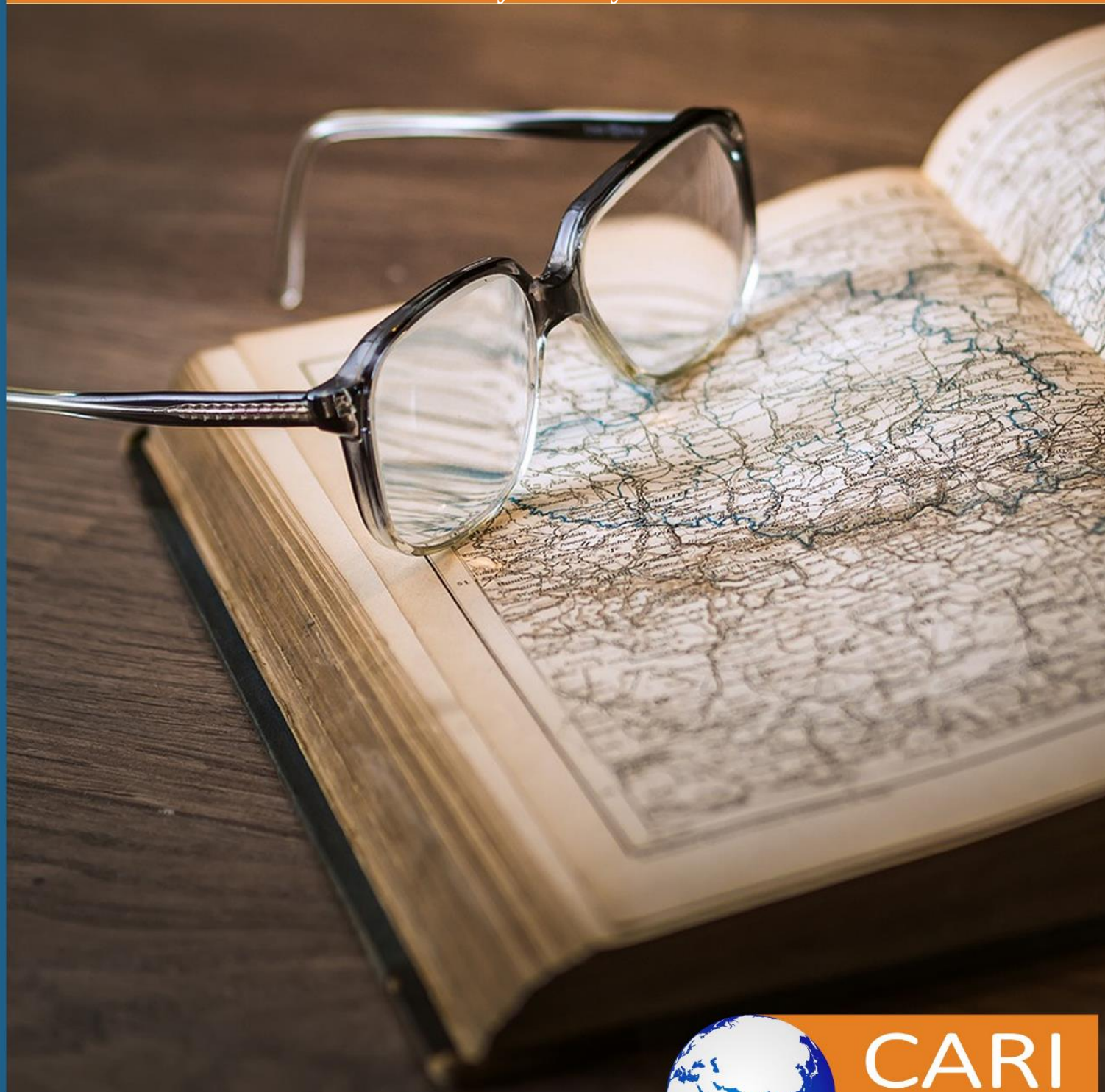


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**Impact of Devolution on Local Governance and Service
Delivery in Kenya**



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Impact of Devolution on Local Governance and Service Delivery in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: The main objective of this study was to explore the impact of devolution on local governance and service delivery in Kenya.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The findings revealed that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to the impact of devolution on local governance and service delivery in Kenya. The empirical review revealed the devolution in Kenya has brought about positive changes in local governance and service delivery. To sustain and enhance these gains, it is imperative to prioritize capacity building, accountability, and collaboration among counties. Devolution remains a powerful tool for fostering development and democratizing governance in Kenya, but ongoing commitment and effort are required to ensure its continued success in improving the lives of Kenyan citizens.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The Decentralization theory, the Public Choice theory and the Institutional theory may be used to anchor future studies on the impact of devolution on local governance and service delivery in Kenya. There is a need for greater coordination and collaboration among counties. Many challenges, such as infrastructure development and resource allocation, transcend county boundaries. Counties should work together on regional development initiatives to maximize their impact and address common issues effectively. The national government can play a facilitating role in promoting inter-county cooperation through the provision of technical assistance and resources.

Keywords: *Devolution, Local Governance, Service Delivery, Decentralization, Citizen Participation, Resource Allocation*

INTRODUCTION

Local governance effectiveness and service delivery are crucial components of a well-functioning government system, even in developed economies. In the United States, for instance, trends indicate that local governments have been facing fiscal challenges, impacting service delivery. Local government fiscal capacity has been declining over the past decade, leading to reduced funding for public services such as education and infrastructure. This decline has prompted discussions about the effectiveness of local governance in balancing budgets and maintaining service quality (Bohn and Inman, 2017)

In Japan, another developed economy, local governance effectiveness has been influenced by demographic shifts. The aging population and rural depopulation have strained local governments' ability to provide essential services. These demographic trends have led to a decline in the availability of healthcare services in some rural areas. This serves as an example of how demographic changes can impact the capacity of local governments to deliver services effectively (Nakamura, 2018)

In addition to that, in Japan, the "Local Autonomy Act" is a crucial framework for local governance and service delivery. Local governments in Japan have significant responsibilities for providing public services, including education, healthcare, and infrastructure maintenance. Research by Nakamura and Nakashima (2017) explores the relationship between local tax revenue and the quality of public services in Japanese municipalities. Their study shows that municipalities with higher local tax revenue tend to provide better public services, illustrating the importance of financial autonomy in local governance and service delivery.

In the UK, one notable initiative to enhance local governance and service delivery is the "Localism Act 2011." This act aimed to devolve greater powers to local authorities and communities, allowing them to take more control over local decision-making, planning, and service provision. One significant aspect of this act was the introduction of "Community Rights," empowering communities to take over and manage local assets, such as community centers and libraries. According to research by Richards and Smith (2015), the Localism Act has had varying impacts on different communities, highlighting the complexities of decentralization efforts even in developed economies.

In India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a notable initiative aimed at enhancing local governance and service delivery. MGNREGA guarantees 100 days of wage employment per year to rural households, with a strong emphasis on decentralized planning and local decision-making. Duflo (2018) examines the impact of MGNREGA on rural India and finds that it has not only provided employment but also empowered local communities by giving them a role in decision-making, thereby improving service delivery and local governance.

In South Africa, the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process is a key mechanism for improving local governance and service delivery. The IDP is a five-year strategic plan developed by local municipalities, involving extensive public participation and consultation. Olowu (2017) discusses how the IDP process has contributed to improved governance and service delivery in South African municipalities. It emphasizes the importance of community involvement in shaping local development priorities.

In Nigeria, a significant sub-Saharan African nation, the effectiveness of local governance and service delivery has been a longstanding issue. Adepoju and Samson (2016) highlights challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient revenue generation at the local level, and political interference in local governance structures. These challenges have hindered the provision of basic services like clean water, education, and healthcare.

Local governance effectiveness and service delivery in Kenya have been subject to significant changes and challenges in recent years. The 2010 Kenyan Constitution introduced a devolved system of government, with 47 county governments responsible for service provision at the local level. This shift aimed to improve local governance and service delivery by bringing decision-making and resources closer to the people. However, the effectiveness of this devolution process has varied across counties.

Chege and Sambu (2017) found that some counties have made significant strides in improving service delivery, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. These counties have demonstrated effective governance structures, transparency, and community engagement, leading to better service outcomes.

Conversely, other counties have faced challenges related to governance, corruption, and resource constraints, hindering service delivery improvements. Khaoya and Simiyu (2018) highlights the disparities in local governance and service delivery outcomes, emphasizing the need for capacity-building and institutional strengthening in some counties.

In the context of local governance and service delivery in Kenya, it's essential to acknowledge the role of citizen participation and accountability mechanisms. Initiatives like public participation forums and citizen scorecards have been implemented to promote transparency and citizen engagement in decision-making processes (Ondimu, 2016).

In summary, local governance effectiveness and service delivery in Kenya are influenced by the devolution process, governance practices, resource allocation, and citizen engagement. While some counties have made significant progress, challenges persist in others, requiring ongoing efforts to string devolution policies in Kenya, as enshrined in the 2010 Constitution, have fundamentally transformed the governance landscape. These policies aimed to transfer significant political, administrative, and fiscal powers from the central government to 47 newly created counties. Devolution marked a departure from Kenya's previous centralized system, with the goal of promoting local self-governance and enhancing citizens' participation in decision-making (Chege & Sambu, 2017).

Local leadership plays a pivotal role in the effectiveness of devolution policies. County governments are headed by governors who are elected as the chief executives of their respective counties. These leaders are tasked with implementing devolved functions, overseeing county administration, and ensuring that public services are delivered efficiently. The effectiveness of local leadership, as well as their commitment to transparency and accountability, significantly influences the success of devolution in Kenya (Ondimu, 2016).

Fiscal decentralization is a crucial component of devolution in Kenya. It involves the allocation of financial resources to county governments to fund their functions and service delivery. The equitable distribution of resources is a fundamental aspect of fiscal decentralization, aiming to address historical imbalances and ensure that all counties have adequate funding to provide essential services. However, challenges related to revenue generation, resource allocation, and financial management have emerged, affecting the ability of county governments to deliver services effectively (Khaoya & Simiyu, 2018).

Devolution on Local Governance and Service Delivery

The interplay between devolution policies, local leadership, and fiscal decentralization directly impacts local governance and service delivery in Kenya. Effective local leadership is essential for efficient service delivery, as governors and county executives are responsible for planning and implementing programs in critical areas like healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Fiscal decentralization is the financial backbone of service delivery, ensuring that county governments have the necessary resources to address the needs of their populations.

In Kenya, the success of devolution policies in improving local governance and service delivery hinges on several factors, including the effectiveness of local leadership and the equitable allocation of resources through fiscal decentralization. A harmonious relationship between these elements can lead to enhanced local governance structures that prioritize citizen engagement, transparency, and accountability in decision-making processes, ultimately resulting in improved service delivery to the people of Kenya.

While devolution policies hold great promise for enhancing local governance and service delivery, they have also encountered several challenges in Kenya. One significant challenge is the varying capacity and preparedness of county governments to take on devolved functions effectively. Some counties have struggled with institutional weaknesses, inadequate technical expertise, and limited resources, which have hindered their ability to deliver services efficiently (Republic of Kenya, 2018).

Local leadership not only involves elected officials but also encompasses a broader network of county executives, members of county assemblies, and public servants. Effective leadership at both political and administrative levels is critical for ensuring that devolution policies are implemented as intended. Leadership that prioritizes transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement can foster trust in local governance structures and promote efficient service delivery (Ondimu, 2016).

In the context of local governance and service delivery, active citizen participation is vital. Devolution policies in Kenya aim to empower citizens by giving them a more direct role in decision-making processes through mechanisms like public participation forums and community-based organizations. Engaged citizens can hold their local leaders accountable and contribute to the identification of community needs, which, in turn, can inform service delivery priorities (Republic of Kenya, 2010).

Devolution policies necessitate robust inter-governmental relations between the county and national governments. Cooperation and coordination between these levels of government are essential to ensure that functions and responsibilities are effectively shared and that resources are allocated equitably. Challenges in this regard, such as conflicts over resource distribution and unclear delineation of roles, can impact service delivery outcomes (Khaoya & Simiyu, 2018).

Devolution policies, local leadership, fiscal decentralization, and active citizen participation are interconnected elements that shape the landscape of local governance and service delivery in Kenya. Effective implementation of devolution requires addressing challenges, building institutional capacity, and promoting accountability. When these elements work in synergy, they can contribute significantly to improved service delivery and governance outcomes at the local level, ultimately benefiting the people of Kenya.

Statement of the problem

The devolution of political, administrative, and fiscal powers to county governments in Kenya, as mandated by the 2010 Constitution, marked a significant shift in the country's governance structure. While devolution was intended to enhance local governance and improve service delivery, there is a pressing need to assess its actual impact and the extent to which it has achieved these objectives. This study seeks to address critical gaps in understanding the consequences of devolution on local governance structures and service delivery in Kenya, with a focus on identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement.

The study aims to comprehensively analyze how the introduction of devolution has affected the structure of local governance in Kenya. Specifically, it examines changes in decision-making processes, roles and responsibilities of local leaders, and the distribution of power between county and national governments. By doing so, it addresses the gap in the existing literature, which often lacks a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of governance under the devolved system (Ondimu, 2016).

The study also investigates the direct and indirect effects of devolution on service delivery at the county level. It evaluates changes in the quality and accessibility of public services, such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, within the context of devolution. This aspect of the research bridges a critical gap by providing empirical evidence of the impact of devolution on the lives of ordinary citizens and the extent to which service delivery has improved or faced challenges (Chege & Sambu, 2017).

This study primarily targets policymakers and government officials at the county and national levels in Kenya. It provides insights that can inform policy decisions related to devolution, local governance, and service delivery. Additionally, scholars and researchers interested in the dynamics of devolution in Kenya will find this research relevant for academic purposes. Furthermore, civil society organizations and advocacy groups focused on governance and service delivery issues will benefit from the study's findings as they seek to promote transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in the context of devolution in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Decentralization Theory

Decentralization theory focuses on the distribution of political, administrative, and fiscal authority from central governments to subnational levels, such as counties or local governments. It examines how power is devolved and the implications for governance and service delivery at the local level. Decentralization theory has evolved over time and draws from various scholars, including Wallace Oates, William Riker, and Paul Peterson. Decentralization theory is highly relevant to the study of the impact of devolution on local governance and service delivery in Kenya. It provides a framework for understanding the principles and mechanisms of devolution, the allocation of resources, and the potential benefits and challenges of decentralization (Manor, 1999).

Public Choice Theory

Public choice theory, pioneered by James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, explores how individuals' rational self-interest shapes public decision-making and government actions. It considers how politicians, bureaucrats, and citizens make choices that influence public policies and service provision. James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock are the primary originators of public choice theory. Public choice theory is pertinent to understanding how devolution in Kenya can impact local governance and service delivery. It helps explain how political and administrative actors may behave under devolution, including issues of accountability, rent-seeking, and the provision of public services (Besley, 2006).

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory examines the formal and informal rules, norms, and structures that govern behavior within organizations and societies. It explores how institutions influence decision-making, shape governance systems, and impact service delivery. Institutional theory has been developed by various scholars, with contributions from Douglass North, John W. Meyer, and Richard Scott, among others. Institutional theory is valuable for analyzing the impact of devolution on local governance and service delivery in Kenya. It helps uncover how institutional arrangements, including legal frameworks, organizational structures, and cultural norms, affect the implementation of devolution policies and influence service delivery outcomes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Empirical Review

Fauziya (2022) investigated the effect of legal framework on devolved service delivery. The study targets a population of 35,444 staff from 8 counties. The study has adopted a mixed method approach.

Structured and open-ended questionnaires were used in the study. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis. More results revealed that legal framework had positive and significant on service delivery. Based on the findings the study concludes legal framework significantly improves service delivery. Thus, legal framework in county governments reinforces management support, financial resources and stakeholder engagement thus increasing the propensity to service delivery. Hence, at high levels of legal framework, the effect of management support, financial resources and stakeholder engagement and delivery of devolved services is stronger and significant as opposed to when it is at low or medium level.

Kamau, Mwangi & Maina (2018) assessed the impact of devolution on healthcare service delivery in selected Kenyan counties. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and document analysis in three counties. It examined changes in healthcare access, quality, and responsiveness. The research found that devolution had led to improvements in healthcare infrastructure and access to services. However, challenges related to resource allocation and management persisted. The study recommended strengthening capacity-building initiatives for county health departments and enhancing collaboration between counties and the national government.

Mwangi & Mwema (2016) investigated the impact of devolution on education service delivery in Kenyan counties. This research employed a comparative case study approach, analyzing education indicators and stakeholders' perceptions in two counties with varying devolution outcomes. The study revealed disparities in educational outcomes between counties. While some counties had improved infrastructure and access to education, others faced challenges related to teacher shortages and infrastructure maintenance. The research recommended targeted interventions to address disparities, such as teacher training programs and infrastructure investment.

Tilas (2014) investigated the factors influencing satisfaction with service delivery within Murang'a County under the era of devolution. A descriptive survey research design was used. Purposive sampling was done in order to select opinion leaders in the eight sub-counties within Murang'a County. Questionnaires and interviews were used as instruments of data collection, which were validated prior to actual data collection by close consultation with experts. Opinion leaders of a ward that was not included in the study were used for pilot testing to determine the instruments reliability. Raw data was systematically organized, coded and analysed through descriptive statistics using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS), and finally presented using percentages and frequency distribution tables. The research findings showed that county leaders' accountability had great influence on services delivered as they were not accessible to citizens as expected. The study also found that financial rate of flow and timely transfers greatly influenced County service delivery. Citizen participation in meetings and their gender representation were great influencers of County service delivery. The study recommends an increase in public meetings to enhance accountability, gender balance in citizen participation in County decisions and civic education.

Smith & Brown (2018) examined how devolution has affected local governance structures in developed countries. The study conducted comparative case study analysis of devolved regions in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe, using surveys and interviews with local officials. Devolution generally leads to increased local autonomy and improved service delivery. However, the impact varies based on the degree of devolution and local capacity. The study recommended for tailor devolution policies to local needs and invest in capacity building programs.

Davis (2018) evaluated the influence of devolution on urban infrastructure development in major Sub Saharan African cities. Spatial analysis, infrastructure investment tracking and stakeholder interviews were the methods adopted in this research. The study found that devolution has led to increased investment in urban infrastructure, but challenges remain in planning and implementation. The study

recommends for fostering of intergovernmental collaboration for coordinated urban development planning.

Calzada (2017) analyzed the effects of devolution on local governance structures in selected European regions. The study conducted comparative case study analysis and surveys of local officials. Devolution led to greater autonomy for local governments and increased responsiveness to local needs. The study recommends for the promotion of intergovernmental cooperation and knowledge-sharing among regions.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

FINDINGS

Our study presented both a contextual and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Kamau, Mwangi & Maina (2018) assessed the impact of devolution on healthcare service delivery in selected Kenyan counties. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and document analysis in three counties. It examined changes in healthcare access, quality, and responsiveness. The research found that devolution had led to improvements in healthcare infrastructure and access to services. However, challenges related to resource allocation and management persisted. The study recommended strengthening capacity-building initiatives for county health departments and enhancing collaboration between counties and the national government. On the other hand, our current study focused on the impact of devolution on local governance and service delivery in Kenya.

Secondly, this study also presented a methodological gap, whereby, Kamau et al. (2018) in their study on the impact of devolution on healthcare services adopted a mixed method approach that included surveys, interviews and document analysis. Whereas, the current study focused on the impact of devolution on local governance and service delivery adopted a desktop research method.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of devolution on local governance and service delivery in Kenya has been significant and transformative since its inception in 2013. Devolution has decentralized power and resources, leading to increased citizen participation and a more responsive government at the county level. The shift of authority and funding to the counties has improved the delivery of essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, as local governments are better equipped to understand and address the unique needs of their communities.

One of the key observations from the implementation of devolution is the need for ongoing capacity building and training for county officials. While there have been substantial improvements, some counties still face challenges in managing their resources efficiently and effectively. Therefore, it is crucial for the Kenyan government and development partners to invest in training and mentorship programs for county officials to enhance their skills in financial management, project planning, and service delivery.

Furthermore, the importance of accountability and transparency cannot be overstated in the context of devolution. Counties must establish robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the use of funds and the delivery of services. Civil society organizations and citizens should be encouraged to actively engage in oversight activities to ensure that resources are used for the benefit of the people. The Kenyan government should also strengthen the capacity of county audit offices and other oversight institutions to ensure transparency and accountability.

Recommendations

In light of the challenges faced in some counties, it is recommended that the Kenyan government conducts regular assessments of the devolution process. These assessments should involve stakeholders from various sectors, including civil society, academia, and government agencies, to provide a comprehensive picture of the strengths and weaknesses of devolution. The findings from these assessments can inform policy adjustments and improvements to the devolution system.

Moreover, there is a need for greater coordination and collaboration among counties. Many challenges, such as infrastructure development and resource allocation, transcend county boundaries. Counties should work together on regional development initiatives to maximize their impact and address common issues effectively. The national government can play a facilitating role in promoting inter-county cooperation through the provision of technical assistance and resources.

In conclusion, devolution in Kenya has brought about positive changes in local governance and service delivery. To sustain and enhance these gains, it is imperative to prioritize capacity building, accountability, and collaboration among counties. Devolution remains a powerful tool for fostering development and democratizing governance in Kenya, but ongoing commitment and effort are required to ensure its continued success in improving the lives of Kenyan citizens.

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