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STRATEGIC PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES AT THE KISII COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN KENYA

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to ascertain strategic planning and implementation practices at the Kisii county government in Kenya. The researcher collected qualitative data from the County secretary, Deputy Speaker, County Development Officer (CDO) and county executives. The total number of targeted respondents was 10 and the researcher managed to interview 7 of the respondents. The study was a case study of Kisii County in Kenya. The data was collected through face to face interviews with the respondents. It was revealed that Kisii County has a number of challenges that can be solved through proper strategic planning. The County has a well stated vision and mission that focus on the country's vision 2030. Stakeholders such as the electorate, the county executive, professional and civic leaders are involved in the strategic planning and implementation process. It is also clear that financial and human resources are the main resources that are required in the implementation of the strategic plan. The main challenge in strategic planning and implementation is financial constraints.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Implementation Practices, Kisii County, Kenya's vision 2030

INTRODUCTION

The development of the field of strategic management within the last two decades has had organizations lend themselves to external environment. The environment is highly dynamic and continually presents opportunities and challenges. To ensure survival and success, firms have to develop capabilities to manage threats and exploit emerging opportunities promptly. This requires adoption of strategic planning practices that constantly match capabilities and environmental requirements (Pearce and Robinson, 2007). One of the challenges presented by the dynamic environment is increased competition. The dynamics in the environment destabilizes most organizations that do not have formal strategic plans. Strategic planning response is a set of decision and actions that result in the formulation and implementation of plans designed to achieve firm's objectives (Pearce & Robinson, 2007).

Strategic planning is a forward-looking exercise and all managers should be involved with it. If strategic plan is available and well implemented, an organization will have little or no challenge in managing external changes. For organizations to survive, it should be able to operate successfully with environmental forces that are unstable and uncontrollable and which can greatly affect decision making process. Organizations adapt to these environmental forces as they plan and carry out strategic activities. It is through strategic planning that an organization can predict changes in the environment and act pro-actively. (Adeleke et al, 2008). However, it has been observed that most organizations are more concerned with the formulation of strategic plan and not how to implement them (Douglas, 2003). He concluded that "plan without effective and measurable implementation is no plan at all." No matter how super a plan is, it has to be well implemented to achieve the desired result (Lynch, 1997). David (2009) believes that the usage of strategic plan is very important to organization's ability to achieve and maintain competitive advantage over other organizations.

Spotting problems early as a result of close monitoring of the environment is core to dynamic strategic planning. Effective implementation of strategy is essential to its success (McGuinness and Morgan, 2005; David, 2009). However, there is evidence in the strategy literature about it being neglected and ill-conceived (Kennedy et al., 2003). In particular, Noble and Mokwa, (1999) believe that the nature of implementation and why it succeeds or not have not been well understood. For McGuinnes and Morgan (2005), in this timeless framework, strategic planning's main themes are strategy formulation and implementation, which are treated separately and sequentially. They further state this traditional, linear approach emphasizes the design of organizational structures and systems; that implementation is an administrative issue and follows after formulation as day follows night.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is defined as the process of diagnosing an organization’s external and internal environments, deciding on a vision and mission, developing overall goals, creating and selecting general strategies to be pursued, and allocating resources to achieve the organization’s goals (Raps, 2005). The objective of strategic planning is to align an organization’s activities with its environment, thereby providing for its continuing survival and effectiveness. It requires an organization to monitor its internal and external environments constantly for changes that may require modifying existing strategic and tactical plans or developing different ones altogether.

Central to strategic planning is the determination of long-term goals and objectives of an organization serving as a framework within which choices are made concerning the nature and direction of the organization (David, 2009). This framework helps in the allocation of resources in order to enhance financial and strategic performance (Dincer et al, 2006). By “nature “ and “direction” implies that decisions are of fundamental importance to the organization as opposed to less important, operational decisions. Strategic planning also places emphasis on resource allocation and plans throughout the entire organization (Dincer et al, 2006). From this perspective, strategy is considered as a deliberate planning process, initiated by top management, based on an elaborate industry analysis and aimed at designing a cohesive grand strategy for the organization (Dincer, et. al., 2006). Strategic planning further ensures that the organization has appropriate structures, processes and culture or mindset, to carry through a programme of change (Raps, 2005).

Strategic planning has also been described as a formal managerial process. Dincer, et al (2006) indicated that it can be broadly defined as the process of determining the mission, major objectives, strategies, and policies that govern the acquisition and allocation of resources to achieve organizational aims. To Johnson and Scholes (1999), strategic planning is a systematic analysis and evaluation of procedures to formulate strategy as well as the process of implementing that strategy. Also Strategic planning can be considered from a content or process point of view (Hartman, 2004). The content relates to the distinct elements of the strategic plan which differ for every organization and the process relates to the mechanisms for the development of the strategic plan and its subsequent deployment. Effective strategic planning clearly requires defined achievable goals, systematic integration of a number of sequential activities, and above all commitment to implement the plan (David, 2009). There is no doubt that a well-conceived plan can be an effective catalyst for managing change and enhancing decision-making processes in organizations.

Strategy Implementation

Strategy implementation is defined as a series of interventions concerning organizational structures, key personnel actions and control systems designed to control performance to desired ends (Hrebbinak, 2005). Nobble (1999) views strategy implementation as a process that turns plans into action assignments and ensures that such assignments are executed in a manner that accomplishes the plans stated objectives. Both Douglas (2003) and Lynch (1997) treat strategy implementation as synonymous with execution of the strategic plan .this view of strategy implementation is limited as it falls to acknowledge the emergent nature of the many of the processes involved in the implementation of the strategy.

According to Nobble (1991) and Douglas (2003) accentuate the importance of allocating resources and operational issues that combine several of the perspectives with more of a focus on the process involved. Noble (1999) viewed strategy implementation as the communication, interpretation, adoption and enactment of strategic plans. David (2009) also stated that strategy implementation is often called the action stage of strategic management process, as it requires mobilizing of managers and employees on all levels of the organization to convert the formulated strategy into action and results.

Otsieka (2009) stated that strategies are not valuable if they are developed and not implemented. Crafting and executing strategy is the heart and soul of managing business enterprise (Thompson et al, 2008). Kaplon and Norton (2008) assert that once strategies have been developed, they need to be implemented otherwise excellent strategies would continue to be of no good.

Strategic Planning and Implementation

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Cespedes and Piercy (1996) have referred to the formulation-implementation dichotomy as the heart of the traditional approach stating that the many difficulties that arise in the practice of implementation can be attributed to it. To resolve this problem a different mix of skills and abilities are needed (McGuinnes and Morgan, 2005) and to this end they propose three themes. These are a process perspective on implementing strategy, an emergence view and co-aligning the organization with its environment. A process perspective of implementing strategy (Piercy, 1998; Noble, 1999) widens the traditional focus on organizational structure and control systems by also including behavioral and interpersonal process elements (McGuinnes and Morgan, 2005). This they said, would introduce psychological issues such as individual motivation and commitment; and issues relating to social and political processes such as organizational culture, leadership, and learning which requires consideration as a result of their complex interrelationships with organizational structure and control systems.

An emergence view of strategy deliberately puts formulation and implementation together (McGuinnes and Morgan, 2005). They are viewed from this perspective as interactive and reciprocal processes, intertwined in a higher level process of strategy emergence, adaptation and improvisation (Pearce and Robinson, 2007). The third theme that McGuinnes and Morgan (2005) propose towards solving the formulation-implementation problem is co-alignment of the organization with its environment as a process indicative of strategic intent; noting that it involves the purposeful, adaptive coordination of organizational goals and actions over time. This is an essential part of the dynamic concept of strategy. These themes, they argue, provide a coherent basis for formulating and implementing strategy.

Structure of the Kenyan Government

Kenya's central government is structured through the constitution with administrative and policy making powers being distributed to its three arms namely Executive**,** Legislature and Judiciary. However, the current structuring is being replaced by a revamped new governance system following the recent adoption of the new constitution. Executive being by far one of the most crucial arms, it consists of the following primary members: President, Deputy President, Cabinet Secretaries, Attorney General and Director of public prosecutions. Headed by the president of the republic, the executive is guided by an underlying framework of laws. The laws require the president to appoint between 14 and 22 cabinet secretaries reflecting ethnic and regional diversity.

According to the new constitution (2010), the Legislature is held responsible for advocating for the people's interest in law making. In addition to that, it is vested in two houses - the national assembly and the senate. The specific roles of the national assembly are: to represent their constituents and all the special interests within their respective constituencies; enactment of legislation for both county and national government; approval or disapproval of revenue allocation presented by the senate; check the conduct of the executive and other state officers and if necessary initiate the process of removal of president, deputy president and other state officers and lastly exercise oversight over state organs. The roles of the Kenya Senate under the new constitution are: to debate and approve county bills; determine the allocation of national revenue to be distributed to the counties and represent the interests of the counties at the national level.

Judiciary is another important arm of the government. This arm of government mainly centers on the Kenyan Judicial system. The Kenyan Judicial system adheres to a hierarchical system, with The Supreme Court being the highest organ, followed by the Court of Appeal, High Court, Magistrate's Courts and other Subordinate Courts. The chief justice is the president of the judiciary and is appointed by the president subject to the approval of the National Assembly. The Supreme Court, being the highest judicial organ, has the following key functions: It is mandated to hear and determine presidential election disputes, if they occur and to attend to the appeals arising from the Court of Appeal.

Kisii County, Kenya

After the promulgation of the new constitution in Kenya in 2010, new 47 units of devolution known as counties came into existence as a result of the passage of the new constitution. Kisii County is among the most picturesque and naturally endowed counties in Kenya. Blessed with breath-taking hills and valleys interspersed by all-year-round clear flowing rivers, the county is a beehive of agricultural and commercial activities thanks to the abundant rainfall and the industrious spirit its people. Kisii county is located Kisii in the western Kenya. It has a population of 1 152 282 as per the 2008 census, 245,029 households and covers an area of 1,317.4 sq. km. The population density stands at 874.7 people per sq. km and 51% of the population lives below the poverty line (Economic Survey, 2012). Kisii County is a major business hub in the Western region. Due to the massive circulation of money in the region, Kisii town has attracted a total of 17 commercial banks.

About 90 percent of the residents rely on agriculture for economic empowerment with the main activities being subsistence farming, soapstone carvings, vegetable, dairy, tea, coffee and small scale farming. Kisii receives frequent convectional rains and enjoys a great highland climate. The county has nine constituencies and 10 sub-counties. It is a vibrant urban and commercial center with the town having about 85,000 residents. According to latest national population and housing census of 2009, it has a large dependent metropolitan population of over 100,000 residents. Kisii is a bustling town and home to several businesses, organizations, educational institutions and government agencies.

The economy of Kisii County today is derived from commerce and agriculture. Kisii town is dotted with tall commercial buildings and is ever bustling with activity. It has several businesses dealing in food processing, health care and education. Although it has are few industrial setups, the county has the potential for the establishment of large agro-based industries. Kisii town also hosts large supermarket chain stores. There are also numerous other businesses such as the hospitality sector with hotels, bars, restaurants, sports pubs, among other commercial activities. The county has an airstrip located in South West Suneka where charted planes can land. Due the large population and ever-increasing demand for education, most public universities and colleges have set up campuses in Kisii town.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This study is anchored on several theories. The study adopted the resource-based theory of the firm. This theory combines concepts from organizational economics and strategic management (Barney, 1991). In this theory, the competitive advantage and superior performance of an organization is explained by the distinctiveness of its capabilities (Johnson et al, 2008). Traditional sources of competitive advantage such as financial and natural resources, technology and economies of scale can be used to create value. However, the resource-based argument is that these sources are increasingly accessible and easy to imitate (Pfeffer, 1994). Critics of this theory are of the opinion that the core position of this theory which sees resources as strategically valuable, rare, inimitable and organizationally embedded as sources of competitive advantage is not scientifically proven (Raps, 2005).

Barney's (1991) resource based view reflects the fact that rival organizations may not perform at a level that could be identified as considerable competition for the organizations that have been well established in the market because they do not possess the required resources to perform at a level that creates a threat and competition. An organization should exploit existing business opportunities using the present resources while generating and developing a new set of resources to sustain its competitiveness in the future market environments; hence, an organization should be engaged in resource management. There is always high uncertainty in the environment and for organizations to survive and stay ahead of competition, new resources become highly necessary. (Crook et al, 2008). Strategic planning process will give the organization the needed opportunity to analyze the environment effectively and be able to prepare for any eventuality that may affect the plans therefore negatively affecting the performance of the organization.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) is another important theory in strategic planning and implementation. ANT appears far more able to detect effects of strategic planning activities in relation to who and what is involved, how, why, and with what results than the blunt-instrument variance methods noted above. By allowing the actors to act and by focusing on the associations they trace, ANT appears to be particularly able to clarify in practice what it means to call strategic planning a way of knowing defined as ‘‘a network of heterogeneous objects’’ (Douglas 2003) that is ‘‘relationally constituted’’ and ‘‘kept together by active processes of ordering and sense making, [where] to know is to keep all these elements in alignment, given that order is not given but is always an emergent process (Hax, 1990). At the same time, by focusing on actors and the associations they trace (or not) ANT is well-suited to the task of discerning how and to what extent strategic planning in practice is inclusive, participatory, and democratic.

The Concept of Strategy

Douglas (2003) defined strategy as a match between what a company was capable of doing within the reality of what it could possibly do. This it does by trying to match the company's strengths and weaknesses with the environmental opportunities and threats. Strategy means making clear-cut choices about how to compete and win. Hough et al (2008) support that view; they say that a company's strategy is management's action plan for running the business and conducting its operations. They see strategy as being all about how management intends to grow the business, how it will build a loyal clientele and out-compete its rivals, and how each functional piece of the organization will contribute to the sum total and how performance would be boosted and sustained.

According to Hough et al. (2008), a company's strategy consists of the competitive moves and business approaches that managers are employing to grow the business, attract and please customers, compete successfully, conduct operations and achieve the targeted levels of organizational performance. Hill and Jones (2001) give an all-encompassing definition of strategy: "A strategy is an action that a company takes to attain one or more of its goals, the overriding goal being to achieve superior performance". There seems to be agreement that one cannot be strategic about the past. Strategies tend to be both proactive and reactive, depending on the market conditions and will evolve over time, as companies endeavor to stay ahead of their competitors in terms of market share, profitability and customer service. Even though the focus of this research is more on strategy implementation than formulation, it is important to review how implementation fits into the broader strategic planning process.

The Strategic Planning Process

The strategic planning process, which can be formal or informal, entails setting visions and missions, goals and objectives; clarifying policies and principles; and searching for opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses (SWOT). One of the critical aspects of being successful in a modern business context is having a clear vision, a balanced journey for the future based on a market-oriented approach and building core competencies of the organizations concerned. Whether developing a new business or reformulating direction for an ongoing company or institution, the basic goals, characteristics and philosophies which will shape a firm’s strategic posture must be determined (Pearce and Robinson, 2007). The mission guides future executive action. Thus a company mission can be defined as the fundamental, unique purpose that sets a business apart from other firms of its type and identifies the scope of its operations in product and market terms (Pearce and Robinson, 2007). The principal value of a mission statement is the specification of the ultimate aims of the firm and which also provides managers with a unity of direction that transcends individual, parochial and temporary needs.

As Lynch (1997) notes, long term objectives are the results a business seeks to achieve over a specified period of time, typically five years. Seven common long-term objectives he describes are; profitability, productivity, competitive position, employee development, employee relations, technological leadership and public responsibility. These and any other term objectives should be acceptable, flexible, and measurable over time, motivating, suitable, understandable and achievable. Policy and strategy has to be tackled as a whole process which needs to be managed and reviewed on a regular basis. Objectives could be short-term, medium-term or long-term.

Strategic planning involves carefully analyzing the external environment, because the environment keeps changing and calls for new organizational strategies (Beal, 2006). The aim is to produce a documented picture of the most significant environmental developments around which the organization must formulate its future goals, strategies, structures and systems. Second, the internal scan or assessment of the internal environment of the organization involves identification of its strengths and weaknesses, that is, those aspects that help or hinder accomplishment of the organization’s mission and fulfillment of its mandate with respect to People (Human Resources), Properties (Buildings, Equipment’s and other facilities), Processes (Such as student placement services, M.I.S etc.), Products (graduates, Publications etc.) (Lynch, 1997). A SWOT analysis is conducted with a focuses on the internal and external environments, examining strengths and weaknesses in the internal environment and opportunities and threats in the external environment.

Strategic Planning Models

According to Mintzberg et al, (1998), the basic strategic planning model originated from Ansoff (1965), the Harvard Group and Steiner (1979) asserting that strategic planning reached its peak in the 1970s when managers extolled the virtues of formal strategic planning. This basic model involves five stages which are objective setting, external and internal auditing, strategy evaluation and operationalization stages. In this model there is also programming of works where a plan of action regarding how, where and what needs to be done is drawn to ensure that the process is achieved on time. This model has been criticized to be too rational and methodical with a long hierarchy of activities making it bureaucratic and may not succeed in dynamic, changing environments (Chaffee, 1985). However, it remains the basic building blocks upon which strategic planning is developed in almost all situations.

The second strategic planning model known as the HAX model was developed by Hax (1990). It is said to be a rational approach in which activities in developing a strategy flow in a sequential manner. He derived the model from the various hierarchical levels that exist in the organization emphasizing that their different managerial responsibilities contribute to defining the strategy of the organization. In his discourse, he indicated that three levels of strategy exist in an organization – corporate, business and functional levels. He argued that, the general tasks that need to be addressed are the responsibility of corporate level strategists and these primarily include the determination of overall missions, validation of proposals emerging from business and functional levels, identification and exploration of linkages between distinct but related business units, and the allocation of resources with a sense of strategic priorities.

The second level, intrinsic to the business unit, is the place where the activities needed to enhance the competitive position of each business unit is coordinated. The third level, functional level, deals with competency development such as financing, administrative infrastructure, human resources, technology, logistics, etc. Hax (1990) concludes that regardless of the structure adopted by a firm, these three highly differentiated strategic concerns still remain. These two models have been referred to in the literature as the linear approach to strategy because it connotes the methodical, directed, sequential action involved in planning (Chaffee, 1985).

Factors Affecting Strategy Implementation

Various authors have looked at the dilemma of implementation, specifically as it relates to strategy with (Pfeeffer, 1996) commenting that implementation is one of the more difficult business challenges facing today's managers. They say that a strategy is as good as its implementation. Ungerer et al. (2007) suggest a cycle that must be followed to enable the implementation of strategic plans. The stages involved are an evaluation of current position and an understanding of potential futures, the development of various options and choices, formulation of a robust strategy architecture and then implementation.

Mintzberg (1998) had a different view on strategy implementation. He argued that it depended on what one's view was on strategy. He questioned whether strategy formulation came first before implementation or vice versa. In his view, one's perspective on strategy greatly influenced how one viewed implementation. It could be seen as executing what had been planned already, otherwise the alternate view is that strategies emerge and evolve. Raps (2005) found that strategy implementation requires much more energy and time than the mere formulation of the strategy.

The success of the implementation effort depends on the level of commitment and involvement of middle managers. Often the input of the middle managers' knowledge is underestimated in strategy formulation and it is not surprising that Kaplan and Norton (2008) found that as few as five percent of a typical workforce understand their organization's strategy. Miniace and Falter (1996) stated that communication stands out as the key success factor when it comes to strategy implementation. It is imperative for an organization to develop a comprehensive communication plan in order to improve the success rate of its implementation programme.

Miniace and Falter (1996) assert that companies need to take an integrative view point where not only the organizational structure, but cultural aspects and other human resource issues are taken into account. They see implementation being a boundary less set of activities working together to achieve the change needed. Vagueness of the assignment of duties and responsibilities often results in failure. Miniace and Falter (1996) argue that employees tend to think and see only in their own department structures and companies need to ensure a cross-functional effort in order to improve their implementation plans. A detailed plan detailing activities and who is responsible prevents power struggles between departments and within hierarchies.

Importance of Effective Strategy Implementation

The effective implementation of strategy can lead to creating and sustaining a competitive advantage in addition to realizing higher returns for shareholders. All other factors being equal, an organization with managers who are competent at implementing strategy will enjoy a competitive advantage over a competing organization with managers who are less competent at implementing strategy (Hrebbinak, 2005).

Effective strategy implementation has a positive impact on strategic and organizational success. A recent comprehensive study of what contributes to organizational success highlights the importance of strategy implementation. In this study of 160 organizations over a five-year period, organizational success (as measured by total return to shareholders) was strongly correlated, amongst other factors, with an ability to ". . . execute flawlessly" (Joyce et al, 2003). Various other publications support the notion that effective strategy implementation is critical to strategic and organizational success. These include Raps (2005); Dicer et al (2006); and Hartman (2004).

The effective implementation of strategy can also contribute to good corporate governance. Dincer et al (2006) stated that it is the responsibility of the board of directors of an organization to formulate a strategy based on the expectations of identified stakeholders. In addition, it is the responsibility of the board to ensure that managers not only implement the formulated strategy, but also that the implementation efforts are monitored and controlled. The board of directors must ensure that the implementation of strategy takes into account issues such as social responsibility, environmental responsibility, and stakeholder engagement and sustainability. The claims of internal as well as external stakeholders should be taken into account during the organization's strategy implementation efforts (Hartman, 2004).

Challenges facing Strategic Planning and Implementation

Strategic planning in public entities is affected by a number of issues. Public organizations are inclined to approach strategic planning according to traditional planning theory from the private sector. This approach is what Mintzberg (1998) refers to as the synoptic approach, which is based on strategy formation being a controlled and formalized effort, outlining specific steps and procedures that are to be followed. The prescribed top-down strategic planning approach is problematic for entities. According to Mintzberg (1998), this approach is based on three fallacies, viz. the fallacy of predetermination – strategies can be predetermined since the strategy making context is least predictable; the fallacy of detachment – strategy has to be detached from operations, and thinking detached from doing; and the fallacy of formulation – the process of making strategy can be programmed by the use of systems.

Resource constraints are apparent during strategic planning in public entities, in particular, those dependent on the government for funding. This is so partly because such entities are subject to political factors, making funds availability and allocation more difficult when compared to the private sector. In some instances, political support might be lacking to fund strategic projects even though there could be demand from the community. In other instances, political support may be available to fund non-strategic projects which have no real demand. The legal environment in which public entities operate is another constraining factor to strategic planning. According to Lynch (1997) this environment makes it difficult for entities to be flexible and autonomous.

Ungerer et al (2007) and Johnson (2008) assert that performance indicators and expectations for public organizations are normally unclear and vague as a result of the requirements by numerous and varied stakeholders. Douglas (2003) adds that performance in government is difficult to measure due to the need to report on outcomes as compared to outputs. Outputs, such as the number of houses built, are the direct effects of actions taken, and are easy to measure. However, outputs present a limited picture of a public entity's performance. Unlike the private sector firms, public entities do not have a profit motive, which is a significant performance indicator for the private firms. Legislated provisions and mandated objectives, functions and responsibilities are instead used as performance indicators in the public sector (Douglass, 2003).

According to David (2009) public sector managers tend to perceive their goals as achievable and straightforward, depending on the degree of the entity's publicness. However, entities that have a variety of stakeholders normally experience problems during goal setting processes. Such processes tend to be politicized, resulting in goals that are general ambiguous, not specific, and difficult to implement. Joyce (2004) asserts that to counter the problem of goal conflict, public sector strategic management processes need to accommodate the results of consultations and involvement by the public. It is the coordination of information from various stakeholders that creates a challenge for public entities in their effort to reach consensus in goals that are sometime conflicting.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a case study design in determining the strategic planning and implementation practices at the Kisii County government in Kenya. Kothari (1990) describes a case study as a form of qualitative analysis that involves a careful and complete observation of a social unit. He further describes a social unit as a person, family or institution. The researcher adopted a case study because of its contribution to the knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social and political phenomena.

A Case study is a common research strategy in business (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2002) and community planning. The distinct need for case studies arises out of the desire of the researcher to understand the complex social phenomena. Case study method was also to allow the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real life events such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes (Robert, 2002).

Data Collection

Interview guide was used in the collection of data. Interviewing is a way of collecting data as well as to gaining knowledge from individuals. Kvale (1996) regarded interviews as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social impact of research data.

The interview guide was considered appropriate for this study since there was need to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategic planning and implementation practices at the Kisii County government and this can only be achieved by conducting interviews. The researcher did personally conduct the data collection exercise through face to face interviews with the respondents. The respondents included the governor, deputy governor, secretary, speaker and county executives.

Data Analysis

The researcher collected qualitative data. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) define content analysis as any technique used to make inferences through systematic and objective identification of specified characteristics of messages. Kothari (2004) also explain content analysis as the analysis of the contents of documentary and verbal material and describes it as a qualitative analysis concerning the general import of message of the existing documents and measure pervasiveness. Before embarking on content analysis, the researcher assessed the written material's quality to ensure that the available material accurately represents what is written or said. The researcher listed and summarized the major issues contained in the interview guide responses. This enabled him to structure the data in a way that made it possible to analyze and interpret.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The study reveals that Kisii County is among the devolved government administrative units that were brought into existence due to the promulgation of the new constitution of the Republic of Kenya in the year 2010. The county has an approximate population of 1.5 million people of whom 51% live below the poverty line. The county has other challenges such as high infant and below five years mortality rate which stands at approximately 10%. The study revealed that these and other challenges facing the county can only be addressed using proper strategic planning in the county. It was evident that through proper strategic planning, the county can be able to get solutions to most of these challenges.

It was established that the county has made great strides in the strategic planning and implementation process. The county also involved experts and academicians in the strategic planning process where they were required to give their views and ideas. It was also evident that the county draws its content from the Kenya Vision 2030 objectives that are meant to transform the country into a middle level economy by the year 2030. The study confirmed that the county strategic plan highlights issues such as social and economic transformation within the county; development of infrastructure to facilitate service delivery; provision of reliable energy in order to assist in the development of manufacturing sector in the county; to imp[rove science and technology and innovation; to conduct land reforms in the county; to engage in the development of human resources and provision of efficient and effective public service; promotion of tourism activities in the county and promotion of manufacturing activities in the county in order to provide employment opportunities to many unemployed young people.

It was also clear from the findings that the various stakeholders in the county play a significant role in the strategic planning and implementation process. The electorate for instance is the source of the information and activities in the strategic plan; the central government provides much of the funds that were to implement the strategic plan; the county executive committee is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the strategic plan is efficiently and effectively implemented. It was also established that the county assessed the internal and external environment before embarking on the strategic planning processes. This process as revealed by the study assisted the county to establish the weaknesses and opportunities as well as threats that are facing it.

It was clear from the study that the main resources that are required in the strategic planning and implementation process are the financial and human resources. The financial resources are provided partly by the central government and partly by the county government through the revenue collected from within the county. The study also revealed that there are a number of challenges that affect the strategic planning and implementation process. The first among these challenges is lack of finances to implement the strategic plan. The study revealed that the county is constrained financially and it is a big challenge to implement some of the activities outlined in their strategic plan. On evaluation of the success of strategic planning and implementation, the study revealed that it may be too earlier to start talking of success or failure since the county government is hardly a year old.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Kisii County has a number of challenges that can be solved through proper strategic planning. The County has a well stated vision and mission that focus on the country's vision 2030. Stakeholders such as the electorate, the county executive, professional and civic leaders are involved in the strategic planning and implementation process. It is also clear that financial and human resources are the main resources that are required in the implementation of the strategic plan. The main challenge in strategic planning and implementation is financial constraints.

It will be important from the county to closely monitor its implementation process so as to get things right from the beginning.

This study should be carried out in form of a countrywide survey that involves other counties. This will assist in establishing the strategic planning and implementation practices among the County governments in Kenya. The County government concept is relatively new in Kenya. There is need for a comparative study to be carried out with a country that has a devolved government that has been successful over a long duration in order to establish best practices in strategic planning and implementation.

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