

Research Article

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Communicative actions and intersectoral coordination in food system governance, in Migori County, Kenya

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Abstract: This study investigates how communicative actions shape intersectoral coordination in Kenya's food system governance, which depends on communication across multiple sectors. However, in Migori County, communication remains administratively siloed, making intersectoral collaboration difficult. Drawing on Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, the study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, where the qualitative phase was followed by and informed the quantitative phase. This study was guided by two objectives: To examine how communicative actions shape the functioning of coordination structures in food system governance and to assess how communicative practices influence the participation of women and youth in food system governance. The total study population comprised 268 actors and 29 relevant policy

documents, from whom a purposive and snowball sampling approach was used to select a sample of 255 participants. Thematic analysis guided qualitative interpretation, while descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and ordinal logistic regression were applied to quantitative data. Findings reveal that communicative coordination, though formally mandated, remains fragmented in practice, with weakly institutionalised collaborative structures and reliance on informal communication platforms. Secondly, the inclusion of women and youth is tokenistic, further weakening communicative coordination. These findings point to a central conclusion: communication is not peripheral to food system governance but foundational to it. Strengthening intersectoral coordination requires institutionalising communicative structures, joint planning mechanisms, and meaningfully inclusive participatory platforms across devolved sectors. The study contributes a communicative framing of food system governance theoretically and offers practical strategies for embedding communicative coherence.

Keywords – Communicative action, Food system governance, Intersectoral coordination, Migori County, Participatory governance, Policy coherence

1. INTRODUCTION

Communicative action, which emphasises consensus through open, reasoned, and inclusive dialogue instead of force or manipulation, is essential for the social legitimacy and operational coherence of food system governance. Transforming global food systems for sustainable, resilient, and equitable outcomes is vital for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Fanzo et al., 2021; UNEP, FAO, & UNDP et al., 2023; Webb et al., 2020; B.

Wood et al., 2025). This transformation is not merely a technical or institutional challenge; it is fundamentally rooted in communicative action. Governance in complex social systems like food systems relies on this approach, enabling interdependent actors to interpret situations, coordinate plans, and reach a shared understanding.

However, in practice, food system governance is undermined by fragmented coordination and institutional inertia, particularly where agriculture, health, and environment sectors remain siloed despite their inherent interdependence (Chen et al., 2021; Meuleman, 2021). This “silo mentality” constrains cross-sectoral systems thinking at national, translocal, and local levels (Gottenhuber et al., 2023; Guerrieri et al., 2025; Meuleman, 2021; Ooi & Thangadurai, 2025; Wambua et al., 2025). Evidence from various contexts, including challenges in the Water-Energy-Food (WEF) nexus and in Kenya’s food, land, and water systems, suggests that such fragmentation may limit horizontal communicative actions and collaborative coordination, potentially leading to policy incoherence and unintended trade-offs (Khofi et al., 2025; Richelle et al., 2025; Wambua et al., 2025). As a result, there is growing global demand for horizontal coordinating bodies and monitoring systems that can achieve policy alignment across key sectoral agendas, particularly in nutrition, agriculture, and environmental sustainability (Fanzo et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2025; Sibanda et al., 2023).

In the African context, food system governance scholarship has documented patterns of fragmented coordination and policy incoherence across multiple countries (Wood et al., 2023). In East Africa specifically, structural and institutional constraints have been identified, including governance approaches that marginalise grassroots actors, infrastructural deficits, and limited adaptive and participatory practices (Akther & Evans, 2024; Breisinger et al., 2023; Knook et al., 2020; Queiroz et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2023). At the national level, Kenya’s food system governance is shaped by agriculture’s central role in economic growth and livelihoods (Central Bank of Kenya, 2024). Studies indicate that coordination across government agencies remains uneven, with overlapping mandates and questions about the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms in achieving policy coherence (Chepleting et al., 2023; De Jong et al., 2024; Newell et al., 2019; Sibanda et al., 2023).

County governments occupy a critical position within Kenya’s devolved governance system, serving as primary implementers of food system policies and coordinators of intersectoral action. Migori County presents a compelling case for examining these dynamics: agriculture employs approximately 80% of the county’s residents and contributes nearly 30% of county revenue, making effective governance essential for both livelihoods and sustainability (Migori County, 2023; Statistics & African Women’s Studies Centre, 2014). Like other devolved contexts in Kenya, Migori faces complex challenges in aligning departmental priorities, effectively disseminating policies, and engaging diverse stakeholder groups, particularly women and youth, in governance decision-making (Mburu et al., 2024; MoH Migori County, 2018; Statistics & African Women’s Studies Centre, 2014). The specific communicative mechanisms through which coordination occurs or fails, and how these interact with institutional structures and power relations, remain an empirical question requiring systematic investigation.

These coordination failures are not isolated to Migori County. Kilelo et al., (2023) in a study of Vihiga County, Kenya, found that poor collaboration among agriculture and health stakeholders resulted not only in unequal program coverage but also in a systematic failure to align agricultural productivity goals with nutritional outcomes, evidence that situates Migori County within a broader pattern of communicative governance failure in Kenya’s devolved food system. Their findings revealed that sectoral actors operated largely independently, with inter-ministerial communication described as episodic and ineffective.

Communicative action, as theorised by Habermas, (1984), positions communication not only as a tool for information transmission, but as the constitutive medium through which governance is socially reproduced and legitimised. It is through communicative action that participants apply shared competences to arrive at mutual definitions of situations and coordinate plans cooperatively. This is complemented by Condit’s (2006) communication as relationality, which recognises governance as embedded in social interactions that continuously remake the actors involved, shaping trust, power, and cooperation in ways that are rarely neutral. Together, these perspectives reveal that governance failures in food systems are often, at their root, communicative failures:

breakdowns in the conditions for open, inclusive, and reasoned dialogue. Addressing them requires moving beyond ad hoc information exchange toward the institutionalisation of communicative structures that can sustain genuine inter-sectoral collaboration and participatory decision-making.

Traditional siloed management structures are insufficient for addressing the complexity of modern food systems. What is required is the practical institutionalisation of communicative action, as a rational-relational mechanism for collaborative action coordination through multi-stakeholder engagement and collaborative learning, designed to bridge the gap between national policies and ground-level realities (Djenontin et al., 2025; Khofi et al., 2025; UNEP, FAO, & UNDP et al., 2023). Good food system governance recognises inclusivity and collective participation as a condition for sustainability (Mamès et al., 2025), and this requires adopting a deliberative democratic approach that integrates diverse knowledge, including local and territorial intelligence, into policymaking and implementation (Béné & Abdulai, 2024; Kraak & Niewolny, 2024; UNEP, FAO, & UNDP et al., 2023).

Recent empirical evidence from Kenya corroborates this argument. Saenyi et al., (2025) demonstrated that specific communication channels, such as extension officers, mass media, and peer social networks, are primary determinants of agricultural practice adoption among youth farmers in Bumula Sub-County, with a near-perfect association between information source and uptake (Cramer's $V = 1.0$). Their findings confirm that a one-size-fits-all communication approach is ineffective and that matching communication channels to governance objectives is essential for achieving sectoral outcomes. This insight is instructive for food system governance more broadly, that is, if the communicative mechanism does not fit the governance need, coordination fails regardless of institutional mandate.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine how communicative actions shape collaborative coordination between intersectoral county government departments and community-level stakeholders in Migori County's food system governance. It was guided by the following specific research objectives:

1. To examine how communicative actions shape the functioning of coordination structures in Migori County's food system governance.
2. To assess how communicative practices influence the participation of women and youth in food system governance in Migori County, Kenya.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

The following review examines six interrelated dimensions that frame the study of communicative action and collaborative coordination within food system governance.

Existence and Functionality of Coordination Structures

One of the most persistent paradoxes in food system governance is the gap between what coordination structures are designed to do and what they actually deliver in practice. In theory, effective food system governance depends on formalised coordination mechanisms that link national priorities with local implementation and convene diverse actors to address multi-sectoral challenges (Béné & Abdulai, 2024; Kraak & Niewolny, 2024; Pahl-Wostl, 2019). Such mechanisms, often in the form of multi-stakeholder platforms, gain legitimacy when they are underpinned by clear mandates, strong leadership, and adequate resources (Godrich et al., 2025; UNEP, FAO, & UNDP et al., 2023). However, the literature reveals that many of these structures remain symbolic rather than functional and are constrained by limited funding and weak institutionalisation (Béné & Abdulai, 2024; Termeer et al., 2018).

Research across various contexts demonstrates a disconnect between institutional design and operational practice, where articulated commitments to coordination do not translate into functional communicative infrastructure capable of overcoming entrenched sectoral silos. In Kenya's devolved governance system, county development plans typically articulate the need for cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms. However, questions remain about whether these articulated structures operate as intended, what communicative infrastructure supports or constrains their functionality, and how the gap between policy articulation and implementation manifests in

practice. Understanding the operational reality of coordination structures in Migori County, whether they function as deliberative platforms or remain symbolic commitments, represents a critical empirical question for this research (Migori County, 2023).

Interdepartmental Communication Practices

Globally, siloed governance is a central challenge undermining horizontal coherence across agriculture, health, and environment sectors (Gottenhuber et al., 2023; Meuleman, 2021). Literature on food system governance identifies departmental prioritisation of individual mandates as a potential constraint on cross-sectoral objectives. For example, when agricultural departments focus primarily on production metrics while health departments emphasise nutrition outcomes, opportunities for integrated approaches may be missed (Sibanda et al., 2023). Evidence from the Nairobi dairy system demonstrates how fragmented communication leads to a focus on licensing and revenue collection rather than ensuring food safety, which results in weakened governance outcomes (Kiambi et al., 2020). Additionally, Kilelo et al. (2023) found in Vihiga County that stakeholder collaboration between agriculture and nutrition departments remained largely aspirational, with meetings failing to translate into joint implementation or shared monitoring. Their study further revealed that while 75% of farmers were beneficiaries of agricultural programs, nutritional outcomes remained poor precisely because agricultural productivity was pursued independently of nutritional goals. This is a direct manifestation of what Habermas (1984) would describe as instrumental rather than communicative action.

Community Engagement, Feedback Loops, and Participation

As observed in the literature, inclusive participation is crucial to democratic and sustainable governance (Kraak & Niewolny, 2024; López Cifuentes & Gugerell, 2021). To achieve inclusive engagement of all food system governance actors, governance processes must move beyond top-down approaches and incorporate mechanisms that amplify local knowledge, empower women and youth, and integrate grassroots voices into decision-making (Godrich et al., 2025; Mwangi et al., 2020). However, multi-stakeholder platforms often prioritise managerial efficiency and consensus over authentic deliberation, thus becoming performative (Uribe, 2024). In Migori County, this tension is evident as farmers, women, and youth remain marginalised due to tokenistic participation and weak feedback systems (Statistics & African Women's Studies Centre, 2014). Without institutionalised and iterative communicative mechanisms, inclusivity remains rhetorical rather than substantive, leaving governance outcomes vulnerable to entrenched inequities (Sibanda et al., 2023). Gendered exclusion from governance decision-making is not confined to food system governance, but it reflects a structural pattern across Kenya's devolved institutions. Magara et al., (2026) demonstrate that even where progressive legal frameworks formally guarantee women's participation in land governance, patriarchal institutional norms and weak enforcement mechanisms reduce this participation to symbolic inclusion. Their findings are informative to food system governance, showing that access to governance forums does not equate to communicative influence, and meaningful inclusion requires both structural reform and cultural transformation of the deliberative conditions under which participation occurs.

In Kenya's devolved governance context, research has documented variations in how county governments engage communities in decision-making processes. Questions persist about whether farmers, women, and youth participate meaningfully or tokenistically, whether feedback systems operate effectively, and how communication mechanisms either enable or constrain authentic participation. Whether the tension between procedural participation and genuine deliberation manifests in Migori County's governance practices, and how marginalised groups experience inclusion or exclusion, represents central empirical questions for this research (Statistics & African Women's Studies Centre, 2014).

Communication Modalities and Channels

The effectiveness of collaboration depends heavily on the communication modalities employed to facilitate dialogue, share data, and enable digital exchange. Structured deliberation, such as workshops and roundtables, fosters trust and shared meaning among stakeholders (Del Valle M et al., 2025), while transparent data-sharing tools like dashboards and scorecards enhance accountability and monitoring (Fanzo et al., 2021; Manorat et al., 2019). At the same time, digital technologies offer new opportunities for information exchange, but must be adapted to local literacy levels and cultural contexts if they are to be truly inclusive (Yuan & Sun, 2024).

At the sub-county level, evidence from Kenya demonstrates that differentiated communication channels produce differentiated governance outcomes. Saenyi et al. (2025) found that extension agents were most effective for knowledge-intensive agricultural practices, social networks for visible and replicable practices, and mass media for market-linked inputs, showing that effective communicative action requires deliberate alignment between the medium, the message, and the actor. This practice-specific communicative logic is equally applicable to intersectoral food system governance, where different coordination needs, that is, joint planning, community mobilisation, or policy dissemination, all demand different communicative structures.

In devolved Kenyan counties, the specific communication modalities employed, their frequency and reach, and their effectiveness in facilitating inclusive, timely information exchange vary. Whether communication remains predominantly unidirectional or incorporates feedback mechanisms, whether it reaches marginalised groups effectively, and how the choice of modalities shapes coordination outcomes are empirical questions this study addresses. Understanding which communication channels Migori County relies upon, how stakeholders experience these channels, and whether they facilitate or constrain coordination represents a key area of investigation (Migori County Government, 2024a).

Barriers and Enablers of Effective Coordination

Literature identifies multiple barriers to effective coordination stemming from institutional silos, inadequate resources, and political marginalisation (Meuleman, 2021; Sibanda et al., 2023; Srigiri & Dombrowsky, 2022). Simultaneously, research identifies enabling factors that can strengthen coordination, including the presence of boundary-spanning actors and deliberate communicative design processes that build trust and shared agendas (Pelletier et al., 2018; UNEP, FAO, & UNDP et al., 2023). Illustrative examples such as the Kisumu Action Team demonstrate how structured dialogue can mobilise diverse stakeholders toward integrated urban governance (Hayombe et al., 2018; Smit, 2018). However, research also cautions that participatory structures may reinforce rather than dismantle exclusionary practices when power asymmetries remain unaddressed (Uribe, 2024).

2.1. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in a triangulation of four complementary theoretical frameworks: Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action, Condit's Communication as Relationality, Multi-Level Governance (MLG), and Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) (Habermas, 1984; Hooghe & Marks, 2001; OECD, 2016). Each framework describes a distinct but interconnected dimension of food system governance, and together they provide the analytical architecture through which this study's findings are interpreted.

Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action is the foundational lens of this study. For Habermas (1984), governance derives its legitimacy not from authority or coercion, but from communicatively achieved consensus, the kind of mutual understanding that emerges when actors engage in open, reasoned dialogue oriented toward shared comprehension rather than strategic gain. This study applies this framework directly to food system governance in Migori County: when county departments convene in Technical Working Groups, when extension officers engage farmers, or when women and youth are invited into governance forums, the question is whether these interactions constitute genuine communicative action, deliberative, inclusive, and consensus-building, or whether they remain instrumental, transactional, and top-down. The distinction is critical because where communicative action is absent

or distorted, coordination fractures and policy coherence weaken. The two objectives in this study are assessed through this lens: does the observed practice enable or suppress communicative action?

Condit's (2006) Communication as Relationality extends this framework by drawing attention to the relational dynamics that shape how communication actually unfolds between unequal actors. From a relationality perspective, communication is not a neutral exchange but a continuous process that remakes the participants involved, with actors shaping one another asymmetrically across lines of power, gender, and institutional position. This framework is very relevant for understanding why the inclusion of women, youth, and smallholder farmers in Migori County's governance processes often remains tokenistic rather than transformative: participation without communicative equality does not constitute genuine relational engagement. The study uses this perspective to analyse how power asymmetries manifest communicatively, and what structural conditions would be necessary to rebalance them.

Multi-Level Governance (MLG) theory provides the structural-institutional frame by addressing the vertical and horizontal linkages that must be in place for communicative action to function across governance scales (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). In Kenya's devolved system, food system governance involves simultaneous interactions at the national, county, sub-county, and community levels. MLG directs attention to whether these levels are connected through functioning communicative architecture, joint planning forums, inter-ministerial committees, feedback channels, or whether they operate in parallel silos with weak inter-level communication. The study applies MLG to assess the structural conditions for communicative coordination between Migori County's Agriculture, Health, and Environment departments and between departmental actors and community stakeholders.

The Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) framework complements these perspectives by highlighting that intersectoral coordination must ultimately produce coherent policy outcomes, aligned priorities, harmonised plans, and integrated implementation across sectors (OECD, 2016). This study treats policy coherence as a downstream indicator of communicative action quality: where communicative mechanisms are robust, deliberative, and inclusive, policy coherence tends to strengthen; where they are fragmented or instrumental, incoherence persists. By triangulating PCSD with the preceding frameworks, this study positions communicative action as not merely a process value but a practical governance tool, one whose institutionalisation is essential for achieving the agricultural, nutritional, and environmental objectives that Migori County's devolved mandate requires.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Communication is central to food system governance, facilitating the collaborative processes through which governments, civil society, and community actors co-create pathways for sustainable food security, equitable resource distribution, and ecological integrity. (Azizi, 2020; Den Boer et al., 2021; Hamann, 2020). In Kenya's devolved system, county governments are expected to operationalise this vision through coordinated intersectoral action, inclusive participation, and coherent policy implementation (Migori County Government, 2025; Newell et al., 2019). However, in practice, governance is fragmented, with power asymmetries and weak inter-sectoral coordination that undermine these ideals (Clapp et al., 2021; Leeuwis et al., 2021; Schneider et al., 2023).

In Migori County, where agriculture employs over 80% of residents and contributes approximately 30% of county revenue, the Departments of Agriculture, Health, and Environment continue to operate in silos, with limited cross-sectoral dialogue and weak communicative linkages (Migori County Government, 2023; MoALFC, 2021). Smallholder farmers, women, and youth remain systematically marginalised from decision-making, while the absence of coherent communicative frameworks constrains the integration of agricultural, nutritional, and environmental priorities (Mburu et al., 2024; MoH Migori County, 2018). Despite these structural realities, the communicative mechanisms through which coordination succeeds or fails in Migori County's devolved food system governance remain empirically underexplored.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OR METHODS

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design situated within an interpretive case study framework. The exploratory sequential approach begins with a qualitative phase, using its findings to inform and structure a subsequent quantitative phase, a sequencing that is particularly well-suited to phenomena that are poorly understood or contextually complex and where existing measurement instruments cannot be assumed to capture local realities without prior exploration (Creswell & Clark, 2017). In this study, food system governance in Migori County is precisely such a phenomenon: the communicative dynamics shaping intersectoral coordination are context-dependent, relational, and not reducible to predefined survey categories. Qualitative inquiry was therefore conducted first to surface the lived governance experiences of county officials, technical implementers, and community actors, identify the communicative practices and barriers at play, and develop the conceptual grounding needed to design meaningful quantitative instruments. In this phase, 29 policy documents were systematically reviewed to establish governance mandates and coordination structures. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with 22 participants, which explored institutional coordination experiences and communicative practices. Six FGDs involving 10 participants each provided collective insights into coordination challenges and inclusivity. In the quantitative phase, surveys informed by these qualitative insights were administered to quantify perceptions of coordination effectiveness and communication channel access.

The total study population comprised 268 actors and 29 relevant policy documents, from whom a sample of 255 participants was engaged through purposive and snowball sampling. These included 10 policy-level county officials drawn from the Agriculture, Health, and Environment departments; 9 Ward Agricultural Officers serving as frontline technical implementers; 2 farmer group leaders as community governance representatives; 233 smallholder farmers from the Oywa Ngori and Nyanam Ratek Tich groups; and 1 NGO representative from the Red Cross, selected as the only organisation simultaneously engaged across all three sectors at the county level. Qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s, (2006) a six-step thematic coding procedure (Familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, searching for (constructing) themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report) in MAXQDA 24. Quantitative survey data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Spearman’s rho for assessing variable associations, and binary and ordinal logistic regression to identify predictors of coordination outcomes. Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) was also applied to visualise patterns in categorical barriers to coordination.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents results from the analysis of policy documents, interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and surveys organised thematically around six key indicators: existence and functionality of coordination structures, interdepartmental communication practices, community engagement and feedback loops, communication modalities and channels, barriers and enablers of coordination, and pathways for strengthening coordination.

Existence and Functionality of Coordination Structures

Table 1: Cross-Sectoral National and County Policy Provisions for Coordination Mechanisms in Agriculture, Environment, and Health

Theme / Code	Extracts & Summaries (Policy Source)	Agriculture	Environment	Health
Structured Coordination Platforms / Joint Planning Structures	<p>“The Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee (ICC)... will include all ministries that provide services to the agricultural sector...” (ASDS 2010–2020, p.91(Government of Kenya, 2010)).</p> <p>“The multisectoral approach was adopted... key in planning, budgeting and implementation.” (ADP 2025/26, p.13(Migori County Government, 2025)).</p>	<p>✓ (ASDS, ADP)</p>	<p>✓ (ADP)</p>	<p>✓ (ADP)</p>

Technical Working Groups (TWGs) / Whole-of-Government Approach	<p>“ASCU has established thematic working groups... to implement the strategy in consultation with relevant sector players” (ASDS 2010–2020, p.92).</p> <p>“Delivery of objectives will be championed through the county multi-sectoral approach/whole of government approach...” (ADP 2024/25, Exec. Summary(Migori County Government, 2024b).</p>	✓ (ASDS, ADP)	✓ (CSA Strategy, ADP)	✓ (Community Health Policy, ADP)
Feedback and Deliberative Structures / Interdepartmental Coordination	<p>“Biannual national forum of stakeholders... to review progress and ensure political will” (ASDS 2010–2020, p.91).</p> <p>“Coordination between the department of health, agriculture and education.” (CIDP 2023–2027, p.286(Migori County Government, 2023).</p>	✓ (ASDS, CIDP)	✓ (NCCAP)	✓ (Community Health Policy, CIDP)
Cross-Sector Communication Mechanisms / Nutrition Forums (CNTF)	<p>“A communication framework... within six months of the policy... among County and National governments, private sector, and farmers” (Agricultural Policy, p.51(Government of Kenya, 2021)).</p> <p>“County Nutrition Technical Forums... held quarterly... multisector platforms also held, though schedules undefined.” (Nutrition Capacity Report, p.17(Migori County Government, 2018).</p>	✓ (Agricultural Policy, Nutrition Capacity Report)	✓ (NCCAP, Nutrition Capacity Report)	✓ (Community Health Policy, Nutrition Capacity Report)
Policy Coherence in Climate-Sensitive Sectors / Barriers to Coordination	<p>“Inconsistency between agriculture, food security and climate change... leads to inefficiencies in implementation” (Kenya CSA Strategy, p.24(Government of Kenya, 2017).</p> <p>“Lack of coordination between the departments.” (CIDP 2023–2027, p.286 – cross-sectoral impacts table).</p>	✓ (CSA Strategy, CIDP)	✓ (NCCAP, CIDP)	✓ (CIDP)
Intergovernmental Coordination Structures / Planning Units and Actors	<p>“The NCCC chaired by the President... ensures mainstreaming at national and county levels” (Climate Change Act, NCCAP 2023–2027, p.140(Government of Kenya, 2018)).</p> <p>“The main institutions... include the County Government of Migori, national government agencies, the public, private sector...” (Spatial Plan, p.170–171(Migori County Government, 2020)).</p>	✓ (Migori Spatial Plan)	✓ (Climate Change Act, NCCAP, Spatial Plan)	✓ (Migori Spatial Plan)
Participatory Policy Development / Feedback Loops and Participation	<p>“Community engagement... high participation... stakeholder feedback integrated into draft policy” (Community Health Policy, p.7(Government of Kenya, 2020)).</p> <p>“Sub-county and health facility meetings... include community health committee meetings, facility meetings, in-charge meetings and staff meetings.” (Nutrition Report, p.18).</p>	✓ (CSA Strategy)	✓ (NCCAP)	✓ (Community Health Policy, Nutrition Capacity Report)
Joint Service Delivery and Outreach	<p>“Agriculture, health, and other services should work jointly to enhance rural livelihoods and resilience” (Vision 2030, Economic Pillar, p.6(Government of Kenya, 2008)).</p>	✓ (Vision 2030)	✓ (Vision 2030)	✓ (Vision 2030)
:✓= Theme appears in the policy document in relation to sector				

Analysis of both national and county-level policy documents and interviews with county officers highlighted the

centrality of Technical Working Groups (TWGs), inter-ministerial committees, and County Agriculture Sector Coordination Mechanisms (CASCOM) in promoting multi-sectoral dialogue (see Table 1). For example, agricultural and health officers described working together on nutrition-sensitive agriculture, with the health sector focusing on behavioural messaging while agriculture provided agronomic expertise: *“We were promoting the high iron bean variety... agriculture did the agronomical part, health worked through the community health system”* (Health officer-4, Interview Segment ID: 19). While such structures facilitated joint action, their functionality was uneven. Health Officer-3 noted that although a multi-sectoral nutrition technical working group exists, participation was inconsistent: *“We have a WhatsApp group... the only person who gives us an update is someone from the weather department, the rest of the departments are dormant”* (Interview Segment ID: 292). Taken together, the evidence indicates a policy-practice disjuncture in which discursive commitment to coordination (reflected across national and county matrices in Table 1) is not matched by routinised, resourced, and clearly mandated communicative architecture. These findings illustrate Habermas’ distinction between normative commitments and practical action: coordination is institutionally articulated but communicatively under-resourced. Within the MLG frame, this reflects weak horizontal linkages and absent backbone institutions.

Interdepartmental Communication Practices.

Table 2: Information or Support from Other Departments Besides Agriculture

	Frequency	Percent	Percent (valid)	Percent (cum.)
Yes	88	66.2	66.2	66.2
No	45	33.8	33.8	100.0
TOTAL (valid)	133	100.0	100.0	
MISSING: System	0	0.0		
TOTAL	133	100.0		

Table 3: Frequency of extension visits

	Frequency	Percent	Percent (valid)	Percent (cum.)
Weekly	1	0.8	0.8	0.8
Monthly	2	1.5	1.5	2.3
3-6 months	18	13.5	13.6	15.9
Rarely/Never	111	83.5	84.1	100.0
TOTAL (valid)	132	99.2	100.0	
MISSING: System	0	0.0		
MISSING: -9	1	0.8		

Table 4: Spearman’s Correlation Matrix for Perceived Relevance of Information, Coordination Perception, Support or Guidance from Extension Officers and Frequency of Extension

Does perceived relevance of information predict Perceived Coordination among Government Departments?	Perceived Coordination among Government Departments	Perceived relevance of information	
Perceived Coordination among Government Departments		0.177 (p=0.0215) N=132	
Perceived relevance of information	0.177 (p=0.0215) N=132		
Does frequency of extension visits predict Perceived Coordination among Government Departments?	Perceived Coordination among Government Departments	Frequency of extension visits	
Perceived Coordination among Government Departments		0.132 (p=0.0664) N=132	
Frequency of extension visits	0.132 (p=0.0664) N=132		
Perceived relevance of information, support or guidance from extension officers and perceived coordination among departments			
	Perceived Relevance of Information	Support Or Guidance from Extension Officers	Perceived Coordination Among Departments
Perceived relevance of information		0.272 (p=0.0036) N=97	0.120 (p=0.1195) N=98
Support or guidance from extension officers	0.272 (p=0.0036) N=97		-0.144 (p=0.0770) N=99
Perceived coordination among departments	0.120 (p=0.1195) N=98	-0.144 (p=0.0770) N=99	

The study found that, Interdepartmental communication in Migori County functions as both a catalyst for task-specific collaboration and a constraint on systemic coordination: on the positive side, actors reported concrete instances where communication brought sectors together to solve practical problems *“even when you have the stakeholder meetings on issues dealing with health, the two sectors come together, including other departments like environment which is also key on issues of water wasting”* (Agricultural Officer-1 segment ID: 3, 4) and where community representation is channelled into decision-making through lead farmers *“we also have stakeholder forums where farmers are represented. We have what we call lead farmers. They are called in those decision making. They give their views on behalf of the farmers”* (Agricultural Officer-1 segment ID:35). It is evident that health-agriculture programming sometimes operates in an integrated manner e.g., *“We were promoting... the high iron bean variety... working closely with agriculture Department... the agronomical part of it is done by agriculture... the health bit... was being done by the health department through the community health system”* (Health officer-4, segment ID:19); these examples are mirrored in farmer accounts of joint departmental outreach *“They (Agriculture, Health and Environment departments) visited us jointly”* and *“educated us on the use of right tools, nutrition and marketing”* (Farmer Group-1 FDG, segment ID: 306), and joint advice on safe pesticide disposal *“they work well together, when the agricultural department introduces drugs (pesticides), other department (Environment) also educates us on how to dispose of the same drugs”* (Farmer Group-2 FDG, segment ID: 40).

However, this enabling capacity is uneven and fragile. Data demonstrates that several service providers and

community informants described engagement as episodic or contingent. Health officer-4 qualified integration with *"We have minimal engagement with other departments... it will be difficult for them to incorporate the community health system unless it's something that touches on health..."* (segment ID: 30) and institutional actors reported reliance on improvised, multi-channel workarounds for achieving interdepartmental contact *"You have to use like 3 or 4 aspects [of communication]... a mail... a physical letter... a WhatsApp message... so that they keep it and diarize it"* (Health officer-2 segment ID: 274). On the other hand, coordination fora show asymmetric participation *"We have a WhatsApp group... the only person who gives us an update is someone from the weather department... the rest of the departments are dormant"* (Health officer-3 segment ID:292) and unclear mandates: *"There is no clear boundary as to what is for health, this for agriculture, this for livestock..."* (Health officer-1 segment ID:157).

Digging further through FDGs, data shows that community voices corroborate fragmentation and uneven visibility. Some farmers reported confusion and unpredictability when departments act at cross-purposes; *"they cause confusion because they are, sometimes, they are unpredictable"* (Farmer Group-1 FDG, segment ID:398); *"they cause confusion... when we spray herbicides environment tell us that it can effect aquatic lives"* (Farmer Group-2 FDG, segment ID:48), others noted that departments *"don't work well together"* (Farmer Group-2 FDG, segment ID:140) and that communities are distant from government officers, *"we are not aware of ongoing programs and [are] distant from government officers"* (Farmer Group-2 FDG, segment ID:91). Furthermore, survey data confirm this mixed picture. While 66.2% of smallholder farmers reported receiving information or support from departments beyond agriculture (Table 3), perceptions of coordination were low, only 7.5% judged departments as well-coordinated, 34.6% said they sometimes work together, 38.3% reported that departments work in isolation, and 19.5% did not know (Figure 1) and extension coverage is thin (Table 3 shows 83.5% of respondents receive extension visits rarely/never). Additionally, the correlation analysis showed that while the perceived relevance of information had a significant positive correlation with farmers' perception of interdepartmental coordination ($\rho = 0.177$, $p = 0.0215$, $N = 132$), the frequency of extension visits demonstrated only a weak and statistically non-significant relationship ($\rho = 0.132$, $p = 0.0664$, $N = 132$). To further test these relationships, an additional correlation analysis (Table 4) examined how perceived relevance of information, extension support, and coordination interact, confirming that information relevance shows a modest but significant association with perceived interdepartmental coordination ($r = 0.272$, $p = 0.0036$), whereas guidance and visit frequency were not statistically significant. This suggests that regular visits by extension officers alone do not necessarily enhance farmers' perception of coordination among county departments. The finding implies that communicative quality and coherence across departments, rather than contact frequency, are the stronger determinants of perceived coordination, consistent with Habermas' notion of communicative rationality and the MLG framework's emphasis on structured, cross-level dialogue (see Tables 2-4).

To further deepen empirical rigour, two comparative ordinal regression models were estimated to explore how communicative and institutional factors influence perceptions of coordination (see table 5-6). The first model, which included communicative variables such as perceived relevance of information and frequency of extension visits, demonstrated that communicative interactions have a measurable effect on how farmers evaluate coordination effectiveness. When institutional predictors such as cross-sectoral support and farmer cooperative membership were added in a second model, the overall explanatory strength improved, indicating that while communicative quality is foundational to coordination, institutional alignment and collaborative mechanisms provide additional explanatory power. These results reinforce the view that coordination effectiveness depends not only on how often departments communicate, but also on the relational depth, structural linkages, and institutionalised mechanisms that sustain communicative action across governance levels (Habermas, 1984; Hooghe & Marks, 2001; OECD, 2016).

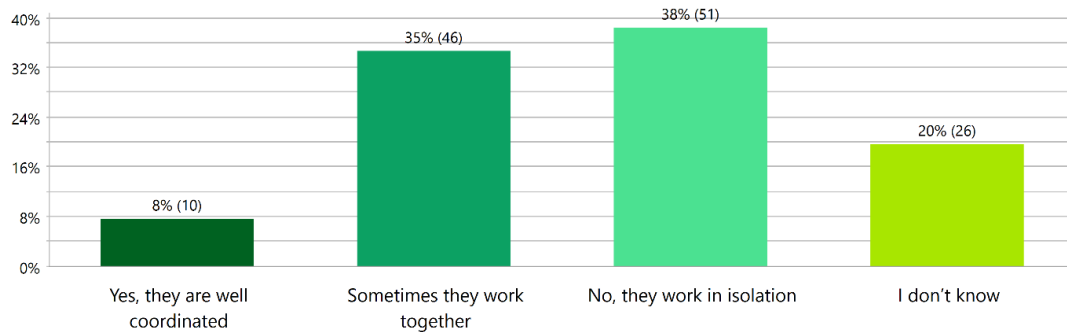


Figure 1: Smallholder farmers' Perceived Coordination among Government Departments

Community Engagement, Feedback Loops, and Participation.

Table 5: Women and Youth's Perceptions of Interdepartmental Coordination

	Frequency	Percent	Percent (valid)	Percent (cum.)
Yes, they are well coordinated	7	7.0	7.0	7.0
Sometimes they work together	31	31.0	31.0	38.0
No, they work in isolation	51	51.0	51.0	89.0
I don't know	11	11.0	11.0	100.0
TOTAL (valid)	100	100.0	100.0	
MISSING: System	0	0.0		
TOTAL	100	100.0		

Table 6: Cross-Tabulation of Communication Barriers and Communication from more than one department

	Yes	No	Not sure	TOTAL
Challenge-Lack of awareness	4	45	4	53
Challenge-Limited access	3	23	2	28
Challenge: High cost	0	15	0	15
Challenge: Language barriers	1	7	0	8
TOTAL	8	90	6	104
TOTAL CASES	8	85	6	99

Building on the preceding section on interdepartmental communication, this theme explores how communicative structures at the community level enable or constrain participatory governance, focusing on feedback loops, inclusivity, and the relational quality of engagement. The evidence shows that while county and project level forums exist, community engagement in Migori is frequently procedural rather than genuinely deliberative, with weak feedback loops and limited inclusion of marginalised voices. For example, participants directly reported that, "we provide information to extension officers... they don't come back and give us feedback" (farmer Group leader-2, Interview Segment ID: 19-21) and that "the community has not really been heard very well" (NGO Officer-1, Interview Segment ID: 20), while farmer group leaders noted untimely support "Normally we get some aids and help from the county government in terms of seed provision, but they are not timely"(farmer Group leader-2r, Interview Segment ID: 5) and farmer FDGs

highlighted language and literacy constraints: “[There is] language barrier and illiteracy, [which] lead to no clear communication and lack of awareness” (Farmer Group-2 FDG, segment ID: 143).

These qualitative reports are reinforced by survey data showing that a large share of respondents identify lack of awareness and weak feedback as barriers to participation (see Table 6), and that many perceive departments as operating in isolation rather than as partners in inclusive decision-making (Table 5). A cross-tabulation of communication barriers and communication from more than one department (Table 6) showed that lack of awareness and limited access were the most frequently reported obstacles (53% and 28%, respectively), both of which were strongly associated with low exposure to multi-departmental communication. This pattern reinforces that the absence of feedback mechanisms directly constrains farmers’ ability to engage across sectors. This pattern reinforces that the absence of feedback mechanisms directly constrains farmers’ ability to engage across sectors and to receive integrated guidance from different departments.

FGDs further revealed direct perceptions of exclusion and political filtering, such as experiences of bias in resource distribution among the farmer Group-1 (FDG Segment IDs: 309–317) “a times they are bias in resources distribution and information dissemination if you don’t side to their political goal a times you don’t benefit” and complaints that communities are “not aware of ongoing programs and [are] distant from government officers” (FGD Segment ID: 91). Collectively, these data indicate that participation mechanisms, although present on paper and occasionally active in outreach events, fail to produce the iterative, reciprocal communication required for legitimised, bottom-up governance.

These findings align with Habermas’ (1984) conception of communicative action, which holds that legitimate governance arises from dialogic, two-way communication where actors can question, justify, and reach mutual understanding. In Migori, the absence of feedback loops reflects communicative asymmetry; citizens’ inputs are solicited but rarely integrated into final decisions. The predominance of one-way, procedural participation also mirrors the communication modalities used by county departments, which remain largely top-down and broadcast-oriented, as discussed in the next section.

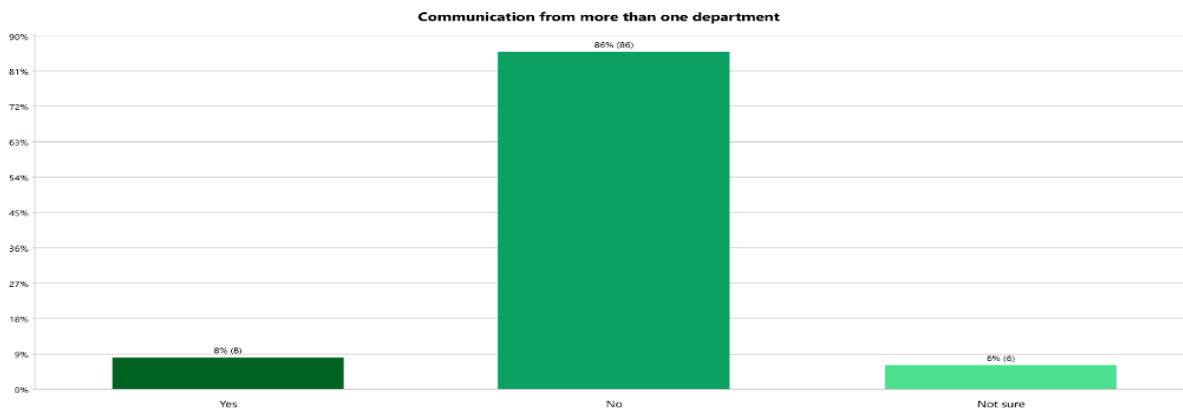


Figure 2: communication from more than one department

Communication Modalities and Channels

Table 7: Frequency of Reported Information Channels

	Frequency	Percent responses	Percent cases
Receives info via gov’t extension officers	22	16.9	22.0

Receives info via radio	52	40.0	52.0
Receives info via community meetings/barazas	14	10.8	14.0
Receives info via SMS	14	10.8	14.0
Receives info via social media	16	12.3	16.0
Receives info via farmer cooperatives	12	9.2	12.0
TOTAL	130	100.0	130.0
TOTAL CASES	100		
MISSING CASES	0		

Table 8: Frequency and Type of Agricultural Information Access by Smallholder Farmers

	Frequency	Percent responses	Percent cases
Receives info via extension officers	37	18.5	28.0
Receives info via radio broadcasts	62	31.0	47.0
Receives info via community meetings	63	31.5	47.7
Receives info via mobile phone messages	16	8.0	12.1
Receives info via social media	4	2.0	3.0
Receives info via farmer cooperatives	18	9.0	13.6
TOTAL	200	100.0	151.5
TOTAL CASES	132		
MISSING CASES	1		

Table 9: Frequency of extension visits

	Frequency	Percent	Percent (valid)	Percent (cum.)
Weekly	1	0.8	0.8	0.8
Monthly	2	1.5	1.5	2.3
3-6 months	18	13.5	13.6	15.9
Rarely/Never	111	83.5	84.1	100.0
TOTAL (valid)	132	99.2	100.0	
MISSING: System	0	0.0		
MISSING: -9	1	0.8		

The data show that Migori County's coordination depends heavily on traditional, place-based communication channels that are trusted but frequently delayed and largely unidirectional, while digital modalities remain under-utilised and unevenly accessible. Survey data indicate radio is the most frequently cited channel among women and youth (52%), followed by extension officers (22%) and barazas (14%), and smallholder farmers report heavy reliance on community meetings (47.7%) and radio (47.0%), demonstrating the primacy of broadcast and in-person modalities (see Table 7; Table 8). These quantitative patterns are supported by participant testimony: members of Farmer Group 1 noted that *"The information is clear and reliable... they help to face early caution on climate issues"* (FGD, Segment ID: 275),

while Farmer Group 2 participants complained that *“The information reaches very late”* (FGD, Segment ID: 69), and other records point to irregular, one-way SMS/extension contacts that fail to link departmental planning with community realities (see Table 9 on extension frequency). Together, these data indicate that hierarchical and fragmented structures prioritise top-down dissemination over mutual dialogue. In Habermasian terms, coordination practices are guided by instrumental rather than communicative rationality, limiting collective understanding. From a Multi-Level Governance (MLG) and Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) perspective, weak vertical and horizontal linkages constrain policy alignment across agriculture, health, and environment. Strengthening coordination, therefore, requires hybrid systems that combine trusted local forums with accessible digital platforms to enhance timeliness, feedback, and inclusive deliberation.

Barriers and Enablers of Effective Coordination

Findings indicate that while communication was widely recognised as central to coordination, stakeholders consistently identified barriers linked to weak structures, inadequate resources, and fragmented leadership, alongside enablers such as multi-channel communication platforms and calls for unified governance mechanisms. Respondents stressed the need for stronger institutional mechanisms, with one participant noting, *“We need to enhance our communication... let’s avail the money... be transparent... mobilize more partners”* (NGO Officer-1, segment ID: 272). Others pointed to leadership gaps, as illustrated in the suggestion, *“Maybe we should let the Office of the County Commissioner take lead”* (Health Officer-3, segment ID: 179). Participants also criticised fragmented policy processes, arguing for unified frameworks: *“we just have one big document... not a document from Department of Agriculture... we just need to have one big document”* (Health Officer-3, segment ID: 261). Alongside these structural issues, farmers highlighted the importance of diverse communication platforms, reporting reliance on *“radio, television, friends, chief barazas and extension officers”* (Farmers Group-1 FDG, segment ID: 272). When timely, these channels were valued as *“very clear and reliable because they help to face early caution on climate issues”* (Farmers Group-1 FDG, segment ID: 275). However, timeliness and clarity were major challenges, with frustrations such as *“the information reaches very late”* (Farmer Group-2 FDG, segment ID: 69) and *“There is no clear communication and we don’t know government policies”* (Farmer Group-2 FDG, segment ID: 186). Quantitative evidence amplifies this mixed picture: a majority identify lack of awareness and weak feedback as key barriers (Table 6), many report departments operating in isolation (Table 5), and extension coverage is limited (Table 9).

Collectively, these results show that while communication structures exist, their functionality is constrained by limited resources, diffuse mandates, and uncoordinated policy instruments. At the same time, several enabling factors emerged that illustrate the potential for communicative renewal. Boundary-spanning mechanisms such as Technical Working Groups (TWGs), CASCOS, and joint departmental visits demonstrate that inclusive, multi-channel communication can strengthen coordination when adequately resourced. Farmers described these instances positively (Farmers Group-1 FDG, Segment ID: 275), suggesting that relational and transparent communication fosters trust. These findings align with Habermas’ theory of communicative action, which posits that coordination arises from deliberative, inclusive dialogue rather than instrumental exchange. Additionally, they resonate with the Multi-Level Governance and Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development frameworks, which emphasise the need for both vertical and horizontal alignment across institutions. Thus, communication in Migori County plays a dual role: it acts as a powerful enabler when structured and transparent, but when delayed, fragmented, or poorly led, it becomes a systemic barrier to effective cross-sectoral coordination. Strengthening leadership clarity, institutionalised dialogue platforms, and feedback mechanisms is therefore critical to transforming communication from a reactive process into a driver of policy coherence and collaborative governance.

Pathways for Strengthening Coordination
Table 10: Predictors of Perceived Interdepartmental Coordination

Predictor Variable	Estimate (B)	p-value
Extension officer visit frequency	2.031	0.002
Farmer cooperative membership	1.358	0.065
Perceived relevance of information	-1.939	0.025
Cross-sectoral support	-	0
Extension frequency category (Model 2: ext_freq_09 = 3)	Negative	0.026
Access to communication channels (radio, SMS, social media, baraza)	Mixed directions	ns
Model Fit Indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nagelkerke R² (Model 1): .192 Nagelkerke R² (Model 2): .205 -Both models explain a modest proportion of variation, indicating that coordination is shaped by relational mechanisms more than information access.		

Findings revealed that communicative actions significantly shape perceptions of interdepartmental coordination in Migori County's food system governance, with relational mechanisms proving more decisive than mere access to information. Ordinal logistic regression analysis (Table 10) demonstrated that the frequency of extension officer visits strongly predicted positive perceptions of coordination ($B = 2.031$, $p = .002$). Farmer cooperatives were also found to be marginally associated with improved perceptions ($B = 1.358$, $p = .065$). Interestingly, perceived relevance of information was negatively associated with coordination perceptions ($B = -1.939$, $p = .025$), suggesting that while information was valued, it highlighted deeper awareness of fragmentation. A second regression model reinforced these insights, with cross-sectoral support emerging as the strongest predictor of coordination ($p = .000$). At the same time, frequency of extension officer contact showed mixed results, with one category ([ext_freq_09=3]) statistically significant but negatively associated with positive coordination perceptions ($p = .026$). Access to communication sources did not show significant effects, and the directions of association were mixed, suggesting that mode of communication alone was not decisive. These patterns demonstrate the need for institutionalised communication mechanisms that foster relational trust, structured dialogue, and shared accountability. Consistent with Habermas' communicative action theory, coordination improves when actors engage in open, deliberative exchange oriented toward understanding rather than task compliance. Similarly, the Multi-Level Governance (MLG) and Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) frameworks point to the importance of vertical and horizontal integration, where farmer cooperatives, extension officers, and departmental actors serve as communicative bridges linking community and policy levels. Thus, strengthening coordination in Migori County requires routinising multi-stakeholder forums, empowering farmer groups as boundary-spanners, and harmonising sectoral plans under a unified framework. By prioritising transparent, relational communication and consistent feedback loops, Migori can transform sporadic collaboration into sustained, inclusive governance aligned with national coherence goals.

6. DISCUSSION

The study indicates that, although coordination structures are present, they are predominantly ad hoc, reactive, and insufficiently institutionalised. It further demonstrates that coordination primarily occurs during crises or temporary initiatives, resulting in the agriculture, health, and environment departments operating independently. This situation reflects broader trends observed in devolved systems across Kenya and Africa, where multi-stakeholder platforms

remain largely symbolic due to limited funding, weak leadership, and ambiguous mandates (Béné & Abdulai, 2024; Termeer et al., 2018). Theoretically, these findings deviate from Habermas' concept of communicative rationality, which advocates for sustained, inclusive deliberation aimed at mutual understanding. Instead, communicative processes in Migori are episodic and strategic, reinforcing systemic domination over participatory discourse. This observation aligns with MLG theory, which warns that without robust cross-level linkages, decentralised systems risk fragmentation and weak coordination. Similarly, the PCSD framework emphasises that coherence cannot be achieved without institutionalised communicative mechanisms linking horizontal and vertical structures (Gottenhuber et al., 2023; Habermas, 1984; Hooghe & Marks, 2001; OECD, 2016).

At the community level, engagement is weak, with smallholder farmers, women, and youth often excluded from decision-making due to tokenistic participation and inadequate feedback loops. Respondents noted that community voices rarely influence planning, echoing concerns that multi-stakeholder platforms often become performative rather than deliberative (Uribe, 2024). This distortion reflects Habermas' critique of the "ideal speech situation," where communicative equality is undermined by bureaucratic hierarchies, and local perspectives are subordinated to technocratic logics. Such exclusion contradicts the participatory ethos of MLG, which assumes shared authority and interdependence. Consequently, without inclusive communicative spaces, collaborative governance devolves into symbolic participation, reaffirming PCSD's assertion that policy coherence requires participatory legitimacy alongside structural coordination (Kraak & Niewolny, 2024; López Cifuentes & Gugerell, 2021).

Moreover, unidirectional communication through extension visits or SMS platforms remains informational rather than deliberative, reflecting Kenya's gap between digital innovation rhetoric and communicative practice (Fanzo et al., 2021; Yuan & Sun, 2024). Finally, barriers and enablers point to weak structures, fragmented leadership, and limited resources as core challenges (Meuleman, 2021; Srigiri & Dombrowsky, 2022; Weitz et al., 2017). The findings affirm that trust-based, relational mechanisms such as cooperative networks and extension officer engagement predict coordination more effectively than mere information flow, consistent with Habermas' and MLG's emphasis on communicative relationships and institutional coherence (Béné & Abdulai, 2024; Bishwakarma, 2022; Fanzo et al., 2021; Hoey et al., 2021; UNEP, FAO, & UNDP et al., 2023). The counterintuitive result that greater information access heightens awareness of fragmentation further supports Habermas' argument: without institutionalised feedback and deliberation, communication remains instrumental rather than transformative.

7. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study carry implications for both policy and practice in food system governance within Kenya's devolved system and beyond. At the policy level, the evidence that coordination structures exist on policy documents but remain communicatively incoherent calls for the Migori county government to move beyond articulating inter-sectoral mandates toward actively institutionalising the communicative mechanisms. For this to be realised, there is a need to formalise Technical Working Groups with clear terms of reference, dedicated convening resources, and accountability frameworks that require sectors and departments to demonstrate communicative engagement rather than reporting attendance.

At the practice level, this finding shows that the quality of communication is more important than how often it happens. This means extension systems need to focus on building deeper relationships and better conversations, rather than just counting visits or messages. The persistent tokenistic inclusion of women and youth further implies that participation frameworks must be redesigned not only to invite these groups into governance spaces but to structurally alter the deliberative conditions, including language, timing, venue, and feedback mechanisms, that determine whether their voices carry weight. For NGOs and development partners operating in Migori County and similar devolved contexts, the implication is that investments in food system governance must prioritise

communicative infrastructure alongside technical capacity, recognising that no amount of sectoral expertise will produce coherent outcomes if the channels for translating that expertise into coordinated action remain fragmented, unidirectional, and poorly institutionalised.

8. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Theoretically, the study advances a communicative framing of food system governance by triangulating Habermas with Communication as Relationality, Multi-Level Governance, and Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development. The study also models a multi-framework analytical approach that other researchers can adapt to examine communicative governance dynamics in different sectoral and geographic contexts.

For the broader scientific community, the study contributes empirical evidence from an underrepresented governance context, a devolved Kenyan county, to a literature that has tended to draw its theoretical and empirical foundations disproportionately from Global North settings.

Additionally, future research directions emerge from the study's findings and limitations. First, comparative studies across multiple Kenyan counties would establish whether the communicative governance patterns documented in Migori are county-specific or systemic features of devolved food system governance more broadly.

9. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that communicative actions are central to shaping collaborative coordination in Migori County's food system governance; however, current practices remain fragmented, inconsistent, and constrained by institutional silos and political dynamics. While coordination structures and participatory mechanisms exist, they often function symbolically rather than substantively, limiting the inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disability and undermining communicative and policy coherence across agriculture, health, and environment. Strengthening communication as both a relational and institutional mechanism is therefore essential for building integrated, inclusive, and resilient food system governance in the county. Additionally, while the findings are contextually grounded in Migori County, the observed patterns of fragmented coordination, ad hoc communication, and partial policy coherence mirror broader dynamics in other devolved counties across Kenya, as was evident from the national policy analysis.

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