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STRATEGIC COLLABORATION PRACTICES AND PERFORMANCE OF BUSIA COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Strategic collaboration exists when institutions or individuals embark on specific actions to realize mutual benefit. Strategic collaboration promotes collective intelligence by encouraging institutions to make informed decisions and adopt feasible problem-solving techniques. The general purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between strategic collaboration and the performance of county governments in Kenya using the case of the Busia County Government. Specifically, the study focused on strategic inter-county collaboration; and strategic public-private partnership. The research utilised a descriptive case study research design with a target population of 2,880 county government employees. The research adopted a stratified random sampling technique. The research utilised a sample size of 144 participants. A questionnaire was used to collect primary data while a document analysis guide was used for secondary data collection. Data was analysed using descriptive statistic tools such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Inferential statistics such as Pearson's correlation was used to test the existence of the relationship between dependent and independent variables while simple linear regression was used to test cause-effect relationships. From the study findings, it was revealed that strategic inter-collaboration and strategic public-private had a positive relationship with performance. The study concludes that strategic collaboration influences the performance of Busia County Government, Kenya. The study recommends constant consultation, open communication, shared decision making and consolidation of county responsibilities to improve strategic collaboration practices and build devolved units' capacity to achieve desired performance.

Keywords: *Strategic Collaboration, Inter-Collaboration, Public-Private Partnership, Performance*

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INTRODUCTION

Significant transformation takes place when organisations adopt and cultivate progressive cultures. Effective strategy execution requires consistency and commitment to ensure the goals are met and that all stakeholders understand the strategy concept (Van der Kolk & Schokker, 2016). The strategy concept was adopted from the military and integrated into business and social setup. The strategy was developed to break the gap between policy and tactics, ends and means (Porter, 2017). Strategic collaboration is an agreement between two or more independent parties to achieve a common goal (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020). Strategic collaboration promotes collective intelligence by combining diverse views to facilitate informed decisions making and adopt feasible problem-solving techniques (Bryson & George, 2020).

Organisation Performance evaluates how leaders utilise the organisation's resources efficiently and effectively to accomplish set goals and meet stakeholders' interests (Freeman et al., 2017). Harrison et al. (2019) conceptualize performance as the use of productive assets by the organisation to create utility compared to the value expectation of the stakeholders. The performance expectation within the organisation varies since each stakeholder has a unique set of interests that inform their individual and team contribution. Performance in a public institution is evaluated on service delivery quality, accessibility, affordability, and effectiveness (Mhina, 2015).

In Swiss, local authorities adopted diverse strategic collaboration programs to enhance the quality of service delivery. Collaboration in Swiss municipalities involves multi-stakeholder engagement beyond the inter-municipal level (Baschung & Heim, 2022). The strategic collaboration between different municipalities facilitates network governance. Strategic collaboration should facilitate vertical and horizontal networking. Vertical networking is composed of relating with other municipals, cantonal and federal levels. Local authorities such as municipalities use strategic collaboration to achieve their goals (Baschung & Heim, 2022).

In South Africa, local authorities have embraced strategic collaboration to foster local development. Kamara (2017) indicates that collaborative governance helps salvage incapacitated municipalities to be more resourceful in fostering localised territorial development. Strategic collaboration involves encouraging numerous entities to operate as a unit to consolidate resources and achieve quality performance. Kamara (2017) emphasizes that local economic development is based on three concepts: devolution, delegation, and decentralization. Effective strategic collaboration influences infrastructural development, small and medium enterprise growth, foreign direct investment growth, territorial competitiveness, and the strengthening of local institutions (Kamara, 2017).

Strategic collaboration integrates aspects of collaborative governance. Local authorities in Kenya should embrace collaborative governance by relating and engaging multiple stakeholders in the decision-making process to enhance quality service delivery. Sinitei et al. (2021) indicate collaborative governance between local authorities in Kenya and the community contributes to quality service improvement. Busia County is in the western part of Kenya and belongs to the former western region of Kenya. The Vision of Busia County is to be a "Transformative and progressive County for sustainable and equitable development" (Busia County, 2023a). Busia County Government (BCG) comprises twelve departments and 48 directorates (Busia County, 2023a). BCG has formed strategic alliances with other counties through the Lake Region Economic Bloc (LREB).

Study Objectives

The general objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between strategic collaboration practices and the performance of Busia County Government in Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were; to examine the relationship between strategic inter-collaboration and performance at the Busia County Government in Kenya; and to investigate the relationship between strategic public-private collaboration and performance at the Busia County Government in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem:

In an ideal situation, strong strategic collaboration improves performance outcomes in local authorities and devolved units. A strong strategic collaboration allows residents to receive quality services (Okwilagwe, 2020). It facilitates open communication among stakeholders, ensuring operational efficiency and sustainability despite economic volatilities and socio-political uncertainties (Yagub, 2014). Effective strategic collaboration provides greater leverage for the local authorities to serve their residents by ensuring increased accessibility to fundamental services (Boyle, 2016). Strategic collaboration facilitates community governance by relating with multiple corporate stakeholders.

Currently, Busia County has embraced inter-collaboration through its bi-relations with other counties and multi-collaboration with other counties through LREB and the Council of Governors (CoG). Despite the engagement, most county governments in Kenya have not achieved economic sustainability. The low strategic engagement has made it harder for the devolved units to consolidate and maximally utilise their resources. A report by World Bank indicates that only ten counties in Kenya spend 30% of their budget on a development project. Busia County is among 37 counties that spend less than 30% of its resources on development projects. Low inter-collaboration makes consolidating resources harder for county governments (Kimani, 2016).

Besides, strategic public-private collaboration is crucial in enhancing the quality of service delivery within a local authority and devolved units. County governments in Kenya have formed strategic collaborations with multi-lateral entities like the World Bank (Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2016). However, low strategic public-private collaboration has contributed to low service delivery efficiency and poverty within the counties. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics also indicates that Busia County is amongst the poorest counties in Kenya despite having enormous natural resources that can be utilised through strategic innovation to enhance economic sustainability (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The county also struggles to generate sufficient revenue to execute its constitutional mandates. The Office of Controller of Budget (2021) report indicated that Busia collected revenue worth Kes. 322.6 million against its target of Kes 1.122 billion, representing 29.8% in the financial year 2020/2021, as counties like Tana River, Turkana, and Uasin Gishu surpassed their revenue collection targets. The county can utilise strategic public-private collaboration to empower residents to access quality, affordable, timely services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The theoretical review offers a conceptual foundation necessary to conduct the research. The research was guided by stakeholder theory and transaction cost theory. The Stakeholder theory optimizes relationships with stakeholders, improving efficiency throughout strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes. The stakeholder theory advanced by Freeman in 1983 is based on assumptions that institutions can only be successful when delivering value to most stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2017). Freeman et al. (2020) consider stakeholder theory as a model of cooperating, recommending, and managing diverse individuals' interests to increase stakeholder values. There are numerous stakeholders in the public management and county government. This applies to Busia County, where the most significant groups are the constituents' residents of the county. The stakeholder theory urges that several interstate parties, such as customers, suppliers, political groups, humanitarian organisations, trade unions, and government agencies, impact the strategic success.

Coase (1937) developed the transaction cost theory to explain why institution expands their influence and interact with the external environment to achieve sustainability. The theory emphasizes that institutions try to minimize the costs of exchanging resources within and with the external environment. Institutions consistently weigh the opportunity costs of exchanging resources with external stakeholders and bureaucratic expenses on in-house performance. For instance, the BCG internally evaluates the costs of providing social services like water, agriculture, basic education, and healthcare. It uses limited resources or collaborates with external stakeholders like non-governmental organisations and community-based institutions. The theory explains why devolved units, like the BCG, would engage in public-private strategic collaboration. The theory can explain and justify the diverse collaboration efforts adopted by institutions to minimize cost inefficiency and governance choices and determine collaboration mode (Parker et al., 2020).

Conceptual Framework

This research combines inter-collaboration and strategic public-private collaboration to map a significant relationship between strategic collaboration and the county government's performance. The county government is required to utilise limited resources to achieve its strategic goals. Devolved units can form strategic alliances with other stakeholders to deliver quality services.

Strategic inter-collaboration

Institutions consolidate their resources and collaborate with other corporations to enhance their output quality (Suo & Yuan, 2013). Inter-collaboration is a strategic partnership between two institutions operating similar but not identical operations (Le Pennec & Raufflet, 2018). Inter-collaboration also refers to the relational process of engaging two or more legally independent entities to manage problem domains. The county government embraces strategic inter-collaboration to enhance the quality of service delivery and expand the economic opportunities offered to consumers. Most public institutions adopt inter-collaborations to serve more community participants in need, gain legitimacy, improve program outcomes, broaden networks, enhance funding opportunities, and inform policymakers of joint concerns (Le Pennec & Raufflet, 2018).

Inter-municipal collaboration strength differs between entities depending on shared interests, cultural ties and political association (Steiner & Kaiser, 2018). For instance, most counties in Western Kenya have shared cultural, ethnic, and historical relationships, which makes it easier for them to collaborate through the LREB organisation. The Central Kenya counties have the Central Kenya Economic Bloc (CEKEB), which includes counties like Kiambu, Laikipia, and Kirinyaga. The North Rift counties have the North Rift Economic Bloc (NOREB), which includes counties like Uasin Gishu, Turkana, and Bomet. The inter-collaboration allows the devolved units to rationalize and standardize their strategic plan to meet the county and region’s needs.

Strategic Public-Private Partnership

County governments collaborate with private entities to enhance service delivery quality and efficiency. County governments collaborate with private entities, including financial institutions, community-based organisations, local and international NGOs, welfare groups, and professional associations. Objective interaction between local authorities and private institutions fosters operational efficiency and the country's legitimacy in undertaking critical projects. The support from private entities increases the local authorities' financial capabilities through donations and service accessibility through volunteering (Tandon and Jaitli, 2007). Busia County has numerous community-based and non-governmental organisations that offer services to specific groups. For instance, the Association for The Physically Disabled of Kenya (APDK) focuses on physically disabled persons, while Innovations for Poverty Action for low-income households.

An effective strategic Public-Private collaboration enhances accountability and transparency among stakeholders. The county government leaders are encouraged to utilise their interpersonal skills by advocating for transparency and accountability, navigating change, and embracing diversity and inclusivity; analytic skills by performing an environmental assessment, conducting stakeholder analysis encouraging teams to develop shared knowledge; and boundary-spinning skills that integrates continuous monitoring, soliciting feedback, and encourage cross-agency coordination (Nyakundi, 2015). Strategic public-private collaboration enables institutions to develop elaborate visions, missions, and cultures by sharing their progress and aspirations with multiple stakeholders. Strategic public-private collaboration positively impacts an organisation's performance by enhancing the consolidation of external stakeholders' resources, innovation, and human capital capabilities (Nyakundi, 2015).

Performance

Organisational performance is transforming all input to achieve the desired output (Ahmed & Kisingu, 2019). Performance integrates aspects that foster efficiency and effectiveness to achieve the target. Organisations that achieve ideal performance create services or goods of high-value propositions that meet the needs and demands of their customers (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). However, performance measurement procedure differs depending on the context of the organisation and the aspects being investigated. Historically, the financial component has been the basis of determining the strategic performance of an institution. The financial aspects integrate increased profit, high turnover, and increased philanthropic contribution and donation.

The performance can be measured through nonfinancial means, such as customer satisfaction and technologies developed and utilised. Simiyu (2012) indicates that organisational performance in the public sector is divided into external or internal performance. Each dimension specifies the performance based on fairness, efficiency, and effectiveness values. In Kenya, the performance of the county government is evaluated by efficiency in communication, service accessibility, and payment process, and staff motivation in providing the services (Simiyu, 2012). Counties focus on essential services like basic education, healthcare, and agriculture.

Performance in the county can be evaluated on the number and types of innovations developed and utilised. Counties can innovate to improve the services they offer their residents and customers. Innovations utilised should focus on critical and essential services such as education, healthcare, agriculture, and revenue generation. County governments have strategic plans that outline the key performance areas. They utilise their existing resources and capabilities to achieve their goals and objectives. Issack and Muathe (2017) indicate that public institutions' performance can be achieved by accomplishing the set strategic goals, reducing stakeholder complaints, increasing revenue generation, and improving the institution's image.

Empirical Review of the Study Variable

Strategic Inter-Collaboration and Performance

A study conducted in Kenya revealed a significant impact on inter-organisational collaboration and performance (Gachengo, 2018). The study analysed data from 309 managers from 103 courier firms in Nairobi, Kenya, using descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative data and content analysis for qualitative data. Gachengo (2018) emphasized that relational-based, cost-based, and resource-based collaboration significantly impacts performance. Gachengo (2018) further recommends that institutions rethink configuring their resources through strategic collaboration to bolster performance.

A study in Switzerland revealed that strategic inter-collaboration helps local authorities realize their legal and constitutional responsibilities (Baschung & Heim, 2022). Using a descriptive research design, the study analysed data from 45 Swiss municipalities with a population above 20,000 (Baschung & Heim, 2022). Baschung and Heim (2022) found that 75% and 10% of the local authorities in Swiss prefer planned strategic horizontal and vertical collaboration. 11% of the local authorities embraced vertical and horizontal collaboration, while 34% did not have a definite collaboration approach. Decentralised governments in Kenya have embraced strategic inter-collaboration by forming regional blocs such as LREB to consolidate resources and achieve efficient service delivery.

Elston and Bel (2022) reveal that strategic Inter-collaboration between municipal authorities improves public service resilience in England, United Kingdom. Research conducted in 188 lower-tier councils and analysed using descriptive research design revealed that strategic inter-municipal collaboration improves public resilience by leveraging scarce resources, information, and capabilities across different organisations (Elston & Bel, 2022). Elston and Bel (2022) indicate that strategic collaboration partly limits service accuracy decline but offers no service speed protection.

Strategic Public-Private Sector and Performance

A study in Canada indicated that multi-stakeholder collaboration between local authorities and private entities significantly influences the achievement of sustainable communities and cities (Macdonald et al., 2017). The study used a descriptive research design to compare data from a survey conducted in 111 local governments globally. Strategic collaboration with private institutions increases the local authorities' capabilities to deliver quality services and realize sustainable goals (Macdonald et al., 2017).

Strategic public-private partnerships significantly influence the quality of project performance in a study conducted in Kenya (Mungai, 2021). The study analysed data from thirty-two Kenyan corporations and 102 participants using a descriptive research design with inferential findings integrating correlation and regression analysis (Mungai, 2021). This research revealed that a strategic PPP fosters project performance by improving financial contribution, risk mitigation, and accountability.

Wambalaba and Wambalaba (2020) revealed that strategic PPP influences performance in local authorities by establishing clear implementation and legal framework, encouraging implementation consistency, and fostering transparency in Kenya. The research used descriptive and exploratory research design to identify key stakeholders and crucial issues for content analysis. Wambalaba and Wambalaba (2020) used contents within the Nairobi city council to show that county governments' conflicting or unilateral decisions can compromise service delivery quality.

METHODOLOGY

The research utilised a descriptive case study design to establish the relationship between strategic collaboration and performance at the BCG. The study focused on three senior employees in each directorate. Senior county employees are responsible for strategy planning and implementation within their departments/ directorates. In this study, stratified random sampling was used to select 144 respondents from the 12 departments and 48 departments in BCG. Three respondents were taken from each of the forty-eight directorates. The research applies Curry's (1984) Sample Size Rule of thumb that 5% is ideal when the population size is between 1001 to 5,000 (Khan et al., 2019). A questionnaire with open and close-ended questions was used to collect primary data. A questionnaire is a written list of questions; respondents record the answers. Respondents read the questions in a questionnaire, interpret what is expected, and then write down the answers (Simonsohn et al., 2019). The secondary data was collected using a document analysis guide. The document analysis focused on the performance indicators: revenue generation, the number of innovations utilised, and the number of strategic partnerships formed and MoUs signed

FINDINGS

Response Rate

The study sought to engage 144 county government employees across the twelve departments. The questionnaires were self-administered to county officers across different departments. A total of 67 questionnaires were filled and returned representing 46.53%. A response rate of between 21% and 70% is acceptable for self-administered questionnaires (Pandey & Pandey, 2021).

Research Finding of Strategic inter-collaboration and Performance

Descriptive Statistics Findings of Strategic Inter-collaboration

This section presents findings on the Likert scale questions for the variables. The respondents were asked about the extent they agreed or disagreed with statements under each variable. The five-point Likert scale where 1-strongly agree, 2 agree, 3= neutral, 4-disagree and 5= strongly disagree. The data was analysed and findings were interpreted using means, percentages and standard deviation. The respondents' responses to the statement relating to strategic inter-collaboration on performance were analysed and results are presented in Table 1;

Table 1 Descriptive statistics findings: strategic inter-collaboration

S/N	Statements	N	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	SD
I	Busia County department has a strong working relationship with similar departments of different counties in Kenya.	67	41.8	58.2	2.86	1.45
Ii	The Busia County departments engage with similar county departments within the Lake region economic bloc to recommend strategic practices and strategic objectives.	67	74.6	25.4	2.14	1.10
Iii	Busia County departments collaborate with similar departments within the Council of Governors framework to determine strategic tasks.	67	79.1	20.9	2.14	0.96
Iv	There is mutual trust between top leaders and junior employees in BCG and other county governments	67	34.3	65.7	3.04	1.28
V	County senior officials can engage junior employees within similar departments in other counties to develop and execute strategic tasks.	67	61.2	38.8	2.33	1.15
Vi	The top county leaders in Busia engage with employees within the same department from other counties to develop strategic innovations.	67	53.7	46.3	2.60	1.11
Vii	Mutual trust exists between senior officers in BCG and junior employees in different departments in other counties in developing strategic objectives.	67	37.3	62.7	3.19	1.21
Viii	BCG uses the Lake Region Economic Bloc to foster cross-department collaboration, allowing executive leaders to engage junior officers of other counties in designing strategic objectives.	67	56.7	43.3	2.57	1.12
Ix	The Council of Governors has facilitated departmental collaboration between BCG and other counties in designing objectives.	67	38.8	61.2	3.14	1.31

The result in Table 1 indicates that the respondents did not have different opinions from the mean. The finding revealed that respondents were neutral that strategic inter-collaboration influences county government performance. The study revealed that Busia has a moderate working relationship with similar departments in other counties (Mean=2.86, SD= 1.45). 70% of the respondents revealed that BCG has a strong strategic collaboration with other counties within the LREB model to recommend strategic practices and strategic objectives (Mean=2.14 SD=1.10). Busia County departments collaborate with similar departments within the CoG framework to determine strategic tasks (Mean=2.14, SD=0.96). 79.1% of the respondents agreed that Busia County departments collaborate with similar departments within the Council of Governors framework to determine strategic tasks. This shows that BGC embraces strategic inter-collaboration with other countries to improve its performance. The study outcome corresponds with the finding by Diejomaoh and Eboh (2010), revealing that inter-collaboration between local authorities and counties increases service delivery capabilities. The devolved government system allows local institutions to provide essential services autonomously and interdependently to the residents. Strategic collaboration between the devolved units influences service delivery quality like combating poverty and ensuring economic development (Diejomaoh & Eboh, 2010).

Besides, 74.1% of respondents agreed that Busia County departments engage with similar county departments within the Lake Region Economic Bloc to recommend strategic practices and strategic objectives. The findings align with Diejomaoh and Eboh (2010) who emphasize that strategic collaboration among local authorities improves performance in providing basic services like waste management, transportation, healthcare provision, education, and a conducive business environment. Counties have resource limitations to undertake some projects; therefore, collaboration with other counties or local authorities enables them to consolidate resources and provide basic services to the residents. Devolved governments face challenges like a lack of fiscal sustainability, lower technical and managerial capabilities, corruption and lack of monitoring, political interference, and lack of a clear institutional framework that limits their strategic implementation, thus strategic collaboration with other units fosters their capacity (Diejomaoh & Eboh, 2010).

Qualitative Analysis Findings of Strategic inter-Collaboration

The respondents were requested to recommend any improvement between the Busia County Government and other county governments in Kenya. Table 2 shows suggested improvements in strategic inter-collaboration at Busia County government, Kenya. 79% of respondents recommended that the county government should harmonize communication and information structures while 73% recommend that BCG should regularly involve other counties through CoG and LREB platforms in developing and executing strategic plans

Table 2: Content Analysis: Strategic inter-collaboration and performance

S/N	Response Theme	Frequency	%
1	Regular consultation with other counties	49	73.1
2	Collaborative training and development programs	38	56.7

Correlation Analysis Findings of Strategic inter-Collaboration

Table 3 shows a moderate relationship between strategic inter-collaboration and performance (r=0.550, p=0.000). This aligns with the finding by Rubado (2019) that strategic collaboration between different devolved units increases their capabilities to deliver quality services and achieve accelerated socio-economic development. Coordination between devolved units increases their capabilities to solve local and regional problems. Objective interaction within a structured framework increases access to financial resources and information and develops progressive strategic policies and practices (Rubado, 2019).

Table 3: Correlation analysis findings: Strategic inter-collaboration and performance

		Strategic Inter-Collaboration	Organisational Performance
Strategic Inter-Collaboration	Pearson correlation	1.000	0.550
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	67	67
Organisational Performance	Pearson correlation	0.550	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	67	67

Linear Regression Analysis Findings of Strategic Intra-collaboration

A simple regression analysis was performed between strategic inter-collaboration and performance. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Linear regression: strategic inter-collaboration and performance

Model Summary (performance)

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.550	.30	.29	.08

ANOVA (l Performance)

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	.20	1	.20	28.12	0.000
Residual	.46	65	.01		
Total	.66	66			

Coefficient (Performance)

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig.
	B	Standard Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.93	.03	.00	33.74	.000
Strategic intra-collaboration	.05	.01	.55	5.30	.000

The research findings in Table 4 indicated that the R^2 value was 0.30, implying that 30% of counties' performance can be attributed to changes in strategic inter-collaboration. The remaining 70% of performance variation is attributed to other aspects than changes in strategic inter-collaboration. The finding shows that strategic inter-collaboration and performance are positively and strongly related with a correlation coefficient (R) value of 0.550. The finding concurs with Elston and Bel (2022) that strategic inter-collaboration fosters resilience, making the devolved units more prepared to confront environmental complexities to realize their strategic goals.

The ANOVA findings indicate that the p-value was 0.000, which is less than 0.05, showing that the model was significant. The findings also show that the F-calculated value of 28.12 is greater than the F critical value ($F_{1,65}$=3.989), demonstrating that the model is reliable and can predict the performance of counties in Kenya. The finding revealed that t-statistics 5.30 has a p-value=0.000, higher than the selected 0.05 significance level. This shows that strategic inter-collaboration has a significant influence on counties' performance. The Coefficient table indicates that $Y=0.93+0.05X_1$. This implies that the performance value is 0.93 if inter-collaboration is zero. A unit increase in strategic inter-collaboration results in a 0.5 increase in counties' performance.

The finding concurs with Puntillo (2017) that inter-municipal collaboration enables devolved units to effectively manage volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments. Counties advance strategic inter-collaboration by embracing the shared governance principle to allow activities such as shared revenue departments to combine capabilities and achieve higher efficiencies (uncertainties (Puntillo, 2017).

Research Findings of Strategic public-private collaboration and Performance

Descriptive Statistics Finding of Strategic Public-Private Collaboration

Respondents' responses to the statement relating to strategic public-private collaboration on performance were analysed and results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Strategic public-private collaboration

S/N	Statements	N	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	SD
I	BCG has a strong relationship with NGOs within the county in implementing strategic activities	67	85.1	24.9	1.86	0.79
Ii	The county government involves NGOs in the strategic decision-making process.	67	65.7	34.3	2.24	1.14
Iii	The county government has initiated numerous strategic programmes by collaborating with NGOs.	67	62.7	37.3	2.00	1.10
Iv	The county government has a strong relationship with private businesses in developing strategic activities	67	52.2	47.8	2.71	1.27
V	The county government engages private businesses in initiating and developing agile community-based programs.	67	53.7	46.3	2.76	1.18
Vi	County government create forums that allow private business stakeholders to recommend strategic activities.	67	59.7	40.3	2.57	1.08
Vii	The county government has a strong relationship with civil society in executing strategic tasks.	67	61.2	38.8	2.29	0.72
Viii	The county government engages civil society in strategic decision-making.	67	46.3	53.7	2.62	1.20
Ix	The county government engages civil society in developing and executing strategic community-based activities.	67	62.7	37.3	2.52	0.87

The respondents agreed that strategic collaboration between BCG and private corporations like non-governmental organisations, civil societies, and private institutions influenced performance. The respondents agreed that: 85.1% of respondents agreed that BCG has a strong relationship with NGOs within the county in implementing strategic activities (Mean=1.86, SD=0.79); while 65.7% indicated that the county government involves NGOs in the strategic decision-making process (Mean=2.24, SD=1.14). The findings complement observations by MacDonald et al. (2017), indicating that strategic collaboration between devolved units and private entities allows local institutions to consolidate resources, identify populace needs, and identify ideal ways of providing high-quality and sustainable services. Local authorities must partner with private, community-based, non-governmental organisations to deliver high-quality services (MacDonald et al., 2017). The strategic partnership between decentralised governments and community-based organisations increases community participation in strategic decision-making (Dongier, 2020). BCG creates forums that allow grassroots organisations to represent residents' concerns in strategy development and decision-making to enhance collective ownership and improve the implementation process.

However, 46.3% of respondents indicated that county government engaged civil society in strategic decision-making, while 52.2%agreed that BCG had a strong relationship with private businesses in developing strategic activities. The findings show low or moderate engagement with private businesses and civil society in strategy planning and implementation. The finding aligns with Kekez et al. (2020) that strategic collaboration between the devolved governments and other private institutions facilitates consensus-oriented decision-making that leads to the injection of citizens' priorities in strategic plans and implementation. Strategic collaboration allows multi-stakeholder engagement, leading to quality decision outcome that incorporates multiple views.

Qualitative Analysis Findings of Strategic public-private collaboration

The respondents were requested to recommend any improvement between the Busia County Government and other stakeholders to facilitate strategic public-private collaboration. Table 6 shows suggested improvements in strategic public-private collaboration at Busia County government, Kenya. 65% of respondents recommended that BCG should create forums to promote the business community, NGO and other stakeholders' involvement during strategic planning and implementation.

Table 6: Content analysis: strategic public-private collaboration and performance

S/N	Response Theme	Frequency	%
1	Encourage collective decision-making	44	65.7
2	Organise collaborative programs	17	25.4

Correlation Analysis Findings of Strategic public-private collaboration

Table 7 shows a moderate correlation between strategic public-private collaboration and performance (r=0.473, p=0.000). The findings align with Dongier et al. (2020) that strategic public-private partnerships collaboration enables the institutions to develop implementation structures and outcomes that ensure effective and quality service delivery. The increased devolved unit authority and the rising reliance on the private sector and civil society have bolstered the devolved government's strategy implementation and service delivery efficiency (Dongier et al., 2020).

Table 7: Correlation Analysis: strategic public-private collaboration and performance

		Strategic Public-Private Partnership	Organisational Performance
Strategic Public-Private Partnership	Pearson correlation	1.000	0.473
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	67	67
Organisational Performance	Pearson correlation	0.473	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	67	67

Regression Analysis Findings of Strategic public-private collaboration

The third study's objective was to examine the influence of strategic public-private collaboration on the performance of counties in Kenya. The objective was answered by regressing strategic public-private collaboration and performance. The findings are presented in Table 8;

Table 8: Linear regression: strategic public-private collaboration and performance

Model Summary (performance)

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.47	.22	.21	.09

ANOVA (Performance)

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	.15	1	.15	18.74	0.000
Residual	.51	65	.01		
Total	.66	66			

Coefficient (Performance)

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig.
	B	Standard Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.95	.03	.00	32.35	.000
Strategic intra-collaboration	.05	.01	.47	4.33	.000

The research finding in Table 8 indicated that the R2 value was 0.22 implying that 22% of counties' performance can be attributed to changes in strategic public-private collaboration. The remaining 78% of performance variation is attributed to other aspects than changes in strategic public-private collaboration. The finding showed that strategic public-private collaboration and performance are positively and moderately related with a correlation coefficient (R) value of 0.47. The finding concurs with Tandon and Jaitli (2007) that strategic public-private collaboration strengthens the devolved government's capabilities to deliver its mandates by prioritizing the needs of poor and marginalised groups.

The ANOVA findings indicate that the p-value was 0.000, which is less than 0.05, showing that the model was significant. The findings also show that the F-calculated value of 18.74 is greater than the F-critical value (F1,65=3.989), demonstrating that the model is reliable and can predict the performance of counties in Kenya. The finding revealed that t-statistics 4.33 has a p-value=0.000, which is higher than the selected 0.05 significance level. This shows that strategic public-private collaboration has a significant influence on counties' performance. The Coefficient table indicates that $Y=0.95+0.05X_2$. This implies that the performance value is 0.95 if strategic public-private collaboration is zero. A unit increase in strategic public-private collaboration results in a 0.5 increase in performance. Thus, the findings conclude that strategic public-private collaboration has a significant influence on the performance of the Busia County Government. The finding concurs with Yagub (2014) that strategic public and private collaboration improves devolved units' performance by improving their capabilities to deliver essential services like education, healthcare, and sanitation.

Performance

In Table 8 inter-collaboration and strategic public-private collaboration tied at 93.5%. Over 90% of the respondents indicated strategic collaboration influenced organisational performance in terms of revenue generation, innovations developed and utilised and level of customer satisfaction. This aligns with Elston and Bel (2022) that Strategic collaboration between devolved units improves organisational performance by enhancing institutions' capability to predict risks and overt failures.

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics of Performance

	Statement	Yes Number (%)	No Number (%)
1	Strategic inter-collaboration influences revenue generation within the county.	65 (97.0%)	2 (3.0%)
2	Strategic inter-collaboration influences innovations utilised within the county.	63 (94.0%)	4(6.0%)
3	Strategic inter-collaboration influences customer satisfaction within the county	60 (89.5%)	7 (10.5%)
4	Strategic public-private collaboration influences revenue generation within the county	62 (92.5%)	5 (7.5%)
5	Strategic public-private collaboration influences the number of innovations utilised within the county	62 (92.5%)	5 (7.5%)
6	Strategic public-private collaboration influences customers' satisfaction within the county	64 (95.5%)	(4.5%)

Revenue Generation

Busia County experiences a fluctuating revenue collection, affecting its service delivery and strategic plan implementation. Between the financial year 2016/2017 and FY 2020/21, the county reported revenue between Kes 176.29 million to Kes 322.56 million as shown in Figure 1 below (Office of Controller of Budget, 2022).

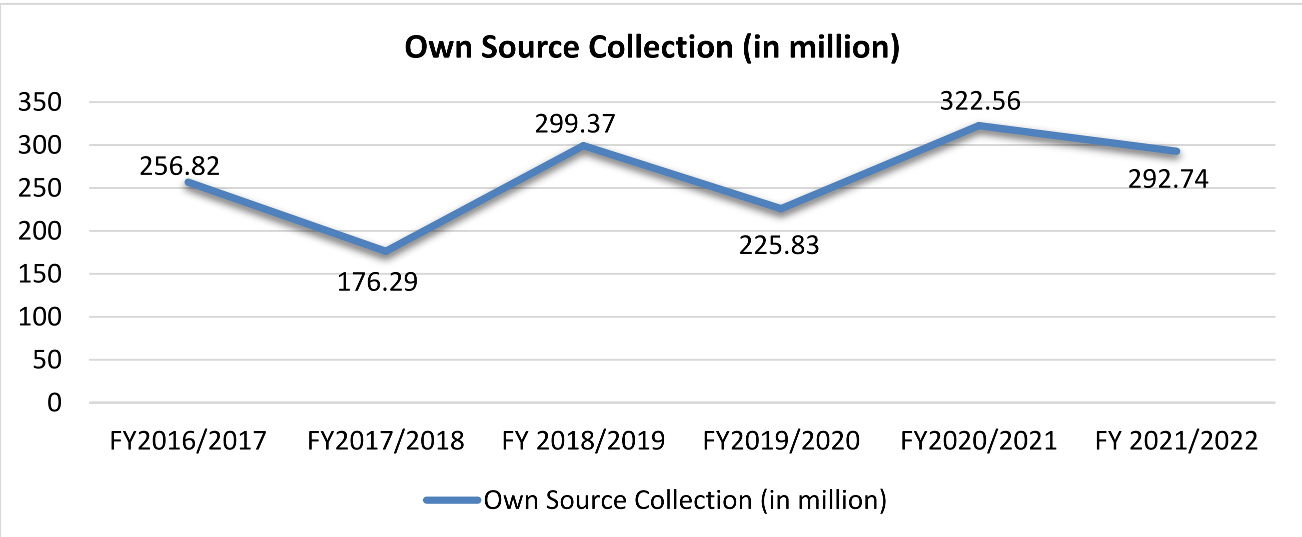

Figure 1: Findings of Busia County revenue collection

Source (Office of Controller of Budget, 2022)

Innovation Developed and Utilized

Busia County has also partnered with several organisations and institutions to develop and utilise technology to achieve their strategic activities (Table 10). BCG collaborated with the National Treasury in the 2018/2019 financial year to adopt an e-procurement system to streamline procurement processes (Busia County, 2023b). Some technologies developed and utilised by the BCG between FY 2019/2020 include Child Protection Management systems (CPMS), Child Protection Information Management systems (CPIMS), Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS), Human Resource Management Information Systems (HRIMS) (Busia County, 2020). Innovations developed and utilised between FY 2020/2021 include Electronic Revenue Management Information Systems (ERMIS), and Global Information System (GIS) (Busia County, 2021). In FY 2021/2022, Busia County developed and utilised innovations like Digital County Management Rental House Systems (DCMRHS), and Multi-Media Digital Congress Systems. Innovations developed and utilised in FY 2023/2024 include the Electronic County Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (eCIMES).

Table 10: Innovations developed and utilised by Busia County Government

FY 2019/2020	FY 2020/2021	FY 2021/2022	FY 2022/2023
e-procurement system	ERMIS	DCMRHS	eCIMES
CPMS	Sinology back-up	eCHIS	
CPIMS	IP Surveillance		
		e-Governance system	
	GIS		
	EMR		
IPPD			
IFMIS			
ERP			

MoU Signed

BCG recognises the need for public-private partnerships to reduce over-reliance on limited equitable share (Busia County, 2022). County government forms strategic alliances with several NGOs and multilateral institutions, especially in healthcare, education and agricultural sectors. BCG's 2018-2022 CIPD targeted signing at least twenty-nine MoUs with international civil society organisations (Busia County, 2022). The county has formed strategic partnerships with national government agencies and local civil societies. FY 2021/2021 includes Strathmore University, Safaricom Kenya, Nutrition International, Red Cross and KPSP (Busia County 2022). Strategic Partnerships and MoUs signed between FY 2022/2023 include KCSAP, the Agricultural Development Society, and the Agricultural Sector Support Program (ASDSP).

Multivariate Analysis

Multivariate Correlation Analysis

Table 11: Correlation Analysis: Strategic collaboration and performance

		X_1	X_2	Y
X_1	Pearson correlation	1.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	67		
X_2	Pearson correlation	0.971	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	67	67	
Y	Pearson correlation	0.550	0.473	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	67	67	67

Significance level at 0.05

X_1= Strategic inter collaboration, X_2= strategic public private collaboration and Y=Performance

Table 11 shows a multivariate correlation analysis between strategic collaboration and performance. The finding revealed that the relationship between the dependent and independent variables was significant (p-value<0.05). The findings revealed a strong relationship between dependent variables; strategic inter-collaboration and strategic public-private partnership (r=0.971, p=0.000). The finding indicated that dependent variables have a moderate relationship with the independent variables, implying multilinearity between variables. The finding revealed that inter-collaboration had a moderate positive correlation with counties' performance (p=0.550, r=0.000). Strategic public-private collaboration has a moderate and positive relationship with counties' performance (0.473, r=0.000). The findings agree with Elston and Bel (2021) that strategic collaboration is necessary for performance as it allows the local authorities to converge the interests of different stakeholders and embrace shared governance principles to accomplish mutual objectives. Besides, Kekez et al. (2018) indicate that most contemporary devolved units embrace strategic collaboration to improve their service delivery efficiency and access to quality services.

Multivariate Regression Analysis

The multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of strategic collaboration on the performance of Busia County Government, Kenya. The model $Y = \alpha + \beta 1X1 + \beta 2X2 + \varepsilon$ was adopted. The findings were as represented in Table 12;

Table 12: Multivariate Regression: strategic collaboration and performance

Model Summary (Performance)

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.66	.43	.39	.08

ANOVA (Performance)

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	.29	2	.07	11.72	0.000
Residual	.38	64	.01		
Total	.66	66			

Coefficient (Performance)

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sig.
	B	Standard Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.92	.03	.00	33.86	.000
X_1	.21	.05	2.20	4.09	.000
X_2	.17	.07	1.57	2.55	.013

The finding presented in Table 12 on the model summary indicated value of R2 is 0.43, implying that 43% of the variations in counties' performance can be attributed to changes in strategic collaboration. The remaining 57% of performance variations can be attributed to other factors that were not captured in the model. The correlation coefficient revealed a strong and positive relationship between the dependent and independent variables as r=0.66

The ANOVA table reveals that the model was significant as the p-value=0.000, which is less than 0.05. This shows that the model was statistically significant in establishing the influence of strategic inter-collaboration and strategic public-private collaboration on the performance of counties in Kenya. Besides, the F-Calculated was greater than the f-critical (F4,62=2.520), showing that strategic collaboration can predict the performance of counties in Kenya.

The finding from the coefficient table indicates the following regression model;

$Y= 0.92+0.21X_1+0.17X_2+0.08\ \varepsilon$

The model above reveals that by holding dependent variables to a constant zero the performance of counties in Kenya will be at a constant value of 0.92. The multivariate analysis revealed that strategic inter-collaboration has a significant influence on counties' performance (β=0.21, p-value=0.000). The findings reveal a positive influence of strategic inter-collaboration and organisational performance. Improvement in strategic inter-collaboration will bolster counties' performance. This concurs with Elston and Bel (2022) that strategic inter-collaboration facilitates resource consolidation and task sharing, improving operational efficiency.

The finding reveals that strategic public-private collaboration has a significant influence on the performance of counties in Kenya (β =0.17, p-value=0.013). The findings show that strategic public-private collaboration positively influences counties' performance. An improvement in strategic public-private collaboration leads to better performance in counties. The finding concurs with Antonovych and Anatoliyvna (2021) that strategic collaboration between public and private institutions utilises bilateral consultation, informative advice, cooperation mechanisms, financial practices, and responsibility delegation that improves performance.

CONCLUSION

The general objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between strategic collaboration practices and the performance of Busia County Government, Kenya. The conclusion based on the literature review and study findings is that there is a significant relationship between strategic inter-collaboration strategic public and private collaboration, and performance of Busia County Government. The study revealed that strategic inter-collaboration had a statistically significant influence on the performance of counties in Kenya. The strategic inter-collaboration improved performance by enabling counties to mobilize and consolidate resources, improve capacity building, and develop quality innovations that foster efficiency and service quality. Furthermore, the study findings indicated that strategic public-private collaboration influences the performance of the Busia County Government. Strategic public-private collaboration positively influences performance through objectively engaging business corporations, civil service, and non-governmental organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

County leadership should ensure regular consultation between departments to improve performance. Effective consultation and coordination require an open communication framework that facilitates constant information sharing across the organisational levels. A mutual relationship and respect among employees and stakeholders create synergy and rapport, improving the capacity to deliver and achieve desired outcomes. The study also recommends that the county government should invest in workforce capacity building to ensure all employees improve the quality of strategic collaboration at different levels. Capacity building improves employees' competencies to deal with critical external stakeholders like non-governmental and multi-lateral organisations. Counties should invest in regional blocs to improve their strategic capacity to deliver quality services to the population. The LREB and CoG framework should empower counties to develop more elaborate policies that guide their strategic operations and goals. Strategic vertical collaboration allows interaction between two devolved units to realize mutual goals (Rubado, 2019).

Busia County government should embrace forming a strategic collaboration with non-market and non-state actors to create a network mode of governance. Strategic public-private collaboration enables public organisations to access resources from different stakeholders, thereby facilitating service delivery quality. Strategic collaboration plans can take the form of alliances and business clusters. The purpose of strategic public-private collaboration is to reduce service duplication, facilitate innovation, encourage cost-saving, foster local participation and networking, and enhance skill development.

Areas for Further Research

The general objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between strategic collaboration practices and the performance of county governments in Kenya, In Busia County. The dimensions included strategic intra-collaboration, inter-collaboration, public-private collaboration, strategic county, and national collaboration. The findings revealed that all dimensions had a positive relationship with performance. There is a need for further research to compare the magnitude of the relationship in other counties in Kenya, humanitarian non-governmental organisations, and other public institutions. Besides, further research can be conducted to evaluate the relationship between strategic collaboration and performance in other dimensions like engaging multi-lateral institutions.

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