

Decentralization in Kenya: The Constituencies Development Fund and its Impact on Literacy Levels in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency

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Abstract: *Distribution of development power from central government to grassroots is a major aspect emphasized by development experts in the world today. This gives local communities the opportunity to gain experience necessary for sustainable development initiatives and implementation of appropriate project that address their most felt needs. The Kenyan government has attempted to decentralize development powers to the grassroots since independence but most have failed due to a number of reasons including underfunding, management problems etc. The constituency Development Fund is the latest decentralization program by the government to enhance rural development. However, inadequate literature is available on the impact of the fund on literacy levels. This paper sought to highlight how Constituency Development Fund has influenced literacy levels in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency. The established that the fund has improved literacy levels in the constituency. The paper recommends that government should consider allocating more resources particularly to the CDF kitty to foster initiation of education and other projects in the country.*

Keywords: Constituency Development Fund, Rural Development, Decentralization, Literacy Levels, Kenya, North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency

1. Introduction

Most developing nations are still struggling for efficient use of their resources. In order to overcome physical and administrative constraints of the development, it is necessary to transfer the power from the central government to local authorities. Distribution of power from central government to local authorities improves the management of resources and community participation which is considered key to sustainable development [1], [2]. Decentralization is therefore a source for bottom up participatory development, thus improving local governance resulting to poverty reduction in rural areas. The whole purpose of development is being redefined so as to bring people to the central stage. There are three types of decentralization namely deconcentration, devolution and delegation [3], [4].

Decentralization is the opposite of development paradigm where development agencies including the government are used to acting know-all and taking communities as passive objects of development [5], [6]. The top-down approach is problematic as communities develop dependency syndrome and are least prepared to initiate development without direction from development agencies and government officials. The approach does not give local communities the opportunity to gain experience necessary for sustainability of development initiatives thus whenever development agencies including government withdrew, it means collapse of projects which renders the investment a waste [6].

The shift to decentralization approach implies substantial change whereby bottom-up development decisions are emphasized. Most important, decentralization means empowering development beneficiaries in terms of resource and needs identification, planning on the use of resources

and the actual implementation of development initiatives[7], [5]. This ensures development and mobilization of local resources, necessary for development and sustainability of projects.

The idea of decentralization in Kenya can be traced back to the period immediately after independence as espoused in the Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya [8]. Before independence in 1963, the British introduced a system of administration in Kenya which emphasized departmental independence where development matters were left to the individual heads of technical departments. During this period there was no integrated organizational framework within which decision making for development took place at the sub-territorial level therefore projects were identified within departmental framework with the officers at the sub-territorial level working under close instructions from the centre [9].

At independence Kenya sought to pursue a development strategy that was informed by African Socialism. The policy placed emphasis on rapid economic growth and human development and assumed that poverty, ignorance, health, unemployment and income disparities would improve as a result of a robust economy [10]. For instance access to education was envisioned from a purely economic perspective. In education sector the government adopted both the African Socialism policy and the Ominde Commission report (1965) which emphasized the development of manpower for nation building [10].

The government therefore embarked on decentralization programs to promote community participation in development so as to achieve goals set in the African Socialism policy among them education. The most

notable decentralization programs include the majimbo system (1963), District Development Grant Program (1966), the Special Rural Development Program (1969/70), District Development Planning (1971), the Rural Development Fund (1975), and the District Focus for Rural Development (1983/84). These programs failed as a result of inadequate funding, lack of government commitment, and failure to actively involve beneficiaries in development projects among other factors [11].

Failure of the above decentralization programs led to development challenges in the country. For instance in the education sector number of challenges existed before 2002 including the high cost of training, inequality in access to education, problem of relevance and quality and under enrolment in key post - school courses for developing a labour force for industrialization [12]. Due to these challenges Kenyan government initiated the Constituencies Development Fund to foster uniform development in the country.

The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) was established in 2003 through the CDF Act in The Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 107 (Act No. 11) of 9th January 2004. The fund comprises an annual budgetary allocation equivalent to 7.5% of the government's ordinary revenue. Seventy - five percent (75%) of the fund is allocated equally amongst all the current 290 constituencies in the country. The remaining twenty five percent (25%) is allocated as per constituency poverty levels. The establishment of the CDF program is an expression of continued faith in decentralization and frustration with the poor performance of all previous models of decentralization [13]. The fund aims to correct imbalances in regional development brought about by partisan politics. It targets all constituency-level development projects, particularly those aiming to combat poverty at the grassroots and to relieve members of parliament from the heavy demands of fund-raising for projects which ought to be financed through the Consolidated Fund [14].

The legal provision of the establishment and operation of the Act suggests that the fund is essentially a model for decentralization of development planning and implementation. In this case, the organization and operation of the fund lies squarely within the domain of administrative decentralization.

Decentralization as a means for fostering development has been a focus of intense academic, policy and even popular debate in Africa in general and Kenya in particular. [15]. The budgetary allocation of these funds as per the year 2011 was about Ksh 9.35 billion a year and with 210 constituencies in Kenya, each of them get Ksh 44.54 million annually [13].

CDF is managed by five committees, two of which are at the national and three are at the grassroots level. The national committees include National Management Committee (NMC) or Constituencies Development Fund Board (CDFB) and Constituency Fund Committee (CFC). Grassroots committees are District Project Committee

(DPC), Constituency Development Fund Committee (CDFC), and Project Management Committee (PMC) [14].

Unlike other development funds that filter from the central government through larger and more layers of administrative organs and bureaucracies, funds under this program go directly to local levels and thus provide people at the grassroots the opportunity to make expenditure decisions that maximize their welfare through establishing development projects among them educational programs [15].

Since its initiation, CDF has made a great impact, with numerous CDF projects coming up throughout the country [16]. While this yearly allocations may not appear to be much, its impact both physically and socially at the community level has been phenomenal [13]. For instance, through the CDF funds, many schools have been built and equipped. This has aided the government's policy of providing free primary school education. However, it is argued that the funds have not achieved intended development goals [15],[17], [18]. These conflicting literatures provide a gap on whether CDF has enhanced development in Kenya. Therefore this study sought to establish the role of CDF on education sector in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency.

2. Research Methodology

This paper is an outcome of a study conducted in North Mugirango /Borabu constituency in Nyamira County. This constituency boarder West Mugirango and Kitutu Masaba on the west, Kasupul Kabondo to the north, Nyaribari Masaba to the south and Belgut and Sotik constituencies on the east. The climatic conditions in this area are hot and wet and the major economic activity is farming of crops including tea, coffee bananas, maize, and arrowroots.

The authors' focus on North Mugirango/Borabu constituency is based on the fact that the constituency was ranked among poor performing constituencies in Kenya in 2011 with regard to utilization of CDF fund [19]. In addition, myriad problems have faced management of North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency CDF including resignation of the chairman and other four members of the CDF committee in 2011 citing frustration from the area MP. This was the constituency in Kenya where such large numbers of CDF committee members have resigned and therefore the researcher was interested to establish whether the funds have had effect on education sector despite corruption and favouritism claims cited by the former CDF committee members. The study utilized quasi experimental design to yield qualitative and quantitative data required to answer research questions using questionnaire and interviews. The design entails measurement of a phenomenon before (pretest) a stimulus (intervention) is introduced and determining change(s) on a phenomenon (post test). Therefore education status in the constituency before and after introduction of CDF in 2002 was determined.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 CDF and Education Sector in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency

To establish education standards before and after introduction of CDF in 2003, the study focused on the distance to the nearest school, availability of classrooms, teachers and textbooks in primary and secondary schools before and after initiation of CDF.

Respondents were asked to indicate the distance to the nearest school before initiation of CDF in 2003. Table 3.1 shows that 246 (94.6%) of respondents argued that the nearest school was below 5km away whereas 14 (5.4%) said that the nearest school was between 5 and 10 km away. This data shows that people in North Mugirango/Borabu constituency accessed schools easily. Presence of many schools was attributed to the government and community efforts to construct learning institutions especially primary and secondary schools to address illiteracy. Therefore most parts of the constituency had adequate learning facilities even before introduction of Constituency Development Fund.

Table 3.1: Distance to the nearest schools before 2003

| Distance to the nearest schools before 2003 | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| 0-5km | 246 | 94.6 |
| 5-10km | 14 | 5.4 |
| Total | 260 | 100.0 |

On the number of classrooms in schools before initiation of CDF in 2003, the head teachers and other key informants interviewed said that before CDF was introduced most schools in the constituency had shortage of classrooms. They argued that most primary schools had less than six classes that were not enough to accommodate learners from pre unit to standard eight. The informants asserted that a primary school needs to have at least nine classrooms to accommodate pupils from pre-unit up to standard eight indicating that the schools that had less than six classrooms had insufficient classrooms. In addition, the classrooms were mostly mud walled which made learning uncondusive due to dust and jigger infestation in some schools. To overcome the challenge of shortage of classrooms some schools conducted classes under a tree. Shortage of classrooms was attributed to inability of government and community members in some parts of the constituency to construct more classrooms. A proportion (51.5%) of respondents confirmed the head teachers arguments that some schools in the constituency had shortage of classrooms and that classes were sometimes conducted under a tree. A primary head teacher during interviews said that:

“Before the year 2003 most schools in this constituency did not have adequate classrooms. Some school had five or six classes and most of them were mud walled. In some schools children smeared the floor and walls with cow dung and mud .The classrooms were congested and in some schools pupils learned under a tree because of scarcity of classrooms”.

On the number of teachers in schools the education experts interviewed said that before 2003, schools in the constituency had shortage of teachers. For instance the informants argued that some schools in the constituency had between three and five teachers handling pupils from pre-unit to standard eight implying that knowledge delivery was a challenge during that time due work overload. Similarly secondary schools in the area of study had shortage of teachers. Most schools had less than four teachers suggesting that it was difficult for them to handle more than 10 subjects (each from form one to form four). This situation contributed to poor performance of the schools in KCPE and KCSE. The experts attributed shortage of teachers in primary and secondary schools in the area to failure of the government to employ more instructors in public learning institutions. A primary head teacher said that

“...schools had insufficient teachers for example some primary schools had between three and five teachers handling pupils from pre unit up to standard eight”.

Similarly a high school principal interviewed argued that:

“Before 2003 most schools in this constituency and the whole Nyamira district had acute shortage of teachers. Most schools had less than four teachers teaching students in form one, two, three, and four”.

Furthermore, existence of textbooks in schools before 2003 was another aspect that this study sought to establish. Education experts interviewed revealed that schools in the constituency did not have adequate textbooks. They said that some schools had only one copy of each text book which was teacher’s copy implying that learners didn’t have access to such books. In some schools according to education experts, there was no any textbook and therefore teachers purchased their own copies. This data shows that most schools in the constituency did not have text books which a phenomenon that translated to poor performance in national examinations. During interviews a high school principal said that:

“Before 2003 almost all primary and secondary schools in the whole constituency did not have enough learning facilities..... Desks and books were also a problem. Some schools only had one textbook for each subjects while in other schools there were no textbook at all”.

The sentiments clearly illustrates that school in the constituency did not have books and other learning facilities like desks a phenomenon that education experts attributed to government’s failure to purchase books in schools and parents’ inability to buy the books. In this regard, a primary head teacher said that:

“Most primary schools before 2003 had only one copy of some textbooks which were used by subject teachers meaning that learners did not access such textbooks”.

3.2 Education in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency after Introduction of CDF in 2003

The study sought to determine literacy level in the constituency after initiation of CDF in 2003. This was determined by the following indicators: distance to the nearest school, availability of classrooms, teachers, and availability of textbooks in schools.

On the distance to school, table 3.2 indicates that 246 (94.6%) of respondents argued that after introduction of CDF in 2003 the nearest school is below 5km away whereas 14 (5.4%) said that the nearest school is between 5 and 10 km away. This data suggests that after introduction of CDF no school has been established in the constituency thus responses are the same with earlier responses on distance to the nearest school before introduction of CDF. One CDF committee member said that CDF in the constituency has never been used to construct new schools but to build new buildings and other developments in existing schools. This supports respondents' argument that no new school has been established since 2003.

Table 3.2: Distance to the nearest schools after 2003

| Distance to the nearest schools after 2003 | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| 0-5km | 246 | 94.6 |
| 5-10km | 14 | 5.4 |
| Total | 260 | 100.0 |

On availability of classrooms in schools after introduction of CDF in 2003 education experts interviewed argued that schools in the constituency have sufficient classrooms. They said that primary schools have more than nine classrooms enough to accommodate learners from pre-unit to standard eight and secondary schools have adequate classrooms (above four) to accommodate students from form one to form and the schools with many students have classroom divided into streams. This shows that measures have been put in place to increase the number of classrooms in schools. According to North Mugirango/Borabu CDF statistics (2011) at least two classrooms have been built by the funds in 156 primary schools and 39 secondary schools between 2003 and 2011. According to education experts interviewed the aim of building classrooms in the schools is to reduce congestion that existed before 2003. Apart from classrooms, the funds have been used to build laboratories, libraries, dining halls, dormitories, toilets, and offices as well as installing electricity and piped water in some schools. This implies that nowadays knowledge delivery is done in conducive environments. A District Education Officer (DEO) said that:

“Through CDF classroom have been built in many schools. Each school in the constituency has a minimum of two classes built by the fund since 2003. This has reduced congestion in classrooms”.

Therefore the DEO's sentiment was confirmed by other education experts and a proportion (92%) of respondents who claimed that after 2003 there is increase in the number of classrooms which has reduced congestion in primary and secondary schools in the constituency.

On the number of teachers in schools after introduction of CDF, key informant interviews established that the number of teachers in the schools has increased since 2003 a phenomenon that was attributed to government effort to employ more teachers through Free Primary and Secondary School Education Programme. The instructors are able to handle learners in schools without strain witnessed before 2003 when the teachers were few. Education experts said that after 2003 most primary schools have more than eight teachers while secondary schools have more than seven teachers. During interviews a head teacher in a primary school said that:

“The number of teachers especially in primary schools has drastically increased since 2003. This is because the government has employed more teachers. Nowadays most primary schools have more than eight teachers”.

Similarly, a secondary school principal said that after 2003 secondary schools in the constituency have more than seven teachers who they view sufficient to teach students without strain. Increase in the number of instructors in schools is attributed to government efforts through FPE and other initiatives to hire more teachers in the country.

On availability of textbooks in schools after introduction of CDF in 2003 education experts interviewed said that schools in the constituency nowadays have textbooks for learners and subject teachers. Availability of such books in primary and secondary schools was attributed to government's Free Primary and Secondary Education Programmes and CDF. The informants argued that the funds have been utilized to purchase textbooks and laboratory equipments in some secondary schools. For instance CDF records indicate that Ntana Secondary school received textbooks from the kitty in 2005, which was also confirmed by principal of the school. According to CDF committee member interviewed, some secondary schools have received books from the kitty to equip their libraries. However, existence of most books in secondary and primary schools according to CDF committee member is as a result of government efforts through Free Primary and Secondary Education Programmes. Therefore most schools in the constituency have more books compared to period before 2003.

Based on the data above this study concluded that education standards (literacy level) in North Mugirango/Borabu constituency have improved since 2003. This is due to utilization of CDF to build more classrooms, dormitories, laboratories, toilets, and libraries as well as purchase laboratory equipments, and textbooks in most schools. In addition, the funds have been used to install electricity and piped water in most schools. Since CDF is used to build classrooms and provide facilities to schools as mentioned above, it can be concluded that learning environment in schools has improved thus effective knowledge delivery.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Each society in the world is striving to achieve development. For development to be realized the government need to focus on infrastructural development, industrialization and

more importantly provide education and other social welfare services to raise peoples' living standards. Since independence Kenyan government is committed to foster development by introducing a number of rural development but most of them failed to achieve indeed objectives. However, CDF has enhanced rural development especially on education sector since classrooms have been built, learning resources and laboratory equipments have been made available in learning institutions, and students from humble background are able to access post secondary education due to CDF bursaries. The government need to increase the amount allocated for CDF to enhance implementation of projects especially in schools to ensure citizens' access to quality education.

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