

Can Devolution Assist Marginalized Kenyan Communities to Adapt to Climate Change?

Climate change is one of the defining challenges of our time, and affects all areas of human life and well-being. Climate extremes are expected to affect billions of people; especially those residing in arid and semi-arid lands (henceforth, ASALs) (IPCC 2014). For instance, patterns of warming temperatures, changes in precipitation, and the rise of sea level are likely to affect water supply and the quality of water (IPCC 2014). Other effects include concomitant shocks such as malnutrition, pests and diseases, conflict and death. It is often believed that people with resilient livelihoods are often those who are able to respond to climate change (Adger et al 2007; Abdullah et al 2009). In the same vein, it is expected that the poorest and most marginalized groups are being adversely affected by the impact of climate change (Adger et al 2007; Abdullah et al 2009). Kenya presents a case where marginalized communities are faced with

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climate change impacts. This is a sub-Saharan African country characterized by socio-economic inequalities with close to half its population living below the poverty line (Fosu, 2015; Ravallion, 2017; Njoya & Seetaram, 2018). Majority of the poor in Kenya reside in low income urban settlements and rural ASALs where social and economic opportunities are limited making these groups to be considered generally non-resilient. It is hypothesized in this paper that a generally resilient community is climate change resilient.

To address the challenge of climate change, mitigation and adaptation mechanisms have been proposed by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

(UNFCCC, 2015). Mitigation in this context involves limiting atmospheric greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations to levels that avoid dangerous climate change. Adaptation entails the adjustment of human and natural systems to actual or expected climate stimuli or their effects (IPCC 2014). In the twenty-first century, there is an increasing realization that poverty is closely linked to development and environment (McGray *et al* 2007). The poverty-environment development discourse has been instrumental in changing global focus exclusively on mitigation to a more balanced approach that recognizes adaptation, especially as it regards developing countries. However, adaptation is situated within existing poverty levels and income inequalities among communities that experience adverse effects of climate change. Communities that have been generally marginalized in terms of access to resources are considered to be more vulnerable to effects of

climate change (Adger *et al* 2007; Abdullah *et al*, 2009). Majority of these people reside in urban slums and ASALs. Being unable to respond to different shocks might act as obstacles for communities in ASALs to address climate change adaptation today and in the future.

One of the steps taken to address regional inequalities in development has been to change the way of governing a nation. To work towards sustainable development, the normative position to which a vast number of countries and civil society groups subscribe to has been to involve citizens in making decisions and participating in management at the local level (Madzwamuse 2010). However, this position seems to be better articulated in theory than in practice. A more pragmatic and radical way of ensuring that all citizenry does not feel marginalized in terms of access to a country's wealth has been the entrenchment of devolved systems of governance in the legislative processes (Lowndes & Gardner, 2016). Governance in this context implies politics, sharing of rights and responsibilities, and setting objectives and the policy agenda in developing a nation.

Devolution has been termed as a form of governance reform; a system meant to bring citizens, local groups and organizations into the policy and decision-making process (Kettl 2000). It is intended under devolution that all regions (e.g. administrative, geographical and social components) of a nation are represented in the decision-making processes that affect their wellbeing economically, socially and politically. In spirit, devolution is a mechanism that is intended to reduce inequalities and marginalization (e.g. ethnic, geographic and gender etc) among citizens.

Following the challenges of a unitary centralized governance system in Kenya, for example, the nation entered into a new constitutional dispensation (G.O.K 2010) that was meant to be progressive. The new constitution has been termed 'progressive' because it contains sections dedicated to human rights, citizen participation and devolution that were perceived to be lacking prior to when it was promulgated in 2010. Devolution in the Kenyan context was meant to decentralize power and resources as a way of dealing with past economic injustices. It is agreed among writers (e.g Miguel & Gugerty, 2005; Kanyinga 2006; Kiringai 2006; Oucho 2007); and within public parlance that centralization of governance had led to sections of Kenya growing at unprecedented rates as compared to marginalized areas such ASALs that had been neglected since the time Kenya got her independence from the British rule in 1963. Hitherto year 2010, development across Kenya was determined by Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 (G.O.K 1965), which favored agriculturally productive areas such as the central highlands against other areas. These 'productive' areas received more funding for infrastructural development as compared to other regions like ASALs. Under devolution, communities in different regions would elect their own governor, manage monetary resources allocated to them by the central government and generally decide on the direction they needed to take to uplift the livelihood of their people. It is expected that communities in geographically challenged terrains such as ASALs will greatly benefit from devolution.

The nexus between development, poverty and climate change has been drawn and well-illustrated

in recent literature. Many scholars agree that marginalized groups are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and climate variability (extremes) (Agrawala *et al*, 2003; Casillas & Kammen, 2010; Turner *et al*, 2015; Sanderson *et al*, 2016). It has been argued that by reducing marginalization and empowering groups to be generally resilient to any form of shocks, resilience to climate change will be achieved by all communities (Yamin *et al*, 2005). In Kenya, for a long time, communities residing in ASALs have been perceived to be economically marginalized and excluded from many central government initiated projects (Eriksen 2005). However, since the advent of devolution in 2010, different regions in Kenya have been mandated by the constitution to participate in the management and governance of local economies through their elected county leaders. Albeit, devolution has been touted to be experiencing some teething problems such as corruption and underfunding, it is perceived among scholars and general public that decentralised system of governance can help to solve economic injustices and hence reduce poverty and marginalization among the citizenry (Kibua & Mwabu, 2008; Mwenda 2010; Omolo 2010).

Devolution in Kenya offers hope to formerly marginalized groups through decentralization of resources and decision-making on key sectors that affect livelihoods. This is because the spirit and letter of devolution as encapsulated in the constitution is to ensure inclusion of Kenyan citizenry in decision making process that affect their livelihoods at local, regional and national levels. Thus, in climate change adaptation, there is a need for policy-makers in devolved

units (counties) to improve existing interventions by extending support such as water access to the marginalized locals and integrating the immediate needs of the local communities in their adaptation plans. However, to ensure success of climate adaptation strategies among the vulnerable, efforts at the county level should be buttressed by goodwill of political players in the national arena.

This article resonates with concerns that have been raised towards the Paris Agreement reached on 12 December 2015 and adopted by all 196 parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Of particular concern was the extent to which the agreement would be implemented at both global and local levels in a manner that respects 'the principles of justice, fairness and equity'. The contribution of this article in this respect is to explore how governance can be looped into discourse on effective adaptation mechanisms by countries affected the most by climate change.

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