single most important factor for translating participation into performance, all responses circled back to accountability and follow-through: project execution (KII-001), whether citizen views are used in decision-making (KII-004), and whether the government listens and acts on citizen views (KII-005).

4.5.4 Thematic Summary from KII

Table 8: Accountability Themes from Key Informant Interviews

Theme	KII-001	KII-002	KII-003	KII-004	KII-005
Grievance systems weak or inaccessible	✓			✓	✓
Documentation/tracking weak	✓			✓	✓
Accountability improves outcomes		✓		✓	
Corruption undermines devolution	✓	✓		✓	
Political interference in accountability	✓		✓		✓
Community scorecards limited to health		✓		✓	
Citizens don’t know where to report			✓		✓

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Accountability as the Binding Constraint

The central empirical contribution of this study is the paradox it reveals: stakeholder accountability recorded the lowest perceived level (M = 3.014) yet the highest predictive power for devolution performance ($\beta = 0.398$, $R^2 = 0.442$ in simple regression). This finding is both theoretically significant and practically consequential. It demonstrates that accountability is not merely one among several participation dimensions it is the binding

constraint. Where accountability is weak, the other forms of participation (engagement, involvement, management) remain necessary but insufficient conditions for improved governance outcomes.

This is consistent with Social Accountability Theory (Fox, 2020), which argues that governance improvements require both citizen voice and state responsiveness. The Homa Bay data suggests that while citizen voice (through engagement, involvement, and CSO activism) exists at moderate levels, state responsiveness as measured by accountability items SA2 (timely response, $M = 2.956$), SA3 (regular reporting, $M = 2.919$), and SA4 (grievance mechanisms, $M = 2.969$) is the binding constraint. Engagement creates awareness; involvement ensures diverse perspectives; management provides institutional processes; but accountability is what closes the loop by ensuring participatory inputs are acted upon.

5.2 The Design-Implementation Gap

A key qualitative finding was the stark divergence between formal accountability structures and their functional implementation. Ward administrators described elaborate systems formal grievance desks with 24-hour response targets, CIDP implementation reports, and CBIR publications. Yet CSO representatives and the county auditor described slow responses, unresolved complaints, and citizens who do not know where to report issues. This ‘design-implementation gap’ is directly reflected in the quantitative data: SA4 (grievance mechanisms effective) received the second-lowest mean rating ($M = 2.969$), with 33.1% neutral and 28.1% disagreeing.

This pattern aligns with Bryson et al.’s (2013) argument that stakeholder management contributes to performance only when supported by functioning feedback and accountability mechanisms. It also reflects Omolo’s (2015) finding that counties with systematic stakeholder management systems achieve greater fiscal transparency but only when accountability mechanisms are functioning, not merely designed.

5.3 Accountability and Participation Frequency

The dose-response relationship between participation frequency and devolution performance ($F(4, 155) = 6.581, p < 0.001$) provides additional evidence linking accountability to performance. Respondents who participated very often rated devolution performance significantly higher ($M = 4.050$) than those who never participated ($M = 2.900$). More frequent participation likely means greater exposure to accountability processes feedback mechanisms, public hearings, and project monitoring which creates a virtuous cycle where participation generates accountability, which in turn motivates further participation.

The sub-county analysis supports this interpretation: while participation scores were statistically identical in Homa Bay Town and Kabondo Kasipul (all $p > 0.05$), devolution performance was rated significantly higher in Kabondo Kasipul ($M = 3.260$ vs. $M = 2.975, p = 0.007$). This suggests that local governance effectiveness largely an accountability matter varies even where participation structures are identical.

5.4 Comparison with the Literature

The finding aligns strongly with Fox (2015, 2020) and Danhoundo et al. (2018), whose studies of social accountability mechanisms in sub-Saharan Africa demonstrated that accountability tools significantly improve government responsiveness and service delivery when functional. It corroborates Gaventa (2023), who reported a positive association between accountability in budget forums and improved services in Homa Bay County, while noting breakdown at the follow-up stage. The 44.2% variance explained by accountability alone

($R^2 = 0.442$) exceeds comparable studies: Khemani (2006) and Lambright (2011) similarly found accountability to be the decisive factor in converting decentralised resources into service outcomes across African contexts.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

The study concludes that stakeholder accountability is the single most important determinant of devolution performance in Homa Bay County. The central finding is a paradox: accountability has the lowest perceived level ($M = 3.014$) yet the highest predictive importance ($\beta = 0.398$, $R^2 = 0.442$), confirming that it is the binding constraint on devolution performance. Accountability is the mechanism through which engagement, involvement, and management are converted into governance outcomes. Without it, the other three dimensions remain necessary but insufficient conditions for improved devolution performance.

Three specific accountability sub-dimensions are most deficient and most consequential: regular public reporting on resource utilisation (SA3, $M = 2.919$), timely response to citizen complaints (SA2, $M = 2.956$), and effective grievance redress mechanisms (SA4, $M = 2.969$). These represent the specific interventions that would yield the greatest marginal improvement in devolution performance.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Strengthen Grievance Redress Mechanisms

The study found that grievance mechanisms are the weakest link in the accountability chain (SA4, $M = 2.969$). While a formal system with a 24-hour response target exists on paper, informants reported that responses are slow and many complaints remain unresolved. The county government should:

- i. Establish ward-level grievance desks staffed by designated officers with clear resolution mandates and timelines.
- ii. Publicize complaint channels widely using local radio (the most used information channel at 31.9% of respondents), community leaders, and barazas.
- iii. Publish quarterly complaint resolution reports, showing the number of complaints received, resolved, pending, and the average resolution time.
- iv. Set enforceable response-time standards with consequences for non-compliance.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should: (1) employ structural equation modelling (SEM) to test whether accountability mediates the effects of engagement, involvement, and management on performance; (2) conduct longitudinal studies tracking the same communities over multiple budget cycles to establish causal direction; (3) compare accountability-performance relationships across multiple Kenyan counties with different governance performance ratings; and (4) investigate the role of digital technology in enhancing accountability mechanisms and real-time citizen feedback.

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