

InfoBrief

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Has devolution benefited the youth ?

By:

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1. Summary

The five years the country has experimented devolution have not been rosy. Counties have complained of late and insufficient allocation from the national government, most of which goes to recurrent expenditure instead of financing social and economic infrastructure that they need to spur growth. In this mix, many social economic programmes such as those required to address the myriad problems facing the youth have not received the attention they deserve. Will the counties get it right this second round by bringing innovations and initiating programmes that can reduce over-reliance on national government's allocation, which has been seen as the main culprit derailing devolution? Most important, will counties implement programmes that will improve the economic and social welfare of the youth? To use former senate speaker's Ekwe Ethuro words: What is in stock for the Kenyan youth as unemployment becomes a menace?

2. Introduction

The five years of devolution in Kenya have brought mixed results. On the positive note, devolution has brought governance closer to the people and given them opportunity to directly hold leaders accountable. Also, it has brought crucial resources and services closer to the people, such as provision of healthcare, which were previously seen as tools of political bargain.

However, both the national and county government have scored poorly in empowering young people and giving them opportunities and supporting their participation in governance processes. The two levels of government have also performed poorly in promoting socio economic programmes that can create opportunities for livelihood for the young people.

Although there is an appreciation of the fact that the devolved units have not received sufficient resources commensurate to the problems facing the counties, there are quick gains that have not been pursued, which would assist in tackling some of the problems facing young people.





According to a study carried out by Wordometers recently, Kenya currently has a population of 50 million people with median age standing at 19.2 years. Reports show that at least 80 percent of Kenya's population is made up of the youth aged 35 years and below. The unemployment rate in Kenya now stands at 39.1 percent. This translates to one out of every six Kenyans being unemployed with the situation worsening each passing day. Training institutions continue to channel many graduates into an already saturated job market. The economy, in its formal set up, can only accommodate a few.

This dire situation is complicated by lack of a soft infrastructure in the counties such as the continued existence of an environment deficient of enough safety and appreciation of the great potential the youth hold to transform the wellbeing of the society. Also, the youthful population has not sufficiently been engaged in political and leadership processes, meaningful, to have impact in solving the problems facing them.

Youth empowerment would mean creation of strategies, policies and programmes that allows the youth to define the direction they want to take to transform the 47 counties and the nation at large. Also, it would mean giving the youth, the most

productive constituent, an opportunity to participate in the economic development of the nation.

Some of the quick gains that can be made when youth are empowered, with far reaching results, without necessarily using immense resources include equity and accessibility to the opportunities, gender inclusiveness, good governance and mainstreaming of youth issues in the county development blue prints.

Young people have fresh ideas a significantly high number, innovative ideas and can easily inspire their peers. Innovation in the counties is inevitably needed since without it, the counties will continue to suffer from the forces beyond their control such as insufficient disbursement of constrained resources as the national government get overwhelmed with many other responsibilities.

3. Areas that deserve attention

i. Crime, drugs and unemployment

The problems facing the youth in the country are strongly interlinked. Lack of employment and opportunities to meaningfully participate in the economy has driven youth into crime and drug abuse. The re-emergence of the proscribed-organized gangs that once unleashed terror on



Kenya, and served as goons for hire by politicians and land grabbers does not augur well for a country seeking economic prosperity.

Apart from enhancing security and intelligence gathering, there is need to create community policing at the county levels. Initiatives such as Nyumba Kumi programme that was initiated by the state a few years ago with great zeal that fizzled out shortly after the launch should be revisited and anchored properly in a policy framework.

The county governments should set aside resources to rehabilitate drug addicts and also develop programmes to accommodate back to the society young people who have served jail terms or gone through other judicial processes. Studies that have been carried out shows that most of young people who are freed from jails end up back there due to lack of programmes in the society to integrate them back.

The county governments should also pass legislations that allows, encourages and makes it easy for the formation of community based organizations, where members can serve both as social and financial security for those who want to participate in businesses either as individuals or as a collective group. Unemployment has been cited as the mother of all the problems facing the youth today. Although the national government has been keen on creating

programmes to economically empower the youth such as the creation of youth entrepreneurship funds and giving more opportunities to the youth to participate in government tenders, the same cannot be said of the county governments.

It would be vital to have the programmes of the national government on youth empowerment devolved to the county level. County governments should also take deliberate move to ensure that the youth participate in the county procurement processes by giving them opportunities and incase of capital constraints, guarantee youth to acquire capital from lenders.

Traditional financial institutions consider the youth as high-risk borrowers. Therefore, they are shunned by the banks, which have created many products targeting only the established players. Also, programmes like the Youth Enterprise Development Fund have failed to yield the envisaged results and should be integrated into other business processes.

Affirmative action should be accorded to the youth with special needs- unemployed, uneducated, female, those living with HIV/AIDS, those living in the street, physically and mentally challenged.

The government's recent initiative titled Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project is welcome.

The project, being implemented by the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs with support from the World Bank seeks to increase employment and earning opportunities for more than 280,000 youth in Kenya within a five-year project period.

The target group of beneficiaries consists of youth between 18 and 29 years in the first cycle of KYEOP five counties: Kisumu, Nakuru, Nairobi, Mombasa and Kwale.

These programmes offers vital lessons to the county governments who can seek more partners to emulate the success expected from the project. It should also trigger the county governments to create enabling environment to allow private sector to embark on similar undertakings.

ii. Healthcare

The uneven distribution of health facilities in the counties continue to widen disparities in affordability and access to medical care. Health has been a major issue affecting the youth due to their high level of unemployment and lack of resources. Besides the traditional health problems like malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS, there are health issues related to drug abuse and excessive consumption of second-generation liquor, especially in the counties

with great economic potential such as those in Central region.

Provision of universal health should be a major area of focus for the county governments. It is commendable that counties such as Laikipia, which has undertaken a huge campaign to enroll residents to the government run National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) and the Makueni County, which is rolling a universal health programme offers vital lessons that other counties can borrow a leaf from.

It must be appreciated that devolution of health services from the national government has brought about impressive results. However, counties must seek partnership with regional and global players for provision of medicines, equipment and the sector's best practices. Although the national government has been keen on this, the same cannot be said for most of the counties, which have instead suffered wrath of poor service delivery and a demotivated work force.

County governments should come up with clear policies that define important health related issues such as reproductive health, cancer treatment, early disease detection, hygiene, control of illegal alcohol and nutrition. Such measures will help prevent diseases and eventually bring down the cost of provision of health services.



iii. Education

Due to high poverty levels and lack of facilities in some of the counties, there has been a high school dropout rate. Most of the youth either drop out of school or graduate without necessary skills for self-employment. There are incidences of early marriage that continue to be practiced in some counties such as those in Coast region.

Although education polices are largely guided by the national government, counties too have a role to play. There is need to create structures for close working relationship among the education stakeholders and leaders. This will provide an opportunity to pull resources, identify strategies such as provision of bursary for the most deserving cases. Today, there are numerous cases of government provided bursaries that goes to undeserving cases at the expense of the needy children who ends up missing education. A multi sectoral approach would also help in identifying education needs unique to specific counties and raise resources to bridge the gaps.

A county such as Kiambu would have different economic needs compared to say Garissa county and therefore different training needs.

By identifying these specific needs, it would be easy to identify tailor made interventions such as creation of tertiary institutions with capacity to meet the unique needs of each county. The education system in the country today, which is gradually being phased out, limits graduates' capacity to participate in the county economies and ends up migrating to urban centres to seek elusive jobs whereas huge capacity still exists at the county level.

iv. Leisure, Recreation and Community Service

Promotion of leisure and recreation as an economic frontier is one of the areas that have performed poorly at the county levels. Resources allocated to this area are very little to have any meaningful impact. The talented youth lack motivation and without clear mechanism of tapping their talents, they are exploited by some people and end up getting wasted despite the growing importance of this new market.





County governments should create strong policies to help promote talent among the youth and also nurture this as a source of livelihood. Sports and entertainment are becoming major sources of livelihood to many people world over.

Therefore, County governments should create enough resources to cater for the youth who are interested in this sector. Institutions of learning have already created talent nurturing programmes but the efforts of the youth graduating goes down the drain upon completion of school due to poor support from the counties.

v. Information and Communication Technology

Information Communication and Technology (ICT) has been the main pillar of development in the world today. Through this, the world has become a global village. However the level of ICT penetration in many counties is significantly low. This has curtailed the capacity of the youth to interact with the rest of the world. County governments should setup centers where the youth can learn and access cheap or free internet, arguably the most powerful tool for social and economic change in the rapidly growing world. There are so many people working from the comfort of their homes due to penetration of internet.

vi. Environment

Need to conserve the environment in the counties has become increasingly important and many youth organizations are engaged in various activities to protect the environment such as tree planting, clean up campaigns, bio diversity conservation, and wildlife preservation campaigns and agroforestry.

Counties government should develop policies that appreciate youth engagement in environmental activities, and integrate these initiatives in its development agendas. With youth billed as innovative and creative, support to youth to set up initiatives that will improve the environment is important.

vii. Youth participation

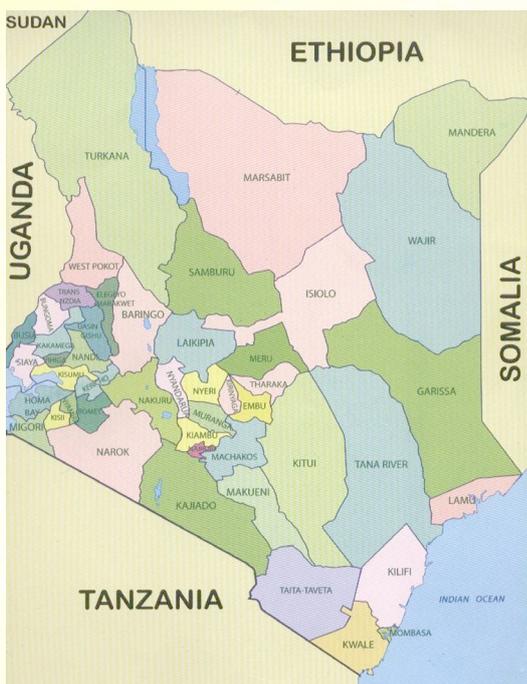
Counties should enhance youth participation in governance and development. Lack of inclusivity and engagement of youth in planning and budgeting in the counties is a big threat to sustainability and ownership of development. Lamentably, studies show that the numbers of youth involved in planning and budgeting meetings at the county levels are low.

The new constitution supports public participation, which is a crucial part for component of governance and service delivery.

It is important for county governments to share information that will enhance citizens and especially youth participation in planning and budgeting. Access to information is a crucial ingredient to active citizens participation that would enhance service delivery, accountability, governance and development.

Recommendations

1. Develop policies in the counties that will address unemployment problems and create an environment where the youth can exploit their potential
2. Leaders in the counties should be a catalyst for youth empowerment and participation
3. Leaders in the counties should collaborate with other stakeholders to research and come up with policies that would assist the youth overcome the challenges of crime, drug and substance abuse
4. Devolved government should take advantage of benefits associated with ICT to foster youth development
5. Devolved government should help the youth to work towards the realization of their life goals currently hindered by the tough regulations that financial institutions has put for borrowers
6. Leaders in the counties should put sufficient mechanisms to protect and properly utilize public funds in the counties



About The Youth Congress

The Youth Congress (TYC) is a youth serving Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) providing young people in Kenya with a platform to articulate their issues, explore opportunities for youth participation and leadership to effectively address their interests and concerns and engage young people in social, economic and political development. The organization has four main programmes:

1. Research, Policy and Advocacy

The programme aims to realise meaningful participation of youth in policy-making and implementation. Its expected outputs are: improved knowledge on existing policies and their effect on the youth; one stop information centre on the state of the youth in Kenya; coordinated advocacy initiatives on youth issues; and increased youth participation in policy making and advocacy.

2. Youth and Leadership

The programme aims to realise meaningful youth participation in leadership and governance processes, and to build next generation of youth leaders with vision and values. Its expected outputs are: youth in leadership positions and processes; increased awareness and capacity of youth to engage in leadership and governance processes; and youth actively promoting ethical leadership.

3. Youth Entrepreneurship, Talent and Innovation

The programme aims to realise an empowered youth population benefiting from available opportunities and utilizing their skills and talents for economic development. Its expected outputs are: young people equipped with entrepreneurial skills; young people linked to financial opportunities and markets; talent realization and utilization by the youth; and partnerships and alliances built to advance youth economic development.

4. Institutional Development

The programme aims to realise an effectively governed and managed organization with adequate resources to deliver its programmes. Its expected outputs are: adequate resources for smooth and effective implementation of activities; a staff complement that is competent, passionate, determined and responsive to youth values and agenda; functional partnerships and networks; and inclusive, participatory and gender responsive programmes, policies and strategies.

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