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Exploring the Role of Decentralization in Resource Marginalization in Kenya

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Abstract

Against a background of decentralization in Kenya, limited previous research examines its role in resource marginalization in the country. Specific objectives include identifying the socio-economic sources of resource marginalization and identifying solutions to the socio-economic resource marginalization. The results of the study will improve our understanding of decentralization. Qualitative data was collected and analysed using thematic analysis. Quantitative data was collected and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The study found that though decentralization has been used as a vehicle to alleviate poverty, it has led to some form of marginalization of certain key groups in the society. Recommendations for policy and further studies are made from the conclusions emanating from the academic study.

Keywords: Decentralization, Resource, Socio-economic, Marginalization

1.1. Introduction

In the recent past, policy response pertaining to participation has epitomized many aspects of contemporary societies, especially those relating to development, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Issues in development are salient not only because they touch individuals and communities in important respects, but because they expose many of the

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political, economic, social, and ethical dilemmas of the time. These issues are likely to continue to gain public attention and consume increasing amounts of resources as nations are faced with a myriad of problems, poverty being one of them. According to Amin (2011), this is caused by relative economic stagnation.

Efforts to combat inequality and poverty has risen to the top of the international agenda (Desandi, 2014; Ymeraj, 2018). Development in most countries is increasingly driven through decentralization, including the devolution of government funds (Mollel, 2010; Litvack *et al.*, 1998). Devolved funds are development schemes designed to transfer money directly to the local authority, ward, constituency or district to finance local development projects such as schools, markets, hospitals, roads, housing, irrigation schemes, bridges, power, water, etc. According to Ndii (2010, p. 4), "devolved funds are ring-fenced monies for which decision making has been delegated to local entities, such as committees of one type or another, that have community participation or control." The concept has a strong component of citizen participation (Republic of Kenya, 2016; Mollel, 2010).

Decentralization is widely recognised as the best way to cope with the ever-increasing challenge of inequality (Drãgan & Gogenea, 2009). The Local Development International (LLC) notes that decentralization "involves assigning public functions, including a general mandate to promote local well-being to local governments, along with systems and resources needed to support specific goals" (LLC, 2013, p. i). According to the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), inequality has resulted in the establishment of devolved funds to tackle regional socio-economic inequality (IEA, 2014).

Public sector decentralization has become a global phenomenon that is pursued in many countries with the given intention (s) of improving service delivery, enhancing governance and accountability, increasing equity, promoting a more stable state, etc. (LLC, 2013). Following the end of the Cold War and the subsequent opening up of political space in Africa, several nations not only opened up political space by introducing multiparty system, but also reformed their administration and gave local actors more power in the management of public affairs. The reforms were introduced after pressure from citizens, donors, and development partners, including the Bretton Woods institutions and the Paris Club member countries.

1.2 Literature Review

Today, decentralization as a foundation of good governance has become the tool of social harmony and development in the world (Wato, 2012). This is in addition to the level of efficiency and equity that is achieved through greater retention and fair or democratic distribution of benefits from local activities (Ribot, 2002; Chilwalo, 2016).

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Kenya has had various policies and attempts towards decentralization and community participation from the pre-colonial period. The various communities that make up the nation of Kenya have been known to pull resources together to achieve societal good (Mboya, 1993). During independence, the country adopted a federal system of government before reverting to the highly centralised form. Under the centralised form of governance, some forms of deconcentration through established local authorities, government corporations, and parastatals were introduced.

Kenya's decentralization has been cited as one of the most ambitious globally (World Bank, 2011; KPMG, 2013). After independence, the post-independence development blueprint, *Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965*, proposed investment in the high potential areas with the anticipation of surplus reproduced being redistributed to the low potential areas as a strategy for effective reduction of nationwide poverty, ignorance, and disease (Republic of Kenya, 1965).

According to Society for International Development (SID), though the sessional paper recognized regional disparities, it did exacerbate them through ineffective redistribution systems (SID, 2012). The high potential regions in the country had already benefited from colonialism as colonial infrastructure investments focused exclusively on the 'White Highlands'. The White Highlands were Kenya's best and most fertile farmland, expropriated through a succession of land regulations between 1899 and 1915 for European settlement (Africa Watch, 1993, p. 23).

The need for equity since independence has fueled long-standing demands for decentralized management of equitably shared budget resources and service delivery through devolved funds as opposed to centralized government (Mwenda, 2010; SID, 2012). SID reports that a powerful executive arm of the government patronized the distribution and allocation of public resources, leading to serious regional inequalities. To tackle inequality and poverty, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2012) reports that the government of Kenya implemented decentralized anti-poverty programs designed to distribute assets, cash or services to households, individuals, and communities through line ministries, which in turn allocate the funds to the various districts and communities. However, after decades of the project/program's target and implementation through line ministries, it became apparent that channeling funds through ministries was not effective and there were many leakages to the extent that many poor communities were marginalized and were never reached by the anti-poverty programs.

Against this background, the government decided to create alternative windows that allow the allocation of additional resources directly to districts and communities without going through line ministries (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012). In the recent past, for instance, there has been a massive

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increase in resources devoted to the youth, women, ward, constituency, and community-based development programs. This direct disbursement of funds is intended to reduce poverty and improve project implementation by using local information and encouraging community participation in project identification, implementation, and evaluation. The funds are to enhance the community infrastructure, welfare, sanitation, and environmental protection. Furthermore, the funds are important to tackle environmental problems as the environment is increasingly being polluted (Kitause, Gemade, & Jando, 2020).

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) notes that devolved funds have empowered the youth and women to promote their own socio-economic development and establish private employment (USAID, 2014). The funds have been credited for the massive transformation of infrastructure at the local level, especially in the hitherto marginalized regions. On the other hand, according to The Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Kenya (ICPAK), though the state has allocated substantial resources to decentralized funds since the 1990s, this has not significantly improved the national response to poverty, inequitable resource distribution, and general livelihoods of the people (ICPAK, 2014).

In addition, the funds are not making the anticipated impact. In a study by Muriu (2013), participation is said to be limited by space. In other instances, participation is not binding or is not in an active form. It further decreases as it progresses from needs identification to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The reasons for the dismal performance of the funds are attributed to a myriad of challenges, such as lack of effective participation of local communities in selecting, prioritizing and implementing development projects, poor public finance management at national and sub-national levels, and lack of institutional monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It also lists duplicity and overlapping of the devolved funds, weak accountability structures, and political interference. In this study, the focus is on exploring the role of decentralization in resource marginalization in Kenya.

1.3. Methods

The study was conducted in UG County in the Rift Valley (RV) Province of Kenya. Kenya comprises a land area of 225,000 square miles (Muleri, 2009). The Republic of Kenya lies in the eastern coast of Sub-Saharan Africa. The country has a total area of 582,646 square kilometres of which 571,466 square kilometres form the land area and approximately 80% of the land area of the country is ASAL. However, only 20% of the land is arable (KNBS & ICF Macro, 2010). The country lies between 5 degrees north and 5 degrees south latitude and between 24 and 31 degrees’ east longitude. In addition, it is almost bisected by the equator. The country is bordered by

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Ethiopia in the north, Somalia in the north-east, Tanzania in the south, Uganda and Lake Victoria in the west, and South-Sudan in the north-west. It is bordered on the east by the Indian Ocean.

UG is one of the 47 counties in Kenya. The County is a highland plateau with altitudes falling gently from 2,700 meters above sea level to about 1,500 meters above sea level (Uasin Gishu County, 2013). The county is one of the most cosmopolitan in Kenya and a home to ethnic groups of the Bantu, Nilotic, and Cushitic extraction (Kyrili *et al.*, 2012). It is located mid-west of the Rift Valley and borders six counties, namely: Elgeyo-Marakwet to the east, Trans Nzoia to the north, Kericho to the south, Baringo to the south-east, Nandi to the south-west, and Bungoma and Kakamega to the west (Kyrili *et al.*, 2012). According to the Uasin Gishu County Integrated Development Plan (2013-2018), the county lies between longitudes 34 degrees 50' east and 35 degrees 37' west and latitudes 0 degrees 03' south and 0 degrees 55' north (Uasin Gishu County, 2013). It covers a total area of 3,345.2 Sq. Km. The County is a highland plateau with altitudes falling gently from 2,700 meters above sea level to about 1,500 meters above sea level. The topography is higher to the east and declines gently towards the western border.

The study was allocated within mixed methods of qualitative data in conjunction with quantitative data. Qualitative data was obtained through secondary sources (content analysis), primary sources, expert interviews (in-depth interviews), and by seeking out the 'why' through analysing unstructured information from the open-ended survey responses. Interview checklist or discussion checklist was used to obtain data. Expert Interviews were held on a one-to-one basis with the officials who run the funds. A digital tape recorder was used in the expert interviews, which were digitally recorded and preserved verbatim. Short hand notes were also taken during the interviews.

Quantitative data was collected through survey. Before the full-scale survey fieldwork started, the validated interview schedule and interview checklist were then pilot tested in two phases to ensure reliability of the instruments and to identify and resolve any arising issues (United Nations, 2005). Different types of neighbourhoods and social classes within the county were all represented in the sample (KNBS, 2007; Peck *et al.*, 2008).

Table 1 gives a breakdown of the number of households sampled in each district. The first column lists each district. The second column lists the number of households within each district. These figures are obtained from the 2009 census results. The third column indicates "household proportion" and is calculated by dividing the number of households in each district by the total sample size (530). The most conservative sample size needed for the study was calculated to be 384. The study sampled 530 respondents who were randomly selected to comprise the sample, which was designated to generate

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representative statistics at the county and districts levels. There are 88,956 households in Eldoret West, 51,469 in Eldoret East, and 61,866 in Wareng district (KNBS, 2013). The fourth column illustrates "sample size" and is calculated by multiplying the third column by the total survey sample size to get the sample size for each district.

Table 1. Sample Size Selection of Eligible Households by District for Random Sampling

District	**Total number of households**	**Household proportion**	**Sample Size**
Eldoret West	88,956	44.00	233
Eldoret East	51,469	25.44	135
Wareng	61,866	30.58	162
Total	**202,291**	**100.00%**	**530**

Source: *KNBS (2013)*

Systematic sampling procedure was used. to select heads of households (male or female) from each of the estates at a constant interval of ten. Through this sampling procedure, every tenth household head was selected in a circular systematic fashion with equal probability, especially after a random start, until the required number of sample household heads within each stratum was reached. The sampling strategy allowed for substitution of the selected households in the field if they were not available despite repeated attempts to contact them or if they refused to participate in the survey. The procedure resulted in a sample size of 180 household heads from the estates. The eligible household heads were canvassed through the schedule to elicit data.

1.4. Results

This section presents the results and discusses the key findings of the study in line with its stated objectives. Table 2 indicates the data collection methods. The interview periods lasted for 30 minutes for each subject.

From the in-depth interviews, it was established that most of the devolved funds in Kenya were established in the 1990s and 2000s. The oldest was Secondary Education Bursary Fund (SEBF), which was established in 1993, and the newest is the *Uwezo*Fund (Table 3).

Table 2. Expert Data

Primary Data	**Secondary Data**
Interviews	Websites
Survey	Newspapers
	Magazines
	Government data

Source: Author

 ISSN: 1857-7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857-7431

Table 3. List of Devolved Funds

Devolved Fund	**Year Established**
Secondary Education Bursary Fund (S.E.B.F)	1993
Community Development Trust Fund (CDTF)	1996
HIV/AIDS Community Initiative Account(HIV/AIDS CIA)	1999
Local Authorities Trust Fund (LATF)	1999
Poverty Eradication Loan Fund (PELF)	1999
Water Services Trust Fund (WSTF)	2002
Constituency Development Fund (CDF)	2003
Free Primary Education Fund (FSEF)	2003
Disability Fund (DF)	2004
Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF)	2006
Rural Electrification Programme Levy Fund (REPLF)	2006
Women Enterprise Development Fund(WEDF)	2007
Road Maintenance Levy Fund (RMLF)	2007
Tuition Free Secondary Education (TFSE)	2008
Uwezo Fund (UF)	2013
InuaJamii Fund -IJ-Cash for senior citizens	2014

Source: Field Data

Table 4. *Reasons Household Members are not Involved in Devolved Funds*

Variable	**Frequency**	**%**
Application/proposal was rejected	17	3.2
Accessed credit from financial institutions/NGOs	93	17.5
Corruption	29	5.5
Denied permission by family members	8	1.5
Group was not registered	3	0.6
Had no need to participate	57	10.8
Lack of identification card	16	3
Lack of information on the application procedures	35	6.6
Long distance to the fund offices	16	3
Longer time to benefit	29	5.5
Not aware of the funds	19	3.6
Religious values, principles and practices	8	1.5
State/political infiltration	12	2.3
Stringent application procedures/requirements	10	1.9
Others	16	3
Application dates elapsed	18	3.4
No response	144	27.2
Total	530	100

Source: Field Data

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As presented in Box 1, in-depth interviews indicated that there is a high demand for the funds. Publicity on the funds is done through various means including mass media among others. In addition, some of the funds are segregated for women, youth or persons living with disability. However, as presented in Table 4, there are diverse reasons why the people participated in the devolved funds.

Box 1. Participation in Devolved Funds

Citizen Participation in Devolved Funds

1.1. The funds do not match the demand.
1.2. Awareness of the devolved funds is made through newspapers, radio, television, road shows, posters, word of mouth, websites, and public meetings (*Baraza*).
1.3. Some of the funds are segregated (e.g., for youth, women, disabled), while some are not segregated (open to all groups e.g., CDF, WSTF, CDTF).
1.4. Selection of beneficiaries for some of the funds is done in public meetings (e.g., CDF, CDTF), while some is done in the funds' offices (e.g., DF, YEDF, WEDF).
1.5. Differences in citizen participation.
    1.5.1. Rural residents prefer agricultural and livestock projects.
    1.5.2. Rural residents are more involved with funds given as grants as they desire to improve community infrastructure and well-being.
    1.5.3. Women and youth respond more to the devolved funds than men do.

Source: Field Data

As indicated in Table 5, more men and male household heads were involved in the funds than women were. The young, the employed, the highly educated, and those living without disability participate more in the funds. In general, residents of UG County and those from rural areas in particular benefit from the funds more than those from outside the county and urban areas respectively. Those in non-rental homes and without access to commercial credit reported higher levels of participation in the devolved funds.

Table 5. Respondents Participation in Devolved Funds (n=325)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	177	54.5
	female	148	45.5
Age	18-39	194	59.7
	40>	131	40.3
Household head	Male	192	59.1
	Female	133	40.9
Employed	Yes	197	60.6
	No	128	39.4
Marital Status	Married	207	63.7
	Single	118	36..3

 ISSN: 1857-7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857-7431

Education level	Primary	53	16.3
	Secondary	110	33.8
	Tertiary	163	49.8
Disability	Yes	69	21.2
	No	256	78.8
County of birth	Uasin Gishu	183	56.3
	Other	142	43.7
	Rural	165	50.8
Residence	Urban	160	49.2
House tenure	Rental	842	5.8
	Non-rental	241	74.2
Access to Commercial credit	Yes	219	67.4
	No	106	32.6

Source: Field Data

1.5. Discussion

The in-depth interviews, survey results, and secondary data were analysed and examined in relation to the research questions in the study. The persisting unequal treatment of men, women, boys, and girls require affirmative action to provide each of them an opportunity to exploit their full endowments towards maximising their entitlements (SID, 2012). Evidence indicate that most devolved funds were established in the 1990s and the 2000s (ICPAK, 2014). This is a unique period in the history of Kenya and other Sub-Saharan African countries. When the Berlin wall collapsed in 1989, it paved the way for German reunification in 1990 and the end of the Cold War. Consequently, the ideological differences between the East and West that had hindered progress in African countries were dismantled (Kumassa & Jones, 2015). Public reforms became obvious and there were socio-economic and political transformations.

Most African countries transitioned from single-party rule to political pluralism (multi-party democracy), thus ending the one-party rule through competitive elections (Olowu, 2011). People became more aware of their rights and demanded for certain basic services from the state. The civil society, college students, university lecturers, workers' unions, professional organisations, religious leaders, and ordinary people led in the struggle for basic rights (Wanyande, 2009).

At the same time, the effects of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) on the economies of the countries of Africa had become manifest (Kumssa & Jones, 2015; Heidhues & Obare, 2011). It was the beginning of the free market economy. Cost sharing was declared an official government

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policy in 1988 (Bunyi *et al.*, 2011). The SAPs also included austerity measures in the public service, which resulted in retrenchment of government workers and freeze on employment in the public sector even as household incomes dwindled.

The devolved funds were established to cover various areas from education, healthcare to basic infrastructure. Decentralization, through social funds, sought to target and empower poor communities to improve participation and local service (Parker & Serrano, 2000). The social funds have two goals: increasing sustained access of the poor to local services and infrastructure; and empowering communities through participation in the selection, implementation, and ongoing operation and maintenance of development projects.

Place of origin or county of birth is an important feature in Kenya. Home County is not necessarily the county of birth in Kenya. Home County, in most cases, is the ancestral home. Those who were born in UG County reported higher percentage of participation in the devolved funds. However, those from other counties participated less in UG County devolved funds.

The population of UG County is more rural. By default, the rural inhabitants benefit the most. The constituencies are political representation areas, which play an important role in the devolved funds. Constituencies have well laid structures that enable the community to be involved in the devolved funds. They are a strong unit for mobilizing the people involved in the devolved funds. Across the county, the constituencies received direct funds like the CDF from the national government, or other funds like HIV/AIDS and CBF, which are channeled through the constituency. Participation in the devolved funds is highest at the constituency. The CDF is a constituency-based fund that uses its structures to offer bursaries to needy students.

Men and male household heads participate the most in the funds. Due to patriarchal set ups, most of the household property is registered under the name of the male head or male folk in the household. Hence, women are disadvantaged from the conventional financial institutions that require collaterals for credit. The devolved funds are meant to help women and other vulnerable groups that are not able to meet the credit requirements offered by the available banks, micro-finance, and shylocks (groups or persons lending money at excessive rates).

The WEDF fund is segregated for women from the start. Women have an upper hand in participating in the fund. Men can also form a minority (up to 30%) in the women groups but cannot hold any leadership role. It was established to support women-owned enterprises in Kenya, which comprises 48% of the total micro and small enterprises (Kiraka *et al.*, 2013). This is because women are more organized in groups and suffer most from poverty at the household level.

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Since the fund targets women groups or groups with more women, this allows for more women participants than men. The young and more educated participate in the funds due to their high literacy levels because they are more informed about the funds and their requirements.

Conclusion

Study on decentralization has been increasing in the recent past. Growing empirical evidence in development literature indicates that decentralization is becoming increasingly more pronounced as a form of governance, thereby making the study on devolved funds topical and necessary. Devolution of services to everyone is a duty imposed by the Kenyan Constitution. Decentralization has been propagated as a development paradigm shift to enhance citizen participation in poverty reduction efforts. The national government strives to enhance decentralization at the local levels, with a special focus on ensuring participation in poverty alleviation of the marginalized groups such as women, youth, children, orphans, elderly persons, persons living with disabilities, the indigenous people, those affected with HIV/AIDS affected, and other vulnerable groups.

There has been an increase in the number of devolved funds in Kenya with subsequent increment for allocation to the funds (Mwenda, 2010). The devolved funds target improved food security, healthcare, installation of security, electricity, roads, and water infrastructure. Most of the previous studies have been conducted on the influence of the devolved funds to improve livelihoods and basic infrastructure of intended communities. Other studies have examined the absorptive capacities of the devolved funds, allocative rationale, and governance issues surrounding the funds. The perspective of the current study had an emphasis on the intended recipients of the funds. However, the funds have improved the standards of living of the participants and has marginalised women, urban areas, the disabled, the unemployed, and the lowly educated. In addition, the funds are less beneficial to those from outside their home counties. This is an aspect of marginalization. There are also cases of people or groups benefiting multiple times from one or more funds. Serial defaulters can easily move from one devolved fund to another. This can be avoided through automation of the funds and mergers. Proper keeping of records and automation will help to weed out double or multiple applicants. Although this study was limited to UG County, it is important recognize that generalization from the sample has provided compelling evidence that can be inferred to other counties in the country.

Recommendations

Recommendations are made based on the outcome of the study and the conclusions drawn. Decentralization is a policy program that has taken root in

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many countries but in different forms. Nonetheless, devolved funds is a major policy concern in development today. Amidst reports of success, the funds have been found to marginalise segments of the society. Thus, there is need to examine the lending structure of the funds to deepen them and expand their reach in the community without marginalising any segment in the society. The existence of several funds targeting the same projects and beneficiaries leads to duplication. Therefore, it is better to merge the funds into two or three broad funds.

The scale of this debate is not exhaustive. The current study was conducted on a limited scale. To produce achievable policy strategies and development targets with regards to devolved funds, there is need for further studies to allow for comparisons of the results on the subject. More research needs to be done to broaden the geographical scope and develop similar study in other areas. Data collection in this study is cross-sectional in nature. The data was collected at one specific point in time. A future study that employs longitudinal research designs to examine participation over a period of time would capture repeated observations and trends in participation in devolved funds. Although many studies on devolved funds have been conducted in the past, there is still more work to be done. In recent years, the results of various research studies have taken center stage in the popular media. As a result, more informed policies can be formulated. Therefore, the findings of this study, along with several others produced on devolved funds, should stimulate greater interest in this line of inquiry.

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