

Devolution and National Security- Case of Mombasa County

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ABSTRACT

A devolved system of governance is that where power rests on the local units. Nations adopt the devolved system to transform the discriminatory components that can exist within centralized system of government, to establish a level playing field for all communities to prosper. Devolution alters the structure of governance including fiscal structure and the distribution of public resources across a nation. Therefore, this research paper sought to explore the influence that devolution has on national security, with a specific focus on economic security in Mombasa County. This study traced the impact that devolution has on the deeply seated marginalization grievances of the coastal communities in Kenya. This study focused on impact of devolved governance on economic security in Mombasa County. The study found that devolution has promoted equitable distribution of resources, contrary to what was observed when Kenya was operating under a unitary system. Mombasa County was among the counties on the receiving end of the discriminatory policies adopted by successive regimes in the post-independent Kenya. However, with the introduction of devolution, significant improvement has been observed in access to essential services and infrastructure development. Considering the positive impact of devolution, the researcher recommended that it should be securitized, which would ensure that this system is prioritized by current and future regimes. The public should also become an equal partner in the processes of policy development and implementation. Also, improving county revenue structures is essential to unlocking their Own Source Revenue potential for greater economic progress.

Key words: Economic Security, Economic Development, Marginalization, Equitable Distribution of Resources, Securitization.

INTRODUCTION

Devolution, also known as devolved governance represents the transfer of governance, powers and responsibilities from the central government to local authorities. This decentralization aims at granting decision-making and powers to subnational units. The broader discourse of devolution includes not only political processes, but also, administrative and financial processes (Nzau, 2021). Its objective is to establish an inclusive institutional landscape that can address imbalances, promote local participation in decision-making process, and improve the delivery of public goods by tailoring them according to the specific needs of each region. National security encompasses the safeguarding of a nation's economic well-being, stability and the way of life. In this light, it was critical to determine the impact Kenya's devolved governance has had on national security, with a specific focus on the economic security of Mombasa County. Devolution is especially critical in ensuring equitable resource allocation to eliminate inequality in economic development, which can culminate in state failure. The impact of devolution on economic security can be viewed through the lens of institutional operations. In the book, *Why Nations Fail* by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, they explain that the nature of a nation's institutions determines its prosperity, and countries with inclusive institutions succeed because they promote prosperity for all (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The goal of devolution is to create inclusive institutions committed to transforming components that are discriminatory and establishing a level playing field for all persons to participate in the economy. In a devolved society, resources should be distributed equally, thus, social tensions are minimized.

Unstable countries grapple with economic inequalities attributed to the state's historical exclusionary and discriminatory policies. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) term the institutions in such countries as extractive institutions because the distribution of resources is conducted in a skewed manner and the people are also excluded from governance. According to Khisa and Oesterdiekhoff (2012), inequality breeds suspicion,

distrust, and also heightens ethnic tensions. The wide disparities and imbalances between regions can have a negative impact on national cohesion thereby undermining national security. Inequality acts as an incentive for the marginalized groups to conflict. Because of large disparities in wealth distribution, the marginalized population develop feelings of relative deprivation which leads to violent mobilization, a recipe for state failure.

Mombasa County is a region of interest in this study owing to the claims of economic marginalization by successive post-independence regimes. The entrenched inequality in the distribution of economic resources to this region presented a major threat to national security following the rise of a separatist organization, Mombasa Republic Council (MRC). This group became popular between 2008 and 2012, as it was advocating for the secession of Mombasa from Kenya. This political group rose into prominence through their slogan 'Pwani si Kenya' that was advocating for the coastal region's independence from Kenya (Nzau, 2021). MRC claimed that this County has been economically marginalized by the Kenyan governments for many decades and secession was the only solution that would liberate them from this mistreatment. The centralized system had created inequality and marginalization through unequal distribution of resources, and this had undermined economic development and prosperity in Kenya (Nzau, 2021). This presented a major national security risk of a separatist storm brewing at the coast and possibly other communities across the nation (Akwiri, 2012). Also, in the wake of the rising insecurity in the neighbouring Lamu County, it is necessary to assess the economic progress of Mombasa County under the devolved system. This system was implemented in Kenya in 2013 as a system of governance that can alleviate grievances of marginalization and also promote economic prosperity across all the counties (Anyango, 2023). It is against this background that a comprehensive assessment was conducted to determine the impact that the devolved governance has had in Mombasa County as a driver of economic security.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, the role of devolution in enhancing economic security is viewed in light of devolved system ability to ensure equitable distribution of resources, promote political inclusion and delivery of essential services, promote community engagement, and ability to tailor make policies and programmes to meet the unique needs of communities, which will eradicate the feeling of exclusion. As earlier mentioned, marginalization generates grievances that can lead to hostility between different groups. Poteete (2004) conducted a study to establish whether decentralization is a means for enhancing equity in a society. He expresses that when decentralization takes place within a country, a shift occurs in policy-making and issues that relate to equity emerge. Among the issues is how equitably resources and other benefits are distributed in the communities. Poteete established that decentralization influences equity because it alters power relations and changes the distribution of natural resources. The establishment of a local government also encourages the participation of the locals and can closely monitor the resources condition and use.

Elfverson and Sjogren (2019) express that devolution encourages political inclusion. They explain that societies that are affected by violent conflict that occur because of the winner-takes all politics at the national government level, decentralization is the suitable solution to attain peace. They explain this peace on the basis of political power sharing that can occur through devolution. According to the authors, devolution encourages political power sharing, which diffuses over access to power between political groups. The underlying idea is to structure the local government political institutions in manner that they can promote inclusion such that the fears that different parties might have of marginalization and repression are eradicated. Elfverson and Sjogren (2019) add that in societies that are marked by concentration of identity groups that feel politically excluded, devolution is suited to accommodate these grievances.

A study was also conducted that established that the fiscal devolution ends up improving the overall delivery of essential social services, such as healthcare. Fiscal devolution refers to the shift in revenue collection from the national government to the subnational authorities. In this case, the subnational units raise their financial resources and pay for the public services out of their budgets. According to Bossert et al (2016), fiscal devolution increases the level of funding available to the local government, which translates to increased service delivery.

Even in cases where devolved units have different levels of incomes, devolution can aid to maintain equitable allocation of financial resources to essential social services, such as healthcare. This however is achieved when the allocation plans and process are properly developed and executed within the devolved administrative structures.

Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022) also emphasize on the importance of fiscal devolution as part of a devolved system. In their study, they expressed that it would be difficult for subnational governments to shoulder the devolved responsibilities if there is a mismatch between financial resources and responsibilities. Devolution therefore, is more than just transferring responsibilities to lower tiers; it also involves devolving fiscal resources for spearheading people-centred local development. It is also of essence that the transfer of a service responsibility is accompanied by the simultaneous transfer of equivalent funds, staff, and assets. These circumstances create a conducive environment for a society to thrive economically.

According to Bennet (2018), the post-independent Kenya was characterised by inequality because successive regimes lacked appropriate institution and structures that could distribute resources fairly. In this regard, devolution in Kenya was meant to be a Panacea that would lead to accountable and inclusive institutions that can serve every Kenyan, improve economic performance of the nation and in turn reduce divisions and tensions that cause conflict. Bennet further explains that economic benefits of devolution are undeniable in regions such as Isiolo County as observed through better roads, increased financial investment, better health and education facilities. However, these good signs do not tell the whole story. He mentions that exclusion of pastoralist communities in this region persists and they do not receive meaningful support from institutions that are responsible for providing their immediate needs. Bennet expresses that when the relevant institutions are unable to deliver services equitably, old grievances fester and new ones emerge. Sirite (2017) explored the impacts of devolution on quality service delivery in Turkana County in Kenya. Turkana is another region in Kenya with a history of marginalization and has been a region prone to conflict as the residents compete for resources, such as pasture and water. The author established that the devolved institutions in this region were failing in the delivery of quality public service because of diverse challenges. The biggest challenge was corruption. Other challenges cited included lack of transparency and accountability. Since devolution is a mechanism that is expected to address inequality, corruption, lack of accountability and transparency can hinder the achievement of this goal.

Nyandiko (2020) also agrees with Sirite about the adverse effects of poor implementation of devolution. In the article, he expresses that poor implementation of devolution results in problems such as lack of accountability, inefficient utilization of resources and bureaucracies. A devolved system could also facilitate skewed resource allocation and misuse of public resources and it also poses a significant risk of permitting the mismanagement of devolved resources and corruption. These factors impact the economy negatively. Additionally, when these problems emerge, the peace building capability of the devolved system is also affected. Tensions can develop between communities, which can escalate into violence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was premised on the consociational theory and securitization theory. Consociational theory is credited to Lijphart (1999), but has been refined by other scholars such as McGarry and O'Leary (2006) when they underscored the transfer of power and territorial self-governance in democratic states. It is a political theory and model that is relevant in the management of divisions in societies. It describes and explains the link between the institutions of the devolved system of governance and promotion of security in communities through equal distribution of resources. Lijphart postulated that democracy and social peace can be secured in deeply divided societies if elites engage in accommodative behaviour and forsake centrifugal competition in a self-negating prediction. The theory states that there are institutional arrangements that are born out of a divided society that ensure management of economic grievances to prevent conflicts and these institutions also ensure the delivery of effective and efficient economic services for economic development of the counties (Mung'ale et al., 2021).

Securitization theory complimented the consociational theory. Securitization theory emerged in 1985 from the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute led by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (Titilayo, 2024). It became a

powerful tool and a dynamic lens by which to navigate the shifting landscape of security from traditional military threats to the ever-evolving array of non-military threats such as economic instability. According to the theory, threats could exist in the economic, environmental or societal realms, and if deemed existential, they warrant extraordinary responses. The securitizing actor must even exaggerate the urgency of the threat and convince the audience that because of the nature of threat, extraordinary measures must be taken (Eroukhmanoff, 2020). In this study therefore, devolution is presented as an issue that can enhance or mar national security. Therefore, devolution should also be viewed as a high priority issue that warrants extraordinary responses to ensure it endures and remains effective overtime.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted case study design. The case study design is a qualitative research design and a suitable research approach that helps generate in-depth understanding of the topic of study. It is a research design that lends itself well to exploring a phenomenon in the context in which it occurs. Thus, it was suited to investigate the impact that the devolved system of governance has had on national security with specific focus on economic security of Mombasa County

Area of Study

The study location for this research was Mombasa County as shown by Fig. 1 This county is located in the south-eastern part of Kenya, along the Indian Ocean coastline. This county is further subdivided into six sub-counties namely, Changamwe, Kisauni, Jomvu, Nyali, Lokoni, and Mvita. The sub-counties are further subdivided into 30 wards.

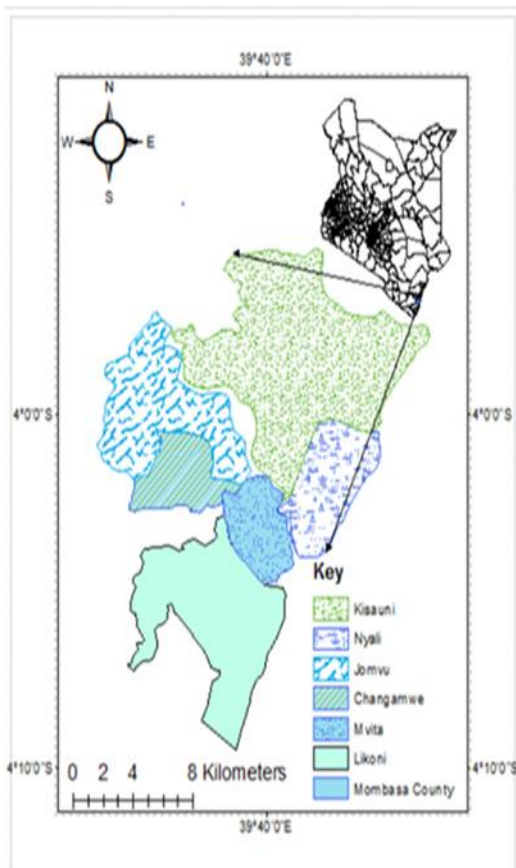


Fig. 1 Map of Mombasa County

Target Population and Sample Size

The target population and the sample size are as illustrated below.

Table 1

Target Population And Sampe Size

	Target Population	Sampe Size
Adults in Mombasa County	700,000	70
Mombasa County Officials	100	20
Mombasa County Commissioner Office Officials	50	10
Total	700,150	100

Data Collection Procedures

The study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected using questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was developed in a manner to produce information aligned to the study objectives and administered on the adult residents of Mombasa County who were willing to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted on the key informants, and they included the personnel selected from Mombasa County and Mombasa County Commissioner office. Secondary data needed for this research was derived from various secondary sources. These included; government publications, reports of key governmental and non-government organizations, journals, websites, and periodicals. The use of both primary and secondary data helped produce comprehensive research results.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The qualitative data generated from the surveys and interviews was analysed using the content analysis method. This allowed for the organization of the data into various themes. This information was then presented in the study in textual method. The quantitative data achieved from the study was analysed using a statistical package for science (SPSS). After the data was analysed, the presentation was done systematically using tables and charts.

FINDINGS**Response Rate**

The study targeted a total sample size of 100 respondents including Mombasa County residents, representatives from Mombasa County offices and representatives from the Office of the Mombasa County Commissioner. 88 people participated in the study, which is an equivalent of 88% response rate. This response rate was adequate for this research.

Impact of Devolved Governance on Economic Security in Mombasa County

Economic security is the ability of individuals, households and communities to meet their basic and essential needs sustainably, including food, shelter, healthcare, education, livelihood and social protection (GSDI, 2021). Absence of economic security drives individuals, households and communities into devastating poverty and strips them of their dignity and worth. This section of the study focused on determining the impact that devolution has had on economic security in Mombasa County. The marginalization of the people of Mombasa

by successive governments after independence is documented by various scholars (Oyombra, 2021). Rectifying the persistent economic marginalization of this county and other regions in Kenya is one of the key reasons the devolved system was introduced. It is now one decade since decentralization; thus, it is necessary to determine whether this system of governance has brought positive economic transformation in Mombasa County. During the study, the respondents were presented with a number of statements to assist in evaluating the state of economic security in Mombasa County under the devolved system. The findings are presented by Table 2.

Table 2

Impact Of Devolution On Key Economic Indicators In Mombasa County

	Yes (%)	No (%)
Devolution has improved access to healthcare in Mombasa County	84%	16%
There are better roads in Mombasa County as a result of devolution	68%	32%
Devolution has improved access to education in Mombasa County	82%	18%
The general infrastructure development has improved in Mombasa County because of devolution	76%	24%
There are more opportunities for youth employment in Mombasa County because of devolution	56%	44%

Table 2 has illustrated the responses given by the study participants about how diverse economic indicators in Mombasa County have been impacted by devolution. These included; healthcare, infrastructure development, access to education and youth employment. Their responses are analysed in the subsections that follow.

Healthcare

According to the World Bank, the decentralization of governance in Kenya is among the most ambitious and rapid devolution processes that have taken place in the world (World Bank, 2019). Healthcare is among the sectors whose functions were devolved. Devolution therefore presented opportunities for the county governments to determine the healthcare priorities of their citizenry, decision making on resource mobilization and spending, and designing interventions that suit their county’s healthcare needs. To establish the impact that devolution has on the healthcare sector, the researcher presented the participants with the following statement, which is also illustrated in the Table 4. Devolution has improved access to healthcare in Mombasa County. The results shows that 84% of the respondents agreed that access to healthcare in this county has improved under devolution. According to a report by the County Government of Mombasa, before devolution, the hospitals in Mombasa County were poorly equipped and the region was also recording high maternal and child mortality rate (County Government of Mombasa, 2024). Today however, because of devolution, major transformations have been observed in the health sector. Hospitals are now equipped to offer specialized healthcare services that were not available before. Devolution has also enabled the construction of 5 level-4 hospitals in Mtongwe, Marimani, Shila Adabu, Vikwatani, and Chaani is also a great milestone (Beja, 2018).

The improved health outcomes in Mombasa County prove that access to healthcare in the county has improved significantly. These include reduction in under-five child mortality rate from 65% of live births in 2013 to 33% in 2018. Infant mortality rate also declined from 3.6 % to 1.1% in the same period (Mombasa County, 2018). Significant improvements have also been recorded in maternal mortality rates, immunization coverage, screening of cervical cancer, to mention a few. These positive changes are attributed to the increased delivery

of healthcare services. Between 2013 and 2018, the county implemented various service delivery initiatives aimed at enhancing the provision of essential services. These initiatives encompassed community services, outreach programs, supportive supervision, emergency preparedness planning, patient safety initiatives, clinical audits, on-the-job training, and referral health services, among others (Mombasa County, 2018).

Infrastructure Development

According to Table 4.2, 74% of the respondents agreed that the general infrastructure development in Mombasa County has improved because of devolution. 68% of the respondents reported that they have observed improvement in the road networks in Mombasa County. It is reported that under the devolved system, more roads have been constructed in Mombasa County than has ever been observed before. At least 100km of roads have been constructed.

Access to Education

82% of the study participants also expressed that improvement in access to education has also been observed in this County over the last decade. For many decades, Mombasa was recording low enrolment and transition rates. In recognizing that there was a problem in access to education, the County Government of Mombasa embarked on introducing scholarships and bursaries to boost school attendance. In 2020, Murathe (2018) reported that over 25,000 students had benefited from the bursaries and scholarships, thus improving access to education across the six sub-counties.

Youth Employment

Looking at the responses on matters employment, it is clear that the participants were divided. 56% of participants responded that there were more opportunities for youth employment in the devolved system, while 44% held a differing opinion on the matter. This shows that respondents were not in agreement about whether devolution has opened up more opportunities for youth employment or not. Reports also show that Mombasa is among the counties grappling with high unemployment rate in Kenya. According to Juma (2020), nearly 50% of the youths in Mombasa are unemployed. He also reported that Mombasa has the worst unemployment rate compared to other cities in Kenya.

The study also sought the participants' general view of economic development in Mombasa County in the era of devolution. The following question was posed to the respondents: In your opinion, has the overall economic state of Mombasa County improved with the introduction of devolution. Their responses are as shown by Fig 2.

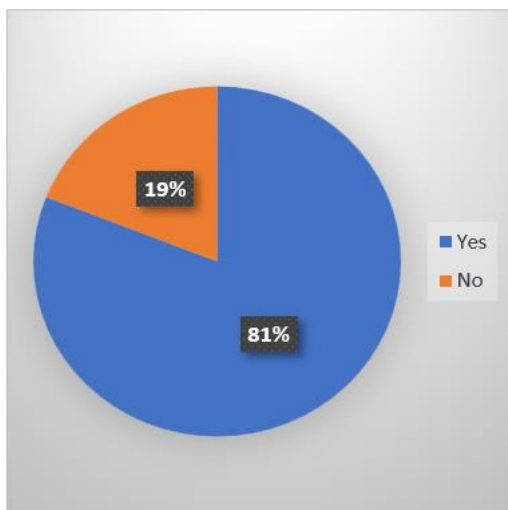


Fig. 2 The Impact of Devolution on the General Economic State of Mombasa County.

The Fig. 2 shows that majority of the respondents (81%) responded that they had observed improvement in the economic state of this County following the implementation of devolved governance system in 2013. One of the respondents said that the situation is far better off than in the pre-2010 era. Another said that because of infrastructure development through devolution, more businesses are coming up in the County. Some of the respondents who answered that they had not observed any improvement in the economic state of this county raised the issue of the high unemployment rate that persists in Mombasa County.

Marginalization is an issue that comes up in relation to Mombasa County, because to its potential to hinder economic development, and to increase the probability of security incidents. Therefore, this research also tried to find out the respondents view about the matter. One of respondents said that land ownership had been a problem but significant improvements has been observed in recent years, though there still remains a lot to be done. The County Government of Mombasa County created land registry to improve land management in this County. This has been able to improve the issuance of land titles, thereby empowering the squatters as land owners and providing the security of tenure (KIPPRA, 2023). According to the consociational theory, institutional arrangements arise out of devolution to ensure management of economic grievances. It is evident that is what has happened in Mombasa County. Local institutional structures arose from devolution that have strived to improve the longstanding grievances in terms of access to healthcare, education, infrastructure development, and youth employment in Mombasa County.

Challenges Facing Devolution in Mombasa County

The study would not be complete without looking into some of the existing challenges within the County Government of Mombasa that could be hindering it from operating at its optimal to enhance the economic security of its people. Mombasa is richly endowed with various resources including port infrastructure, beautiful and expansive beaches, cultural attractions, marine resources to mention a few. These resources have the capacity of transforming the economic status of this County further. Therefore, the respondents were presented with a number of potential challenges that could be facing this county, and their responses were as shown by Table 4.3.

Table 3

Responses On Challenges Facing The Mombasa County Government

	Yes (%)	No (%)
Corruption	98%	2%
Lack of transparency	92%	8%
Lack of accountability	92%	8%
Inadequate financial resources	73%	27%
Lack of expertise	66%	34%

Table 3 shows the challenges facing Mombasa County Government are corruption (98%), lack of transparency (92%), and lack of accountability (92%). Inadequate resources and lack of expertise were also reported. The Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) reported that there is rampant corruption in the counties. According to EACC, the devolved units also lack effective accountability mechanisms, rendering them highly susceptible to high-level corruption orchestrated by county officials seeking to misappropriate county funds (Kizito, 2024). The failure to embrace preventive measures has resulted in weakened accountability systems within most devolved units, facilitating brazen misappropriation of public funds. According to a report by the International Budget Partnership Kenya (IBP Kenya), counties lack transparency in the budgeting process

(Mkawale, 2023). The 2023 report however noted improvement in the coastal counties in their budget transparency scores. Regardless of these gains, there is more work that is needed to make county operations more effective.

Nzao (2021) describes these issues as institutional capacity constraints within the devolved system. The capacity challenges within county administrative offices such as the county assemblies hinder them from performing their functions effectively. He also describes that technical constraints are also prevalent in the devolved system. It is observed through shortage of skilled labour in critical sectors such as natural resource management, health, economic planning and agriculture. The shortages hinder optimal performance of the affected county governments.

CONCLUSION

From the study findings, it is clear that devolved governance has had a significant impact on economic security in Mombasa County. The County Government of Mombasa has achieved significant development milestones, including improved access to healthcare, people of Mombasa have access to better roads, and there is also improved access to education. It was determined that infrastructure development in Mombasa County has improved significantly over the last decade. It was also noted that the County Government of Mombasa has improved land management and many squatters have been issued with land titles. This showed that devolution has succeeded in championing for more economically secure counties compared to the situation one decade ago before devolution, particularly within the formerly marginalized regions. It is responsible for the positive transformation observed today in access to essential public services. Also, the improvement in infrastructure development signifies that Mombasa County has grown more economically secure. By bolstering economic security, national security incidents are eliminated. However, unemployment remains pervasive in this county because nearly 50% of the youth in the region are unemployed. The study also noted that corruption, lack of transparency and accountability have emerged within the county offices, and these constraints can hinder optimal performance of devolution. A little over a decade ago, Mombasa County was at the edge of a precipice as MRC was calling for the secession of this region on account of discrimination and marginalization by successive post-independence regimes. This study has however presented evidence-based insight on the positive influence that devolution has had on the economic status of Mombasa County.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has shown that devolution promotes equitable distribution of resources and enhances services delivery, which in turn makes communities secure. Considering this, devolution should be securitized, which means that in Kenya, devolution should be framed as an aspect requiring extraordinary measures or responses to ensure its sustainability. The state, policymakers, citizens, and all other stakeholders should view the strengthening of devolution a priority. As a system that has proved beneficial in countering disparities in economic development and a system of governance capable of building successful communities, devolution should be prioritized, promoted and protected by successive regimes. Regarding the constraints that counties are facing currently, this study recommends for the assessment of the resource and capacity needs of the counties to ensure these needs are met, for the successful implementation of the devolution agenda countrywide.

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