

CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUND AS AN INSTRUMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN KAKAMEGA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to assess the dynamics of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) as a tool of rural development in Ikolomani Constituency, Kakamega County. Alexis de Tocqueville's "Decentralization Theory," whose main tenet is the linkage between decentralization, democracy, and citizen participation, guided this study. A cross-sectional research design was used and mixed methods research, whereby, both qualitative and quantitative research techniques and approaches were used to gather data for the study. The research study sample was determined using Andrew Fisher's Sample Size Determination Formula resulting in a sample size of 384 respondents. The instruments for data collection included a survey questionnaire, which was used to get quantitative data and focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) which were used to gather qualitative data. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean, mode, percentages, and frequency distributions. The qualitative data was analysed mathematically. The study obtained ethical approval from the KUERC and informed consent was obtained before data collection. The study established that a very majority (84.4%) indicated that they were cognisant of the existence of the CDF fund. It was also found that more than half (53.6%) of the respondents learned about the fund through chief barazas. Regarding the utilization of the fund, it was established that nearly three-quarters (72%) of the respondents perceived that Ikolomani Constituency CDF is well utilized. Lastly, most of the respondents strongly agreed that low community participation (42.5%), embezzlement of CDF (42.5%) and high levels of corruption and poor leadership (48%) were the main challenges facing the constituency development fund in Ikolomani Constituency. The study concluded that it is paramount for policymakers and practitioners, including leaders to put in place effective strategies that will see strict adherence to the set modalities of CDFs implementation, and management that would propel the realization of sustainable rural development.

Key Words: awareness, Constituency Development Fund, CDF hindrances, Public participation

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INTRODUCTION

For many past decades, extreme poverty has remained a momentous challenge both in developed and developing societies across the world. However, as pointed out by the World Bank (2020), the worldwide poverty rates have been significantly declining over the past two decades. This decline in the overall poverty levels had been associated with the subsiding of rural poverty from 29 percent in 2003 to 23 percent in 2016, owing to several measures that have been put in place by governments and states to ensure local development (Barry & Øverland, 2016). Poverty is a multidimensional and complex issue that pertains to, among other aspects, markets, gender, climate, governance, culture, and public policy. Some of the causes of persistent poverty included, but are not limited to low agricultural production, inadequate development, unemployment, weaknesses in the education system, and climatic conditions such as persistent droughts among others (Anyanwu, 2017; Brady, 2019; Kabuya, 2015). Although global poverty rates are decreasing, there are varied regional trends in mitigating rural poverty, with the rates of decline being much slower in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Lyons, Kass-Hanna & Greenlee, 2020). Pinter (2013) argues that the most effective mechanism and core strategy for eradicating poverty and attaining sustainable community and rural development are for governments and stakeholders to work with underprivileged community members. Rural development, therefore, becomes a crucial strategy for poverty alleviation and improving the overall quality of life for local populations.

CDF is a program that has been initiated and implemented in several developing economies and is spreading rapidly across the world (Samwel, Emmanuel & Sylvester, 2015). The CDF funds refer to funding provisions by the central/national government, which are directly channelled as financial resources to electoral constituencies for local development (Tshangana, 2010). As noted by Hickey (2010), to date more than 23 countries adopted CDFs including India, Philippines, Pakistan, Malaysia, Nepal, Mongolia, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Papua New Guinea, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya among others. As argued by Mezey (2014), CDFs were meant to offer the communities at the grassroots level the opportunity to make informed expenditure resolutions that were geared toward maximizing their welfare. In Kenya, the CDF was established under the “CDF Act of 2003”, which was subsequently amended in the CDF revision “Act of 2007” (Mitullah, 2015). The fundamental purpose of its establishment was to intensify community involvement in decision-making, particularly where the affairs of the local populace are concerned. Harris and Posner (2020), argued that Kenya’s CDF program was a decentralized development initiative that aimed at poverty alleviation at the constituency levels. As pointed out by Ngiri (2016), CDFs in Kenya had been used to steer local development projects including economic empowerment, health, education, and infrastructural developments such as cattle dips, water and sanitation, police posts, and rural roads. The emerging questions however are how then have CDFs in Kenya as a local development initiative become fundamental in enhancing the welfare and lives of individuals in rural places. How has its implementation been conducted to drive the rural development agenda? Even though the fund had been in existence in Kenya for nearly two decades now, there have been constant concerns regarding its distribution, implementation and governance mechanisms, as well as contests about its efforts in enhancing the welfare of the local communities (Samwel, Emmanuel & Sylvester, 2015).

Despite growing research and advances in methodologies and data, understanding the dynamics of constituency development funds and reconciling this with patterns of rural development in Kenya remains a disputatious subject. Furthermore, the contests around CDF in Kenya attract an inquiry into the degree to which the initiative is attaining its envisioned goal of rural advancement, particularly through beneficiary participation and community welfare. Moreover, the extent to which CDFs are put in use by legislators, and the extent to which local people partake in and benefit from them vary from one constituency to another. This contentiousness and the element that rural poverty remains pervasive in Ikolomani Constituency (Mutwiri, 2021) regardless of the CDF and rural development initiatives that had been put in place charged the interest

of the researcher to examine the dynamics of the Constituency Development Fund as a mechanism put in place by the Kenyan national government to alleviate rural poverty and enhance local development in the area. Additionally, to the best of the scholar's familiarity, there is no precise study that examined the dynamics and utilization of CDF as an instrument of rural development in the Ikolomani Constituency, thus a significant research gap. This study, therefore, sought to build on what is known from extant research on CDF and rural development, as well as existing knowledge gaps to provide a critical and in-depth analysis of the dynamics of the Constituency Development Fund as an instrument of rural development in Ikolomani Constituency. The study examined CDF with specific reference to its allocation and utilization, awareness and participation of local communities, and the related hindrances in its utilization in Ikolomani Constituency, Kakamega County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Rural poverty has been established as a detrimental challenge to rural development, thus an increased need for rural development. One of the key mechanisms for local development in Kenya is the Constituency Development Funds (CDFs). The fundamental purpose of its establishment was to intensify community involvement in decision-making, particularly where the affairs of the local populace are concerned. The emerging question, however, is, how then has the CDF in Kenya as a rural development initiative become fundamental in improving the welfare and lives of individuals in rural locations?

Even though the fund has been in existence in Kenya for nearly two decades now, there have been constant concerns regarding its implementation, distribution and governance mechanisms, as well as contests about its efficacy in alleviating rural poverty and enhancing the welfare of the local communities. Furthermore, measuring the efficacy of constituency development funds and reconciling this with patterns of rural development in Kenya remains a disputatious subject. Moreover, the contests around CDF in Kenya attracted an inquiry into the degree to which the fund attained its envisioned aim of local development, particularly through beneficiary participation and community welfare. It is with this context, therefore, that this study sought to incorporate CDF as a variable influencing rural development in Ikolomani Constituency, which has no particular empirical study. The study, therefore, sought to examine the dynamics of CDF as an instrument of rural development in the Ikolomani Constituency, Kakamega County. The research shed light on the utilization of CDF funds, beneficiary awareness, and participation, as well as the key hindrances facing the utilization of the funds, which explained the persistence of rural poverty in the Ikolomani Constituency.

Objectives of the Study

The general aim of the study was to examine Constituency Development Fund as a tool of rural development in Ikolomani Constituency, Kakamega County. The precise objectives of the research were:

- To find the extent of awareness and involvement of local populace in Community Development Fund initiatives in Ikolomani Constituency, Kakamega County, Kenya
- To examine the utilisation of the Constituency Development Fund as an instrument of rural development in Ikolomani Constituency, Kakamega County, Kenya
- To assess the key hindrances to Constituency Development Fund as a tool of local development in Ikolomani Constituency, Kakamega County, Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical Review

The Concept of Rural Development in Kenya

There is no collectively agreed meaning of rural development as it was used in distinct ways and within vastly diverse contexts, both as a concept and as a phenomenon. As a concept, Torre and Wallet (2020) note that rural development connotes the general enhancement in the quality of life of rural populations. As a phenomenon, on the other hand, Van der Ploeg (2018), defined rural development as an outcome of various economic, physical, institutional, sociocultural, and technological factors. Concisely, rural development refers to an integrated process, which comprises economic, political, and social development that targets to enhance the welfare and standards of living of individuals residing in rural areas, as well as alleviation of rural poverty (Morss, 2019). Horowitz (2019), delineates rural development as a strategy for assisting local populaces to set the priorities within their rural communities through democratic and effective frames, by offering local capacities, equity, justice, investment in key social services and infrastructure, and ensuring the overall welfare of the rural populations.

Constituency Development Fund in Kenya

As aforementioned, most of the rural development agendas that were initiated by the government failed to ensure development in the local areas of the country, thus necessitating the government to launch the CDF as a program that would be more successful in realizing rural development. The CDF was initiated by the government in the year 2003 under the CDF Act (Act No. 11) as stipulated in the “Kenya Gazette No. 107 of 9th January 2004” (Das & Ngacho, 2017). As noted in the Acts 2013 repeal, the CDF is delineated as a quota of the yearly country’s budget that is dedicated to the country’s 290 constituencies for the goal of poverty eradication, capital creation, and infrastructural expansion at the constituency levels (the Republic of Kenya, 2013). As noted by Waribu (2016), the CDF was launched to alleviate rural poverty and intensify civic contribution in decision-making, particularly where the affairs of the local populace are concerned. The CDFs comprise of yearly budgetary allocation of 2.5 percent of the government’s returns to the 290 constituencies. In the 2006/2007 fiscal year, the rates were reviewed to 3.5 per cent. 75 percent of the CDFs are distributed equally amongst all the constituencies, while 25 percent is assigned to constituencies based on their prevailing poverty levels (Ngiiri, 2016). Overall, the CDF program targets to control regional developmental imbalances that are often caused by inequitable resource distribution and partisan politics. It also targets general growth and development, especially in the improvement of community welfare at the grassroots and local levels. Additionally, it aims at funding development projects that have a direct economic and social influence on poverty alleviation and uplifting the lives of the populace (Waribu, 2016).

The Awareness and Participation of Local People in Community Development Fund Initiatives

Participation in rural development can be described as the course through which individuals/stakeholders divide the control and influence over rural development resources, decisions, and initiatives that affect them (Audu, Ahmed & Lawan, 2021). The significance of the involvement and contribution of rural people in rural development initiatives has been reiterated in the extant literature. In a descriptive survey conducted in Mwense Constituency in Zambia, Matipa (2020) assessed the degree of community involvement in the identification of CDF schemes and their implementation. The findings of the study revealed that the councillors and MPs are the ones who came up with the CDF projects to be executed, with little consultation or involvement from the members of the community. The authors further reported that the level of local people’s participation in the identification of the projects was only in being informed of what is being planned by the CDF management team. Matipa (2020) argues that this extent of participation is weak and reflects the first stage in Wilcox’s (1994), Ladder of Participation Theory, in which the theorist argues that consultation and information dissemination are often wrongly perceived as participation. The conclusion from the research’s findings is that the extent of communal participation in CDF is often restricted to being told what has

previously been decided by other main stakeholders, thus implying “a passive participation” of the local beneficiaries by consultation. Furthermore, the outcome of this passive participation is projects that are unwanted, inappropriate, and unused by the targeted community beneficiaries.

The Utilization of Constituency Development Fund as an Instrument of Rural Development

Governments have varied purposes for implementing decentralization programs such as the Constituency Development Funds. Existing studies have shown different ways in which CDF has been utilized for local development across different countries and contexts. In a study done in India by Blair (2017), the author notes that the constituency development funds scheme, which is termed the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS), is allocated yearly to each Member of Parliament (MP) as an unrestricted fund for community works. As pointed out by the author, the funds have been used to create physical infrastructure such as electrification, health, sanitation, education, and transportation amenities among others.

Hindrances to Constituency Development Fund as an Instrument of Rural Development

While the Constituency Development fund has been proven to play a noteworthy role in ensuring sustainable rural development, a myriad of hindrances has been noted and emphasized in the existing literature. In a study meant at unearthing the challenges faced by CDF in Borabu/North Mugirango Constituency, Samwel, Emmanuel, and Sylvester (2015) reported that although CDF has had a positive influence in the country, it has been faced with numerous hindrances that range from poor leadership, low community participation, corruption, poor implementation and monitoring of CDF initiatives to unequal distribution of the funds within the constituency. The findings from the study point to poor leadership in the constituency as the key hindrance to CDF, which is attributed to the unfair and corrupt recruitment processes of members of the CDF committee (Samwel et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Alexis de Tocqueville’s “Decentralization Theory” (De Tocqueville, 1945) guided this study. The theory was propounded by Alexis de Tocqueville in the mid-1800s and later broadened by John Stuart Mill (Mill, 1998) on the ground to positively influence the political engagement of citizens, which is pertinent in contemporary times. Tocqueville's study on 'Democracy in America,' in the 1830s brought about the ideologies of the linkage between decentralization, democracy, and citizen participation, which are the key tenets of the theory. Within the context of the theory, decentralization denoted the allocation of resources and power from the national government to smaller local governments, as a mechanism of dispensing power and conveying resources closer to the electorates. As in many emerging economies, decentralization has become a major component in the democratization of societies in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya.

The CDF is one of the key mechanisms of fiscal decentralization in Kenya, which was implemented to enhance community contribution to sustainable development, more so in rural development. Within the framework of the current study, the fiscal decentralization of CDF as a deliberate transmission of power and resources to lower units of the government aims at enhancing community participation in resource allocation and decision-making, fair and equitable access to major services, and accountability and transparency. The aims and successes of the devolved fund in bringing about local development and contributing to rural poverty alleviation lie in adherence to its implementation, administration, and management modalities. The decentralization theory was relevant, therefore, in assessing the dynamics of CDF as a decentralized instrument for rural development in Ikolomani Constituency.

Conceptual Framework

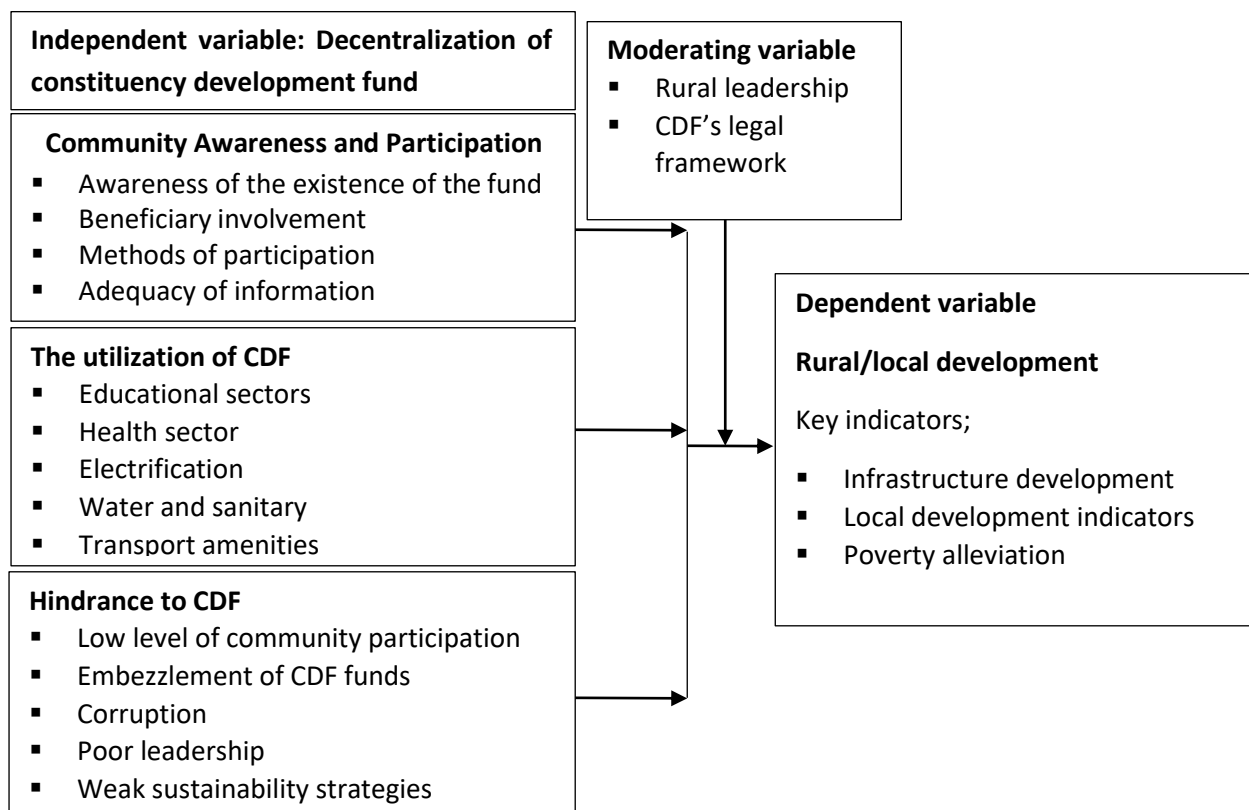


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional research design. This study was carried out in the Ikolomani Constituency, one of the twelve constituencies of Kakamega County. The targeted population for this study were members of the rural communities in Idakho North and Idakho East Wards of Ikolomani Constituency, Kakamega County. Based on KNBS (2019) reports, Idakho North Ward had 25, 861 people, while Idakho East had an approximate population of 26,757 people. Because the study used both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, a combination of non-probability and probability sampling techniques was used concurrently. The sample population for this research study was derived using Andrew Fisher's Sample Size Determination Formulary. Based on this formula, the sample size for the study was 384.

The study collected primary research data and therefore, primary data collection instruments were used. Additionally, since the study adopted mixed methods research, both qualitative and quantitative research tools were used to collect data. As part of the data collection process, four (4) focus group discussions were conducted, two in each of the purposively selected wards. 24 respondents were targeted in total by the FGDs. Each FGD comprised six to eight members in line with literature by Mishra (2016) who noted that the ideal number of participants in an FGD in a study is between six (6) and eight (8). The FGDs were homogenous.

The content validity of this research was ensured by developing the research tools for the study in wide consultation with the thesis advisors and peers. In the context of this study, the reliability of its findings was ensured by certifying that the research processes were credible thus yielding precise, stable, and repeatable outcomes. Since the study used a mixed research methods approach where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, the analysis of the data was done separately. To establish a consistent data pattern, the data analysis process was informed and guided by the research objectives and questions. The quantitative data

for the study were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 24 to produce both descriptive and inferential statistics.

FINDINGS

The Extent of Awareness and participation of Local People in CDF Initiatives in the Ikolomani Constituency

The participants in the study were asked about their awareness of the existence of the CDF fund, and those who were not aware of its existence were asked about their awareness of other development projects in their localities. To begin with, a very large majority (84.4%) indicated that they were aware of the existence of the CDF fund with only 15.6 per cent being not aware of its existence. For those who were not aware of CDF, a significant portion (65.5%) said that they were aware of other development projects in their locality.

These findings collaborate those from the focus group discussions whereby the discussants mentioned that they were aware of the existence of CDF and related development projects in the areas. As stated by a discussant,

“I understand CDF as a tool used in development within different communities. CDF is here in Ikolomani and I can say that CDF has helped in many ways like giving out bursaries, building schools and paying fees maybe some parents are disabled but when you go to school their children are studying.” [P1, FGD1, Idakho North Ward].

These findings imply that most of the constituents in Ikolomani have adequate awareness of community projects, both CDF projects and other development projects in the community. The findings are contrary to those of a study by Gekul (2014), whose findings from a study in Babati Constituency, Tanzania, revealed that most of the constituents had limited awareness of CDCF community projects since they do not take part in their identification, prioritization, and implementation.

Using a multiple-choice question, the study further sought to examine the awareness of CDF information disseminators among the participants. On CDF information dissemination channels, more than half (53.6%) of the respondents noted that they learnt about the fund through chief barazas. Moreover, 37.5 per cent of the respondents learned about the fund through fellow community members, 28.7 per cent through media platforms, 24.3 per cent through the CDF Act and the least (18.9%) through the CDF committee.

In the focus group discussion, a participant pointed out their participation through chief barazas. He mentioned that

“In the chief barazas is where people meet to choose the projects ... I think the projects are being proposed when “Mheshimiwa” comes because when he comes there are meetings that are usually being held, so with us we can decide to say we lack water or maybe renovation of schools first and after that, he will take it on board because there is the board under CDF, and those board members are the representatives who were chosen by the community because, in the last board, I saw like every sub-location was to select one person to represent them because in general we have four locations/wards and every location was to give out one person to represent them.” [P5, FGD1, Idakho East Ward].

In reiterating the role of chiefs' barazas as CDF information dissemination channels, a key informant, who is a chief in one of the sub-locations in the study area stated that:

“Yes, and it (chief's baraza) is the only way and maybe the funerals because our people don't have these smartphones, even if we technically improved in those sectors and therefore, it becomes the only way to reach the targeted group” [Asst. Chief, KII, Idakho North Ward].

These findings show that Chiefs' barazas were the most common platforms through which members of the constituency learned about CDF and related projects. Interestingly, only 18.9 per cent cited the CDF

committee as an information channel. They are consistent with those of a study by Nthiga and Moi (2021), who noted that there were high levels of civic involvement, and awareness of CDF initiatives among citizens from Makueni County, which was actualized through chiefs' barazas and local group meetings.

In a further examination of the participants' awareness of CDF activities in the area, it was revealed that a significant proportion of the study participants were aware of the CDF initiatives and initiators (82% and 71.5% respectively). On the other hand, it was established that over four-fifths (85.2%) of the respondents were not aware of the costs associated with CDF projects nor the amount of money disbursed by the CDF for these projects.

The findings revealed that most of the constituents in the Ikolomani Constituency are aware of the existence of the CDF projects and project initiators, but are not aware of the monetary elements of the projects including associated costs and funds disbursed for the projects. The findings agree to an extent, with those of a study by Muusya (2019), which revealed that significant levels of unawareness were present among the local individuals in the constituency, particularly on the monetary aspects of CDF projects, since most of them held a strong belief that the CDF projects were facilitated by MP's money, liked to MP's cronies and it is only the legislator who has the authorities to assign the funds' officials and committee and to prioritize the projects.

The level of participation of the community members in CDF initiatives was also evaluated in the study. First, regarding their perceptions of community ownership of CDF projects/initiatives, a significant proportion (64%) of the respondents agreed that the community owned the projects.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked about community their participation in CDF projects as well as the overall participation of community members in CDF projects/activities. The findings showed that slightly above half (54%) of the respondents were cognizant of community participation in CDF projects/initiatives in the study area. Interestingly, while the majority of the participants indicated that they were aware of community participation in CDF projects/initiatives, only 34.6 per cent of the study participants showed that they participated in the initiatives against 65.3 per cent who cited that they did not participate. This finding implies that whereas the participants were aware of the presence of the fund, the majority of them were not participating in CDF development projects and activities in the area. This agrees with the findings of Matipa (2020) who argues that the extent of community participation in CDF is often restricted to being told what has previously been decided by other main stakeholders, thus implying "a passive participation" of the local beneficiaries by consultation. Furthermore, the outcome of this passive participation is projects that are unwanted, inappropriate, and unused by the targeted community beneficiaries.

The participation of the respondents in different stages of the CDF project/activities was further examined using a 5-point Likert Scale. According to the findings, across all the categories of stages of CDF projects/initiatives, most of the respondents indicated that they did not participate. For instance, a significant proportion (68.6%) of the respondents indicated that they did not participate in project prioritization, with 63.2 per cent citing that they did not participate in the project selection processes. Moreover, three-quarters (75%) of the respondents revealed that there was no community consultation when the projects were initiated, and just over three-quarters (75.8%) revealed that there were no community participation forums as far as CDF projects/initiatives were concerned. While the participants mentioned the chief's barazas as a major channel for the dissemination of CDF-related information, their participation in the forums was passive.

These findings agree with the sentiments of the FGD participants. When asked if the members of the community are given a chance to participate in the CDF projects' process, an FGD participant stated that it only happens a few times, with the parliamentarian, referred to as "*Mheshimiwa*" in the context of the study, coming up with the ideas of the different projects as well as playing a central role in the prioritisation of the projects. The participant said

“Of course, yes but only a few because at times you may find out that “Mheshimiwa” came with ideas but before doing anything they will involve the community to know those who for example might need water or the ones to be built for schools and many more then he/she will be the one to go and select the ones to start with because he can't manage to work on all of them at the same time and he will do this depending on the money available. I believe he knows how to plan this.” [P5, FGD2, Idakho East Ward]

Another participant added that *“...Okay who gets involved in this is the member of parliament who appoints his/her members or team to work with.” [P9, FGD2, Idakho East Ward]*

Regarding the overall community participation in CDF initiatives, a majority (60%) of the respondents perceived their participation as a passive one (Stamping what has already been decided by others) with only 40 per cent indicating that they actively participated in the projects. Interestingly, passive participation of the community members in CDF projects has been associated with unwanted, unused and inappropriate development projects in the locality such as the case of a water project in one of the areas. According to a key informant,

“Recently there was a water project funded by the Canadian government in Kifingo, so people were complaining that that wasn't their water. People were not involved so there is no ownership of the project. So, everything was not taken into consideration by the community because they were never involved, they used to call it Kifingo water, not their water.” [Asst. Chief, KII, Idakho North Ward]

To validate their prevalent passive participation, most of the respondents in the study revealed that the community participated in CDF projects through chiefs' barazas (63.5%) and local representatives (54.6%)

These findings on the dynamics of community participation in CDF projects and initiatives in the Ikolomani Constituency reveal that the local community is not wholly involved in the implementation, evaluation and monitoring of CDF projects as evidenced by the reported absence of community representation in CDF committees, limited of awareness of monetary aspects of the projects by the locals, and absence of consultative meetings with the local individuals to evaluate the projects that would be most beneficial for them. Seemingly, MPs are the ones who come up with the CDF projects to be implemented, with little consultation or involvement from the members of the community.

The findings are consistent with those of studies by Gekul (2014), Matipa (2020), and Mukuri and Wamitu (2020), whose findings unanimously conclude that the local community is not wholly involved in the implementation, evaluation and monitoring of CDF projects as evidenced by the reported absence of community representation in CDF committees, limited of awareness by the locals, and absence of consultative meetings with the local individuals to identify, prioritise and evaluate the projects that would be most beneficial for them.

Whereas the awareness and participation of the local communities have been perceived in the extant literature as an enabler of full access to benefits of development to beneficiaries, the findings of the study on the extent of awareness and participation of the community members in CDF projects reveal that level of local people's participation in the identification, prioritisation, implementation and evaluation of the projects was only in being informed of what is being planned by the CDF management team. This extent of participation, according to Matipa (2020) is weak and reflects the first stage in Wilcox's (1994), Ladder of Participation Theory, in which the theorist argues that consultation and information dissemination are often wrongly perceived as participation. In conclusion and drawing from the findings of the study, the extent of participation of Ikolomani constituents in CDF projects is largely limited to what has been already decided by key players, especially the Member of Parliament, thus implying “passive participation” of the local beneficiaries. Perhaps, as revealed by a key informant, the outcomes of such passive participation include unwanted, unused and inappropriate development projects for the targeted community beneficiaries.

Constituency Development Fund Utilization in Ikolomani Constituency

Data from the focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and descriptive statistics from the survey were used to understand the dynamics of constituency development fund utilization as an instrument of rural development in the Ikolomani Constituency. From the survey, nearly three-quarters (72%) of the respondents perceived that Ikolomani Constituency CDF was well utilized.

The qualitative findings from the study showed different ways in which CDF has been utilized for rural development across the Ikolomani Constituency. To the majority of the participants and key informants, CDF has been well utilized to bring development to the community. For instance, an FGD discussant acknowledged CDF as a tool used to bring about development within different communities, *“I understand it as a tool used in development within different communities”* [P1, FGD1, Idakho East Ward]

First, it has been mentioned that CDF has been utilized in financing educational programs and school infrastructure in Ikolomani Constituency. In terms of educational programs, it was mentioned that the funds have been used to allocate bursaries and pay school fees for students from underprivileged families in the community. As stated by an FGD participant, *“CDF has helped in many ways like giving out bursaries, building schools and paying fees maybe some parents are disabled but when you go to school their children are studying.”* [P6, FGD2, Idakho North Ward.]

These sentiments are corroborated by those of a headteacher in one of the local schools in the study area who noted that

“They have built the classrooms or generally they’ve participated in the development of infrastructures ... some schools have gotten water facilities through CDF unlike us. I would also say that students are benefiting in terms of school fees and even welfare because there is a period when they were distributing food to them.” [Headteacher, KII, Idakho East Ward]

Besides education, it emerged from the KIIs and FGDs that CDF funds in the constituency have been used to offer welfare and community aid, particularly through giving send-off funds to bereaved families. According to an FGD participant from Idakho East, *“CDF in my own opinion is a tool that helps the community, especially in schools and even in for those who are bereaved it helps in burial issues.”* [P10, FGD1, Idakho East Ward].

Moreover, it was mentioned that CDF has been used in the health sector to improve services and infrastructure in the sector. For instance, a community health worker (CHW) in one of the study areas mentioned that the CDF has been used to roll out NHIF covers for the neediest in the area. *“They’ve helped in supporting the needy people through NHIF”* [CHW, KII, Idakho North Ward]. This was validated by the response of a CDF officer interviewed in the study who mentioned, *“The MP pays for NHIF cards for the needy, disabled and the elderly within the community.”* [CDF Officer, KII, Idakho North Ward]

However, it emerged from the key informants that CDF has been more involved in educational infrastructure in the area and less in health infrastructure. According to a nurse interviewed in the study,

“CDF is where the people within the community and constituency as a whole get help from its funds in different sectors more so in education, they are not that much involved in health care facilities because they say it’s devolved but we are asking them to come in because some of our facilities are bad and we need their support” [Nurse, KII, Idakho East Ward]

According to a key informant, CDF has brought development projects closer to the people in the community as opposed to the times when it was not yet implemented. He states that

“I agree with that because before they devolved these parts, we didn’t see the projects that were coming up, we used to wait for the national government from Nairobi to come a set up a project, meaning it was

usually being done under one grass route but now they are devolved and we are okay with it because these are people who can easily reach out to and share with them what our needs are and what we want as a community.” [Chief, KII, Idakho East Ward]

Overall, the findings from the study reveal that funds have been used to create physical infrastructure such as electrification, health, sanitation, education, and transportation amenities among others. Below are selected quotes from the qualitative findings;

“Transportation has been made easy due to the construction of good roads” [Asst. Chief, KII, Idakho North Ward]

“I’m a social worker so, under research, electricity is under CDF, there is this electricity that is being passed under CDF, you can do your research to confirm that” [P9, FGD2, Idakho North Ward]

“One we’ve seen roads being constructed, schools are being built and students who can’t cater or their school fee are being paid for, water has been dug in form of boreholes even if it has not yet reached every household but I’m quite sure that Mheshimiwa is working on that, again we have to understand that not everything can be done at the same time within the same period and that’s why I was talking of the 80% and sure the remaining 20% will be done just with time.” [P7, FGD2, Idakho East Ward]

These findings agree with those of extant studies by Ngiri (2016), whereby the researcher reported that CDF has been used to facilitate development projects, which have positively influenced grassroots development in the North Mugirango Constituency. The findings revealed that CDF executed and expanded healthcare and educational facilities, as well as basic infrastructure, and has led to the overall improvement in the local community.

Hindrances to CDF as an Instrument of Rural Development

A 5-point Likert Scale was used to assess the perceived challenges facing CDFs in Ikolomani Constituency. Most of the respondents strongly agreed that low community participation (42.5%), embezzlement of CDF (42.5%) and high levels of corruption and poor leadership (48%) were the main challenges facing the constituency development fund in Ikolomani Constituency. From the focus group discussions and KIIs, various challenges including corruption, tribalism and systemic discrimination, lack of transparency, passive involvement of stakeholders, the inadequacy of the allocated funds, and political interference were pointed out.

In terms of corruption, the FGD participants mentioned that the criteria for selection of CDF bursary beneficiaries are often flawed and corrupt, hence the legitimate beneficiaries missing benefits from the funds. As put out by a discussant,

“The first is a challenge in the bursary sectors because at times you can fill the form and fail to get the response just like others who might even be more well off than you are while some forms are held back there, so we keep on wondering on the criteria being used the issuing of the bursaries. That person who is supposed to benefit on this is not benefiting while the person who is not to benefit benefits” [P4, FGD1, Idakho North Ward]

Tribalism and discrimination in sharing the CDF funds with the members of the community were also highlighted as a challenge, particularly in the disbursement of the CDF bursaries. According to a participant,

“Another challenge is the issue of names, for example, I’m not of this tribe but I’m now married here meaning I now belong here, when the bursary forms come and my child fills the form, he fails to get the money simply because the name is not matching the tribe.” [P6, FGD1, Idakho East Ward]

Additionally, the passive involvement of the key stakeholders (both community members and duty bearers) has been highlighted as another key hindrance to CDF as a tool for rural development in Ikolomani Constituency. According to a key informant,

“They are passively involved and I wanted them to improve on that because when the funds are being brought to your school you should be actively involved and even the community but you are a contractor coming with even the workers, so the community members are not involved in such therefore they don’t benefit from them, the worst part is you out that the project has not been done to its perfection and when you question the cause of such you find that it is how they have been handling the work and since you were never involved actively you just do the observations.” [Headteacher, KII, Idakho East Ward]

The key informant also cited a lack of transparency as a major challenge facing the CDF projects’ processes in the study area. She stated

“I’m not that familiar with the guidelines but I know that the fund is there because it has assisted us thrice or more but when it comes to transparency, I don’t think it’s very much there because we are only brought the contractors on sight then they start working and after them doing that yours is only appending the signature may be on the payments but the way they do their work you are not so much involved.” [Headteacher, KII, Idakho East Ward]

Lastly, political interference was also cited as a hindrance to CDF as an instrument for rural development in Ikolomani Constituency. It is stated that the change of regimes often affects ongoing projects that were initiated by the outgoing regimes. As stated by a key informant,

“When the members of parliament are doing their patrol today in the funds’ sector, if it is not successfully re-elected and then another person comes in, he will abandon what the other person was doing and it will come like a cost project because he will want to start his to make an aim.” [Chief, KII, Idakho East Ward]

The findings on the hindrances of CDF highlight passive involvement and low levels of community participation in CDF initiatives and projects, lack of transparency, tribalism and discrimination as well as political interference as the key hindrances facing the fund as an instrument for rural development in Ikolomani Constituency. These findings are consistent with those of a study by Samwel et al. (2015), which highlighted that although CDF has had a positive influence in the country, it has been faced with numerous hindrances that range from poor leadership, low community participation, corruption, poor implementation and monitoring of CDF initiatives to unequal distribution of the funds within the constituency. They also agree with those of a study by Hussein (2018), where the author argued that the fund faces numerous implementation challenges that affect the effectiveness of CDF projects. The researcher argues that these challenges include a lack of collaboration and valuable trust among the stakeholder, substandard projects, embezzlement of CDF money, as well as selectively implemented projects that do not pay attention to the dire needs of the local constituents, hence the persistent of rural poverty and failure to realize the envisioned goal of local development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Just like in any other economy in the world, the rural economy is a fundamental component of the overall Kenyan economy. Drawing from the insights and perspectives of the study participants, rural development is perceived through the lens of key social services and infrastructure, which are elements of the outcomes of various economic, physical, and institutional processes, including the implementation of the CDF fund. In terms of awareness and participation, it is evident from that study that the local people were aware of the existence of the fund, including related development projects and community aid initiatives. However, while their level of awareness was relatively high, it also emerged that they were not aware of the monetary aspects

of the projects. There is no doubt that the monetary elements of development projects are often at the core of contestation and debates. On the flip side, whilst the participants highlighted significant levels of awareness, their actual participation in these projects and initiatives was low. To them, it was more of passive participation i.e., stamping what has already been decided by others, especially those in influential positions, rather than the desired active participation whereby they are consulted in all stages of the projects and their inputs count.

Regarding their perceptions of the utilization of the fund, most of the respondents cited that the fund was well utilized. The utilization cut across various sectors, with education being stated as a sector where the fund has been majorly utilized in the constituency in the form of educational infrastructure as well as through bursaries for students from underprivileged families in the community. Overall, the findings from the study reveal that funds have been used to create physical infrastructure such as electrification, health, sanitation, education, and transportation amenities among others.

While the CDF is deemed a critical instrument that has the potential of driving rural development in the study area, it was highlighted that it had its fair share of challenges, hence failing to adequately meet the needs of the local community. Some of the hindrances highlighted included political interference, inadequate participation of the beneficiaries, the inadequacy of funding, systemic discrimination and lack of transparency. These challenges take us back to the notion that this study was built on that for a rural development dogma to be effective, it must give a concentrated and deeper thought to the central role of the “local” rural setting in seeking to find amicable solutions to the prevailing challenges of rural poverty and regional development imbalance of the countryside.

The fiscal decentralization of CDF as a deliberate transmission of power and resources to lower units of the government aims at enhancing community participation in resource allocation and decision-making, fair and equitable access to major services, and accountability and transparency. The findings of this study, especially on the thematic areas of drawbacks of stakeholder/community participation and the highlighted hindrances to the fund, reiterate the fact that the aims and successes of the devolved fund in bringing about rural development lie in adherence to its implementation, administration, and management modalities. This study, therefore, concludes that it is paramount for policymakers and practitioners, including leaders to put in place effective strategies that will see strict adherence to the set modalities of CDFs implementation, and management and hence sustainable rural development in the long term.

Drawing from the findings of the study, the following were the suggested recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the constituency development fund as an instrument for rural development in Ikolomani Constituency:

- Based on the finding that there is low community participation in CDF projects/initiatives, the study recommends increased avenues for community members to actively participate, and contribute to the sustainability of the initiatives, hence realization of rural development
- The study also suggests that there should be increased civic education to enlighten the local people on what their roles are in development initiatives and how they can actively engage in them and own the projects. This can be done through the common barazas, media engagements, and through local leaders among other channels
- The study also recommends that systemic discrimination, especially that is brought about by tribalism, and patronage politics should be ironed out across all CDF projects to ensure the efficacy of the fund.
- Lastly, from the results of this study, it is recommended that needs assessment should always be given merit before rolling out any development-targeted project. This can be realized by engaging the community members in project identification and prioritisation processes to ensure that the initiated projects address the dire and immediate needs of the community, hence contributing to the alleviation of rural poverty and improvement of their overall well-being.

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