

## **DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY OF DEVOLVED COUNTY UNITS IN NYERI COUNTY, KENYA**

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**Abstract:** *Devolution is the strongest form of governance decentralization. Devolution involves rescaling of responsibilities or powers from the national to the regional political organization. The actual form and politics of such rescaling will vary substantially between states, however, amounting to a radical transfer of powers and resources in some cases and a more modest and rhetorical shift of responsibility and service delivery in others. The conceptual scope of this study was limited to three governance structures variables namely financial decentralization, administrative decentralization, and political decentralization. This study targeted staff of Nyeri County and compose of senior managers, middle level managers and operational staff. The study employed descriptive survey design. The study applied both primary and secondary data analysis research design. Primary data was collected using semi structured questionnaires containing both closed and open-ended questions to allow variety. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. In addition, inferential statistics was applied to text correlation as well as multiple regression analysis to analyze the data. The findings of the study indicated that all the variable had a positive significance influence to service delivery in the devolved units. The study concluded that administration decentralization has a significant and a positive effect on service delivery in the devolved units in Kenya. The study further concluded that political decentralization has a significant and a positive effect on service delivery in the devolved units in Kenya. The study also concluded that financial decentralization had significant and a positive effect on service delivery in the devolved units in Kenya. The study recommended that the government should increase county government autonomy to promote administrative decentralization. The study also recommended that national and County governments should put in place measures to safeguard the independence of political decentralization. The study further recommended that national and County governments should put in place a set of deliberate and proactive processes, policies and structures that support financial decentralization. Generally in order to increase service deliver in the Counties, the Government should allocate more fund for the devolved units.*

**Keywords:** *administration decentralization, political decentralization, financial decentralization*

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### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Devolution is the strongest form of governance decentralization (Olatona & Olomola, 2015). Devolution involves rescaling of responsibilities or powers from the national to the regional political organization (Lobao, Martin, & Rodriguez-Pose, 2009). The actual form and politics of such rescaling will vary substantially between states, however, amounting to a radical transfer of powers and resources in some cases and a more modest and rhetorical shift of responsibility and service delivery in others (Cox, 2009). Devolution grants the devolved governments the capacity to develop policies that are better tailored to the economic and social

conditions of their areas, encouraging policy divergence through the introduction of ‘local solutions to local problems (Mackinnon, 2015).

In the developed countries, devolution has been seen as an important tool in revenue performance and therefore instrumental in providing services closer to people in large and densely populated economies such as China, the US and some European countries through federal arrangements (Clegg & Greg, 2010). According to Rosenbaum (2013) the worldwide governance trend is towards devolution. Some developing countries have not been left out in trial of devolution. In Africa countries such as Kenya, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda have initiated or deepened processes to transfer authority, power, responsibilities, and resources to sub-national levels.

In Kenya, devolution is an ambitious form of decentralization involving large-scale political, fiscal, and administrative decentralization (Kenya School of Government, 2015). Unlike other countries where the devolution process of the three powers has been sequentially attained, in Kenya the experience has been a ‘big bang’ where the three types of decentralization were achieved at once with the ratification of the constitution (Kobia & Bagaka, 2014). Devolution in Kenya is also based on the supremacy of the constitution, sovereignty of the people and the principle of public participation (ICJ Kenya, 2013).

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The change of system of governance in Kenya since promulgation of new constitution led to decentralization of certain government functions to county level, as outlined in Kenya constitution 2010 schedule 4. Some of the decentralized functions include education, health, agriculture, Public works and services among others. Lubale (2012) observes that, county governments and their agencies have the responsibility of delivering services within their designated area of jurisdiction, while observing the principles of equity, efficiency, accessibility, non-discrimination, transparency, accountability, sharing of data and information, and subsidiarity. So far, county governments in Kenya are still grappling with challenges of service delivery on the decentralized functions. A report by Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) in 2013 highlights key sectors like infrastructure, health, water and sanitation, education among others have faced challenges in their performance. Survey done by Transparency international (TI) (2017) reported that 41% of Kenyans were not satisfied with the performance of their county governments in service delivery.

Various studies on decentralization and performance of county governments have been conducted locally. Some include; Wamae, (2014) who studied role of procurement function in enhancing performance in devolved government. Mugambi and Theuri (2014) studied challenges encountered by devolved governments in Kenya in budget-preparations. Muriu R. (2012) did a study on the nature and influence of citizen participation on decentralized service delivery in Kenya. Gathuya (2010) conducted a survey of factors that influence local authority’s County devolved units’ funds of City Council of Nairobi. Lawson (2012) in a study Commissioned by Sida, Danida and AfDB did an evaluation of County devolved unit’s funds in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Malawi for a period between 2001 and 2010.

These studies however focused narrowly on the subject of decentralizing functions and their effect on performance of county governments. They dwelt on single function or variable which cannot be taken as representative of the overall performance measurement. There is still a gap in knowledge that has to be filled in view of the performance of county governments in Kenya based on the decentralized operations. This research will endeavor to explore this subject, in particular the way county 47 governments in Kenya have performed of the decentralized functions. The research question will be, “how has decentralized governance influenced service delivery of services of devolved units in Kenya?”

### **1.3 General objective**

The general objective of this study is to determine the influence of decentralized governance on the service delivery of devolved units in Kenya

### **1.4 Specific objectives**

- i. To establish the influence of administration decentralization on the service delivery of devolved units in Kenya
- ii. To determine the effect of political decentralization on the service delivery of devolved units in Kenya
- iii. To find out the effect of financial decentralization on the service delivery of devolved units in Kenya

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

#### **2.1.1 Souffle Theory**

The Soufflé Theory was proposed by (Parker, 1995) who postulates that the element of decentralization is administrative decentralization. Parker (1995) emphasized that decentralization is a multi-dimensional process that proceeds with successes and setbacks. The theory argues that like a Souffle that needs just the right combination of milk, eggs, and heat to rise, a successful program of decentralization must include the right combination of institutional elements to improve rural development outcomes (Farooq, Shamail, & Awais, 2008; Laryea-Adjei, 2006). Decentralization initiatives will therefore be subject to a continuous process of modification reflecting changes in social, political and economic conditions (Laryea-Adjei, 2006). There is therefore the need to include all dimensions of administrative decentralization. Parker suggests a conceptual model, the soufflé theory, which incorporates the essential elements of political, fiscal, and administrative decentralization as they combine to realize desired outcomes.

#### **2.1.2 Agency Theory**

Agency theory is concerned with agency relationships. The two parties have an agency relationship when they cooperate and engage in an association wherein one party (the principal) delegates decisions and/or work to another (an agent) to act on its behalf (Eisenhardt 2009; Rungtusanatham et al., 2007). The important assumptions underlying agency theory is that; potential goal conflicts exist between principals and agents; each party acts in its own self-interest; information asymmetry frequently exists between principals and agents; agents are more risk averse than the principal; and efficiency is the effectiveness criterion.

#### **2.1.3 The Sequential Theory of decentralization**

The Sequential Theory of decentralization was proposed by Falleti (2004). The theory contends that decentralization is a set of state reforms. As such, decentralization does not include transfers of authority to non-state actors. Akorsu (2015) cited Falleti (2004) and noted decentralization reforms may take place in authoritarian as well as democratic contexts, which means that the concepts of decentralization and democratization should not be conflated. Notably, (Falleti, 2004; Falleti, 2005) opined that sequential theory of decentralization classifies territorial decentralization into fiscal dimensions. Awortwi (2011) avers that Falleti's sequential theory of decentralization is based on three propositions: First, Institutional design of decentralization policies is highly dependent on when those policies take place within the sequence of reforms.

## 2.2 Conceptual Framework

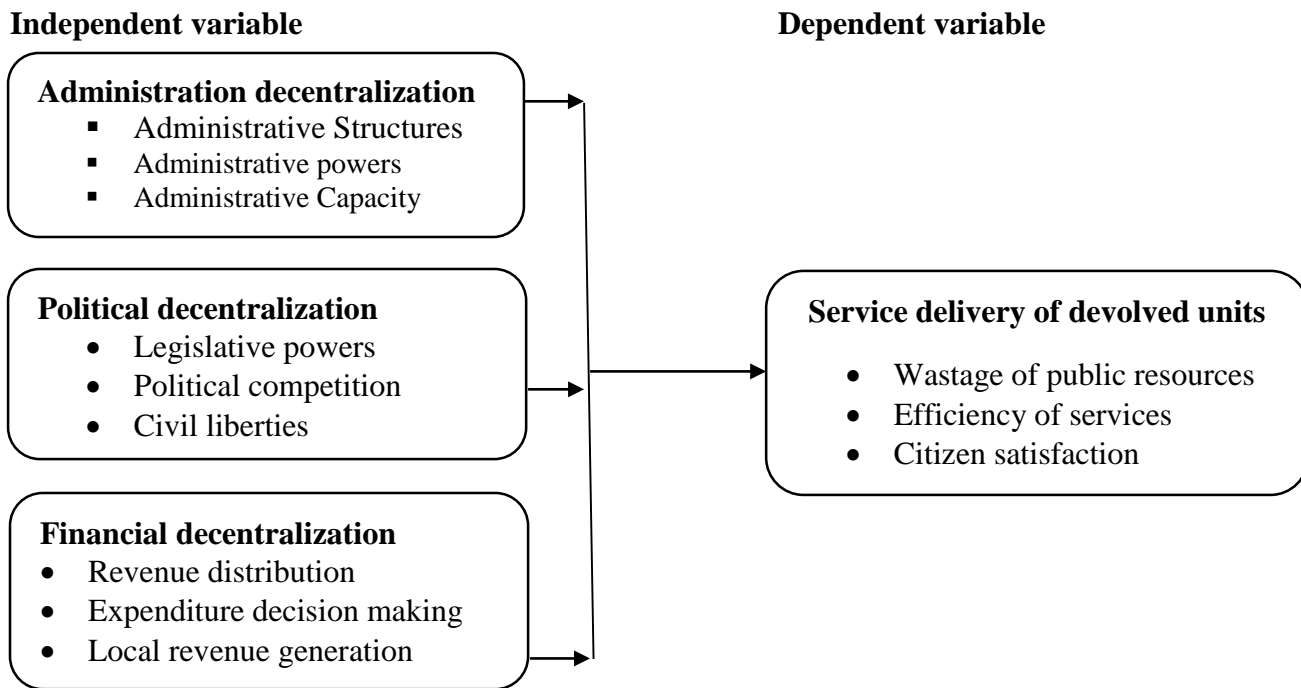


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

### 2.3.1 Administration Decentralization

Administrative decentralization (sometimes referred as institutional decentralization) involves the full or partial transfer of any array of functional responsibilities to the local level institutions such as health care service, the operation of schools, the management service personnel, the buildings and maintenance of roads and garbage collection (Yusoff et al., 2016). As Stanton (2009) asserts, administrative decentralization is concerned with the functional tasks of decent decentralization. It relates to the assignment of service delivery powers and functions across levels of government and determining where responsibility is situated. Administrative decentralization involves transfer of civil servants and public functions to the lower level of government (Olatona & Olomola, 2015). It involves full or partial transfer of functional responsibilities to the sub-national units of governance. The national government assigns local governments the authority to hire and fire local staff without prior approval of central government (Stanton, 2009).

Akorsu (2015) citing Falleti (2004) argued that administrative decentralization has either a positive or negative impact on the autonomy of sub-national executives. If administrative decentralization improves local and state bureaucracies, fosters training of local officials, or facilitates learning through the practice of delivering new responsibilities, it will likely increase the organizational capacities of sub-national governments. Nevertheless, if administrative decentralization takes place without the transfer of funds, this reform may decrease the autonomy of sub-national officials, who will be more dependent on subsequent national fiscal transfers or sub-national debt for the delivery of public services (Akorsu, 2015).

### 2.3.2 Political Decentralization

According to Akorsu (2015) political decentralization is a set of constitutional amendments and electoral reforms designed to open new, or activate existing but dormant or ineffective spaces for the representation of

sub-national politics. It aims to give more authority to citizens and their elected representatives in decision making and public administration. Political decentralization also tends to support democratization by providing more opportunity for citizens and their elected representatives to affect the creation and implementation of policies (Ozmen, 2014). Thus, political decentralization involves the transfer of political authority to the local level through the establishment of elected local governments and political parties. The theories that apply to political decentralization are Souffle theory, sequential theory of decentralization and principal-agent theories. Political decentralization aims to give more authority to citizens and their elected representatives in decision making and public administration. Political decentralization also tends to support democratization by providing more opportunity for citizens and their elected representatives to affect the creation and implementation of policies (Ozmen, 2014). Political decentralization also means a set of constitutional amendments and electoral reforms designed to open new spaces for the representation of sub-national policies. These policies are designed to devolve electoral capacities to sub-national actors. The popular election of mayors and governors, the creation of sub-national legislative assemblies, and constitutional reforms that strengthen the political autonomy of sub-national governments prepare the ground for the success of such structures (Falleti 2004).

### **2.3.3 Financial Decentralization**

In general, financial decentralization refers to transfer of competencies, responsibilities and financial resources from the central (state) level to the lower levels of government (Finzgar & Oplotnik, 2013). Financial decentralization is said to exist when sub-national governments have the decision-making power to raise revenues and perform spending activities (Kim, 2008). Alternatively, Akorsu (2015) posits that financial decentralization refers to a set of policies designed to increase the revenues or fiscal autonomy of sub-national governments. Fiscal decentralization is the most traceable type of decentralization as it is directly linked to budgetary practices. It necessitates the transfer of powers to raise and retain financial resources to fulfill assigned responsibilities to local level political and administrative organizations. It entails the assignment of functions and responsibilities regarding revenue collections and spending to sub-national government institutions (Yusoff et al., 2016).

### **2.3.4 Service Delivery**

Following the promulgation of the new constitution and the establishment of devolved units, expectations of Kenyans have been raised. Kenyans now look upon development projects delivered by devolved units, the hope from historically skewed development. Service delivery at devolved units, is hoped to address the inefficiency in public service. Consequently, Kenyans everywhere more than ever before, expect their devolved units, to design and implement high impact development projects that have the capacity to make a real difference in their lives, since development projects have become the principal means through which public services are being delivered in the counties. As a result, devolved units, must design and implement projects that not only make a difference in the lives of their county residents, but must execute development projects and interventions that deliver public value (Kayonde et al., 2013).

## **2.4 Empirical Literature Review**

Akorsu (2015) citing Falleti (2004) argued that administrative decentralization has either a positive or negative impact on the service delivery of devolved County units. If administrative decentralization improves local and state bureaucracies, fosters training of local officials, or facilitates learning through the practice of delivering new responsibilities, it will likely increase the organizational capacities of sub-national governments. Nevertheless, if administrative decentralization takes place without the transfer of funds, this reform may

decrease the effective service delivery of devolved County units, who will be more dependent on subsequent national fiscal transfers or sub-national debt for the delivery of public services (Akorsu, 2015).

Recently, Feizy, Moghali, Gramipour, and Zare (2015) asserts that there are two types of administrative decentralization. First, de-concentration which involves transfers authority and responsibility from one level of the central government to another while maintaining the same hierarchical level of accountability from the local units to the central government ministry or agency which has been decentralized. Secondly, delegation which refers to redistributes authority and responsibility to local units of government or agencies that are not always necessarily branches or local offices of the delegating authority. While some transfer of accountability to the sub-national units to which power is being delegated takes place, the bulk of accountability is still vertical and to the delegating central unit.

Hasnain (2008) examined the impact of the political party structure on the incentives for politicians to focus on patronage versus service delivery improvements in Pakistan. The researchers argued fragmentation and factionalism both exacerbate the information problems that voters have in assigning credit (blame) for service delivery improvements (deterioration), thereby creating the incentives for politicians to focus on targeted benefits. Polarization, particularly ethnic polarization, reduced the ability of groups to agree on the provision of public goods, again causing politicians to favor the delivery of targeted benefits. In the same context, Obicci (2014) revealed that political decentralization can be used as an instrument to promote the provision of service delivery.

Rodríguez-Pose and Krøijer (2009) summarized arguments in favor of fiscal decentralization. They claim it promotes higher efficiency, better public service, greater transparency and, eventually, economic growth. It is often argued that decentralization increases economic efficiency because local governments are better positioned than the national government to deliver public services as a result of proximity and informational advantage. This proximity is particularly important in low-income countries or emerging markets where in absence of market opportunities, vulnerable populations rely heavily on state action for their survival.

Gemmell, Kneller, and Sanz (2013) investigated whether the efficiency gains accompanying fiscal decentralization generate higher growth in more decentralized economies, applying pooled-mean group techniques to a panel dataset of 23 OECD countries, 1972 – 2005. The study found that spending decentralization tends to be associated with lower economic growth while revenue decentralization is associated with higher growth.

### **3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population was 3876 respondents that included both public members and staffs of Nyeri County government who previously participated in the budgeting, procurement, financial reporting and resource utilization and project implementation for the last five years. To come up with an appropriate study sample, the study utilized stratified sampling technique where respondents will be classified based on their departments. The strata's was the 10 departments in the county government of Nyeri County. This study utilized a sample size of 387. The study used both primary and secondary data collecting methods. Primary data was collected through the administration of questionnaires to senior management bank employees. The study carried out a pilot test to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaires in gathering the data required for purposes of the study. The information gathered from the respondents was of a qualitative and quantitative nature. The data was summarized and then analyzed by the use of descriptive statistics comprising of tables, graphs and percentages. The MS Excel, statistical software

was used to analyze the collected information for descriptive statistics as well as application of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software. The regression model is as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where,

Y = Performance of devolved units in Kenya

$\beta_0$  = Constant

$\beta_i$  = Regression coefficients

$X_1$  = Administration decentralization

$X_2$  = Political decentralization

$X_3$  = Financial decentralization

$\varepsilon$  = Error term

#### 4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1 Regression Results

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to test the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The average ratings for the three independent variables (administrative decentralization, Political decentralization and financial decentralization) were used as the indicators for input into the regression model.

The dependent variable used was service delivery. The coefficient of determination and standard error of the regression model is indicated in Table 4.1. Results in Table 4.1 indicate that the adjusted  $r^2$  was 0.577 indicating that the independent variables explained 57.7% of the effectiveness of the service delivery. This indicates that the model had good explanatory power.

*Table 4.1: Regression Model Parameters*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.788	.630	.577	.600

Further, the regression output in Table 4.2 presents the source of variance, mean of variances and the f value. The results indicate that the overall model was significant (f value = 40.80;  $p < 0.05$ ) and could provide important results. This indicates that the model could provide some predictive significance and was a good fit.

*Table 4.2: Analysis of Variance of the Regression*

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	290.251	4	15.472	40.818	.000
Residual	9.027	295	.375		
Total	299.278	50			

Further, the regression output on significance of the independent variables is presented in Table 4.3.

*Table 4.3 Significance of Independent Variables*

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.875	.562		4.785	.000
Administrative decentralization	.675	.218	.688	4.810	.004
Political decentralization	.585	.255	.460	1.708	.004
Financial decentralization	.695	.1 86	.370	1.671	.001

#### 4.1.1 Administration decentralization

The results in Table 4.3 indicate that administration decentralization has a regression coefficient of 0.675. This value shows that holding other variables in the model constant, an increase in administration decentralization by one unit causes the service delivery to increase by 0.675 units. The value of the coefficient is positive. The positive effect shows that there is a positive relationship between administration decentralization and service delivery in the devolved units.

The coefficient was not just positive but also statistically significant with a t-statistic value of 4.810. The standard error was found to be 0.218 and the p-value was found to be < 0.05). The variable was also found to be the second most influential variable on the service delivery in the devolved units.

#### 4.1.1 Political decentralization

The results in Table 4.3 indicate that political decentralization has a regression coefficient of 0.585. This value shows that holding other variables in the model constant, an increase in political decentralization by one unit causes the service delivery to increase by 0.585 units. The value of the coefficient is positive. The positive effect shows that there is a positive relationship between political decentralization and service delivery in the devolved units.

The coefficient was not just positive but also statistically significant with a t-statistic value of 1.708. The standard error was found to be 0.255 and the p-value was found to be < 0.05). The variable was also found to be the least most influential variable on the service delivery in the devolved units.

#### 4.1.1 Financial decentralization

The results in Table 4.3 indicate that financial decentralization has a regression coefficient of 0.695. This value shows that holding other variables in the model constant, an increase in financial decentralization by one unit causes the service delivery to increase by 0.695 units. The value of the coefficient is positive. The positive effect shows that there is a positive relationship between financial decentralization and service delivery in the devolved units.

The coefficient was not just positive but also statistically significant with a t-statistic value of 1.671. The standard error was found to be 0.255 and the p-value was found to be < 0.05). The variable was also found to be the very most influential variable on the service delivery in the devolved units.



## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### 5.1 Conclusion

From the study findings, this study concluded that administration decentralization has a significant and a positive effect on service delivery of devolved County units in Kenya. The study also concluded that political decentralization has a significant and a positive effect and a key determinant to service delivery on devolved County units in Kenya. The study further concluded that financial decentralization had significant and vital to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery in devolved County units in Kenya.

The results from the regression model revealed that the three variables have a strong influence on service delivery and should be among the strategies to be implemented to scale devolution in Kenya.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that the government should increase county government autonomy to promote administrative decentralization. Additionally, the national government should make it easier for county governments to exercise administrative power over county matters.

The study recommends that national and county governments should put in place measures to safeguard the independence of political decentralization. The study further recommends that the members of county assembly use the finding of this study to better align or revise the existing county legal framework, to promote effective service delivery of devolved County units. This study also recommends that national government enhance political decentralization (legislative powers, political competition and civil liberties) to counties in order to promote service delivery of devolved County units in Kenya.

The study recommends that national and county should put in place a set of deliberate and proactive processes, policies and structures that supports financial decentralization. The national government should review existing policy on financial decentralization with a view of increasing funding to counties to enhance service delivery. Additionally, the study recommends that the national government should come up with strategic interventions to promote financial decentralization to enhance service delivery of devolved County units in the Country.

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