**DEVOLUTION: A LIBERATION OR FRAGMENTATION?**

**PROS AND CONS IN RELATION TO THE CURRENT SOCIETY**

Devolution refers to the statutory transfer of power and decision-making authority from a central government of a sovereign state to govern a subnational level eg. region. Devolution as a concept, has polished the government organization up to date. The adoption of devolved systems of government was a desire for citizens who wanted to access to public services closer to them. Objects of devolution as per the constitution include; promotion of democracy and accountability in the exercise of power, fostering national unity by recognizing diversity, enabling communities manage their own affairs, enhancing peoples self-governance and ensuring equitable share of resources. To achieve these, there must be an enabling environment provided to all participants involved in the implementation of devolution. However, the environment for implementation of devolution has not been smooth due to various challenges experienced for the past five years. Issues like; disagreements between the national and county governments for funds, poor or absence of consultation on matters that affect the county governments, little technical support for implementation of functions, insufficient allocations and delayed disbursements of funds to countries by the national treasury, lack of capacity and skills to deliver services, corruption and gender inequality are some of the challenges faced. Proponents approve of devolution as a very benefiting factor while this form of implementation still remains skeptical to some individuals thus having its merits and demerits with respect to the current society.

One of the primary advantages of devolution is equitable distribution of national resources. Equitable share is governed by a set of criteria which may include economic disparities within and among counties and the need to remedy them; the desirability of stable and predictable revenue allocation and need for economic optimization and provision of incentives for each county to optimize its capacity to raise revenue. According to a recent study by the OECD, “*devolving decision-making power to regional and local government leads to well-tailored policies and public services that are more closely aligned with the preferences and needs of citizens.”* Under the fiscal responsibility parameter, county governments that manage their resources better and are more effective in mobilizing their own resources should be rewarded by receiving a higher share of the resources. This method of implementation seeks to equalize allocations based on proximate measure of poverty rates and size of the total population. Division of revenue Act (2013) provides for the equitable division of revenue raised nationally between national and county governments which was developed to provide for the realization of equal and equitable allocation of resources for development projects.

Devolution encourages active participation of citizens in their societal life and in political systems that emphasize the direct involvement of citizens in decision-making processes that may affect their lives. Decisions made at subnational level focus more on the local needs as compared to the national government. This has enhanced the ability of the county government sector to engage into meaningful discussions in regards to running and managing affairs of the county. Community problems are prioritized by the county governments through public participation as stated in the constitution thus providing opportunities for focused and prioritized community concerns to be addressed. This is mainly achieved by bringing decision-making closer to people whereby citizens have a more direct influence on the decisions that affect their way of life. Brookings Institution reports found *that “devolving power to local governments can increase citizen involvement in policymaking and service delivery, as citizens feel more empowered to influence decisions that directly affect their lives.*” This establishes a more engaged and empowered society which stabilizes the democratic organization. Devolution empowers both local and regional societies by promoting decision-making authority freely within the state, increasing citizen participation and equality among the various communities within by shaping programs that affect them. County governments that work together with non-state actors in decision making processes are likely to promote shared responsibility and partnership as well as providing complementary authority thus the community becomes informed on the outcomes and progress of the process and discussions thus improving development. According to Embassy of Sweden (2016) respect on public participation, through participation, there is promotion of sustainable decision-making by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of a community.

Moreover, devolution promotes transparency, accountability and democracy. Accountability is one of the cornerstones of good governance which is achieved when leaders in authority are answerable for their actions, transparency in leadership being included. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) states that one of the objectives of devolution is to promote democracy and accountability of exercise of power. People acquire the discipline of self-governance and this enhances the participation of the people in exercising the powers of the state and in making decisions affecting them. As devolved governments tend to be closer towards their citizens, there has been increased transparency in the use of local resources resulting in a decrease in corrupt practices. For instance, according to the World Bank, the introduction of participatory budgeting, county governments are able to allocate a portion of their development budget for projects that are identified and eventually selected by the society. . Local and centralized leaders are more accountable to their subjects as they are responsible for implementing policies and allocating resources. This has increased trust and reliability in leaders by their subjects especially in tasks involving the society’s resource management.

However, devolution has its shortcomings. One being the increased regional disparities and inequalities especially in situations where one region has greater resources, services and increased opportunities than other regions. European commission found that *“uneven devolution can exacerbate existing socioeconomic and regional inequalities, as some regions may be better equipped to take advantage of their newfound autonomy than others.”*  Particularly, if subnational governments vary in their capacity to provide essential services such as healthcare, education and infrastructure, less affluent regions may struggle to maintain adequate standards of living without sufficient support from the central government. World Bank (2011) suggested that counties in the remote and marginalized areas will take longer time to develop since the national government does not allocate sufficient resources to assure a basic level of service delivery to their citizens thus these counties need additional resources if service and infrastructure gaps are to be closed. Although, it is not realistic to expect all counties to reach the same level of economic development. Development can be achieved when the country experiences growth in its income.

Devolution poses challenges in duplication of roles. Currently, more people are doing the same job and this increases the chances of misusing powers and wasting resources. Duplication of duties has led to internal political supremacy wars due to random employment of conflicting government workers by various government officials within the central government system. Some of their roles have not been clearly demarcated and hence there is redundancy in some cases. Due to this, county public administration and service delivery systems is affected mainly because of overlapping jurisdictions as well as functions. Divergent policies and regulations between subnational entities can hinder seamless cooperation and integration, impending efforts to address national level issues such as economic development, environmental protection and social welfare.

Furthermore, devolution may result in a fragmentation risk especially in decision-making and across different levels of the government resulting to inefficient use of resources. Findings by the institute for government highlighted that “*effective coordination between central and local authorities is crucial to avoid duplication, inconsistencies and inefficiencies.”* As subnational entities may prioritize their own interests over national cohesion, ethnic and regional identities could exacerbate tensions and conflicts. This leads to division, territorial disputes and lack of cohesion within a political society due to the rise of multiple government entities which may excessively authoritate over societal regions and implement conflicting policies. In return, mind-blowing initiatives are rendered ineffective and undermined.

In conclusion, devolution is a vital concept in governance, diversity, unity and economic development in which decentralization of powers, cohesiveness, equality and decision-making is achieved. The debate surrounding the pros and cons of devolution in society is a complex and multifaceted one. While devolution can bring benefits such as increased responsiveness, civic management and innovation, it also carries the potential for regional disparities, coordination challenges, and the erosion of national standards. Based on its pros and cons, the success of devolution depends on the careful customization and implementation of policies.

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