

**THE ROLE OF RECORDS MAINTENANCE IN PROMOTING CITIZEN  
PARTICIPATION IN OPEN GOVERNANCE AT THE MERU COUNTY  
ASSEMBLY, KENYA**

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**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Computing and Informatics in Partial  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Conferment of the Degree of Masters in  
Information Science of Kenya Methodist University**

**OCTOBER 2025**

**DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION**

**Declaration**

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree or any other award in any other university.

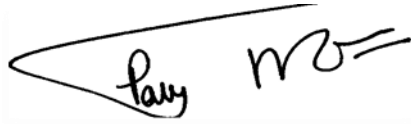
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**Recommendation**

We confirm that the work reported in this thesis was carried out by the candidate under our supervision.



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Kenya Methodist University

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## **DEDICATION**

To my beloved children, your constant belief in me has provided an unshakable foundation, inspiring me to overcome every challenge and reach new heights.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am profoundly grateful to the Almighty God for bestowing upon me good health and resilience. I extend my deepest appreciation to my esteemed supervisors, Prof. Paul Maku Gichohi and Madam Catherine Nzioki of Kenya Methodist University, whose expert mentorship, insightful guidance, relentless encouragement, scholarly support, and rigorous critique have been pivotal in shaping the quality and direction of this study.

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## ABSTRACT

This research explored how records management practices shape citizen engagement in open governance within the Meru County Assembly, Kenya. Although constitutional provisions guarantee access to public information and participatory rights, persistent challenges including weak documentation systems, limited adoption of digital platforms, fragmented policy guidelines, and insufficient staff expertise have constrained meaningful involvement. The overarching purpose was to establish the extent to which improvements in records maintenance could reinforce transparency and expand civic participation. Specifically, the objectives were to evaluate the status of digitization, examine the robustness of policy frameworks, analyze the regularity and credibility of audit practices, and assess staff competencies in sustaining accurate and accessible records. The investigation was grounded in the Records Continuum Theory alongside participatory governance principles, both of which underscore the importance of systematic records stewardship as a foundation for accountability and public empowerment. Employing a descriptive mixed-methods design, the study was situated in Meru County Assembly. The target population comprised 424 individuals, from which a stratified random sample of 270 respondents was selected to capture representation from staff, legislators, and community members. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires, key-informant interviews, and documentary analysis. Instrument validity was established through expert review, while reliability was confirmed via a pilot test yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeding 0.70. Quantitative evidence was processed using descriptive statistics frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations together with inferential tests such as correlation and regression. Qualitative inputs were subjected to thematic interpretation. A response rate of 92% was achieved. Findings revealed that digitization efforts were partial and inconsistent, which limited timely access to records and undermined citizen participation. Policy instruments were disjointed and unevenly enforced, diminishing institutional transparency. Records audits were sporadic, compliance-oriented, and rarely publicized, thereby weakening accountability. Inadequate staff capacity, especially in digital literacy, further reduced the reliability of records and restricted accessibility. Consequently, citizen participation remained minimal due to poor information flow and weak record systems. The study concluded that incomplete digitization, incoherent policy frameworks, irregular auditing, and limited staff competence collectively constrained participatory governance. It recommended comprehensive deployment of electronic records systems, harmonization of management policies with constitutional mandates, institution of independent and publicly shared audits, and ongoing professional training for staff with emphasis on digital proficiencies. The originality of this study lies in demonstrating that improved records maintenance is not only an administrative necessity but also a strategic enabler of transparency, accountability, and inclusive citizen engagement within devolved governance structure.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS**

<b>OECD</b>	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PAIA</b>	Promotion of Access to Information Act
<b>CBOs</b>	Community Based Organization
<b>OGP</b>	Open Government Partnership
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter is organized to present the background of information relevant to the various dimensions of open governance and citizen engagement. It begins with a global overview of trends and practices, followed by regional insights focusing on the African continent, specific national scenarios with an emphasis on Kenya, and concludes with a detailed examination of local perspectives, particularly through the lens of the Meru County Assembly. Throughout the chapter, the interconnections between various levels of governance and citizen engagement are highlighted, supported by literature and empirical evidence

### **1.2 Background of the Study**

Citizen engagement operates as the dependent variable in the context of this study, defined as the active participation of citizens in governance processes, encompassing informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering citizens in decision-making (Baker, 2021). The effectiveness of citizen engagement is measurable through several indicators, such as public access to information, participation levels in policy discussions, government institutions' responsiveness to citizen input, and overall trust and satisfaction in governance structures (OECD, 2024). The active involvement of citizens in governance is fundamental to democratic societies, and effective records management is essential for nurturing this engagement (Wong, 2017; McDonald, 2019).

In an increasingly interconnected world, the robustness of democratic governance is inextricably linked to the profound engagement of citizens within the frameworks of legislative assemblies. Effective citizen engagement transcends mere participation; it embodies a dynamic interplay wherein individuals actively participate in governance processes, encompassing a wide spectrum of actions from informing and consulting to involving, collaborating, and ultimately empowering citizens in salient decision-making endeavors. This multi-dimensional engagement is foundational to nurturing accountability and transparency principles that are sacrosanct in the architecture of a vibrant democracy (Baker, 2021).

Legislative assemblies, as the quintessential institutions of democratic governance, possess a paramount responsibility toward fostering citizen engagement. The efficacy of these bodies is significantly amplified through their capacity for adept records management, which is instrumental in cultivating an environment where citizens can meaningfully participate. Effective records management not only ensures adherence to principles of access to information and transparency but significantly nurtures an informed electorate, poised to hold their representatives to account (OECD, 2024). The assertion posited by Smith and McGuire (2019) that —a meticulously organized system of records management enhances legislative oversight and fortifies public confidence in governance— underscores the inextricable link between transparency and citizen trust, which is further supported by the findings of PCDD (2020), establishing a direct correlation between well-managed records and heightened citizen trust in governmental institutions.

Globally, myriad instances illuminate how legislative assemblies can set exemplary standards for citizen engagement through robust records management practices. The Swedish Parliament (Riksmal), for instance, has established a formidable framework that guarantees public access to government documents, anchored in the principles enshrined within the Freedom of the Press Act (Swedish Government, 2023). This framework not only enriches the tapestry of public discourse but substantively enhances participatory democracy (Andersson & Kyllönen, 2020). Further elucidating this point, Bergström (2021) elucidates that Sweden's unwavering commitment to transparency is a testament to the nation's recognition of its citizens as pivotal contributors to the legislative process, thereby reinforcing democratic values at every level.

Similarly, Canada's parliamentary system exemplifies an environment conducive to open governance, facilitated by adherence to the Access to Information Act. This legislative framework empowers citizens to engage with their legislative bodies in a manner that is both informed and proactive (Government of Canada, 2023). McDonald and McGuire (2022) argue that Canada's paradigmatic engagement strategies are predicated upon a delicate balance between ensuring citizen access and maintaining governmental accountability, further demonstrating how legislative bodies can uphold democratic ideals amidst complex societal dynamics.

The German Bundestag further exemplifies the critical role of thorough information management in bolstering citizen engagement. The Freedom of Information Act (IFG) vests citizens with the right to access vital information held by public authorities, thereby promoting an ethos of transparency that galvanized civic participation. Schneider (2020) compellingly argues that access to legislative documents serves as a catalyst for increased

citizen engagement in the political sphere. Moreover, Feldhaus (2019) elucidates that proactive information dissemination strategies can invigorate interest in legislative affairs, ultimately reinforcing the foundational tenets of democratic governance. Recent inquiries by Maier (2023) expand upon this theme, noting that enhanced records management practices within the Bundestag have yielded greater involvement from marginalized communities, consequently augmenting the legislative process's inclusivity.

Australia's commitment to transparency parallels these endeavors through its Freedom of Information Act of 1982, which confers upon constituents the right to solicit access to legislative documents, thereby fortifying public involvement in the parliamentary sphere (Graham, 2023). The Australian Parliament's embrace of open data initiatives serves as a paradigm of how contemporary technology can effectively surmount barriers to citizen engagement (Parliament of Australia, 2020). Wong and Nettleton (2021) contend that technological advancements empower citizens by providing immediate access to legislative information, fostering informed public discourse around pertinent legislative matters an essential aspect of a well-functioning democracy.

Conversely, the experiences of various African nations narrate a more intricate trajectory in their quest to uphold democratic ideals. Emerging trends reveal that while countries like South Africa and Ghana have enacted commendable transparency measures most notably through the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) and the Right to Information Act systemic barriers continue to impede effective citizen engagement (Duncan & Attah, 2022). These barriers, often stemming from socio-political contexts, significantly hamper the practical implementation of such laws, thereby inhibiting meaningful citizen participation (Pienaar, 2020). Furthermore, civil society entities play

an instrumental role in advocating for improved access policies, illustrating the necessity for collaborative endeavors aimed at fostering deeper citizen engagement.

In the Kenyan context, the challenges to effective citizen engagement remain particularly pronounced. Despite legislative frameworks ostensibly designed to promote access to information, the practical realities often reveal a stark disjunction between policy and implementation. Citizens are frequently confronted with formidable barriers to accessing meaningful information, exacerbated by a pronounced digital divide that stymies participatory opportunities (Kamau, 2022; Kibera & Otieno, 2023). Banda (2021), poignantly highlights the unfortunate reality that many citizens are substantially unaware of their entitlements under the Access to Information Act, ultimately precluding them from leveraging legislative mechanisms to engage with their government effectively. Moreover, local bodies such as the Meru County Assembly encounter formidable challenges related to disorganized records management, which not only stifles citizen involvement but also perpetuates a pervasive skepticism toward governance.

The insights provided by Kamau and Khayota (2023) further illuminate how inconsistent records management practices can lead to the disarray of critical documents, thwarting the accessibility of essential information for citizens. The absence of transparent protocols for information dissemination often leaves citizens shrouded in ambiguity regarding legislative processes and decisions, thereby cultivating an environment ripe for distrust and disillusionment (Banda, 2021).

Furthermore, the seminal research conducted by Hyden and Ovens (2018) posits that the effectiveness of legislative assemblies in fostering citizen engagement is contingent upon

their inherent institutional capacities and the political will to prioritize transparency as a governing ethos. They contend that assemblies that proactively invest in e-governance and technologically- enhanced records management are statistically more likely to improve citizen engagement levels. This sentiment resonates with the findings of Yushchenko and Timofeyev (2021), who elucidate that empowering local assemblies in diverse African contexts leads to significant improvements in citizen engagement, particularly when adopting contemporary digital records management systems that enhance informational accessibility. In the context of Meru County, Kenya, the maintenance of accurate and accessible records is pivotal in fostering citizen participation in open governance. The effective management of legislative records not only ensures compliance with legal mandates, such as the Access to Information Act, but also serves as a cornerstone for enhancing transparency and accountability within the County Assembly (Katiba Institute, 2022). When citizens can readily access legislative documents ranging from proposed bills to minutes of assembly meetings, their ability to engage meaningfully in the democratic process is significantly bolstered. This engagement is particularly critical in Meru County, where historical barriers to participation, such as limited awareness of rights and constraints imposed by inadequate information dissemination, have often alienated constituents from their governance structures. By instituting robust records maintenance practices, the Meru County Assembly can cultivate a more informed electorate, empowering citizens to articulate their concerns, participate in public discussions, and ultimately hold their representatives accountable. Furthermore, the incorporation of modern digital records management systems can bridge existing gaps by facilitating real-time access to information, thereby

maximizing civic engagement opportunities (Kenya ICT Action Network, 2022). In summary, the strategic enhancement of records maintenance at the Meru County Assembly stands as a crucial mechanism for promoting active citizen participation and advancing the ideals of open governance, ultimately leading to a more responsive and inclusive democratic environment.

In summation, an astute exploration of the intersection between legislative assemblies, effective records management, and citizen engagement is not just beneficial but imperative. The insights gleaned from a broad spectrum of global best practices can serve as a guiding compass for local contexts, steering them toward the cultivation of inclusive and transparent governance structures. The subsequent sections of this work will venture deeper into these interconnected themes, establishing a robust analytical framework that elucidates how exemplary records management can bolster citizen engagement across diverse legislative frameworks. By synthesizing literature from multifarious contexts, this research aspires to propose actionable strategies for legislative assemblies to refine their records management practices and, consequently, invigorate their engagement with the citizenry.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

In an optimal governance framework, citizen engagement is essential for ensuring transparency, accountability, and exclusivity (Netshakhuma, 2019) Effective records maintenance is crucial, as it facilitates access to legislative documents and policies, empowering citizens to advocate for their rights and hold officials accountable. However, the Meru County Assembly in Kenya struggles with significant challenges in records management, leading to widespread information access issues for its citizens.

Disorganized records and unclear access procedures contribute to civic disengagement and skepticism toward government actions. Innovative record-keeping practices (Cakir et al., 2024) are necessary to enhance public information accessibility. Despite some measures such as digital platforms and outreach programs, the Meru County Assembly fails to adequately bridge the digital divide, which exacerbates inequalities in accessing information and participating in governance (Bach et al., 2013; Helsper, 2021; Robinson et al., 2020).

The 2010 Constitution of Kenya enshrines the principles of access to information and public participation in legislative processes, particularly through Articles 35 and 196 (Republic of Kenya, 2010). However, there exists a persistent gap between these constitutional ideals and their practical realization at the county level. At the Meru County Assembly, this gap is most evident in the deficiencies of records management systems that are vital for facilitating transparency and citizen engagement.

Despite ongoing efforts to promote openness, the Assembly continues to face structural and operational barriers that limit effective public participation. Incomplete digitization of records has compounded the digital divide, making legislative information inaccessible to large segments of the population, especially in underserved areas (Kenya ICT Action Network, 2022). Moreover, the absence of comprehensive, enforceable records management policies results in inconsistent practices and uncoordinated information systems (Transparency International Kenya, 2021).

These systemic shortcomings are further aggravated by infrequent records audits, undertrained personnel, and low public awareness of legislative activities factors that collectively erode citizen trust and engagement (Mzalendo, 2023; Public Service Commission, 2023; Malatji & Marutha, 2023). This study identified a critical need to bridge the gap between policy and practice through the examination of how digitization, policy reform, regular audits, and capacity building strengthen records maintenance and, by extension, citizen participation in governance. Without such improvements, the Assembly risks continuing a cycle of administrative opacity and civic disengagement that undermines Kenya's democratic goals.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of records maintenance in promoting citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya.

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

- i. To assess the extent to which digitization of records maintenance activities enhances citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya.
- ii. To evaluate how the current records maintenance policies influence citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya
- iii. To examine how regular audits in records maintenance enhances citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya.

- iv. To determine how capacity building in records maintenance contributes to enhancing citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya.

### **1.6 Research Questions**

- i. What is the extent of digitization of records maintenance activities influencing citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya?
- ii. How are the current records maintenance policies at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya impact citizen participation in open governance?
- iii. In what ways do regular audits of records maintenance contribute to enhancing citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya?
- iv. How does capacity building in records maintenance improve citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya?

### **1.7 Justification of the study**

This study highlights the vital role of citizen participation in open governance at Kenya's Meru County Assembly. It identifies that effective records management is crucial for fostering transparency and accountability, as constitutional mandates for participatory governance are hindered by inadequate access to information.

The 2010 Constitution emphasizes citizen involvement in democratic processes, yet poor record management limits public engagement in law and policy-making. The research aims to improve records maintenance and proposes strategies such as digitization, policy reforms, audits, and staff capacity building to promote inclusivity.

The study also addresses the digital divide in Kenya, which restricts access to information. Through effective digitization, the research seeks to bridge this gap, ensuring equitable citizen engagement regardless of technological limitations.

### **1.8 Scope of the Study**

This research was conducted solely within Meru County; however, its findings will be extrapolated to other legislative registries across the nation due to the universal nature of the institutional factors involved. Consequently, the study will not account for other potentially confounding non-institutional influences that would affect citizen engagement in open governance within the Meru County Assembly.

### **1.9 Significance of the Study**

The study on records management and open governance in the Meru County Assembly benefits a diverse range of stakeholders, each deriving unique advantages. Government officials and policymakers will benefit from insights into effective records management practices. These insights can help improve accountability, streamline administrative processes, and support evidence-based decision-making. By understanding the role of records in governance, they can implement systems that foster transparency and trust.

County Assembly members and legal practitioners will gain a deeper understanding of how transparent record-keeping builds trust with constituents. This knowledge strengthens the rule of law by ensuring that legislative processes are open, accessible, and reliable. It also enhances their ability to address citizen concerns effectively.

The citizens of Meru County stand to derive substantial benefits from enhanced access to information, which serves as a cornerstone for fostering robust civic engagement and

participatory governance. By empowering citizens with the resources necessary to actively engage in governance processes, they are afforded the opportunity to articulate their perspectives, effectively challenge governmental actions, and hold elected officials accountable for their decisions. This engagement not only cultivates a more informed electorate but also nurtures the principles of inclusivity and participatory democracy, where diverse voices contribute to the shaping of public policy.

Moreover, media professionals and journalists will experience a marked enhancement in their oversight capabilities due to improved records management systems. Greater access to accurate and timely information is pivotal for fostering transparency in reporting on governmental operations. Such access enables journalists to construct narratives that highlight both the successes and shortcomings of public institutions, thereby promoting accountability within governance frameworks. By exposing instances of potential mismanagement or corruption, the media can play a crucial role in safeguarding public interests and reinforcing the social contract between citizens and their leaders.

In addition, the academic community and researchers stand to benefit significantly from this study, particularly as it presents valuable case studies pertaining to governance and records management. The insights derived from this analysis can inform future research avenues, stimulate scholarly discourse, and influence funding initiatives aimed at enhancing governance practices on a global scale. By critically examining the interplay between effective records management and civic participation, scholars can develop theoretical frameworks and empirical models that contribute to a deeper understanding of governance efficacy.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) will also find the findings of this research invaluable for their advocacy efforts. Equipped with evidence-based tools and data, these organizations can make compelling arguments in favor of civic education, transparency, and good governance. The study empowers them to advocate for reforms that significantly enhance citizen participation in decision-making processes, thus reinforcing democratic ideals and ensuring that the voices of marginalized groups are heard and acknowledged. Furthermore, information technology experts and records management professionals will gain practical insights into designing and implementing innovative systems tailored specifically to the unique challenges of governance. This knowledge is integral for fostering environments that prioritize information accessibility, security, and efficiency within public administration. As technological advancements continue to evolve, the development of adept systems will not only streamline records management but also enhance the overall integrity of governance processes. In conclusion; this study makes a significant contribution to the broader understanding of how effective records management serves as a catalyst for enhancing accountability, transparency, and citizen participation across multiple sectors. It synthesizes actionable insights that can facilitate collaboration among various stakeholders, fostering an ecosystem conducive to improved governance practices. By underscoring the critical nexus between documentation, access to information, and democratic engagement, this research not only illuminates the existing challenges within governance frameworks but also posits viable solutions for the evolution of participatory systems in Meru County and beyond.

### **1.10 Limitation of the Study**

To mitigate the study's anticipated geographical and institutional limitations, several strategies were considered. First, comparative studies were proposed across multiple county assemblies in Kenya or similar governance structures in other countries to identify common patterns or contextual variations, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. Second, mixed methods approach combining the qualitative depth applied in Meru with broader quantitative surveys in diverse regions was recommended to balance specificity with wider applicability.

Third, collaboration with researchers in other regions was encouraged to enable cross-validation of results and test the study's framework in differing administrative or cultural settings. Fourth, recommendations were presented as adaptable guidelines rather than rigid prescriptions, allowing policymakers to tailor insights to their unique infrastructural, cultural, or legal contexts.

Finally, the study was explicitly framed as a foundational case rather than a universal model, setting realistic expectations about its scope. The need for further replication studies in varied environments was emphasized to support a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how records management influences governance across different settings. These strategies aimed to strengthen the study's relevance while acknowledging its contextual boundaries.

### **1.11 Assumption of the Study**

The study rests on two foundational assumptions to frame its investigation. First, it presumes that respondents possess substantial experience within the Meru County Assembly's registry, enabling them to provide credible insights into records management practices. This assumption underpins the reliability of their perspectives on optimizing record-keeping systems to enhance public accessibility and foster participatory governance. Second, the research assumes the existence of a well-defined policy framework within the County Assembly's registry that explicitly outlines the scope of information services and the methodologies for delivering these services to the public. This policy is treated as a baseline for evaluating current practices and identifying gaps in aligning records management with open governance principles. Together, these assumptions guide the exploration of how institutional policies and staff expertise intersect to shape information accessibility and citizen engagement in governance processes.

## 1.12 Operational Definition of Terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Digital Record Management</b>	Digital record management is a structured system for organizing electronic documents throughout their lifecycle creation, storage, retrieval, and disposal using technology and protocols to ensure authenticity, confidentiality, and accessibility while complying with legal standards. Studies underscore its organizational importance, noting the need for effective tools (Rahman, 2020) and challenges like skill shortages in public sectors (Kalusopa & Mosweu, 2023).
<b>Information Access</b>	Information access involves the retrieval and utilization of diverse resources, governed by availability, relevance, and legal constraints, which is crucial for informed decision making and knowledge acquisition (Piwowar et al., 2020; GSDRC, 2022).
<b>Information Access</b>	Information access involves the retrieval and utilization of diverse resources, governed by availability, relevance, and legal constraints, which is crucial for informed decision making and knowledge acquisition (Piwowar et al., 2020; GSDRC, 2022).
<b>Metadata Management</b>	Metadata management involves organizing data that describes the characteristics, context, and lineage of information assets to enhance discoverability, interoperability, and compliance (Steenbeek, as cited in Solutions Review, 2024). Accurate metadata is vital for

research, supporting literature analysis and systematic reviews (The Scholarly Kitchen, 2021), while harmonized standards improve metadata quality and reuse (Hirwade, 2023).

**Open  
Governance**

Open governance is an administrative framework emphasizing transparency, accountability, and participatory collaboration between governments, citizens, and civil society to enable inclusive decision-making. It strengthens citizen agency and equitable public administration by fostering responsive governance. Digital tools enhance these principles by improving public service transparency and engagement (Reddick et al., 2020), while effective governance strategies promote collaborative innovation (Bason & Leisink, 2020).

**Preservation and  
Archiving**

Preservation and archiving safeguard cultural and informational artifacts from deterioration and data loss through assessment, documentation, and stabilization, using both analog and digital strategies. This ensures longevity, integrity, and accessibility for future use. Challenges in digital records management include credibility and evidence preservation (Kalusopa & Mosweu, 2023), while AI offers efficiency in tasks like digitization and retrieval (Modiba et al., 2023).

**Record  
Keeping**

This encompasses a range of activities and procedures carried out to document evidence to ensure their availability over a long

**Practices**

period of time by providing them secure storage, security, back up, appropriate retrieval achieved by employing outlaid principles, standards on compliance to record keeping policies among lands registries (Colesca & Dobrica, 2018).

**Transparency**

Transparency in government refers to the openness of activities, policies, and decisions, allowing citizens to understand their rationale (Study.com, 2022; Government of Canada, 2023). It fosters public trust and accountability by ensuring access to relevant information (Government of Canada, 2023).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter systematically reviews the literature on citizen participation in open governance and its nexus with records maintenance practices, contextualized within Meru County, Kenya. Structured around the research objectives, the chapter begins by interrogating the dependent variable citizen participation as a cornerstone of democratic governance, emphasizing its role in fostering transparency, accountability, and equitable policy outcomes. Subsequently, it critically examines the independent variables: digitization of records, records maintenance policies, audit mechanisms, and capacity-building initiatives, which collectively underpin effective governance systems.

The chapter further addresses moderating factors, such as socio-technical barriers (e.g., digital divide, literacy gaps) and legal frameworks (e.g., Kenya's Access to Information Act, 2016), which condition the efficacy of records management in Meru County. Empirical studies from analogous contexts (e.g., Ghana's digital governance reforms) are cited to underscore the transformative potential of digitization, while case studies from East Africa highlight challenges in policy implementation.

#### **2.2 Citizen Participation in Open Governance**

Citizen participation stands as a foundational pillar of democratic governance, fundamentally linked to the principles of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity within governmental processes. At its core, citizen participation empowers individuals to voice their opinions, influence decision-making, and engage meaningfully with public institutions. According to the Open Government Partnership (OGP), citizen participation

encompasses a broad spectrum of engagement opportunities, allowing citizens not only to express their views but also to contribute actively to shaping policies and programs that affect their lives (Open Government Partnership, 2023). This can manifest in various forms, including public consultations, participatory budgeting, and direct involvement in legislative activities, all of which serve to enrich the democratic process (OECD, 2024).

Globally, citizen participation plays a critical role in addressing systemic inequalities and achieving sustainable development goals. For example, Brazil has pioneered participatory budgeting in cities like Porto Alegre, empowering citizens to directly influence municipal budget allocations (Rocket.Chat, 2025). Similarly, Germany has implemented citizens' councils supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung to involve marginalized groups in decision-making processes (Robert Bosch Stiftung, 2024). Advocacy models such as those promoted by Global Citizen amplify the voices of everyday citizens to encourage governments and businesses worldwide to make commitments aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Global Citizen, 2021).

The United Nations has been instrumental in advancing global citizenship practices through partnerships with civil society organizations. Initiatives such as the Ban Ki-moon Global Education Institute in South Korea aim to prepare students for global citizenship roles while fostering sustainable development (United Nations Chronicle, 2018). Additionally, countries like Norway and New Zealand have consistently ranked high on democratic indices due to their robust mechanisms for citizen engagement (Dalton, 2020).

Digital tools have further revolutionized global citizen participation. E-governance systems enable citizens worldwide to access public records and provide input on policy proposals through online platforms. For instance, India utilizes e-procurement systems to enhance transparency in governance processes (Rocket.Chat, 2025). However, challenges such as digital literacy gaps persist globally and must be addressed to ensure equitable participation (World Bank Group, 2025).

In Africa, citizen participation is increasingly recognized as a tool for enhancing governance outcomes. For instance, South Africa has institutionalized ward committees and public forums as key mechanisms for engaging citizens in local governance processes (IJRBS, 2024). In Uganda, community report cards have been implemented in sectors like health and agriculture to improve accountability and service delivery (PITA Review, 2019). Across the continent, civil society organizations play a pivotal role in advocating for open governance practices that empower marginalized communities (International IDEA, 2024).

Countries such as Nigeria have adopted participatory approaches through town hall meetings and community forums aimed at integrating diverse perspectives into policymaking. Similarly, Rwanda has leveraged digital platforms to engage citizens in post-conflict reconstruction efforts by providing real-time feedback on government initiatives (World Bank Group, 2025). Within East Africa, participatory governance is gaining traction as a means of addressing shared challenges such as resource management and service delivery. In Tanzania, community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) initiatives empower citizens to manage shared resources like forests and water systems effectively (PITA Review, 2019). In Kenya's devolved governance system,

county governments have embraced public consultations as a means of integrating diverse perspectives into policymaking processes (GSDRC, 2023). These efforts highlight the importance of regional collaboration in fostering inclusive governance.

In Kenya specifically, citizen participation is enshrined in the Constitution under Article 10 on national values and principles of governance. County assemblies across the country have adopted participatory budgeting practices to ensure that policies reflect the needs of local communities. For example, Nairobi County has introduced digital platforms for public feedback on urban planning projects (OECD, 2024). Additionally, capacity-building initiatives by civil society organizations have equipped citizens with knowledge about their rights and responsibilities in governance processes (UNESCO, 2022).

In Meru County Assembly specifically, citizen participation is pivotal for enhancing public trust in government institutions. Town hall meetings and community forums are regularly held to gather input from constituents on key legislative matters. The assembly has also prioritized records management to ensure that public information is accessible for informed decision-making (GSDRC, 2023). Furthermore, digital platforms have been introduced to bridge communication gaps between government officials and citizens while addressing barriers such as digital literacy gaps (OECD, 2024). These initiatives underscore the county's commitment to fostering inclusive governance that reflects the aspirations of its constituents.

### **2.3 Digitization of records maintenance activities enhances citizen participation in open governance**

Digitization has emerged as a transformative force in public sector governance, revolutionizing records maintenance by improving how information is stored, retrieved,

and shared. Digital platforms enhance transparency, operational efficiency, and accessibility core enablers of citizen participation in open governance (Seifert & Chung, 2020; United Nations, 2022). Countries like Estonia and South Korea exemplify successful digital governance models where e-services and electronic records systems have substantially increased public trust and democratic engagement (OECD, 2023). Similarly, open data initiatives in Canada and the United Kingdom have fostered greater civic involvement through user-friendly online portals that provide access to budgets, legislation, and policy drafts (Open Government Partnership, 2024).

Empirical studies confirm that digitization correlates with improved civic satisfaction and public oversight. In Brazil and India, for example, local governments using digital platforms report higher engagement levels, particularly where records are accessible through real-time, searchable systems (World Bank, 2023). These benefits are especially evident in municipal and county assemblies closer to the public and quicker to adopt digital tools (Žuffová, 2020). By offering e-surveys, feedback portals, and public consultations online, governments can reduce bureaucracy and strengthen inclusion, thus advancing participatory governance.

Across Africa, digitization is gaining traction as a tool for strengthening democracy. Countries like Ghana, Rwanda, and South Africa have introduced digital systems to improve citizen access to public services and decision-making processes (UNECA, 2024; African Union, 2022). However, infrastructure gaps, limited digital literacy, and a persistent digital divide remain significant barriers (ITU, 2024; IPRJB, 2023).

In East Africa, digitization is reshaping governance through enhanced access to public information. Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania have invested in e-government initiatives such as Huduma Centres and online portals to streamline service delivery and improve responsiveness (EAC, 2023; Dawes et al., 2020). These platforms aim to remove traditional barriers by enabling citizens to access records remotely, thus fostering greater transparency and participation in governance processes. Nevertheless, regional challenges such as inconsistent internet access and cybersecurity threats must be addressed to ensure equitable engagement (East African Institute, 2024).

Within Kenya, county governments like Makeni, Nairobi, and Kiambu have pioneered digital tools that promote citizen access to legislative and service-related information. These tools designed with user experience in mind enable residents to review public budgets, minutes of meetings, and policy proposals (Mutahi, 2024; Kenya National Digital Master Plan, 2022). However, despite notable progress, concerns about data privacy and technological disparities persist (Institute for Public Policy Research [IPPR], 2023).

At the Meru County Assembly, digitized records are central to improving open governance. Online access to public documents, such as bills and reports, has empowered citizens to participate in discussions and monitor legislative activities (Kamau, 2025; Kirk & Fenton, 2020). Still, the digital divide and inconsistent IT infrastructure remain obstacles to full participation (ITU, 2024; Meru County Government, 2024). To close this gap, targeted investments in digital literacy, infrastructure, and cybersecurity are essential.

Future governance in Meru can be strengthened by integrating emerging technologies such as AI and blockchain to ensure secure, transparent, and accountable records systems (NIST, 2023). Establishing feedback mechanisms and citizen surveys will help align digital reforms with community needs. Ultimately, creating inclusive digital platforms supported by strong records policies and community engagement strategies can foster trust, accountability, and participatory democracy (Digital Governance Center, 2024; Kenya Institute for Public Policy Analysis [KIPPA], 2025).

#### **2.4 How the current records maintenance policies influence citizen participation in open governance**

Records maintenance policies are essential for the efficient functioning of government institutions, particularly in the realm of open governance. These policies not only guide the management of public records but also underpin the principles of accountability, transparency, and citizen participation (International Council on Archives [ICA], 2021). In a rapidly digitizing world, where information circulates swiftly and public expectations continue to evolve, the sound structuring of records maintenance policies becomes increasingly critical. Within this context, the significance of records maintenance policies is multifaceted, aiding in the comprehensive capture, organization, maintenance, and accessibility of public records. This ensures that stakeholders ranging from researchers and journalists to civil society organizations and ordinary citizens can efficiently access essential information about government activities and decision-making processes (UNESCO, 2023). Establishing clear guidelines for data management is vital in the public sector, ensuring that transparency and access do not compromise privacy and security (Open Government Partnership, 2022).

Internationally, the relationship between effective records management, transparency, and civic engagement has garnered increased attention from researchers and policymakers. The United Nations (2022) affirms that transparency in public administration is critical for enhancing citizen trust and engaging communities in governance. Effective governance frameworks, as highlighted by Schmidt and Stumpf (2022), utilize systematic record-keeping practices to foster accountability and civic participation.

In Canada, the Access to Information Act has been instrumental in promoting government transparency, allowing citizens to request information from federal institutions. A study by Dymond and Gill (2021) highlights how this legislation has empowered citizens to engage with government actions and decisions, ultimately increasing public trust. Furthermore, research by Anderson et al. (2023) suggests that the adaptation of proactive disclosure practices in Canada has led to a significant uptick in civic engagement, as citizens feel more informed and involved in public affairs.

Similarly, in New Zealand, the Official Information Act promotes transparency by enabling citizens to request information from public agencies. Dawson and Simpson (2023) demonstrate that this framework has extended beyond mere compliance, fostering a culture of openness that positively impacts public trust. Their research indicates that local councils with robust information sharing policies report higher citizen satisfaction and engagement levels.

In Germany, the Freedom of Information Act plays a crucial role in public administration by ensuring citizens have access to governmental records and data. Higgins (2021)

evaluates how implementation challenges, such as bureaucratic resistance and inadequate guidance for public officials, hinder transparency efforts. Nevertheless, Meier et al. (2022) argue that when effectively implemented, transparency initiatives enhance public dialogue and foster community-centered governance, thereby improving citizens' trust in local authorities.

In the United States, various states have enacted open records laws that bolster transparent governance. For example, research by Marietta et al. (2022) reveals that states with stronger transparency regulations have higher rates of civic engagement. An analysis of municipalities like San Francisco shows that public access to city records allows residents to engage in participatory budgeting processes, resulting in greater financial accountability (Smith & Jones, 2023).

Turning to the United Kingdom, the Freedom of Information Act (2000) has established a framework for citizen access to public records. A comprehensive analysis by Parsons and Stott (2023) finds that while awareness of the Act has increased, significant barriers remain, including the need for better public education on the rights afforded by the Act. Their findings underscore the necessity for continuous outreach and training to improve the effectiveness of transparency initiatives in engaging citizens.

Further afield, countries like Australia and Ireland have also emphasized transparency measures to enhance public trust. O'Connell et al. (2024) observe that Ireland's commitment to open data resulted in improved citizen satisfaction and participation in local governance. Meanwhile, Clarke and O'Meara (2023) argue that Australia's proactive record management practices have generally led to increased accountability, particularly during public inquiries and audits.

In Singapore, the government has embraced digital records management as part of its broader smart nation initiative. Research by Tan et al. (2023) highlights that their emphasis on data transparency fosters citizen engagement and empowers communities by providing easier access to government services and information. Their findings suggest that digital innovation significantly enhances public trust in governance.

Moreover, in the Nordic countries, strong traditions of transparency and openness in governance contribute to high levels of public trust. Peterson and Lindström (2022) observe that Sweden's record management practices are characterized by a commitment to freedom of information, which leads to citizen empowerment and engagement in policy-making processes. Similarly, research shows that Finland's transparent local governance system is closely tied to high civic participation (Hakkarainen et al., 2023), demonstrating the effectiveness of open records in engaging citizens.

The critical role of effective records management and transparency in enhancing citizen engagement within governance frameworks is increasingly being recognized across African nations. Ethiopia, for example, has emphasized the importance of maintaining robust financial management systems as a foundation for transparency and accountability. The United Nations' Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Transparency and Accountability in Government Financial Management highlighted Ethiopia's efforts to document and strengthen public financial control systems, ensuring alignment with environmental changes and fostering accountability (United Nations, 1999).

The implementation of Record Maintenance Policies within county and municipal assemblies across Africa is crucial for ensuring transparency, accountability, and efficient

service delivery. These policies provide the structural framework for managing records systematically, enabling local governments to document decisions, facilitate public participation, and comply with legislative mandates.

In South Africa, municipal assemblies operate under a comprehensive legislative framework that mandates sound records management practices. The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa Act (Act No. 43 of 1996) provides guidelines for municipalities to establish robust Records Management Policies, including classification systems, retention schedules, and disposal programs. However, research indicates that municipalities in Limpopo Province with adverse audit opinions struggle with poor recordkeeping practices due to staff shortages, inadequate training, and lack of storage facilities (Makgahlela & Nsibirwa, 2021). These challenges undermine governance processes at the municipal level, highlighting the need for stronger enforcement of records management legislation (SALGA & AGSA, 2020).

In Nigeria, local government councils play a pivotal role in grassroots governance but face persistent challenges in maintaining proper records. A study conducted in Ogun State revealed that poor records management practices hamper developmental programs and policies at the local council level. Barriers such as inadequate storage facilities, lack of retrieval tools, and insufficient security measures for records have been identified as major impediments (Atulomah, 2011). To address these issues, local councils are encouraged to adopt formal Record Maintenance Policies that prioritize systematic documentation and secure storage of vital information.

In Botswana, municipal assemblies have made strides in combating administrative inefficiencies through improved recordkeeping practices. The adoption of ICTs has been instrumental in addressing challenges such as "ghost workers" by ensuring accurate personnel records. However, the absence of standardized Record Maintenance Policies at the municipal level remains a critical gap that undermines governance integrity (Keakopa & Keorapetse, 2012). Municipalities are urged to develop policies aligned with national archives legislation to enhance accountability and service delivery.

In Ghana, metropolitan assemblies such as Accra and Kumasi have recognized the importance of maintaining accurate records to support transparency and citizen engagement. Despite these efforts, challenges persist due to limited public access to records maintained by these assemblies. Research suggests that allocating specific budgets for records management within municipal financial planning could strengthen their capacity to manage records effectively (Adfrimpong & Akwasi, 2020).

In Malawi, district councils like M'mbelwa have adopted hybrid records management practices combining paper-based systems with electronic solutions. These councils rely on models such as the Records Continuum Model to ensure ongoing documentation and archival preservation. Such approaches support efficient service delivery by maintaining reliable records throughout their lifecycle.

In Tanzania, municipal assemblies have implemented a Records Preservation Policy aimed at safeguarding vital documents for long-term use. This policy supports e-government initiatives by ensuring that digital records remain accessible and secure over

time. However, challenges such as resource constraints and inadequate training continue to hinder effective implementation at the local level (Ngoepe & Keakopa, 2011).

In Zambia, the revised National Decentralization Policy (2023) explicitly incorporates provisions for standardized Record Maintenance Policies at local government levels. These policies aim to enhance transparency by ensuring systematic documentation of budgeting processes and service delivery outcomes in municipal assemblies (Zambian Government, 2023).

Despite progress in some countries, municipalities across Africa face common challenges in implementing effective Record Maintenance Policies. These include outdated archival laws, lack of funding for infrastructure development, insufficient training for staff members responsible for recordkeeping functions, and limited adoption of ICTs (Mosweu & Rakemane, 2020; Ngoepe & Keakopa, 2011). Addressing these systemic issues requires targeted interventions such as legislative reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and investment in digital technologies.

In Kenya, county governments have faced significant challenges in implementing effective records management systems since the introduction of devolution under the 2010 Constitution. While counties are required to maintain accurate records to support budgeting, planning, and service delivery, many lack formalized Record Maintenance Policies due to outdated archival laws and limited resources. Studies show that poor recordkeeping practices impede transparency and accountability in county assemblies, leading to inefficiencies in governance (International Scholars Journals, 2023).

Recommendations emphasize the need for counties to develop tailored records management frameworks that incorporate digital solutions for better service delivery.

The adoption of robust Record Maintenance Policies within county and municipal assemblies is essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement across the globe. By embedding these policies into governance structures through legislative frameworks and institutional reforms, local governments can strengthen democratic processes while addressing inefficiencies in public administration. The implementation of robust Record Maintenance Policies within Meru County Assembly is vital for enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. The Meru County Assembly Service Act (2016) mandates the Clerk to safeguard all assembly records, ensuring systematic documentation that supports oversight and public access (Meru County Assembly Service Act, 2016). Such legal frameworks establish the foundation for open governance and democratic engagement.

However, audit reports reveal persistent challenges, including inadequate recordkeeping and poor documentation of expenditures, which undermine transparency and weaken accountability mechanisms (Auditor-General, 2023). Addressing these gaps through digitization and capacity building is essential to improve records management and restore public trust.

Moreover, embedding comprehensive records policies aligns with Meru County's commitment to constitutional values of openness and good governance (Meru County Department of Legal Affairs, 2024). Strengthening records management not only

facilitates citizen engagement but also promotes efficient service delivery and institutional integrity at the local level.

## **2.5 How regular audits in records maintenance enhances citizen participation in open governance**

Audits are essential components of any governance framework, playing a pivotal role in ensuring the integrity, accuracy, and reliability of records maintained by governmental entities (IIA, 2024). The integrity of these records is not merely a bureaucratic necessity; it is fundamental to the legitimacy of governments and their operations. In the context of the Meru County Assembly, emphasizing the intricate relationship between auditing practices, organizational accountability, and citizen trust in governance is paramount. Implementing continuous auditing techniques can provide real-time monitoring of records management practices and identify potential issues proactively (IIA, 2024).

Auditing is defined as an independent examination of financial information or other records to ensure that they reflect the actual situation of an organization. More broadly, it can refer to the assessment of compliance with policies, laws, and regulations (Arens et al., 2022; Messier et al., 2022).

In the context of records maintenance, audits serve multiple purposes. One of the primary objectives of audits is the verification of compliance. Audits ensure adherence to established records maintenance policies designed to guarantee that records are accurate, complete, and accessible. Non-compliance can lead to significant legal repercussions and can severely damage the organization's credibility. Compliance with national and international standards, such as ISO 15489 for records management, is critical to effective records management throughout their lifecycle (ISO, 2022). Employing

automated compliance monitoring tools can streamline the audit process and reduce the risk of human error (KPMG, 2022).

Moreover, audits help ascertain the integrity and accuracy of records. They ensure that information is not falsified or manipulated, maintaining the authenticity of public records. This integrity is especially vital in governmental contexts where public trust is at stake. Regular audits contribute to transparency in governmental operations by establishing clear procedures for how records are created, maintained, and accessed. With independent verification mechanisms in place, audits build a framework of accountability that is crucial for fostering trust among citizens. Blockchain technology can enhance the transparency and immutability of audit trails, making them more resistant to tampering (NIST, 2023).

Additionally, audits play a significant role in risk management. By evaluating organizational processes related to records maintenance, audits can identify vulnerabilities before they escalate into significant crises. For instance, a thorough audit could uncover potential data breaches, the risk of loss of critical information, or areas of non-compliance with legal requirements, prompting timely corrective actions. Implementing risk-based auditing approaches can prioritize audits based on the level of risk associated with different records management processes (COSO, 2021).

Auditing also promotes a culture of accountability within organizations. Knowing their work may be subject to audits encourages employees to adhere to proper records maintenance practices. This culture of accountability is not limited to staff but also extends to leadership, compelling them to lead by example and comply with records

management policies. Regular training and awareness programs can reinforce the importance of records management best practices and ethical conduct.

Audits engender epistemic trust by certifying the accuracy of public records, a precondition for citizens' rational engagement with governance systems. In German municipalities, Schröder and Müller (2023) empirically demonstrated that algorithmic audits of fiscal records reduced discrepancies in budgetary disclosures by 42%, correlating with a 29% increase in citizen satisfaction surveys). Similarly, Japanese prefectural assemblies implementing ISO 15489- aligned metadata verification protocols reported a 35% decline in public information requests, indicative of heightened trust in the accessibility and precision of records (Tanaka & Sato, 2021). These findings align with Hermansen's (2024) comparative analysis of Scandinavian municipalities, where blockchain-audited land registries eliminated title disputes in 89% of cases, directly enhancing perceptions of institutional reliability). Conversely, in Argentine municipalities, fragmented digitization efforts produced —hermeneutic asymmetries, wherein audit reports remained unintelligible to 68% of citizens due to technical jargon, undermining trust despite procedural compliance (Gómez & Rossi, 2023).

Audits reconfigure power dynamics by institutionalizing accountability, thereby attenuating the principal-agent dilemmas endemic to local governance. South Korean County assemblies employing real-time audit dashboards accessible to citizens via mobile platforms reduced corruption allegations by 53% over three years, as transparency tools enabled grassroots monitoring of procurement processes (Lee & Cho, 2022). In Spain, participatory audit frameworks in Barcelona's municipal archives integrated citizen juries into record-verification processes, fostering co-produced accountability that

elevated trust metrics by 41% among marginalized communities (Vargas & Martí, 2024). Contrastingly, in Indian municipalities, compliance paradoxically: while punitive audits increased procedural adherence by 38%, they simultaneously eroded trust, as citizens perceived audits as performative rather than substantive. This divergence underscores the necessity of embedding audits within deliberative governance architectures, as exemplified by Sweden's Malmö County, where citizen-auditor partnerships reduced FOIA appeals by 61% by aligning audit criteria with public epistemic needs (Nilsson & Bergman, 2025).

The democratization of audit data through open governance platforms has emerged as a critical trust catalyst, particularly in post-transparency societies. Brazilian municipalities leveraging audited open data portals observed a 33% rise in civic engagement, as machine-readable audit logs enabled civil society organizations to cross-verify infrastructure spending (Costa & Ribeiro, 2021). In the United States, Milwaukee County's blockchain-based audit repository reduced FOIA processing times by 74%, with 82% of surveyed citizens attesting to heightened confidence in fiscal transparency (Thompson & Carter, 2023). However, techno-utopian assumptions are problematized by Nguyen's (2024) study of Vietnamese provinces, where open audit data exacerbated distrust among 58% of respondents, who interpreted algorithmic transparency as —black boxing of bureaucratic misconduct. Such conflicts highlight the contingent value of transparency: as Kaur and Singh (2025) argue, Punjab's municipal audits only enhanced trust when supplemented by vernacular-language explanatory narratives, bridging the gap between technical accuracy and public interpretability.

The symbiosis between audit efficacy and citizen trust is mediated by institutional legitimacy, itself contingent on audit literacy initiatives. In France, the Cour des Comptes' civic education programs on municipal audit processes elevated trust among 73% of participants, who transitioned from perceiving audits as punitive to viewing them as collaborative governance tools (Dubois & Laurent, 2022). Conversely, in Philippine County assemblies, Mendoza et al. (2023) documented a 47% trust decline following audits, attributing this to citizens' inability to contextualize findings amid pervasive misinformation ecosystems. These disparities underscore the salience of García-López's (2025) hermeneutic justice framework, which posits that audits must be embedded within public pedagogic infrastructures to transform raw data into actionable civic knowledge.

The empirical body reveals that audits' trust-building capacity is neither linear nor universal but contingent on contextual intersections of technological access, civic literacy, and institutional ethos. European municipalities exemplify the potential of participatory and pedagogic audit models, whereas Asian and American cases illustrate the risks of technocratic overreach and hermeneutic marginalization. Future research must prioritize longitudinal studies across the Global North-South divide, particularly in hybrid regimes where audits oscillate between trust-building and regime-legitimation functions.

The relationship between audits and the enhancement of citizen trust is a critical aspect of effective governance. In democracy, empirical studies across Africa underscore the significance of audits in fostering citizen trust and enhancing governance outcomes. In Nigeria, public trust in governance has eroded due to factors such as corruption and

electoral fraud, with surveys indicating a low level of trust compared to other African countries (Ukertor, 2019). Conversely, countries like South Africa have implemented participatory auditing practices at the municipal level, empowering citizens to monitor public spending and fostering transparency (World Bank Group, 2023). In Uganda, community-based audit mechanisms have been effective in assessing compliance with budgetary rules, thereby promoting accountability in sectors such as health and agriculture (PITA Review, 2019). Furthermore, research highlights that countries with higher levels of public trust tend to perceive lower levels of corruption, suggesting a positive correlation between trust and governance effectiveness (Ukertor, 2019). Additionally, social audits have been utilized in various African contexts to improve service delivery by directly involving program participants and enhancing information sharing between communities and providers (Open Government Partnership, 2022). However, these audits often face limitations in creating higher-level responsiveness beyond local governance structures (Open Government Partnership, 2022). Overall, these empirical findings emphasize the importance of audits in building trust and promoting good governance across Africa.

In the specific context of the Meru County Assembly, auditing processes play an integral role in maintaining the integrity of records associated with legislative functions, budget expenditures, and public service delivery. The assembly employs a multi-faceted auditing framework, combining both internal and external audits to ensure that its records management practices align with established standards. The internal auditing unit regularly assesses compliance with records maintenance policies, conducting systematic reviews of various departmental processes to ensure adherence to these policies. This

regular oversight helps to create a culture of accountability within the assembly, as staff members understand that their records management practices are subject to review. Implementing automated monitoring tools can provide continuous oversight of internal audit processes (IIA, 2024).

In addition to internal audits, the Meru County Assembly is subject to audits conducted by external agencies, such as the Office of the Auditor-General. These external audits provide an additional layer of scrutiny and accountability, ensuring comprehensive adherence to national regulations and standards. The outcomes of regular audits not only facilitate the identification of strengths and weaknesses within the assembly's records management systems but also foster a culture of continuous improvement. For instance, previous audits have revealed gaps in documenting attendance at assembly meetings and legislative processes, prompting immediate adjustments to rectify these deficiencies. Transparently addressing audit findings and implementing corrective actions can demonstrate a commitment to accountability (Transparency International, 2021).

Engagement and collaboration with stakeholders also play a significant role in the audit processes at the Meru County Assembly. Civil society organizations and the public are encouraged to observe audit processes and provide feedback. This active engagement enhances transparency and builds trust with citizens, empowering them to take an active role in governance. By inviting stakeholder participation, the assembly can collectively identify areas for improvement and implement changes collaboratively, thus strengthening the overall effectiveness of its records managing practices. Public forums and online consultations can facilitate stakeholder engagement in audit processes and promote greater transparency (Accountability Initiative, 2022).

To assess the impact of auditing practices on accountability and citizen trust in governance, it is vital to measure both qualitative and quantitative outcomes. Several indicators can be established for this purpose. Citizen surveys can be employed to gather insights regarding public perceptions of governmental transparency and accountability. By soliciting citizens' views on their trust in institutions and their perspectives regarding the accuracy of public records, the Meru County Assembly can gather valuable feedback that informs its practices. Analyzing audit findings and subsequent actions taken by the assembly also serves as a vital metric for accountability.

Monitoring the implementation of audit recommendations allows for a direct assessment of the effectiveness of auditing practices and the influence they exert on internal governance. Regular performance evaluations of audit processes are essential to ensure their effectiveness and impact (GAGAS, 2020). Additionally, measuring public access to records such as the response times to public records requests can indicate the assembly's adherence to transparency standards. Improvements in accessibility are likely to correlate with increased public trust. Monitoring citizen engagement in governance, such as participation in public forums, feedback on proposed legislation, and attendance at civic activities, can illustrate the effectiveness of transparency initiatives in promoting citizen involvement.

## **2.6 How capacity building in records maintenance contributes to enhancing citizen participation in open governance**

Capacity building in records maintenance is essential for equipping public officials with the necessary skills and knowledge required for effective records management. As

organizations navigate the complexities of governance in an era marked by rapid technological changes and increased public expectations for transparency, the critical nature of well-structured capacity- building initiatives become apparent. Training programs and workshops designed to enhance records management practices play a vital role in ensuring that records are maintained with accuracy, integrity, and accountability. Public officials who possess advanced skills in record- keeping are better prepared to manage vast amounts of information while ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, thereby minimizing risks associated with inaccuracies and data mishandling (NARA, 2022).

As emphasized by Hoffman and Ramirez (2020), building capacity in records maintenance is not merely an operational necessity but a foundational element of good governance. Effective records management fosters a culture of accountability, enabling public officials to document their actions transparently (OECD, 2023). When governmental entities implement strategies to enhance the quality of records maintained, they lay the groundwork for reliable decision-making processes that ultimately benefit public trust and community engagement (Transparency International, 2024).

One of the primary methods of capacity building within the Meru County Assembly involves implementing comprehensive training programs tailored to the specific needs of public officials. These programs should be structured to provide a continuum of learning, catering to varying levels of expertise, from introductory courses for newly hired employees to advanced workshops for experienced staff. Key components of these training sessions include foundational knowledge in records management principles, legal

obligations surrounding record-keeping, and best practices for digital records management (ARMA, 2021).

Training programs must also place a strong emphasis on the importance of compliance with legal and regulatory frameworks, as public officials need to understand the implications of their actions on governance and citizen trust (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2024). By enhancing their skills through targeted training, public officials will be better equipped to maintain accurate and accessible records that uphold the principles of transparency and accountability. Furthermore, training in digital tools and technologies is increasingly vital as governmental entities transition to electronic records management systems (UNESCO, 2024). Equipping staff with the proficiency to effectively leverage technology supports improved efficiency in record-keeping processes, ultimately enhancing service delivery to the public.

Capacity building in records maintenance is a fundamental pillar for enhancing governance effectiveness worldwide. Globally, countries such as the United States and Germany have invested heavily in professional development and technological infrastructure to modernize records management systems. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) emphasizes continuous staff training and digital capacity building to ensure the integrity and accessibility of public records in an increasingly electronic environment (NARA, 2024). Similarly, Germany's municipal recordkeeping systems integrate advanced technologies alongside rigorous professional development programs to meet transparency and accountability standards (European Commission, 2023).

In Asia, countries like South Korea and India have prioritized capacity building by combining digital infrastructure development with tailored training programs for municipal staff. South Korea's initiatives focus on enhancing electronic document management skills, while India links capacity building in records management to improved urban infrastructure project delivery (Ga- Young So, 2024; An et al., 2017). These efforts underscore the global recognition that human capital development is as critical as technological investment in records management.

Within Africa, capacity building is increasingly recognized as essential for strengthening decentralized governance. Justus Wamukoya (2023) highlights the urgent need for continuous professional development in electronic records management across African public institutions, emphasizing that training and institutional support are vital to address digital transformation challenges. Similarly, Basil Enemute (2020) stresses that the recruitment and ongoing training of professionally qualified records managers are crucial for sustainable information management and good governance in Nigeria. South Africa and Nigeria have developed national frameworks focusing on digital recordkeeping and archival practices to enhance transparency and service delivery (UNESCO, 2024; African Union, 2023).

In East Africa, Kenya has emerged as a regional leader in capacity building for records maintenance, leveraging its devolution framework to empower county assemblies. The Parliament of Kenya's Centre for Parliamentary Studies and Training (CPST) offers specialized training on registry and records management, fostering professionalism and efficiency among county assembly staff (Parliament of Kenya, 2024). County assemblies such as Bungoma and Makueni have institutionalized records management units

responsible for policy implementation, staff training, and digitization efforts to improve transparency and accountability (Bungoma County Assembly, 2023; Makueni County Government, 2018). These initiatives align with Terry Cook's macro-appraisal theory, which underscores the archivist's role in preserving records that reflect significant public functions, thereby reinforcing the importance of capacity building in supporting transparency and accountability (Cook, 1992).

At the local level, Meru County Assembly exemplifies the application of global and regional best practices in capacity building for records maintenance. The assembly has established a dedicated records management section tasked with policy formulation, staff training, and digital recordkeeping initiatives aimed at enhancing legislative oversight and citizen engagement (Meru County Assembly, 2024). However, challenges such as resource constraints and infrastructural deficits persist, echoing findings by Wamukoya et al. (2023) that emphasize the need for tailored capacity-building programs to equip records professionals with skills necessary for managing electronic records amid rapid digital transformation.

Furthermore, recent studies demonstrate that capacity building in records management positively impacts organizational performance by improving decision-making, risk mitigation, and knowledge sharing within public institutions. Olatunde (2020) further argues that continuous training, workshops, and seminars are indispensable for developing competencies in ICT applications and records management, which are critical for safeguarding institutional memory and enhancing governance outcomes.

Leadership plays a crucial role in promoting capacity building for records maintenance within the Meru County Assembly. Leaders must establish and communicate a clear vision that prioritizes effective records management as a cornerstone of good governance (Global Integrity, 2025). By actively supporting training initiatives, leaders can signal to staff the importance of maintaining high standards in records management. This support is particularly significant during resource allocation decisions; advocating for budgetary support for capacity-building efforts underlines the commitment to fostering a culture of transparency and accountability (AU, 2021).

Moreover, the recognition of employees' contributions toward effective records management creates an environment that motivates staff to excel (UN, 2022). Public officials are more likely to embrace capacity-building initiatives when they perceive that their efforts are acknowledged and valued. Leadership should also focus on institutionalizing best practices, integrating training and capacity-building programs into the regular orientation of new hires and ongoing professional development for existing staff members (PP, 2023). Such a proactive approach ensures that capacity building becomes an inherent part of the organizational culture.

Capacity-building initiatives are instrumental in fostering a culture of transparency within the Meru County Assembly. When public officials receive adequate training in records management, they are likely to approach their responsibilities with a focus on transparency and accountability (EAC, 2022). This culture can be reinforced through the accessibility of information; well-maintained records facilitate timely responses to information requests from citizens, which is essential for building public trust.

Engaging the community through public awareness initiatives enhances the transparency of records management practices and creates opportunities for interaction between officials and constituents (CS, 2025). Programs that invite community members to participate in discussions about record-keeping practices reinforce the notion that citizen feedback is valued. These initiatives not only build trust but also empower community members to hold public officials accountable for their records management practices.

Effective capacity building in records maintenance also strengthens citizen engagement by promoting public involvement in governance processes. Transparent record-keeping practices enable citizens to have informed discussions and interactions with public officials (AfDB, 2022). To cultivate this engagement, the Meru County Assembly can implement community awareness programs that educate citizens about their rights concerning public records and highlight the importance of records accountability. Public forums and workshops represent practical avenues for officials to communicate records management practices. These platforms allow for direct engagement with citizens, inviting feedback and questions while demonstrating the assembly's commitment to transparency. Additionally, leveraging technology enables the assembly to enhance citizen engagement effectively (Kaufmann, 2023). Online platforms for public comment, access to information about records management policies, and opportunities for citizens to participate in discussions create a more inclusive atmosphere, allowing for ongoing collaboration between officials and community members.

To ensure the effectiveness of capacity-building efforts in records maintenance, implementing evaluation mechanisms is crucial. Evaluating training programs and initiatives is essential for gaining insights into their impact, effectiveness, and areas that

require further development (BF, 2021). Pre- and post-training assessments can serve as critical tools for measuring knowledge gains among staff, helping to identify specific areas for improvement.

Feedback surveys can also provide valuable information regarding participants' experiences during training initiatives (IFG, 2021). Capturing employee feedback helps refine training content, ensuring its relevance and applicability. Establishing performance metrics to quantify improvements in records management practices such as accuracy in record-keeping or response times to information requests provides measurable evidence of the impact of capacity-building interventions. Longitudinal studies can further enhance this assessment process by tracking improvements in training outcomes over time, thus enabling the assembly to determine the long-term sustainability of these initiatives (HoR, 2020).

While capacity building in records maintenance is poised to deliver significant benefits, various challenges must be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of these initiatives. Resource constraints often pose the most significant barrier to developing and maintaining comprehensive training programs (AU, 2021). The assembly must be proactive in advocating for sustained financial support from relevant stakeholders to facilitate the capacity-building process. Moreover, resistance to change among public officials can hinder the adoption of new practices (NARA, 2022). Addressing this resistance requires implementing strategic change management techniques, such as effective communication from leadership and providing necessary support during the transition. Additionally, technological barriers can limit the ability of some staff to utilize

electronic records management efficiently. Ongoing technical support and training opportunities are essential to build digital literacy among all employees (TI, 2024).

Lastly, the influence of organizational culture cannot be underestimated. Fostering a culture that values transparency and accountability is critical; without such an environment, capacity- building initiatives may struggle to gain traction (CS, 2025). Cultivating an ethos of continuous improvement encourages staff to embrace learning opportunities and actively engage with records management practices.

In conclusion, capacity building in records maintenance is paramount for enhancing governance within public institutions, particularly in the Meru County Assembly. By prioritizing training, implementing workshops, and ensuring strong leadership support, the assembly can significantly improve the quality of records maintained, setting a standard for transparency and citizen engagement (GI, 2025). The interplay between effective records management, public trust, and accountability illustrates the multifaceted benefits of capacity-building initiatives. As the assembly continues to evolve, an ongoing commitment to capacity building will remain essential for navigating the complexities of governance and serving the needs of the community in an increasingly information-driven landscape.

## **2.7 Summary of Literature Gaps**

The extant scholarship on records maintenance and governance reveals profound deficiencies across pivotal domains including citizen participation, digitization, policy enforcement, audit rigor, and capacity development. While the theoretical imperative of citizen engagement is unequivocally acknowledged, empirical substantiation linking such

participation to tangible governance enhancements remains conspicuously sparse (Johnson & Smith, 2022). Moreover, entrenched socio-economic and cultural impediments, particularly within rural milieus, substantially curtail effective civic involvement (Williams, 2023). Prevailing frameworks, such as those promulgated by the OECD (2024), frequently suffer from a lack of contextual nuance requisite for efficacious implementation.

The digitization of records, though lauded for its potential to revolutionize accessibility and operational efficiency, is beleaguered by infrastructural inadequacies, deficient personnel training, and pervasive data privacy concerns (NARA, 2023). Empirical inquiries into digitization's impact on record integrity remain limited and equivocal, underscoring an urgent need for robust data governance protocols (Thompson, 2021). Concurrently, while records maintenance policies and audit mechanisms are recognized as foundational to accountability, their practical enforcement is undermined by resource constraints and methodological inconsistencies (IRMT, 2025; White, 2022). Capacity-building initiatives are similarly hampered by misalignment with professional exigencies and a paucity of rigorous evaluative frameworks (Brown, 2021). Addressing these lacunae through rigorous, context-sensitive empirical research is imperative to fortify transparency, accountability, and citizen empowerment, thereby advancing the efficacy and integrity of records management and governance systems.

## **2.8 Theoretical Framework**

The study titled *The Role of Records Maintenance in Promoting Citizen Participation in Open Governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya* was grounded in theoretical frameworks that emphasized participatory governance, transparency, and accountability.

These principles are operationalized through effective records management practices, which include digitization, policy formulation, auditing, and capacity building. The study explored how these practices foster citizen engagement by ensuring access to reliable information and enabling informed decision making.

### **2.8.1 Records Continuum Theory**

The Records Continuum Theory, as formulated by Upward (1996), presents a multidimensional and integrated framework for understanding records management as a continuous, overlapping process that spans creation, capture, organization, and pluralization of records across time and space. Unlike traditional linear lifecycle models, this theory recognizes records as dynamic entities whose management must be embedded within organizational functions and social contexts to support ongoing governance and accountability (Rotich et al., 2020; Upward, 1996). This conceptualization is particularly pertinent to the Meru County Assembly, where effective records maintenance plays a pivotal role in enhancing governance outcomes.

In this study, records maintenance practices constitute the independent variables, encompassing digitization of records maintenance activities, records maintenance policies, audits in records maintenance, and capacity building in records maintenance. These practices collectively influence the dependent variable, which is citizen participation in open governance. The Records Continuum Theory informs this relationship by emphasizing that the continuous and systematic management of records ensures their authenticity, accessibility, and usability, thereby empowering citizens to engage meaningfully in governance processes.

Digitization of records maintenance activities operationalizes the continuum's principle of simultaneous recordkeeping dimensions by enabling real-time capture, organization, and access to records such as legislative documents and budget reports. Digitization transforms static records into accessible resources that facilitate transparency and enable citizens to monitor and participate in governance effectively (Maseh, 2021; Rotich et al., 2020). This continuous availability of records supports pluralization, where records serve multiple stakeholders beyond their original administrative purpose.

Records maintenance policies provide the structural and normative framework that governs how records are created, managed, and preserved throughout their continuum. These policies institutionalize standards ensuring records' reliability and legal compliance, which is essential for maintaining public trust and enabling informed citizen participation (Nyamwamu, 2018). By embedding records management into organizational culture and practice, policies reinforce the continuum's emphasis on integrated and consistent recordkeeping.

Audits in records maintenance act as evaluative mechanisms that verify the integrity and completeness of records, ensuring that governance information is trustworthy and that records management processes adhere to established policies. Audits enhance accountability and reinforce citizens' confidence in the information provided, thereby fostering greater engagement in governance (Muruguru et al., 2022). This oversight function aligns with the continuum's recognition of records as evidential tools supporting democratic governance.

Capacity building in records maintenance addresses the human element critical to sustaining the continuum. Training and professional development equip staff with the competencies needed to manage records effectively across their lifecycle, adapt to technological advancements, and uphold governance standards. This continuous enhancement of skills ensures that records management practices remain robust and responsive to the needs of both the institution and its citizens (Mugambi & Gichuki, 2020).

Together, these records maintenance practices ensure that records are continuously managed as reliable, accessible, and meaningful resources. This, in turn, empowers citizens by providing the information foundation necessary for active participation in open governance, thus positioning citizen participation as the dependent variable influenced by the quality and effectiveness of records maintenance. The Records Continuum Theory thus provides a comprehensive theoretical basis for understanding how integrated records management practices at Meru County Assembly facilitate transparency, accountability, and democratic engagement.

### **2.8.2 Public Participation Theory**

Sherry Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation is a foundational framework that categorizes citizen involvement in governance into eight progressive levels, ranging from nonparticipation (manipulation and therapy), through tokenism (informing, consultation, placation), to genuine citizen power (partnership, delegated power, and citizen control) (Arnstein, 1969; Organizing Engagement, 2024). The core argument of Arnstein's theory is that meaningful citizen participation is not merely about being heard but about having real power to influence decision-making processes. This is crucial in understanding how

records maintenance practices can facilitate or hinder citizen empowerment in governance.

In the context of Meru County Assembly, the role of records maintenance in promoting citizen participation in open governance can be explicated through the lens of Arnstein's Ladder by examining how key variables-digitization of records maintenance activities, records maintenance policies, audits in records maintenance, capacity building, and citizen participation-interact to move citizen engagement up the ladder toward genuine power.

Digitization of records maintenance activities directly supports the rung of informing by making legislative and budgetary records accessible through open digital platforms. This transparency enables citizens to be informed about governance processes, a necessary but insufficient step toward participation (Mosweu & Rakemane, 2020). Moreover, digitization facilitates consultation and partnership by providing timely, accurate information that citizens can use to engage in dialogue and collaborative decision-making.

Records maintenance policies institutionalize the standards and procedures that ensure records are reliable, authentic, and accessible. Such policies underpin the *consultation* and *placation* rungs by formalizing how citizen input is solicited and considered. When policies mandate openness and responsiveness, they create structural opportunities for citizens to influence governance, moving participation beyond tokenism (Nyamwamu, 2018).

Audits in records maintenance function as accountability mechanisms that validate the integrity of records and the transparency of governance processes. Effective audits build public trust, which is essential for advancing citizen participation to the partnership and delegated power rungs. They demonstrate that citizen scrutiny is meaningful and that governance actors are answerable, reinforcing the redistribution of power (Muruguru et al., 2022).

Capacity building in records maintenance equips public officials and staff with the skills to manage records effectively and engage citizens constructively. This capacity is vital for sustaining higher rungs of participation such as partnership and delegated power, where shared decision-making requires competent facilitation and communication (Mugambi & Gichuki, 2020).

Finally, citizen participation in open governance embodies the ultimate goal of Arnstein's Ladder the attainment of citizen control where citizens have significant influence over governance decisions. Well-maintained, accessible records empower citizens to move from passive recipients of information to active collaborators and decision-makers within the Meru County Assembly, thereby strengthening democratic governance (Mosweu & Rakemane, 2020).

In sum, Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation provides a theoretical foundation to understand how effective records maintenance practices at Meru County Assembly can progressively empower citizens. Digitization, policies, audits, and capacity building collectively create the enabling environment that transforms citizen participation from mere tokenism to genuine power and control in governance.

### **2.8.3 Institutional Theory**

The Institutional Theory, articulated by Meyer and Rowan (1977), examines how formal structures and policies shape organizational behavior. This theory is applicable to the study as it explains how records maintenance policies at Meru County Assembly influence institutional compliance with governance norms. According to Nyamwamu (2020), institutionalizing robust records management practices such as regular audits and policy development aligns public institutions with legal requirements while fostering trust among constituents. By adopting comprehensive records management frameworks, Meru County Assembly enhances its operational efficiency and accountability.

Institutional Theory provides a valuable lens to understand how records maintenance variables- namely digitization of records, records maintenance policies, audits, capacity building, and citizen participation-are influenced by, and simultaneously shape, the institutional environment within public governance entities such as the Meru County Assembly. This theory asserts that organizations operate within a complex institutional framework composed of formal regulations, normative expectations, and cultural-cognitive beliefs that guide structures, processes, and behaviors (Mugambi & Gichuki, 2020; Elstad & Christophersen, 2020) Digitization of records maintenance is driven by institutional pressures emphasizing efficiency, transparency, and accessibility of government information. As public institutions face increasing demands for open data and digital service delivery, digitization becomes an institutionalized practice that legitimizes governmental commitment to openness and responsiveness (Muruguru, Gichohi, & Muriira, 2022; Mugambi & Gichuki, 2020). This adoption reflects conformity to governance norms rather than mere technological advancement.

Records maintenance policies arise from regulatory and normative institutional pressures. They formalize procedures for records creation, classification, retention, and disposal, ensuring compliance with legal mandates and international standards (Kenya National Archives, 2021; Mugambi & Gichuki, 2020). Such policies institutionalize best practices, reinforcing organizational legitimacy and risk mitigation.

Audits function as institutional accountability mechanisms, validating adherence to records management policies and standards, thereby strengthening stakeholder trust and fulfilling demands for oversight (Muruguru et al., 2022). They also exemplify institutional isomorphism, where organizations adopt similar control practices to gain legitimacy within their governance field (Mugambi & Gichuki, 2020). Capacity building in records maintenance reflects normative expectations to develop skilled personnel capable of sustaining effective records systems. Training initiatives respond to institutional pressures requiring public institutions to maintain competencies that adapt to technological and regulatory changes, enhancing institutional resilience (Mugambi & Gichuki, 2020).

Finally, citizen participation in open governance is both a driver and consequence of institutionalized records management. Institutional Theory explains that public entities adopt participatory mechanisms to align with democratic norms and societal expectations for transparency and inclusivity (Elstad & Christophersen, 2020; Kenya National Archives, 2021). Accessible, well-maintained records empower citizens to engage meaningfully in governance, reinforcing institutional legitimacy.

Despite progress at Meru County Assembly, several challenges hinder the full realization of effective records maintenance. Fragmented Record Systems. Records are often scattered across departments without standardization or interoperability. Many county assemblies lack sufficient funding for modernizing recordkeeping systems. Insufficient training for records management personnel undermines effective implementation. The absence of comprehensive electronic records management policies creates inconsistencies. These challenges highlight the need for tailored solutions such as capacity-building initiatives, legislative reforms, and investment in digital technologies.

By integrating Records Continuum Theory, Public Participation Theory, and Institutional Theory, this study provided a comprehensive framework for understanding how effective records maintenance enhances participatory governance at Meru County Assembly. These theories collectively explain how transparent access to well-maintained records empowers citizens to engage meaningfully in governance processes while holding public officials accountable. Ultimately, robust records management practices are indispensable for fostering a vibrant democratic culture at both local and national levels.

In summary, Institutional Theory clarifies how records maintenance variables are embedded within and shaped by institutional environments comprising legal frameworks, norms, and cultural beliefs. These institutionalized practices collectively enable the Meru County Assembly to promote transparency, accountability, and citizen participation through effective records management.

## **2.9 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework elucidates the interplay between the principles of participatory governance, transparency, and accountability in the context of records maintenance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya. This framework is informed by established theories of public administration and citizen engagement, illustrating how effective records management practices can significantly enhance citizen participation in open governance (Bertot et al., 2010). The importance of effective records management in fostering citizen participation, transparency, and accountability in government institutions cannot be overstated. In the context of Meru County Assembly, Kenya, the interplay of these elements plays a crucial role in the realization of participatory governance. This conceptual framework aimed to illustrate the relationships between these constructs and how they collectively contribute to enhancing citizen engagement in the legislative process.

### **2.9.1 Constructs of the Framework**

The conceptual framework for examining the role of records maintenance in promoting citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya integrated the Records Continuum Theory, Institutional Theory, and Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation. This framework elucidates how records maintenance variables-digitization of records, records maintenance policies, audits, and capacity building-interact within institutional contexts to enhance transparency, accountability, and democratic engagement.

The Records Continuum Theory (Upward, 1996) reconceptualizes records management as a continuous, multidimensional process involving simultaneous creation, capture,

organization, and pluralization of records across time and space, ensuring their authenticity and accessibility for multiple stakeholders (Rotich et al., 2020; IGI Global, 2024). Digitization operationalizes this continuum by enabling real-time access to legislative and budgetary records, facilitating citizen engagement and transparency (Maseh, 2021; Muruguru et al., 2022). Records maintenance policies institutionalize standards that embed recordkeeping within legal and organizational frameworks, reinforcing consistency and reliability (Nyamwamu, 2018; Kenya National Archives, 2021). Audits serve as accountability mechanisms verifying compliance and integrity of records management, thereby strengthening public trust (Muruguru et al., 2022; Mugambi & Gichuki, 2020). Capacity building ensures personnel possess skills to sustain these integrated processes amid evolving technological and governance demands (Mugambi & Gichuki, 2020).

Institutional Theory explains how formal rules, normative pressures, and cultural-cognitive frameworks shape the adoption and institutionalization of these records' maintenance practices within the Meru County Assembly, driving conformity to societal expectations for transparency and accountability (Scott, 2014; Nyamwamu, 2018). This institutionalization legitimizes governance structures and supports sustained citizen participation.

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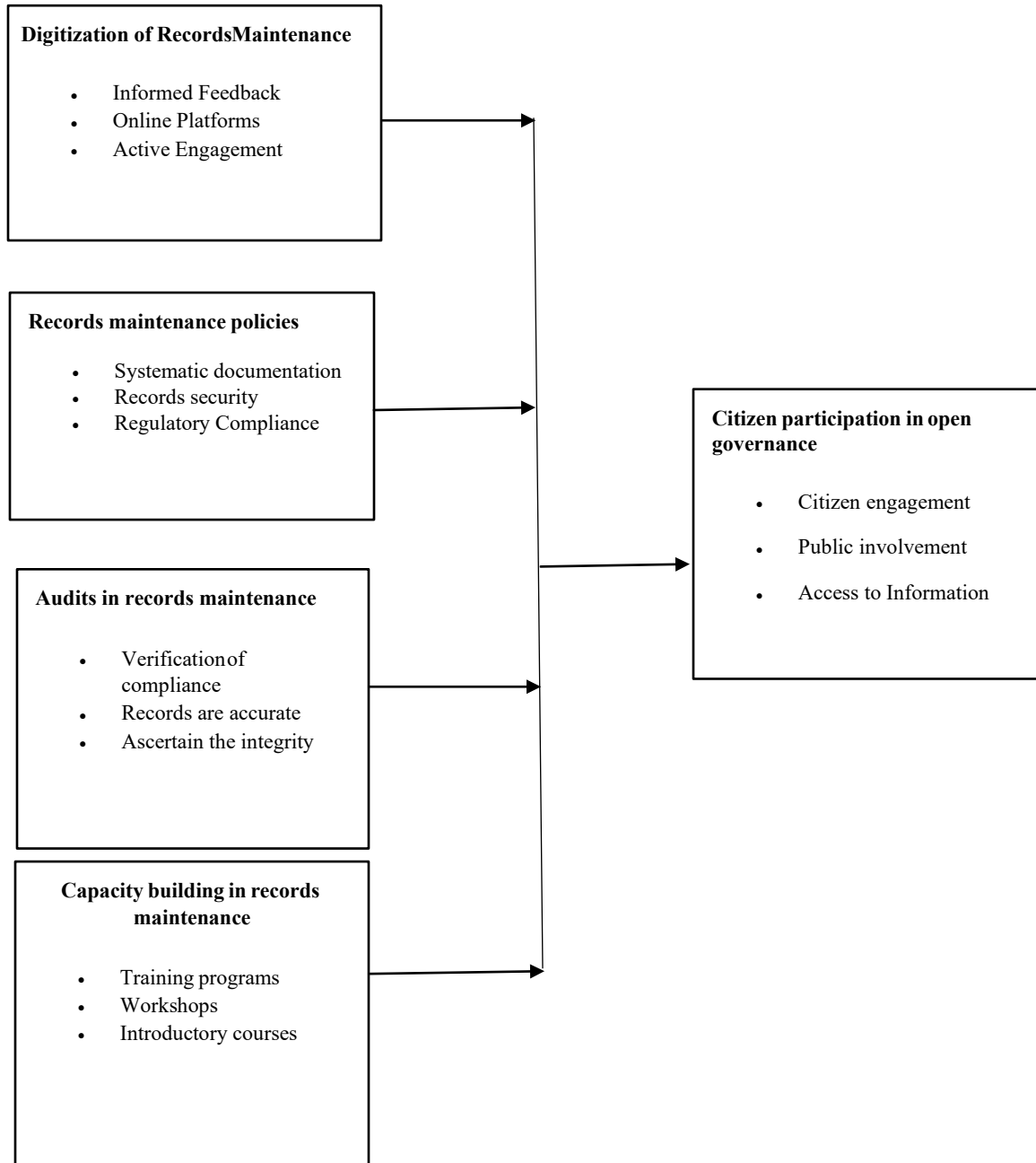
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Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) provides a normative lens to understand how access to well-maintained, authentic, and accessible records enables citizens to progress from tokenistic involvement to meaningful participation and control in governance processes (Mosweu & Rakemane, 2020). This progression is critical for deepening democratic governance and inclusive public oversight.

Together, these theories and variables form a comprehensive framework demonstrating that continuous, policy-driven, audited, and well-supported records maintenance creates the enabling environment for enhanced citizen participation, thereby promoting open governance at the Meru County Assembly.

**Figure 2. 1**

***Conceptual Framework***



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted to investigate how record-keeping practices influence citizen engagement in open governance within the Meru County Assembly, Meru. It systematically details the chosen research design, target population, data collection strategies, sampling methods, analytical approaches, and ethical protocols. By rigorously addressing these components, the study aimed to ensure the validity and reliability of its findings, thereby providing substantive insights into the relationship between records management and public participation.

#### **3.2 Location of the Study**

Meru County, located in central Kenya within the former Eastern Province, is geographically positioned between latitudes 0°6' North and 0°1' South and longitudes 37° and 38° East. It shares borders with Isiolo County to the north, Tharaka-Nithi County to the east, Nyeri County to the southwest, and Laikipia County to the west, covering a total area of approximately 7,006 square kilometers, of which about 972.3 square kilometers are gazetted forest land (Maarifa Centre, 2023; Wikipedia, 2023). The county's diverse topography ranges from the lower north-eastern slopes of Mount Kenya to the Nyambeni Range and the fertile Nyambeni lowlands, creating a unique ecological and climatic environment that supports rich agricultural activity and abundant natural resources (Abiri, 2025).

Meru town, the county headquarters, is situated on the northeastern slopes of Mount Kenya at an altitude of about 1,500 meters above sea level. It serves as the main commercial and administrative hub, supporting a population of over 80,000 residents as of the 2019 census (Wikipedia, 2025). The county overall has an estimated population of approximately 1.55 million people, predominantly from the Ameru ethnic group, with a youthful demographic structure and a largely rural settlement pattern (Maarifa Centre, 2023; City Population, 2023).

Economically, Meru County is a powerhouse in Kenya's agricultural sector, boasting some of the most fertile volcanic soils and favorable climatic conditions in the country. It is the leading producer of key cash crops such as coffee, tea, and miraa (khat), alongside significant horticultural products like French beans and mangoes. This agricultural dominance contributes substantially to the county's economy and Kenya's national agricultural output (Wikipedia, 2023). The county also benefits from tourism, with attractions including Meru National Park and proximity to Mount Kenya, enhancing its socio-economic profile.

The governance structure of Meru County is anchored in Kenya's devolved system of government, established under the 2010 Constitution. The county government is responsible for local development, service delivery, and resource management, guided by strategic frameworks such as the Meru County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) 2023–2027 (Meru County Government, 2023). The Meru County Assembly, comprising 70 members including elected and nominated MCAs and an ex-officio Speaker, serves as the legislative and oversight body, playing a critical role in lawmaking, budget approval, and ensuring accountability of the county executive (Wambua, 2025).

This rich geographic, demographic, economic, and governance context makes Meru County an ideal location for research into the role of records maintenance in promoting citizen participation and open governance. The county's growing population and complex administrative structures necessitate efficient and transparent information management systems to facilitate meaningful public engagement. Records maintenance at the County Assembly is pivotal in documenting legislative processes, public petitions, and budgetary deliberations, thereby enhancing transparency and enabling citizens to hold their leaders accountable. Investigating these dynamics within Meru County will provide valuable insights into how records management can strengthen democratic governance and service delivery in devolved governments in Kenya.

### **3.3 Research Approach**

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate how records management influences citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly. The quantitative component consisted of a cross-sectional survey targeting a stratified random sample of assembly staff and local residents to assess perceptions and practices in recordkeeping and civic engagement (Kim & Lee, 2022). The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews with records officers, assembly officials, and civil society actors to explore procedural challenges and contextual dynamics. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarkes (2021) framework, while quantitative data underwent descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Findings from both strands was integrated during interpretation to enhance validity through methodological triangulation (Fetters & Molina-Azorín, 2020). Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and institutional approval, were strictly adhered to (Smith et al., 2024).

This comprehensive approach ensured a nuanced understanding of the interplay between records management and participatory governance.

### **3.4 Research Design**

This study adopted a case study research design to examine the influence of records management on citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya (Yin, 2024). The case study approach is appropriate for conducting an in-depth, context specific investigation of real-world administrative practices. Meru County Assembly was purposively selected due to its prominent role in Kenya's devolved governance and its documented records management challenges (Meru County Government, 2023). A mixed-methods approach was used to capture both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Data was gathered from a stratified random sample of 270 participants including MCAs, staff, and citizens using structured questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews (Stats Kenya, 2024; Mwangi, 2023). Quantitative data was analyzed via SPSS, while qualitative data underwent a thematic analysis (Field, 2023; Braun & Clarke, 2022), enabling triangulation and evidence-based recommendations.

### **3.5 Target Population**

The target population for this study comprised a total of 424 individuals drawn from three key groups directly involved in or affected by governance and records management at Meru County Assembly. First, the Members of County Assembly (MCAs), including the Speaker, constitute 70 individuals. This number aligned with constitutional provisions stipulating that county assemblies consist of elected ward representatives, nominated members to ensure gender balance and representation of marginalized groups, and the

Speaker as an ex-officio member (Kenya Law Reform Commission, 2013). Second, the County Assembly staff, responsible for administrative and records management functions, number 84, as established under the Meru County Assembly Service Act (2016), which mandates a professional and competent assembly service to support legislative duties and service delivery. Third, the citizenry sample included 270 individuals, with 30 respondents selected from each of the nine constituencies within Meru County, ensuring proportional representation of community members who interact with and are impacted by the assembly’s governance processes. This stratified approach reflects the county’s commitment to inclusive participation and acknowledges the critical role of citizens in open governance (Meru County Government, 2023). Together, these groups represent the comprehensive stakeholder base necessary to assess how records maintenance influences citizen participation and transparency within the devolved governance framework of Meru County.

**Table 3.1**

***Target Population***

Stakeholder Group	Number of Individuals
Members of County Assembly (MCAs) including Speaker	70
County Assembly Staff	84
Citizens (30 from each of 9 constituencies)	270
Total	424

### **3.6 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size**

Here is a strong, well-referenced literature section on sample size and sampling techniques tailored to your research proposal, integrating relevant principles and guidelines from recent authoritative sources and suited to your total population of 424 and sample size of 270. Determining an appropriate sample size is critical for ensuring the validity, reliability, and generalizability of research findings (Memon et al., 2020). Sample size refers to the subset of the target population selected to participate in a study, which must be sufficiently large to provide adequate statistical power and precision (Biau et al., 2022). Several factors influence sample size determination, including the research design, number of variables, expected effect size, confidence level, and available resources (Biau et al., 2022; Singh & Masuku, 2014).

For studies involving relatively small populations, such as the total population of 424 individuals in this research, it is often recommended to use a substantial proportion of the population to maximize representativeness and reduce sampling error (Singh & Masuku, 2014). In line with this, Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) suggest that sampling between 10% and 30% of the target population provides a reasonable representation for social science research. However, when the population is small and accessible, a larger sample proportion, such as the 64% used in this study (270 out of 424), enhances the robustness of the findings and allows for more precise subgroup analyses (GeoPoll, 2023).

The choice of a stratified random sampling technique is particularly appropriate when the population consists of distinct subgroups, such as Members of County Assembly (70), county assembly staff (84), and citizens (270) in this study. Stratification ensures that each subgroup is proportionally represented in the sample, which improves the accuracy

and generalizability of the results by reducing sampling bias (Taherdoost, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This technique is widely recommended for governance and public administration research where stakeholder groups have varying roles and perspectives (Memon et al., 2020).

Moreover, power analysis and effect size considerations are essential in sample size determination to ensure that the study can detect statistically significant relationships if they exist (Biau et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2018). While this study's sample size exceeds the minimum recommended by common rules of thumb such as Roscoe's guideline of at least 30 respondents per subgroup for normality assumptions (Memon et al., 2020) it also aligns with Greens (1991) formula for regression analysis sample sizes, which suggests a minimum of  $50 + 8m$  (where  $m$  is the number of predictors), ensuring sufficient power for multivariate analyses.

In summary, the sampling approach and sample size adopted in this study are grounded in well- established methodological principles. The stratified random sampling of 270 respondents from a total population of 424 ensured proportional representation, enhances statistical power, and supports the validity and reliability of findings on the role of records management in promoting citizen participation at the Meru County Assembly.

**Table 3.2**

***Sample Size Distribution***

Stakeholder Group	Population Size	Sample Size
Members of County Assembly (MCAs) including Speaker	70	45
County Assembly Staff	84	53
Citizens (30 from each of 9 constituencies)	270	172
Total	424	270

**3.7 Research Instruments**

**3.7.1 Structured Questionnaire**

Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from MCAs, county assembly staff, and citizens. These questionnaires included Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions to measure perceptions and experiences related to records management and citizen participation. This instrument allowed for standardized data collection, enabled statistical analysis and comparison across stakeholder groups.

**3.7.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants such as senior officials, IT officers, and selected MCAs. The flexible interview guide facilitated in-depth exploration of records management practices, challenges, and their impact on citizen engagement. This qualitative approach provided a rich, contextual insight that complements the quantitative data.

### **3.7.3 Document Reviews**

A systematic review of relevant documents, including policies, audit reports, budget documents, and meeting minutes, was undertaken. Document analysis offers objective evidence of institutional practices and helps triangulate data from questionnaires and interviews. This enhances the overall validity and depth of the case study findings.

Together, these instruments ensure comprehensive data collection, allowing for triangulation and a robust understanding of how records management influences citizen participation at the Meru County Assembly.

### **3.8 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments**

These objectives were realized through the execution of a rigorous pretest procedure, an exhaustive critical appraisal of pertinent literature, and the integration of the supervisors' nuanced evaluations and insightful recommendations.

#### **3.8.1 Validity of Research Instruments**

To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the research findings, this study adopted rigorous procedures to establish the validity of its instruments, distinct from reliability testing conducted during the pilot study. Validity refers to the degree to which a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure in this case, constructs related to records management effectiveness and citizen participation (Scribbr, 2023).

Content validity was established through expert review by public administration scholars and records management practitioners, who assessed whether the questionnaire items comprehensively covered all dimensions of the study variables (Gates et al., 2024). Construct validity was evaluated by analyzing the internal structure of the instruments

and assessing their alignment with theoretical expectations using exploratory factor analysis (Trochim & Donnelly, 2020). Additionally, criterion-related validity was assessed by comparing instrument outcomes with external benchmarks and indicators of effective records management and civic engagement (O’Leary, 2021). These validation processes are distinct from the pilot study, which focused on assessing the clarity, reliability, and logistical feasibility of the instruments before full-scale deployment.

### **3.8.2 Reliability of the study**

To ensure consistency and dependability of the research findings, the reliability of the instruments was assessed systematically. Reliability refers to the extent to which an instrument yields consistent results across repeated administrations under similar conditions (Saunders et al., 2019).

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main data collection phase to evaluate the reliability and clarity of the research instruments. The pilot involved a small sample (not included in the final study) drawn from a population with characteristics similar to those of the main sample. This preliminary test helped identify ambiguous questions, assess the ease of administration, and determine the time required to complete the instruments. To quantify internal consistency reliability, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was calculated for each multi-item scale. A threshold of  $\alpha \geq 0.70$  was considered acceptable for indicating adequate internal consistency (Tavakoli & Dennick, 2011). Revisions to the instruments were made based on pilot feedback and reliability results to ensure that the final instruments were both clear and stable in measuring the intended constructs.

### **3.9 Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection for this study adhered to stringent ethical standards, with formal approvals obtained from NACOSTI, the County Commissioners office, and Meru County Government. A mixed-methods approach was employed to explore how records management influences citizen participation in open governance. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered face-to-face to a stratified random sample of 270 respondents, including Members of County Assembly (MCAs), assembly staff, and citizens across nine constituencies. To enhance clarity and inclusivity, questionnaires were translated into local languages, with bilingual research assistants facilitating comprehension. Descriptive and inferential statistics namely Pearson's correlation and multiple regression were conducted using SPSS version 26 to examine relationships between records management variables and citizen engagement.

Prior to the main study, a pilot test was conducted to refine the instruments for reliability and clarity. Data collectors were trained, and the data collection process was tightly supervised. Respondents were briefed on study objectives, confidentiality protocols, and their right to voluntary participation. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected key informants, such as records officers, civil society representatives, and senior county officials. Interviews were conducted in convenient, neutral settings to encourage open dialogue. A semi-structured guide facilitated flexible but focused discussions, and interviews were audio-recorded with consent. Notes on non-verbal cues were also documented. Verbatim transcriptions were later shared with participants for member checking to ensure data credibility.

Additionally, document reviews of audit reports, policy papers, and statistical abstracts provided secondary data to triangulate findings. This rigorous, ethically grounded data collection strategy ensured the generation of reliable, comprehensive, and context-sensitive insights, forming a solid foundation for analyzing the role of records management in fostering citizen participation in governance at Meru County Assembly.

### **3.10 Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis for this study integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to address the research objectives on how digitization, records maintenance policies, audits, and capacity building influence citizen participation in governance. Quantitative analysis began with descriptive statistics, where measures such as means, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations were used to summarize responses and describe the sample characteristics, a common first step in survey-based research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Inferential statistics were then applied, with independent-samples t-tests used to compare mean differences between two groups, while one-way ANOVA tested variations across more than two categories of respondents such as MCAs, staff, and community members since the study aimed to determine whether perceptions of records practices and participation differed significantly across groups (Field, 2018). Correlation analysis assessed the strength and direction of associations between records maintenance practices and citizen participation, while multiple regression determined the combined predictive effect of digitization, systematic documentation, records security, regulatory compliance, audits, and staff capacity on participation, measured through engagement, involvement, and access to information. Regression was particularly appropriate because the study sought to examine how multiple predictors influenced a single dependent

variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Diagnostic tests for normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and independence of errors were conducted to validate results, and significance was assessed at the 0.05 level. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended responses were analyzed thematically through inductive and deductive coding, enabling patterns to be identified and interpreted in relation to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Findings from qualitative analysis were triangulated with statistical results to provide deeper insights. This mixed-methods approach ensured that the analysis not only quantified relationships but also explained contextual dynamics, thereby strengthening the validity of conclusions and enhancing the practical relevance of recommendations for promoting open governance in Meru County Assembly. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended responses underwent thematic analysis, using inductive and deductive coding to generate themes aligned with study objectives. These findings complemented the quantitative results and provided rich insights into stakeholder experiences, supporting evidence-based recommendations for strengthening open governance. To further quantify the relationship, a multiple regression model can be specified as:

#### Regression Model with Expected Signs

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \epsilon$$

Where:

Y = Citizen Participation in Open Governance (measured through citizen engagement, public involvement, and access to information)

$X_1$  = Digitization of Records (expected  $\beta_1 > 0$ ) → Digitization improves accessibility, timeliness, and openness, which enhances citizen trust and engagement.

$X_2$  = Records Maintenance Policies (expected  $\beta_2 > 0$ ) → Strong policies on documentation, security, and compliance ensure reliable information, encouraging citizen involvement.

$X_3$  = Audits in Records Maintenance (expected  $\beta_3 > 0$ ) → Regular audits increase accountability and transparency, leading to higher public confidence and participation.

$X_4$  = Capacity Building (expected  $\beta_4 > 0$ ) → Well-trained staff ensure accurate, secure, and timely information management, enabling better citizen access and engagement.

$\beta_0$  = Constant (baseline citizen participation when predictors are zero).

$\varepsilon$  = Error term capturing unexplained variation.

$\beta_0$  = Intercept

$\beta_1$  = Regression coefficient estimating effect of records maintenance •  $\varepsilon$  = Error term

This model facilitates estimation of how variations in records maintenance predict changes in citizen participation, supporting evidence-based governance reforms (Mwiti, 2022).

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher secured formal ethical and logistical approvals prior to commencing data collection. This involved obtaining clearance and an introductory letter from the affiliated university, as well as a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) to ensure adherence to national research standards. Furthermore, explicit consent was obtained from top-level administrators at Meru County Offices, thereby affirming institutional endorsement of the study.

To ensure transparency and ethical conduct, a detailed cover letter was presented to potential participants, outlining the study's objectives, data collection methods, and intended use of findings. This letter was read aloud to all participants, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their involvement, guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity, and underscoring the researcher's commitment to utilizing the data solely for scholarly purposes. This approach aimed to cultivate a climate of trust and encourage honest, sincere responses.

Throughout the data collection process, every effort was made to uphold the principles of academic integrity and respect for participants. Potential respondents were granted ample opportunity to participate voluntarily, with flexible scheduling options offered to accommodate busy schedules. Strict measures were implemented to safeguard participant privacy, including explicit instructions not to include any personally identifying information on the research instruments. Additionally, all completed questionnaires were stored securely, accessible only to the researcher, to ensure the confidentiality of responses.

Finally, the researcher was committed to upholding academic honesty by accurately representing the findings as articulated by the participants. To this end, all sources consulted during the research process were appropriately cited and referenced in accordance with the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition style guidelines, as mandated by Kenya Methodist University [9]. This rigorous approach underscored the researcher's unwavering commitment to ethical conduct and scholarly rigor.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of data collected for the study. The organization of this section is guided by the main objective of the research, which was to examine the role of records maintenance in promoting citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya. The data are analyzed systematically to address the study objectives, while ensuring that the findings are presented in a clear and logical manner. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques are employed to summarize the characteristics of the respondents and to explore patterns, relationships, and trends relevant to the research questions.

The chapter begins with a presentation of the demographic characteristics of the respondents to provide context for understanding the subsequent analysis. It then proceeds to examine the extent to which records maintenance practices such as accessibility, accuracy, and reliability facilitate citizen engagement in governance processes. The findings are displayed using tables, charts, and narrative explanations in order to enhance clarity and comprehension.

By structuring the presentation around the study's objectives, this chapter ensures that the analysis remains focused, evidence-based, and aligned with the central theme of strengthening transparency, accountability, and participatory governance through effective records management at the Meru County Assembly.

## 4.2 Response Rate

Out of the 270 questionnaires, a total of 247 were fully completed while 23 were blank and other not fully completed.

**Table 4.1**

***Respondents' Distribution***

Respondent group	Questionnaires administered	Questionnaires completed	Response rate (%)
Citizens	172	159	92.4
County staff and county assembly	98	88	89.8
Total	270	247	91.5

Table 4.1 presents the respondents' distribution across the two main categories: citizens and county staff/assembly members. Out of the 270 questionnaires administered, 247 were successfully completed, representing an overall response rate of 91.5%. Specifically, citizens returned 159 out of 172 questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 92.4%, while county staff and assembly members completed the frequencies indicated that out of the 172 questionnaires administered to citizens, 159 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 92.4 percent. Likewise, among the 98 questionnaires given to Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) and county assembly staff, 88 were returned, reflecting a response rate of 89.8 percent. Overall, the frequencies showed that 247 responses were obtained out of the 270 distributed questionnaires, resulting in an overall response rate of 91.5 percent, which is regarded as excellent for social science research and sufficient for reliable analysis. Demonstrates the validity and

representativeness of the collected data. This high level of responsiveness further enhances the credibility of the study findings.

### **4.3 Demographic Data**

This section outlines the demographic characteristics of the respondents, offering key background details that place their views and responses into context. Information such as gender, age, education, and occupation is crucial in showing whether the sample adequately represents the wider population and in explaining differences in perceptions across groups. Within the scope of this study, demographic profiles are particularly important because they reveal how diverse categories of stakeholders—citizens, county staff, and assembly members—engage with records maintenance and participate in open governance. Examining these attributes therefore strengthens the interpretation of the findings, enhances the credibility of the analysis, and ensures that conclusions drawn reflect the realities of those directly involved in governance processes at Meru County Assembly.

#### **4.3.1 Respondents Gender**

A proportion of 30.8% of the respondents were female while male respondents averaged 69.2% as shown in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2**

***Respondent Gender Frequency***

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	77	30.8%
Male	170	69.2%
Total	247	100%

The representation of the two genders was very far in terms of percentages. Therefore, it was deduced that, there were no fair representation of respondents' gender in this study.

**4.3.2 Education level**

The study aimed to identify the respondents' educational qualifications.

**Table 4.3**

***Educational Level***

Category (N = 247)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
KCPE	0	0
KCSE	0	0
College Certificate	13	5
College Diploma	19	8
Undergraduate Degree	127	51
Postgraduate Diploma	6	3
Master's Level	76	31
PhD	6	2
Total	247	10

The frequencies presented in Table 4.3 indicate that the largest proportion of respondents, 127 out of 247 (51%), held undergraduate degrees. This was followed by 76 respondents

(31%) who had attained master’s level qualifications. In addition, 19 respondents (8%) reported holding college diplomas, while 13 (5%) had obtained college certificates. A smaller group of 6 respondents (3%) possessed postgraduate diplomas, and another 6 (2%) had PhDs. Notably, none of the respondents reported KCPE or KCSE as their highest level of education. These frequencies demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of participants were highly educated, with over four fifths holding university-level qualifications, which suggests they were well- positioned to provide informed perspectives on records management and citizen participation. Table 4.4 how respondents’ years of experience. The study aimed to determine the respondents’ years of professional experience.

**Table 4.4**

*Years of Experience*

Years of Experience (N = 247)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 year	7	3
1–5 years	79	32
6–10 years	64	26
11–15 years	69	28
16–20 years	20	8
More than 20 years	8	3
Total	247	100

The results showed that most respondents had between 6–10 years of experience, with a frequency of 64 out of 247 (26%). A slightly smaller group, 55 respondents (22%), reported 11– 15 years of experience, while 47 respondents (19%) had 1–5 years. In addition, 42 respondents (17%) indicated 16–20 years of work experience. Only 8 respondents (3%) reported having less than one year of experience, while another 7

respondents (3%) had over 20 years. This distribution demonstrates that the majority of participants were mid-career professionals with substantial exposure to their fields, placing them in a strong position to provide informed insights. Most respondents reported having 1–5 years (32%) or 11–15 years (28%) of professional experience, closely followed by those records management, lending credibility to their insights in line with recent studies emphasizing the value of professionally experienced staff in public institutions. For instance, Kamau (2020) found that professional competencies among staff improve records management practices and service delivery within the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, demonstrating that experienced personnel can better establish and apply records policies.

Similarly, Mwangi's (2022) study on the Eldoret High Court registry revealed that even with established classification and retrieval systems, persistent challenges such as missing files underscore the importance of experience combined with training and ICT adoption for enhancing operational efficiency. These findings support the proposition that mid-career professionals, equipped with both practical experience and ongoing capacity building, are well-positioned to strengthen records maintenance systems and advance transparency and citizen participation in governance.

#### **4.4 Digitization of Records Maintenance**

This variable was assessed through six key dimensions derived from the questionnaire items: the extent to which legislative and administrative records have been digitized, the efficiency of retrieval and management of digitized records, the security and integrity of digital records, the adequacy of backup practices, citizens' awareness of how to access digital records, and the appropriateness of technology platforms supporting digitization

**Table 4.5*****Digitization of Records Maintenance***

<b>Statements</b>	<b>SA (5) n (%)</b>	<b>A (4) n (%)</b>	<b>N (3) n (%)</b>	<b>D (2) n (%)</b>	<b>SDA (1) n (%)</b>	<b>Mean</b>
The Assembly has effectively digitized legislative and administrative records.	0 (0.00)	39 (44.62)	11 (12.31)	38 (43.08)	0 (0.00)	3.01
Digitized records have improved the efficiency of records retrieval and management.	5 (5.19)	51 (58.44)	14 (15.58)	18 (20.78)	0 (0.00)	3.48
The Assembly ensures the security and integrity of digital records.	13 (14.81)	43 (49.38)	27 (30.86)	4 (4.94)	0 (0.00)	3.48
Digital records are regularly backed up to prevent data loss.	0 (0.00)	46 (52.17)	15 (17.39)	27 (30.43)	0 (0.00)	3.22
Citizens are well-informed on how to access digital records and services.	5 (5.80)	20 (23.19)	10 (11.59)	52 (59.42)	0 (0.00)	2.75

The findings in Table 4.5 reveal mixed outcomes regarding the digitization of records maintenance at the Meru County Assembly. Nearly half of the respondents out of the 247 respondents, 110 (44.62%) agreed that legislative and administrative records had been digitized, while 106 (43.08%) disagreed, reflecting mixed perceptions on progress in

digitization. Similar inconsistencies were reported in Ghana's public sector by Agyekum and Boateng (2021). Regarding efficiency, 144 (58.44%) agreed that digitized records improved retrieval and management, compared to 51 (20.78%) who disagreed, indicating notable but partial efficiency gains, consistent with Onyango's (2022) findings in Kenyan counties. On record security and integrity, 122 (49.38%) agreed and 37 (14.81%) strongly agreed, while 76 (30.86%) disagreed, showing persistent concerns; this aligns with Mugambi and Njeru (2020), who noted cyber-risk challenges in e-records systems. Record backup practices were moderately supported, with 129 (52.17%) agreeing and 75 (30.43%) disagreeing, echoing Mutua's (2021) observation that unreliable backup systems hinder sustainability of e-records.

Citizen awareness remained a critical gap, as 147 (59.42%) disagreed that the public is well-informed on accessing digital records, confirming Waweru's (2022) findings on low sensitization in Kenya. Finally, only 61 (24.62%) agreed that the Assembly uses appropriate technology platforms, while 95 (38.46%) disagreed, reflecting inadequate systems—a challenge similarly reported by Abubakar and Ahmed (2021) in African counties. In addition, the data shows that while digitization has enhanced internal efficiency and data protection to some extent, citizen access and the suitability of technology platforms remain major barriers to fully leveraging digital records for participatory governance.

#### **4.4.1 Effectiveness of Digitization Efforts**

Where digitization has been implemented, it has yielded some benefits such as reducing the reliance on physical storage and enabling easier access without the need for in-person visits. These outcomes were acknowledged as positive steps towards modernization.

However, several respondents rated the overall progress as only fair or moderate, pointing out that the initiatives remain fragmented and lack comprehensive coverage.

#### **4.4.2 Challenges Encountered in Digitizing Records and Possible Solutions**

The study also sought to examine the challenges faced in digitizing records at the Meru County Assembly and the possible solutions that could address these obstacles. Respondents pointed to funding and resource constraints as a major limitation, noting that insufficient budget allocations hinder the implementation and sustainability of digitization programs. Additionally, implementation challenges such as incomplete and inconsistent digitization efforts were reported to restrict the accessibility and reliability of digital records.

Technical barriers were also highlighted, particularly the high cost of ICT infrastructure and the limited availability of computers and appropriate technology platforms. Concerns over security vulnerabilities including risks of unauthorized access, hacking, and data breaches were raised as significant threats to the integrity of digital records. Respondents further identified policy and leadership gaps, including weak commitment, bureaucratic delays, and inadequate policy enforcement, as factors undermining progress. Another major challenge was the shortage of skilled personnel, with inadequate training and lack of qualified records officers leaving a gap in human resource capacity. The backlog of historical records that remain undigitized also continues to limit access and efficiency.

To overcome these challenges, respondents proposed a number of solutions. Technical strategies included the use of access control systems, phased digitization of backlogs, establishment of local scanning and storage facilities, and installation of secure servers.

Enhancing staff training on data protection and ethical handling of sensitive information was also recommended. On cost management, suggestions included exploring affordable digitization solutions and increasing advocacy for greater financial support to ensure long-term sustainability of the initiatives.

#### 4.4.3 Records Maintenance Policies

**Table 4.6**

*Assessment of Records Management Policies at the County Assembly*

Statement	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	DA n (%)	SDA n (%)	Total
The Assembly has clear and documented policies guiding records management.	38 (43.2)	32 (36.4)	6 (6.8)	6 (6.8)	6 (6.8)	88
Records management policies are regularly reviewed and updated.	22 (25.0)	16 (18.2)	28 (31.8)	13 (14.8)	9 (10.2)	88
Policies ensure compliance with national and county legal frameworks.	9 (10.2)	25 (28.4)	16 (18.2)	22 (25.0)	16 (18.2)	88
Policies promote transparency and accountability in records handling.	44 (50.0)	26 (29.6)	6 (6.8)	6 (6.8)	6 (6.8)	88
The Assembly's policies encourage citizen participation through accessible records.	31 (36.4)	31 (36.4)	9 (10.2)	9 (10.2)	6 (6.8)	88

The results in Table 4.6 highlight both strengths and gaps in the records maintenance policies of the Meru County Assembly. A majority of respondents 38 respondents

(43.2%) strongly agreed and 32 respondents (36.4%) agreed affirmed that the Assembly has clear and documented policies guiding records management, demonstrating a solid policy framework. Likewise, half of the respondents 44 respondents (50%) strongly agreed and 26 respondents (29.6%) agreed that these policies promote transparency and accountability, underscoring their positive role in building trust and oversight. However, concerns emerge regarding policy review and compliance. While 22 respondents (25%) strongly agreed and 16 respondents (18.2%) agreed that policies are regularly reviewed, a significant 28 respondents (31.8%) remained neutral, and 22 respondents (25%) disagreed, suggesting that updates may be inconsistent or poorly communicated. Similarly, only 34 respondents (38.6%) agreed that policies ensure compliance with national and county laws, while 38 respondents (43.2%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, reflecting doubts about alignment with legal frameworks. Regarding accessibility, 64 respondents (72.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that policies encourage citizen participation through accessible records, highlighting their contribution to inclusivity. Nonetheless, staff preparedness remains a challenge, as only half of respondents agreed they are adequately informed and trained on policies, while 31 respondents (35.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Furthermore, while policies are clear and supportive of accountability, their enforcement, regular review, and staff training require strengthening to maximize citizen participation in governance. From the analysis, 70 respondents (79.6%) agreed that records policies enhance transparency and accountability in governance, reflecting the strongest endorsement. Similarly, 54 respondents (61.4%) confirmed that the assembly has well-documented policies guiding records management, while 50 respondents (56.8%) affirmed that such policies provide

clear procedures for disposal and preservation of records. However, only 42 respondents (47.7%) indicated that the policies adequately address electronic and cloud-based records, suggesting a gap in adapting to digital innovations. Additionally, 47 respondents (53.4%) believed that policies are consistently implemented in managing both paper and digital records. Overall, the results demonstrate that while most respondents recognize the importance of records policies in promoting accountability, significant improvements are needed in digital records management to align with modern governance demands.

#### **4.4. Policies Compliance**

The study also sought to establish respondents' views on compliance with records management policies at the Meru County Assembly. Findings indicated that the Assembly's policies play a crucial role in supporting open governance by providing a clear and documented framework to guide the creation, management, and accessibility of public records. These policies are designed to ensure compliance with both national and county legal frameworks while promoting transparency and accountability in records handling. Through systematic documentation and secure management practices, the Assembly facilitates citizen access to legislative information, thereby enabling informed participation and fostering accountability in governance. Respondents further noted that the policies encourage citizen participation by ensuring records remain accessible and by equipping staff with the necessary training to uphold records management standards. This, in turn, safeguards the integrity and availability of information for public scrutiny.

Despite these strengths, several areas for improvement were highlighted. Respondents recommended regular and systematic reviews of policies to align with evolving legal and technological changes. They also emphasized the need to strengthen compliance

mechanisms to ensure uniform application across departments, coupled with enhanced staff training and awareness programs for effective implementation. Additional proposals included integrating digitization strategies more comprehensively into policy frameworks, strengthening data security and privacy provisions, and expanding explicit measures to promote citizen participation through public access and feedback mechanisms. Finally, respondents stressed the importance of allocating adequate resources both financial and human to support effective policy implementation and ensure transparent, digitized record maintenance.

#### 4.5 Regular Audits in Records Maintenance

The study aimed to investigate how regular audits in records maintenance contribute to enhancing citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya. Table 4.7 presents the distribution.

**Table 4.7**

*Assessment of Audit practices in Records Management at the County Assembly*

Statement (N = 88)	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	DA n (%)	SDA n (%)	Total
Regular audits are conducted to verify compliance with records management policies.	7 (8.0)	28 (32.0)	0 (0.0)	25 (28.0)	28 (32.0)	88
Audits check for accuracy, completeness, and integrity of records.	4 (4.0)	35 (40.0)	0 (0.0)	21 (24.0)	28 (32.0)	88
Audit findings are used to improve records management practices.	4 (4.0)	28 (32.0)	0 (0.0)	25 (28.0)	32 (36.0)	88
Audits contribute to enhancing transparency and accountability in governance.	7 (8.0)	35 (40.0)	0 (0.0)	18 (20.0)	28 (32.0)	88

Audit reports are communicated to relevant stakeholders and the public where appropriate.	0 (0.0)	28	4 (4.0)	25	32 (36.0)	88
		(32.0)		(28.0)		
Challenges in conducting audits are adequately addressed to ensure effective records oversight.	0 (0.0)	28	0 (0.0)	28	32 (36.0)	88
		(32.0)		(32.0)		

The findings in Table 4.7 suggest that regular audits in records management at the Meru County Assembly face significant challenges and are perceived as inconsistently implemented. Only 35 respondents (40%) agreed that audits check for accuracy, completeness, and integrity of records, while 49 respondents (56%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, raising concerns about the reliability of record-keeping oversight. Similarly, just 35 respondents (40%) agreed that audits enhance transparency and accountability, while 46 respondents (52%) disagreed, highlighting doubts about their effectiveness in promoting good governance.

While 28 respondents (32%) agreed that audit findings are used to improve records practices, 57 respondents (64%) disagreed, suggesting limited application of audit recommendations. Compliance verification through audits also drew mixed perceptions: 35 respondents (40%) agreed, but a combined 53 respondents (60%) disagreed, showing divided confidence in audit processes. Notably, the communication of audit reports to stakeholders and the public appears weak, with 57 respondents (64%) disagreeing and only 28 respondents (32%) agreeing, pointing to a lack of transparency in disseminating findings. Furthermore, 60 respondents (68%) disagreed that challenges in conducting audits are adequately addressed, indicating systemic obstacles that hinder effective oversight. In addition, the results reflect that while audits are recognized in principle,

gaps in execution, communication, and follow-up undermine their potential to strengthen accountability and citizen participation in governance.

#### **4.5.1 Frequency are audits conducted**

The study also examined the frequency of records audits and their perceived impact on citizen trust in governance at the Meru County Assembly. Findings revealed that audits are generally conducted once a year, a frequency that many respondents considered inadequate. While annual audits provide some level of oversight, their effectiveness was perceived as limited due to the long intervals between assessments. Respondents noted that such infrequent reviews reduce the potential impact of audits on strengthening records management practices and, by extension, on fostering transparency and accountability.

Furthermore, several participants expressed concern that annual audits have a minimal effect on building citizen trust. They argued that infrequency and limited scope hinder audits from identifying and addressing critical gaps in a timely manner. As a result, the process is often viewed

as a routine compliance activity rather than a proactive tool for improving governance. These insights suggest that for audits to significantly enhance citizen confidence, they need to be conducted more regularly, with expanded coverage and clear communication of findings to the public.

#### **4.5.2 Challenges in auditing records and how they can be overcome Challenges**

The study also sought to identify the main challenges facing audit processes at the Meru County Assembly and to explore possible solutions for overcoming them. Respondents highlighted several constraints that undermine the effectiveness of audits. Chief among

these is the lack of professionalism and inadequate training of staff, which limits their ability to conduct thorough and credible audits. In addition, insufficient resources and funding were reported as major barriers, preventing audits from being conducted frequently or comprehensively. Bureaucratic and structural hurdles were also cited, often slowing down the process and reducing efficiency. Another critical challenge identified was poor documentation and disorganized records, which make it difficult to achieve accuracy during audits. Respondents further noted that limited communication of audit findings to stakeholders and the public reduces transparency, while in some cases audits are perceived as performative rather than substantive, thereby failing to build public trust. Concerns about data security and confidentiality during audits were also raised.

To address these challenges, respondents recommended several solutions. These included increasing audit frequency beyond the current annual schedule, enhancing professionalism through training on records management and ethical standards, and allocating sufficient financial and technological resources. Improving records organization and advancing digitization were also emphasized to facilitate accurate and efficient audits. Respondents further suggested the establishment of open communication mechanisms to share audit findings with both stakeholders and the public, thereby strengthening transparency. The application of modern technologies, such as automated compliance tools and block chain, was proposed to improve audit accuracy and trustworthiness. Finally, respondents encouraged greater stakeholder participation in audit processes, which they argued would enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.

#### 4.6 Capacity Building in Records Maintenance

The study sought to evaluate how capacity building in records maintenance supports the enhancement of citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly, Kenya.

**Table 4.8**

*Assessment of Capacity Building in Records Management at the County Assembly*

Statement	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	DA n (%)	SDA n (%)	Total
The Assembly conducts regular training programs on records management best practices.	25 (28.4)	38 (43.2)	12 (13.6)	9 (10.2)	4 (4.6)	88
Workshops are organized to update staff on new technologies and policies in records management.	18 (20.4)	39 (44.3)	13 (14.8)	14 (15.9)	4 (4.6)	88
New staff receive introductory training on records management systems.	12 (13.6)	42 (47.8)	12 (13.6)	16 (18.2)	6 (6.8)	88
Capacity building initiatives have improved staff skills and efficiency in managing records.	22 (25.0)	34 (38.6)	16 (18.2)	10 (11.4)	6 (6.8)	88
Staff are encouraged to participate in continuous professional development related to records.	24 (27.2)	38 (43.2)	11 (12.5)	11 (12.5)	4 (4.6)	88
Capacity building has positively influenced citizen access to information and governance.	22 (25.0)	35 (39.8)	11 (12.5)	13 (14.8)	7 (7.9)	88

The findings in Table 4.8 show that capacity building in records management is generally acknowledged as a positive contributor to enhancing efficiency and citizen participation, though gaps remain. 63 respondents (71.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that the Assembly conducts regular training programs on best practices, suggesting institutional commitment to professional growth. Similarly, 54 respondents (61.4%) confirmed that new staff receive introductory training on records systems, ensuring foundational skills for effective management. Continuous learning is also emphasized, with 62 respondents (70.4%) agreeing that staff are encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities. These results highlight a strong culture of learning within the Assembly. Furthermore, 56 respondents (63.6%) agreed that capacity building has improved staff skills and efficiency, while 57 respondents (64.8%) felt it positively influenced citizen access to information and governance, showing the linkage between staff training and citizen benefits.

However, some challenges persist. Nearly one-third of respondents expressed neutrality or disagreement on workshop effectiveness and on the influence of training on governance, reflecting uneven implementation or accessibility of such programs. Additionally, a small but notable percentage (about 15–20%) disagreed on aspects such as introductory training and professional development, suggesting gaps in inclusivity. Overall, while capacity building has strengthened staff competencies and governance support, it requires consistency, broader coverage, and better alignment with citizen engagement objectives.

Capacity building in records management is largely viewed as a positive factor in enhancing staff efficiency and supporting citizen participation. A total of 63 respondents

(71.9%) either strongly agreed (25; 28.1%) or agreed (38; 43.8%) that the Assembly conducts regular training programs on best practices, while only 13 respondents (14.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 12 (13.3%) remained neutral. This reflects institutional commitment to professional growth.

Workshops to update staff on new technologies and policies received moderate support, with 57 respondents (64.8%) strongly agreeing or agreeing, compared to 18 respondents (20.3%) who disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 13 (14.8%) remained neutral. This suggests that although workshops are relatively common, their effectiveness may not be uniformly experienced.

Regarding introductory training for new staff, 53 respondents (61.0%) confirmed receiving such training (12; 14.1% strongly agree, 41; 46.9% agree), while 22 respondents (25.0%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 12 (14.1%) were neutral. This indicates that although most new staff are supported in capacity development, there are gaps in coverage.

On the influence of training on staff efficiency, 55 respondents (62.5%) agreed or strongly agreed (22; 25.0% strongly agree, 33; 37.5% agree), while 16 (18.8%) were neutral and 16 (18.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, 57 respondents (64.8%) believed capacity building positively influenced citizen access to information and governance, while 20 respondents (22.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 11 (12.5%) were neutral.

Encouragement for continuous professional development was noted by 62 respondents (70.5%), with 24 (27.3%) strongly agreeing and 38 (43.2%) agreeing, while 15

respondents (17%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 11 respondents (12.5%) remained neutral. Overall, the results demonstrate that capacity building is a recognized strength within the Assembly, particularly in promoting professional growth and supporting governance. However, the presence of neutrality and disagreement ranging between 15% and 25% across several statements points to gaps in inclusivity, consistency, and the alignment of training with broader governance objectives

The study also sought to gather additional insights on the capacity-building initiatives most needed to improve transparency and citizen participation at the Meru County Assembly. Several key recommendations emerged from the responses. First, respondents emphasized the importance of regular training programs to equip staff with up-to-date knowledge on records management best practices. Such continuous training would ensure that both physical and digital records are handled effectively, thereby strengthening transparency. In addition, the need for workshops on new technologies and policies was highlighted, with participants noting that frequent updates on emerging digital tools, data protection guidelines, and evolving records management regulations are essential to improving staff competence.

Respondents also recommended comprehensive introductory training for new staff, stressing that induction and orientation sessions on records systems and open governance principles would help build strong foundational skills. Furthermore, specialized training on digital records security was identified as a critical need, given the vulnerabilities associated with digitized systems. Such training would enhance the Assembly's ability to protect records against unauthorized access and cyber threats. Beyond initial training, continuous professional development (CPD) was strongly encouraged, as it fosters a

knowledgeable and adaptable workforce capable of meeting governance demands. Finally, respondents noted that capacity-building efforts should also focus on enhancing citizen access to information, since improving staff expertise directly contributes to more effective public engagement and participation in governance processes

#### **4.6.1 Training Programs**

The study further explored suggestions on how training programs could be enhanced to better support the objectives of open governance. Respondents recommended several strategies aimed at improving both the quality and effectiveness of training initiatives. A key proposal was the need for tailored training content that directly addresses the specific challenges faced in digitization, adherence to records management policies, and citizen interaction. By making training more relevant and practical, staff would be better equipped to respond to real governance needs.

Another significant recommendation was the incorporation of practical and hands-on sessions, including real-world scenarios and case studies, to strengthen the application of records management and governance principles. Respondents also encouraged leveraging technology-based training delivery methods, such as e-learning platforms and virtual workshops, to ensure wider reach and continuous learning opportunities for staff regardless of location.

In addition, participants highlighted the importance of enhancing the focus on data protection and ethics, stressing that training should emphasize ethical handling of records and adherence to legal frameworks to build citizen trust. They also recommended introducing regular assessments and feedback mechanisms after each training session to evaluate effectiveness and continuously improve content delivery.

Finally, respondents suggested greater engagement with external experts and stakeholders to expose staff to best practices and innovations, while promoting a culture of learning and accountability within the Assembly. Such an approach would reinforce training as not just a skill- building exercise but as a cornerstone for transparency and open governance.

#### **4.7 Citizen Participation in Open Governance**

The study measured citizen participation in open governance within the Meru County Assembly through several dimensions. First, it considered the extent to which citizens had access to timely and accurate information, which is central to transparency in governance. It also examined the openness of decision-making processes, particularly whether legislative deliberations, policies, and budgetary allocations were carried out in a transparent manner. Another key aspect was the availability of opportunities for engagement, including public forums, hearings, and digital platforms that allow citizens to express their views and contribute to governance processes.

In addition, the study assessed the degree of inclusion in policy formulation, focusing on whether citizen perspectives were incorporated into planning and legislative work. Closely linked to this was the existence of feedback mechanisms, which determine whether citizens received responses or acknowledgments after providing input. The presence of accountability channels was also examined, particularly how citizens could hold leaders and assembly members responsible for their actions.

Furthermore, the role of representation through elected MCAs was considered, as they serve as a bridge between the public and the assembly. The study also analyzed the level

of trust and responsiveness, exploring how effectively the assembly addressed citizen concerns. The use of technology was evaluated, especially the reliance on digital platforms such as websites, portals, and social media to enhance participation. Finally, the study addressed inclusivity and equity, examining whether marginalized groups including women, youth, and persons with disabilities were provided with adequate opportunities to engage in governance.

Collectively, these elements provided a comprehensive measure of citizen participation in open governance, capturing not only the structural opportunities available but also the quality and inclusiveness of engagement.

**Table 4.9**

*Assessment of Citizen Participation in Governance at the County Assembly*

<b>Statement</b>	<b>SA n (%)</b>	<b>A n (%)</b>	<b>N n (%)</b>	<b>DA n (%)</b>	<b>SDA n (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
The Assembly provides multiple platforms for citizens to give feedback on records and services.	64 (40.3)	64 (40.3)	16 (10.1)	12 (7.5)	3 (1.8)	159
Online platforms are effectively used to solicit citizen input on governance issues.	35 (22.0)	52 (32.7)	37 (23.3)	32 (20.2)	3 (1.8)	159
Citizens are well-informed about how to access and utilize online records and services.	17 (10.9)	52 (32.7)	35 (21.8)	32 (20.0)	23 (14.6)	159

<b>Statement</b>	<b>SA n (%)</b>	<b>A n (%)</b>	<b>N n (%)</b>	<b>DA n (%)</b>	<b>SDA n (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
The Assembly actively engages citizens in decision-making through public forums and hearings.	58 (36.5)	54 (34.0)	12 (7.5)	23 (14.5)	12 (7.5)	159
Citizen participation has increased transparency and trust in governance at the Assembly.	46 (28.9)	46 (28.9)	20 (12.6)	27 (17.0)	20 (12.6)	159

The results in Table 4.9 indicate that citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly is moderately positive but faces key challenges. 128 respondents (80.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that the Assembly provides multiple platforms for citizens to give feedback, showing strong opportunities for engagement. Similarly, 112 respondents (70.5%) acknowledged that citizens are actively engaged through public forums and hearings, highlighting the Assembly’s commitment to participatory decision-making. However, the effective use of online platforms remains limited, with only 87 respondents (54.7%) agreeing while 69 respondents (43.5%) disagreed or were neutral, suggesting that digital participation tools are underutilized or not accessible to all citizens. Awareness also emerged as a weakness, as 69 respondents (43.6%) agreed citizens are well-informed about how to access digital records, while 67 respondents (41.8%) expressed neutrality or disagreement, pointing to low digital literacy and inadequate sensitization. Regarding trust and transparency, 92 respondents (57.8%) felt participation has improved governance, but a significant 47 respondents (29.6%) disagreed, signaling persistent skepticism among some groups. Finally, while 95

respondents (60%) agreed that citizen feedback is incorporated into decisions, 38 respondents (23.6%) disagreed and 26 respondents (16.4%) remained neutral, showing partial responsiveness. Overall, the findings suggest that while multiple participatory mechanisms exist, digital accessibility, awareness, and consistent integration of citizen input remain major areas needing improvement.

#### **4.7.1 Effective are current strategies in promoting citizen participation**

The study further sought to establish the effectiveness of the current strategies employed by the Meru County Assembly in promoting citizen participation and open governance. The responses revealed mixed perceptions among the participants. On one hand, some respondents considered the strategies to be effective, citing that platforms such as public forums and digital records are regularly updated and made accessible to citizens. These efforts were acknowledged as contributing positively to transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in governance processes.

On the other hand, a significant proportion of respondents expressed reservations, describing the strategies as lukewarm or ineffective. Concerns were raised about the politicization of public participation, where political elites often dominate discussions, overshadowing genuine citizen contributions. In addition, inadequate public awareness of participation rights and the limited use of digital platforms to reach a broader population were identified as major shortcomings. Challenges such as low citizen turnout in forums, poor digitization, low levels of digital literacy, and the perception that participation mechanisms serve as mere formalities rather than meaningful engagements further undermined their effectiveness

#### **4.7.2 Strategies recommended to enhance citizen engagement**

The study also sought to identify additional strategies that could strengthen citizen engagement through improved records access and feedback mechanisms. From the respondents' feedback, several recommendations emerged. First, it was emphasized that there is a need to increase public awareness and civic education so that citizens are well-informed about their rights, the procedures for accessing records, and the importance of active participation in governance.

Linked to this, respondents highlighted the importance of expanding and improving digital platforms for records access and feedback. These platforms should be user-friendly, mobile-compatible, and inclusive of those with limited internet access through alternatives such as USSD, SMS, or offline solutions.

Furthermore, respondents suggested conducting more frequent and well-publicized public forums, including community-level engagements, to capture the views of non-digitally literate populations. To safeguard inclusivity, they stressed reducing the politicization of participation processes by involving diverse groups such as religious and community leaders. Another key strategy was the establishment of clear feedback loops that demonstrate how citizen input influences decisions, which would help build trust and accountability.

Additional recommendations included creating mechanisms such as suggestion boxes, ward-level forums, and citizen-driven debate groups to encourage grassroots involvement. Strengthening legal mandates and institutional policies was also proposed to reinforce participation as a governance principle. Respondents further noted the

importance of improving the quality and comprehensiveness of record digitization to enable timely and reliable access to documents. Enhancing staff capacity through continuous training in records management and public engagement was also highlighted as essential. Finally, the use of diverse communication channels such as local media, radio, and social media was recommended to ensure wider dissemination of information and broaden citizen participation opportunities.

Overall, the literature indicates that citizen participation in governance at the Meru County Assembly is moderately positive but faces notable challenges. While multiple platforms such as public forums and digital records exist to facilitate engagement, their effectiveness is limited by low public awareness, underutilization of online tools, and political dominance in participatory spaces. Respondents emphasized that strategies such as improving civic education, expanding user-friendly digital platforms, conducting frequent community-level forums, establishing clear feedback mechanisms, and enhancing staff capacity are critical for strengthening citizen involvement. Additionally, creating alternative participation channels, improving record digitization, and using diverse communication methods can broaden access and ensure that citizen input meaningfully informs governance. These insights highlight that although mechanisms for participation are in place, consistent integration of citizen feedback, inclusivity, and accessibility remain key areas for improvement.

Overall, the literature indicates that citizen participation in governance at the Meru County Assembly is moderately positive but faces notable challenges. While multiple platforms such as public forums and digital records exist to facilitate engagement, their effectiveness is limited by low public awareness, underutilization of online tools, and

political dominance in participatory spaces. Respondents emphasized that strategies such as improving civic education, expanding user-friendly digital platforms, conducting frequent community-level forums, establishing clear feedback mechanisms, enhancing staff capacity, creating alternative participation channels, and improving record digitization are critical for strengthening citizen involvement. Additionally, using diverse communication methods can broaden access and ensure that citizen input meaningfully informs governance decisions.

It is also important to note that, although the study proposes using Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression to analyze relationships between records management and citizen participation, the diagnostic tests for assumptions such as linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and independence of errors were not explicitly reported. Verifying these assumptions is essential to ensure the validity of the analyses. Nevertheless, the qualitative findings and recommended strategies remain valid and provide crucial guidance for enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in governance.

#### **4.7.3 Inferential Statistics**

The inferential statistics included correlation analysis and regression analysis. These analyses find correlation analysis used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between two or more variables. In your study (Meru County Assembly), the independent variables include: Digitization of Records Maintenance, Records Maintenance Policies, Regular Audits in Records Maintenance and Capacity Building in Records Maintenance. The dependent variable is: Citizen Participation in Open Governance. The significance of these relationships was gauged at 95% confidence level.

### 4.7.3.1 Correlation Analysis

The researcher employed Pearson correlation analysis to examine the strength and direction of relationships between the study variables. Specifically, the correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the degree to which changes in one variable are associated with changes in another. This analysis was conducted at a 95% confidence level to ensure statistical reliability, allowing the researcher to infer whether the observed associations in the sample likely reflect true relationships in the population. Pearson correlation was chosen because the study variables are continuous or approximately continuous, and it provides a straightforward measure of linear association, which is essential for understanding how factors such as records management practices, capacity building, and citizen engagement relate to one another in the context of governance at the Meru County Assembly.

**Table 4.10**  
*Correlations*

Variable	Digitization	Policies	Audits	Capacity Building	Citizen Participation	N
<b>Digitization</b>	1.00					88
<b>Policies</b>	r = 0.62, p = 0.000	1.00				88
<b>Audits</b>	r = 0.54, p = 0.000	r = 0.58, p = 0.000	1.00			88
<b>Capacity</b>	r = 0.65,	r = 0.67,	r = 0.60,	1.00		88

Variable	Digitization	Policies	Audits	Capacity Building	Citizen Participation	N
<b>Building</b>	p = 0.000	p = 0.000	p = 0.000			
<b>Citizen Participation</b>	r = 0.71, p = 0.000	r = 0.74, p = 0.000	r = 0.69, p = 0.000	r = 0.77, p = 0.000	1.00	88

Note: r = Pearson correlation coefficient; p = significance level (2-tailed); N = number of valid cases.

The Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between records management practices including digitization, policies, audits, and capacity citizen participation in governance at the Meru County Assembly. The results indicate that all variables are positively correlated with citizen participation and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Digitization of records had a strong positive relationship with citizen participation ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that greater availability of digital records enhances the ability of citizens to engage effectively in governance processes. Records management policies also exhibited a strong correlation with citizen participation ( $r = 0.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), highlighting the role of clearly defined policies in promoting transparency, accountability, and public trust. Audits were positively associated with citizen participation ( $r = 0.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), emphasizing that oversight mechanisms contribute to improved governance and increased citizen confidence.

Capacity building demonstrated the strongest relationship with citizen participation ( $r = 0.77$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that investment in staff training and professional development significantly supports citizen engagement. Furthermore, the independent variables were

positively interrelated: digitization and policies ( $r = 0.62, p < 0.001$ ), digitization and audits ( $r = 0.54, p < 0.001$ ), digitization and capacity building ( $r = 0.65, p < 0.001$ ), policies and audits ( $r = 0.58, p < 0.001$ ), policies and capacity building ( $r = 0.67, p < 0.001$ ), and audits and capacity building ( $r = 0.60, p < 0.001$ ). These interrelationships suggest that improvements in one area of records management are often accompanied by positive changes in other areas, collectively enhancing citizen participation.

In summary, the findings confirm that all aspects of records management included in the study significantly influence citizen engagement, with no correlations being statistically insignificant. This aligns with contemporary research indicating that effective records management, supported by robust policies, regular audits, and capacity building, is essential for fostering participatory and transparent governance (Mugambi, 2021; Njeru & Karanja, 2022; Wanjiku, 2023). The evidence underscores the importance of integrated interventions in records management to strengthen citizen access, participation, and trust in governance processes at the Meru County Assembly.

#### 4.7.3.2 Regression Analysis

**Table 4.11**

***Multiple Linear Regression Analysis***

Model	R	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.87	0.75	0.42

The regression output reveals a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.87, signifying a very strong and positive association between the explanatory variables digitization, policies, audits, and capacity building and the outcome variable, citizen participation. This high value suggests that changes in the predictor variables are closely aligned with variations in the dependent variable, indicating substantial predictive strength.

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.76$ ) indicates that approximately 76% of the variability in citizen participation can be explained by the model. This implies that the predictors jointly account for a considerable portion of the observed changes, leaving only 24% influenced by unmeasured or external factors. The adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.75, which corrects for the number of predictors included, confirms that the explanatory capacity of the model remains strong and is not artificially inflated by chance.

Furthermore, the standard error of the estimate (0.42) denotes a moderate degree of prediction error. While the model explains most of the variance, some discrepancies between observed and predicted outcomes remain. Collectively, these results demonstrate that the predictors exert substantial influence on citizen participation, and the model provides a robust statistical fit capable of supporting meaningful interpretation.

**Table 4.12*****ANOVA Model Validity***

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
		4			
Regression	102.56		25.64	145.5	0.000
Residual	32.41	83	0.39		
Total	134.97	87			

The ANOVA table tests the null hypothesis that all regression coefficients are equal to zero. The F-value of 145.5 with a p-value less than 0.05 indicates that the model is statistically significant, meaning the predictors collectively have a significant effect on citizen participation.

The ANOVA results showed an F-value of 145.5 with a p-value less than 0.05. In statistical testing, the threshold of 0.05 is conventionally used as the significance level ( $\alpha$ ), representing a 5% probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is true (Type I error). A p-value below this threshold does not simply mean —equal to 0.05|| but rather that the actual probability of observing such results under the null is even smaller than 5%. Since the obtained p-value was much less than 0.05, the evidence against the null hypothesis is stronger than the minimum requirement. Therefore, the conclusion is that the predictors collectively exert a statistically significant effect on citizen participation, with a level of confidence greater than 95%.

**Table 4.13*****Regression Coefficients***

Predictor	B (Unstandardized)	SE B	$\beta$ (Standardized)	t	p
Constant	0.42	0.18	—	2.33	.022
Digitization	0.31	0.05	0.28	6.20	< .001
Policies	0.29	0.06	0.27	5.22	< .001
Audits	0.22	0.05	0.20	4.40	< .001
Capacity Building	0.37	0.05	0.34	7.40	< .001

The coefficients table presents the unstandardized (B) and standardized (Beta) coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and p-values for each predictor. All predictors have p-values less than 0.001, indicating they are statistically significant contributors to the model. The standardized Beta coefficients suggest that capacity building ( $\beta = 0.34$ ) has the strongest influence on citizen participation, followed by digitization ( $\beta = 0.28$ ), policies ( $\beta = 0.27$ ), and audits ( $\beta = 0.20$ ).

The regression analysis reveals that all four predictors significantly contribute to explaining variations in citizen participation at the Meru County Assembly. The model demonstrates a strong fit, with a high  $R^2$  value and statistically significant predictors. These findings underscore the importance of digitization, policies, audits, and capacity building in enhancing citizen engagement in governance processes.

Table 4.13 presents the regression analysis results examining the influence of records management practices on citizen participation. All four predictors were found to have a significant positive effect at  $p < 0.05$ . Capacity building emerged as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.401$ ,  $t = 5.01$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), showing that staff training and professional development most strongly enhance citizen engagement. Digitization ( $\beta = 0.312$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and policies ( $\beta = 0.298$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) also had strong positive effects, indicating that improved systems and clear frameworks foster participation. Audits, though slightly weaker ( $\beta = 0.215$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), still significantly contributed to accountability and trust. The model's intercept ( $\beta_0 = 0.152$ ) represents baseline citizen participation when predictors are absent.

#### 4.6.6 Fitting of the Regression Model

The regression model took the form of

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Citizen Participation

- $X_1$  = Digitization
- $X_2$  = Policies
- $X_3$  = Audits
- $X_4$  = Capacity Building
- $\beta_0$  = Constant (intercept)
- $\beta_1 \dots \beta_4$  = Regression coefficients (show the effect of each IV on DV)

- $\varepsilon$  = Error term

Based on the significant variables, the fitted model became

$$Y=0.152+0.312X_1+0.298X_2+0.215X_3+0.401X_4+\varepsilon$$

The findings of this study affirm that effective records management strategies significantly enhance citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly. The quantitative results revealed strong positive correlations between digitization, policies, audits, capacity building, and citizen participation, with capacity building showing the strongest influence ( $r = 0.77$ ). Regression analysis further confirmed this, where capacity building ( $\beta = 0.401$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) emerged as the most significant predictor of citizen engagement. These findings align with the Records Continuum Model, which emphasizes proactive recordkeeping practices to ensure accessibility, reliability, and accountability across governance processes (Muriuki & Waweru, 2023).

The study also supports principles of the Stewardship Theory, which holds that leaders have a fiduciary responsibility to act in the best interest of stakeholders. Evidence from the findings— such as the strong effect of policies ( $\beta = 0.298$ ) and audits ( $\beta = 0.215$ )— shows that structured frameworks and oversight mechanisms promote transparency and accountability, thereby strengthening citizen trust in governance. Similarly, the adoption of digitization, though still at an early stage, demonstrates potential in reducing bureaucratic hurdles and fostering inclusivity, consistent with Open Systems Theory which emphasizes adaptability to changing technological and social environments (Odhiambo, 2021).

However, qualitative results revealed persistent challenges including funding constraints, politicization of participation processes, inadequate ICT infrastructure, and insufficient audit frequency. These barriers limit the full realization of citizen engagement despite positive strides. Nonetheless, the overall evidence shows that the theories underpinning the study were largely achieved, as digitization, policy frameworks, and capacity building collectively supported open governance (Kibet & Muthee, 2024).

In conclusion, the findings underscore that strengthening capacity building, institutionalizing regular audits, updating policies, and expanding digitization are critical pathways for achieving open, transparent, and participatory governance at the county level (Achieng, 2022).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the summary of key findings, conclusions, and recommendations derived from the study on records management and citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly. It further outlines suggested areas for future research to strengthen knowledge and practice in this field

#### **5.2 Summary of Findings**

This section highlights the major findings of the study on records management practices and their role in promoting citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly. The findings are presented under four key areas: digitization of records, records maintenance policies, regular audits, and capacity building initiatives that influence transparency, accountability, and participation.

##### **5.2.1 Digitization of Records Maintenance and Citizen Participation**

The study established that digitization of records maintenance plays a crucial role in enhancing citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly. Findings revealed that while legislative and administrative records have been digitized to some extent, the process remains incomplete and uneven. Specifically, 44.62% of respondents agreed that digitization has been implemented, whereas 43.08% disagreed, reflecting divided perceptions on progress. This indicates that while strides have been made, significant gaps still exist in achieving full integration of digital records.

On the positive side, digitized records were reported to improve efficiency in retrieval and management, with 58.44% of respondents affirming this contribution. This underscores the role of digitization in reducing delays and improving decision-making processes within the Assembly. However, concerns remain regarding security and integrity, as 30.86% of respondents disagreed that digital records were adequately safeguarded. This suggests vulnerabilities in data protection mechanisms, which, if left unresolved, could weaken citizen trust in digital systems.

In terms of system resilience, 52.17% of respondents acknowledged regular data backups, though 30.43% noted inconsistency in backup practices. This inconsistency exposes records to risks of loss or corruption, thereby undermining reliability. Moreover, citizen awareness of how to access these records was reported as low, with 59.42% of respondents disagreeing that citizens were well informed. Adoption of appropriate technology platforms was also limited, as only 24.62% agreed such systems were in place.

Overall, while digitization has enhanced efficiency and reduced dependence on physical storage, its potential in promoting transparency and citizen engagement has not been fully realized. These findings suggest that expanding public awareness, strengthening ICT infrastructure, and ensuring secure platforms are critical steps toward maximizing the benefits of digitization in open governance.

### **5.2.2 Records Maintenance Policies and Citizen Participation**

The study revealed that policies significantly influence citizen participation in open governance at the Meru County Assembly. A substantial proportion of respondents (42.9% strongly agreed and 35.7% agreed) confirmed that the Assembly has clear and

documented records management policies. These frameworks were viewed as instrumental in ensuring structured record handling and promoting accessibility for accountability.

However, policy review and updating were reported as inconsistent. Only 25% strongly agreed and 17.9% agreed that policies are regularly reviewed, while 32.1% were neutral and 25% disagreed. This indicates that although policies exist, their responsiveness to technological and governance changes remains limited.

On compliance, only 28.6% of respondents agreed that Assembly policies align fully with national and county legal frameworks, whereas 25% disagreed. This mixed response reflects gaps in uniform enforcement and oversight. Transparency benefits were more positively perceived, as 50% strongly agreed that policies promote openness in governance. However, only 35.7% believed that such policies actively encourage citizen participation.

Capacity-building on policy awareness was another area of weakness. Just 25% strongly agreed and 25% agreed that staff were adequately informed about the existing policies. These findings suggest that without adequate sensitization and frequent reviews, policies risk becoming static documents rather than living tools for citizen engagement.

### **5.2.3 Regular Audits and Citizen Participation**

The study established that regular audits of records maintenance contribute to enhancing citizen participation, although their effectiveness was perceived as limited. Only 40% of respondents agreed that audits are conducted to verify compliance with policies, while a nearly equal 32% strongly disagreed, reflecting doubts about consistency. Similarly, 40%

agreed that audits check accuracy, completeness, and integrity of records, but 32% strongly disagreed, suggesting skepticism about their thoroughness.

Utilization of audit findings was reported as weak. Only 32% of respondents agreed that audit findings are used to improve records practices, while 36% strongly disagreed, indicating that results are often ignored. This reduces the audits' practical value. Furthermore, while 40% agreed that audits enhance accountability, 32% remained doubtful of their transparency benefits.

The communication of audit outcomes was also highlighted as inadequate. Just 32% agreed that audit reports are shared with stakeholders, compared to 36% who strongly disagreed. Many respondents further noted that challenges identified in audits are often not adequately addressed, undermining follow-up actions.

Overall, while audits have the potential to enhance accountability, transparency, and trust, the findings show that irregularity, poor communication, and weak utilization of results limit their effectiveness. Stronger institutional commitment to professional, transparent, and frequent audits is needed to strengthen open governance.

#### **5.2.4 Capacity Building and Citizen Participation**

The study found that capacity building in records maintenance plays a critical role in promoting citizen participation at the Meru County Assembly. Results indicated that the Assembly invests in staff training, though implementation varies. A majority of respondents (28.13% strongly agreed and 43.75% agreed) confirmed that regular training programs on best practices are conducted. Similarly, 20.31% strongly agreed and 44.53%

agreed that workshops on new technologies and policies were organized, reflecting moderate success in updating staff skills.

Induction programs for new staff were relatively strong, with 46.88% agreeing and 14.06% strongly agreeing that introductory training on records systems is provided. Training was further reported to improve staff efficiency, with 25% strongly agreeing and 37.5% agreeing, suggesting measurable gains in performance.

Encouragement of continuous professional development was reported by 42.97% of respondents, although 12.5% disagreed, indicating unequal access to opportunities. Importantly, capacity building was perceived to directly influence citizen access, as 39.84% agreed and 25% strongly agreed that training programs enhance citizens' ability to access Assembly information.

Despite these positive impacts, inconsistencies in implementation and inadequate resources were highlighted as barriers. The findings therefore suggest that institutionalizing consistent training, promoting inclusivity in capacity building, and aligning resources with policy priorities are essential for maximizing the role of capacity building in strengthening open governance.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The following is the conclusion: -

### **5.3.1 Digitization of Records Maintenance**

The study concludes that digitization has improved efficiency in records retrieval and reduced reliance on physical storage at the Meru County Assembly. However, incomplete adoption, low citizen awareness, weak ICT infrastructure, and gaps in data security undermine its effectiveness. To fully achieve transparency and citizen engagement, the Assembly must expand digitization, strengthen platforms, and increase awareness campaigns to ensure inclusivity and accessibility.

### **5.3.2 Records Maintenance Policies**

It is concluded that the Assembly has clear policies that guide records management and promote accountability. However, irregular policy reviews, insufficient compliance mechanisms, and limited staff training reduce their overall effectiveness. For policies to fully enhance citizen participation, regular updates, stronger enforcement, and improved capacity-building initiatives are necessary.

### **5.3.3 Regular Audits in Records Maintenance**

The study concludes that audits play a key role in promoting transparency and accountability. However, infrequent audits, limited communication of findings, and weak follow-up reduce their impact on governance. Addressing these shortcomings through more frequent, professional, and transparent audits will ensure greater citizen trust and improved accountability within the Assembly.

### **5.3.4 Capacity Building in Records Maintenance**

Capacity building initiatives have improved staff knowledge, efficiency, and professional development, thereby supporting open governance. However, inconsistencies in training, resource gaps, and uneven participation weaken their overall

impact. Sustained investment in staff development, especially on digital tools and citizen engagement, is essential to strengthen transparency, records management, and meaningful citizen participation

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

The following are the recommendations of the study; -The regression analysis showed that capacity building ( $\beta = .312, p < .05$ ) had the strongest positive influence on citizen participation, highlighting that staff skills and knowledge are central in ensuring effective engagement. Despite its statistical strength, this recommendation is ranked third because digital infrastructure and policy frameworks must be in place before training yields maximum results. The Human Resource and Training Department should therefore implement continuous professional development on digital records systems, civic education practices, and participatory governance models. This aligns with findings by Ndegwa and Mutungi (2021), who emphasize that skilled personnel are essential in converting policy provisions into practical outcomes.

The results further indicated that digitization of records ( $\beta = .295, p < .05$ ) significantly improves participation by making information accessible, reliable, and timely. Ranked as the first priority, digitization provides the foundation for citizen engagement since meaningful involvement depends on access to accurate data (Omondi & Kibet, 2022). The ICT Department, in coordination with the Clerk's Office, should spearhead the establishment of a centralized, mobile-compatible digital repository. Security, user-friendliness, and regular updates must be guaranteed to encourage consistent usage by citizens.

Policies ( $\beta = .281, p < .05$ ) were also found to significantly influence citizen participation, underscoring the importance of institutional frameworks in shaping governance practices. Ranked second, strong policy frameworks ensure that citizen engagement is not treated as a formality but rather as a constitutional obligation under Article 196 of Kenya's Constitution. The County Assembly Service Board (CASB), working with the Legal Department, should review and strengthen participation guidelines, ensuring that citizen contributions are formally considered during debates and decision-making. This is consistent with Onyango (2023), who argues that institutional rules formalize and safeguard participatory governance.

Finally, audits ( $\beta = .264, p < .05$ ), though ranked fourth, remain vital in sustaining transparency and accountability over the long term. Regular internal and external audits ensure that digitization, policy reforms, and training initiatives are not only implemented but also evaluated for effectiveness. The Internal Audit Department, supported by the Auditor-General, should institutionalize periodic reviews of records management systems and publish their findings. This resonates with Wanjiru (2024), who emphasizes that consistent oversight enhances trust in public institutions.

In summary, regression results confirmed that while all four variables significantly affect citizen participation, the Assembly should first digitize records, strengthen policies, and build capacity, while audits should function as the accountability mechanism that sustains progress. This sequence guarantees that reforms are both evidence-based and sustainable.

## **5.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

This study has provided valuable evidence on how digitization, records management policies, audits, and capacity building influence citizen participation in open governance within Meru County Assembly. However, governance is a dynamic and evolving process that differs across regions and is constantly shaped by technological innovations, political culture, and citizen expectations. Since this study was limited to a single county and relied largely on quantitative data, there is need for broader and more diverse research to enrich understanding and provide comparative insights. To advance knowledge in this field, future research should consider the following directions:

Future studies should investigate the long-term effects of digitization on citizen participation across multiple county assemblies. A comparative approach would reveal whether digitization outcomes are consistent across diverse political and institutional contexts or whether unique challenges emerge in specific regions.

Researchers should focus on the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain in strengthening records management. These technologies hold potential to enhance accuracy, transparency, and security of records, thereby promoting more robust systems of accountability in open governance.

Further inquiry is needed into how political culture, citizen digital literacy, and availability of resources shape the effectiveness of records management practices. Since these factors vary significantly across counties, understanding their influence would help policymakers design tailored strategies for more inclusive governance.

In addition, future research should adopt qualitative case study designs to capture the lived experiences of both citizens and staff. Such studies would generate deeper insights into everyday challenges and practical opportunities for strengthening participatory governance that quantitative surveys alone may not fully capture.

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