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Citizen Emancipation through Devolved Funds in Rural Kenya

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Abstract

Against a background of increased decentralization of governance and resources in Kenya, as a response to the increased inequality and the disparities in the development status between different regions in the country, limited previous research, examines citizen emancipation in the devolved resources in rural Kenya. Inequality in Kenya is high, especially in rural areas. To tackle in-equality and poverty, the government of Kenya implemented decentralized anti-poverty programmes designed to distribute assets, cash or services to households, individuals and communities through line ministries. Channeling funds through ministries was not that effective and there were many leakages to the extent that many poor communities were marginalized instead. Against this background, the government decided to allocate resources directly to districts and communities without going through line ministries. While the important role that devolved resources play in the country's development process is now widely recognised, conceptual awareness on rural citizenry emancipation in the devolved resources is still scarce. The main objective of this study is to examine citizen emancipation in devolved funds in rural Kenya. The specific objectives are: to identify the socio-demographic characteristics that influence citizen emancipation in devolved funds; to establish the influence of social institutions on citizen emancipation in devolved funds; to draw on the lessons of experience on the devolved funds and on the evidence of what does and does not work, where and why and under what conditions? It is hoped that the results of the study will improve our understanding on citizen emancipation in devolved funds and support policy-makers in designing better future policy. Institutional theory is used to explain the study findings. Research methods will be both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative methods will employ the use of expert interviews while quantitative methods will employ survey. The expected outcome of the study indicate that there are specific factors favouring and limiting citizen emancipation in devolved funds; that a substantial unmet need persist among potential beneficiaries; and that more than physical reach is required in making emancipation in devolved funds broadly accessible to citizens. Recommendations for policy and further study are made from the conclusions emanating from the study.

Keywords: Emancipation, Decentralization, Devolved Funds, Kenya, Rural.

Introduction

Efforts to combat inequality and poverty has risen to the top of the international agenda (Desandi, 2014). Development in most countries is increasingly being driven through decentralization which includes devolution of funds (Mollel, 2010; Litvack, *et. al.*, 1998). Devolved funds are development schemes designed to transfer money directly to the local authority, ward, constituency or district to finance local development projects such as schools, markets, hospitals, roads, housing, irrigation schemes, bridges, power, water and the like. According to Ndii (2010, p. 4) “devolved Funds are ring fenced monies for which decision making has been delegated to local entities, committees of one type or another, that have community participation or control.” The concept has a strong component of citizen participation (see Republic of Kenya, 2016; Mollel, 2010).

Decentralization is widely recognised as the best way to cope with the ever increasing challenge of inequality (Drãgan & Gogenea, 2009). The Local Development International (LLC) notes that decentralization “involves assigning public functions, including a general mandate to promote local well-being, to local governments, along with systems and resources needed to support specific goals” (LLC, 2013, p. i). According to the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), inequality has resulted in the establishment of devolved funds to tackle regional socio-economic inequality (IEA, 2014). In development circles, the merits and demerits of decentralization are widely discussed in economics and political science (Lessmann, 2006; Martinez-Vazquez, 2011). In this study, the focus is to examine citizen emancipation in devolved funds in rural Kenya. Public sector decentralisation has become a global phenomenon that is pursued in many countries with the given intention of improving service delivery, enhancing governance and accountability, increasing equity, and/or promoting a more stable state, and the like (LLC, 2013).

Decentralization and Emancipation

Kenya has had various policies and attempts at decentralization and community emancipation from the pre-colonial period. The popular understanding of decentralization is the transfer of power, responsibilities and finance from central government to sub-national levels of government at provincial and/or local levels (Crawford and Hartmann, 2008: p. 7). Kenya, in which the study is located, has practiced various form of decentralization from federalism, local government, to devolution. The study is located within the fiscal decentralization category. The fiscal decentralization includes financial schemes operated at the local level for socio-economic improvements (see Ndii, 2010).

Emancipation means to “help eliminate the causes of unwarranted alienation and domination and thereby enhance the opportunities for realizing human potential” (Klein & Myers, 1999, p. 69). It refers to a condition of release from any form of oppression or bondage and the removal of hurdles or constrains for achievement of ones goals in life. Most of rural Africa in general and Kenya in particular has suffered years of marginalization. The majority of people in Kenya are poor and many live below the poverty line (Chitere, 2011). Previously, the country was highly centralized with all fiscal decisions controlled from the capital, with much more emphasis being placed at the center. Centralization has been blamed for the increased in-equality in the country. The Government has therefore taken steps to re-distribute the gains of economic growth to the poorest in the country. One major component of this poverty reduction strategy is the decentralization process.

In the colonial period, the women’s’ organization, *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* Organization (WYWO), which is Kiswahili for ‘Development of Women’ Organization, and the Christian Council of Kenya (CCK) now the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), were supported by the colonial government funds so that the two could help in subverting the independence war waged by the *Mau Mau* uprising. After independence, the country progressively shifted from a centralized to a decentralized form of governance (Omolo, 2010; SNV, 2004). The paradigm shift was precipitated by the shortfalls that are often characteristic of highly centralized systems. The shortfalls include administrative bureaucracies and in-efficiencies, misappropriation of public resources and the marginalization of local communities in development processes.

In the early years of independence, the Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on *African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya* national development was guided by (Republic of Kenya, 1965). It proposed investment in the high potential areas with the anticipation of surplus redistributed to the low potential areas as a strategy for effective reduction of nationwide poverty, ignorance and disease. It set to encourage political equality; social justice; human dignity including freedom of conscience; freedom from want, disease, and exploitation; equal opportunities; and high and growing per capita income, equitably distributed (Ahiuwalia, 1996).

The state efforts to spur local development faded into near oblivion, coupled with fundamental weaknesses in the focus of public spending, characterized by persistent weak spending of the development budget for investments that could open up hitherto marginalized areas, expenditure reforms were initiated which were accompanied by the introduction of various decentralized funds (Nyanjom (2012). The government became more sensitive to issues of regional/ethnic inequality that had pervaded the previous years and it therefore introduced the District Focus initiatives in the 1960s (Lando & Bujra, 2009, Chitere, 1994).

In the 1970s, the state initiated integrated decentralized planning under Special Rural Development Programme (SRDP) that was managed by the Ministry of Finance and coordinated by the National Rural Development Committee (NRDC). The programme was implemented in rural areas chosen to cover a cross section of the nation with the primary objective of increasing rural incomes, employment and welfare. In the 1980s, the Kenyan Government launched the District Focus Approach (DFA) as a major measure for decentralization (Chitere). Under DFA the District Focus Strategy for Rural Development (DFSRD) or District Focus for Rural Development Strategy (DFRDS) or simply known as District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD) Strategy was established. The main objectives of the strategy, was to broaden the base of rural development, encourage and enhance popular participation in development, and increase the efficiency in the identification and mobilization of resources (KNBS, 2014).

The Government of Kenya (GoK) further established a number of funds that include the District Development Grant Program (DDGP) initiated in 1966, the Rural Works Programmes Grants (RWPG) in 1974 to provide discretionary funds outside ministries' budgets for small labour intensive locally defined projects (see KHRC and SPAN, 2010). The DDGP and RWPG were later combined to form the Rural Development Fund (RDF) in 1978. The Housing Fund was established in 1976 to construct houses, with local authorities and individual beneficiaries under the auspices of the National Housing Corporation (NHC).

Beginning in the 1990s moving into the year 2000s, fiscal decentralization became a major trend in Kenya see figure 1. The Sugar Development Levy (SDL) established in 1992 for infrastructure development in the sugarcane belt, research, cane development, assistance to out-grower schemes with land preparation, factory development and refurbishing (Monroy, *et. al.*, 2012). There is also the government and donor funded Community Development Trust Fund (CDTF) established in 1996 as a catalyst to facilitate community development projects at the district level (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012). Some of the funds are initiatives, which focus on addressing gender and generational imbalances. These include the Women Enterprise Development Fund (WEDF) / Women Development Fund (WDF) started in 2007, and the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) started in 2003, which provide concessional loans to women and the youth respectively Aukot, *et. al.*, 2008).

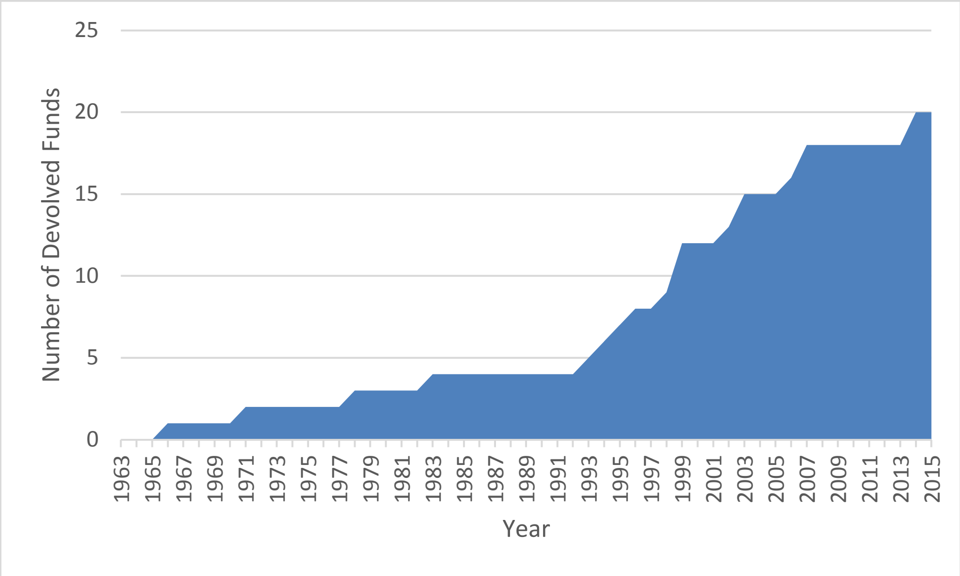


Figure 1. Evolution of Devolved Funds in Kenya.

Unlike at the national level where bureaucratic discretion determines allocation of public resources, devolved funds allocation to the local levels is formalized, and have helped to improve the hitherto marginalized areas and groups (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012). The funds came with a great involvement of citizens in their respective localities, democratically generating their development plans. Generally, the objectives of decentralization in Kenya has been shaped by both economic and political imperatives (KHRC and SPAN, 2010). At the economic level, decentralization entail an effort to create institutional mechanisms for economic reform, and at the political level, it is a response to new international pressures for more participatory development processes to stem the tide of structural poverty that is becoming deeply entrenched in the rural areas.

Socio-demographic Characteristics and Emancipation in Devolved Funds

Social demography is described as the analysis of sociological questions with demographic data (Hirschman & Tolnay, 2006). It encompasses socio-economic conditions as well. Social characteristics include marital status, place of birth, citizenship and year of entry into a geographic region, school enrollment and educational attainment, ancestry, residence (migration), language spoken, and disability. Economic characteristics include labour force status, place of work and journey to work, occupation, industry and class of worker, work status, and income.

Social Institutions and Emancipation in Devolved Funds

Institutions are formal and informal behavioural rules (Skoog, 2005:5). Skoog notes that institutions structure human interaction in social, political and economic life. Institutions mean organizations, or both rules and organizations). Informal rules are traditions, customs, moral values, religious beliefs, and all other norms of behavior that have passed the test of time, whereas as formal rules are constitutions, statutes, common law, and other governmental regulations (Pejovich, 1999: 167).

Institutions are seen as systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions, for example, language, money, law, systems of weights and measures, table manners, and firms/organizations (Hodgson, 2006: 2). Institutions are recognized as systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions and are patterns of activity reproduced across time and space, and are regularly and continuously repeated (Knight, 1992: 2).

Institutions are a major factor explaining development outcomes (Branisa, *et. al.*, 2010). They more less guide human behavior and shape human interaction. According to Hodgson (2006: 2) institutions are the kinds of structures that matter most in the social realm as they make up the stuff of social life as it both constrain and enable behavior. The existence of rules implies constraints, and that such a constraint can open up possibilities as it may enable choices and actions that otherwise would not exist.

Theoretical Framework

Institutional theory in social science can be traced to the emergence of political science, economics and sociology at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries in the multidisciplinary works of Marx and Weber, Cooley and Mead, to Veblen and Commons (Scott, 2001; Machado-da-Silva, 2005). There are various versions of institutional theory in literature.

According to Thoenig (2011), these are historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, new or neo-institutionalism, and local order or actor institutionalism. Each develops a more or less specific set of theoretical as well as empirically grounded interpretations and covers major facets of what institutionalization processes are. On the other hand, Peters (1999) and Peters (2000) lists them as general treatments, normative approach, rational choice, historical institutionalism, empirical institutionalism, sociological, and economics approach.

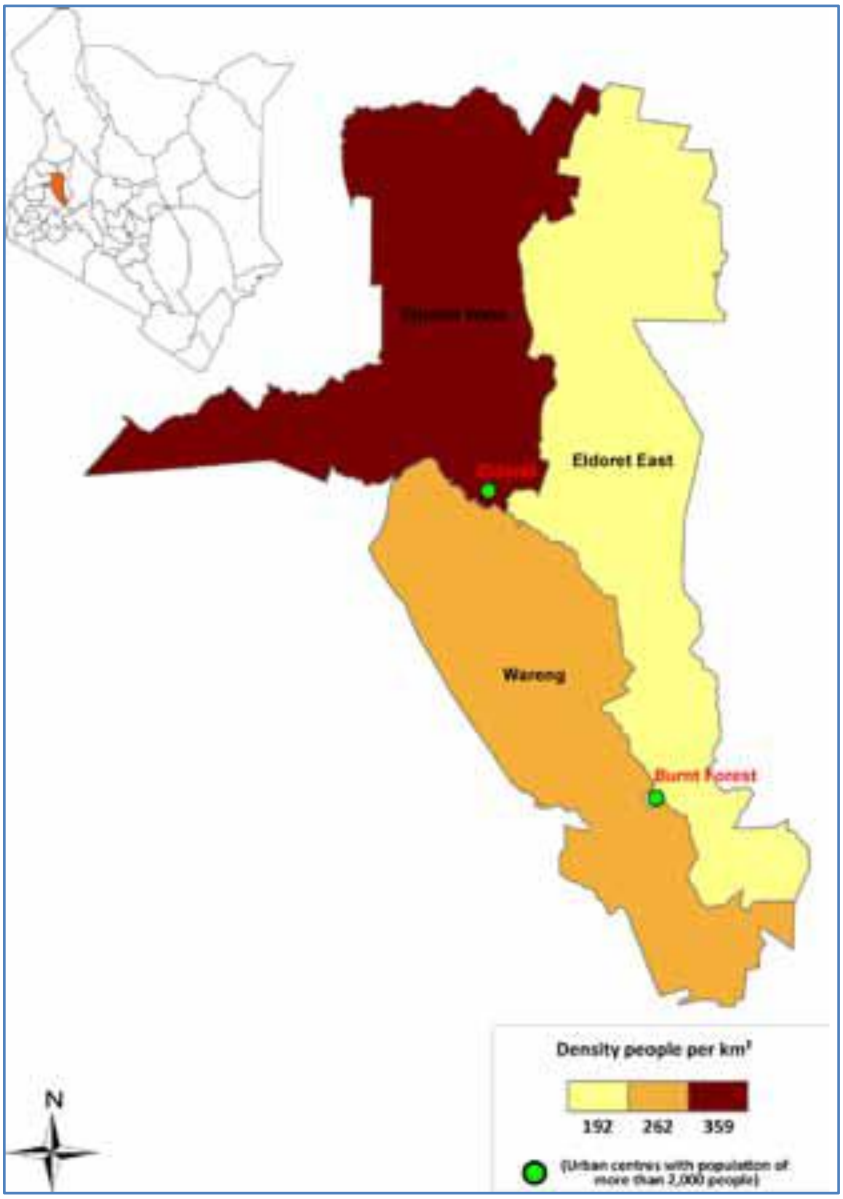
Sociological perspective defines institutions broadly. Beside formal rules and procedures, it includes symbols, moral models, and cognitive schemes. Institutions provide frames of meaning which guide human action and therefore are similar to cultural systems (Thoenig, 2011). Societal institutions affect individuals and organizations (Meyer, 2007).

Methodology

The study was carried out in UG County located in the Rift Valley (RV) Province of Kenya. Kenya comprises land area of 225,000 square miles (Muleri, 2009). The Republic of Kenya lies in the eastern coast of sub-Saharan Africa. UG is one of the 47 counties in Kenya. As is indicated in figure 2, it is located Mid-west of the RV (Kyrili, *et. al.*, 2012; Uasin Gishu County, 2013).

The study was allocated within mixed-methods of qualitative data in conjunction with quantitative data for triangulation purposes. Primary data was obtained using an interview or discussion checklist and an interview schedule. Secondary data constituted statistical publications of the government and concerned organizations.

A four-stage sampling technique selection procedure was adopted in the sample design. First, deliberate sampling also known as purposive sampling (non-probability sampling) was used to select UG County as the area of study. The choice of the sampled county was purposive based on the following criteria: it has more than one district; devolved funds in the county have existed for some time and this ensures the availability of data from the community and key government informants; and the county has a mix of rich and poor, sparsely populated and dense, rural and urban settlements and different livelihood sources, i.e. agriculture, industry, sports etc. The sampling technique was also used in selection of the interviewees from the devolved funds offices for the expert interviews.



Source: CRA (2012).

Figure 3.1. Map of Uasin Gishu County's Districts.

Secondly, stratification (explicit stratification) was used to partition the units in the population into mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive sub-groups or strata (see United Nations, 2005). Explicit strata are generally based on administrative regions and urban and rural areas within administrative regions. Therefore, UG County was sub-divided into three strata of Eldoret East, Eldoret West and Wareng districts. The objective was to make the total sample representative and descriptive of the unequal distribution of the population across districts (see KNBS, 2007).

Thirdly, within each explicit stratum, a technique known as implicit stratification was used in sampling Primary Sampling Units (PSUs). Implicit stratification variable that was used for PSU selection included residential rural and urban (urban areas were further stratified into three classes of low- income, moderate-income, high-income) geographical ordering within explicit strata.

Lastly, systematic random sampling without replacement was used to select the study participants from the households in the PSUs. Systematic sampling is a procedure that can be used when it is possible to view the population of interest as consisting of a list or some other sequential arrangement (Peck, *et. al.,* 2008).

The survey team proceeded to the residential areas, chose a direction through random-walk. A random starting point was selected in the sampling frame and the first household where interview was carried out was selected. This was the first element in the sample. The first unit was selected on a random basis and then additional sampling units were selected at an evenly spaced interval (sampling interval) by repeatedly jumping forward a fixed number of elements using the "nearest front door" method, until all desired units were selected (see Handicap International, 2006; Bethlehem, 2009). Using this sampling procedure, every tenth household was selected in a circular systematic fashion, with equal probability after a random start, until the required number of respondents was obtained.

Collected data was cross-checked for accuracy. The completed interview schedules were serialized, coded, and double-checked to ensure quality control for data processing. Data coding involved a systematic reorganization of the raw data into a format that is machine readable, that is, the process of assigning numbers to the values or levels of each variable (see Leech *et. al.,* 2005). Thereafter, final analysis of the survey data and the content of the interview checklists was done.

Results

The qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews with employees running the devolved funds in UG County. Survey data in UG County was obtained through household interviews. The interviews were conducted in all the UG districts of Eldoret West, Eldoret East, and Wareng. The survey contains information on 530 interviewed households, and data set on 3,348 persons from UG County.

From the in-depth interviews, it was established that most of the devolved funds in Kenya were established in the 1990s and 2000s. Various opinion leaders in the society influence the level of citizen emancipation in the devolved funds. They are referred to as Local Influential Persons (LIPs). These include teachers, religious leaders, politicians, and the PA.

Women and the youth are more involved in the devolved funds compared to men. Poverty at the household level affects women and their children the most. Most women are engaged in agriculture, which is a major pre-occupation of the poor and the people in rural areas. The women constitute a huge portion of the poor in the county in particular and the country in general.

Discussion

Previous studies have documented on the concept of decentralization of resources in Sub-Saharan Africa in general (Dafflon, *et. al.,* 2013), and Kenya in particular (Rocaboy, *et. al.* 2013). Evidence indicate that most devolved funds were established in the 1990s and the 2000s (ICPAK, 2014). In this period, most of the African countries went through a transition from single party rule to political pluralism (multi-party democracy) ending one party rules through competitive elections (Olowu, 2011). People became more aware of their rights and demanded for certain basic services from the state.

At the same time, the effects of SAPs on the economies of the countries of Africa had become manifest (Kumssa, and Jones, 2015; Heidhues and Obare, 2011). The SAPs led to the introduction of user charges and fees (cost sharing) on a range of social services that were previously offered for free. Hence, devolved funds were established to cover a range of social and economic areas.

High number of households that applied for and received the funds were headed by males. Similarly, majority of the recipients of the funds were household heads. Kenya is patriarchal society and men are considered to be the natural heads of their homes. This is a relic of the traditional culture where women are recognized as dependents of their husbands or male heads.

Women had high number of recipients in the funds meant for HIV/AIDS affected and inflicted, secondary school education, water services, and women groups. HIV/AIDS is prevalent among women as they make up over half of the HIV/AIDS cases in Kenya (Nyaga, *et. al.*, 2004). In Kenya, most of the pupils who complete primary school do not attain half the scores (Mutisya, *et. al.*, 2015). There were more female recipients in the secondary school funds. The fund is used for payment of secondary school fees. The students in day schools are wholly funded while those in boarding schools have to meet the cost of boarding. Poor exam performance is more common among poor households and girls. Pupils, who fail to score competitive marks at the primary level, fail to get admission into the competitive secondary schools most of which are located outside the county. Hence, they end up in local schools, which are have no tuition fee charges.

Water and the environment, areas which are closer women issues. The specific people who cook with biomass or coal are almost universally women (Republic of Kenya, 2011). The lack of access to affordable energy services, 'energy poverty' disproportionately affects women and girls due to their traditional roles, household responsibilities, and low socio-political status.

Given that men head most households, funds directed to households end up benefiting men as they head and most of the households. Kenya's social-cultural heritage, such as patriarchy and elder veneration, has been pointed out to disadvantage certain groups in the population, most notably, women, children and minorities (SID, 2012). According to Institute of Economic Affairs – Kenya, (2008) economic growth and development does not benefit men and women equally. Women and in extension girls are disadvantaged by patriarchy.

The various social institutions in the society determine citizens' emancipation in the devolved funds. The institution of the family influences citizen emancipation in devolved funds in various ways. The household is established as a family unit with parents and children. Women are sometimes only able to participate in devolved funds with the permission of their husbands and male relatives due to patriarchal structures.

Educational institutions, other than having local influential persons like schoolteachers, they do provide meeting ground for community members. In addition, they are effective avenues of relaying communication to the community through the school or college-going members. The lowly educated are said to be more involved with the devolved funds than the highly educated. Overall, those with secondary school education had higher participation in the devolved funds.
Those with post graduate education and those with no formal education had the least participation in the devolved funds. The educated are mostly in full time employment and have access to other forms of financing including banks.

Vernacular radio stations and Kiswahili radio stations were much more popular in the country. According to KDHS (2003) in Ngui (2009) 81% of urban Kenyan households own a radio receiver and 71% of the rural households have a radio set, television are 41% for urban households and 12% for rural households.

Religious institutions and the religious leaders act as leaders as a link between the funds offices and the community. Religious institutions are used to provide communication and create awareness on devolved funds. Posters about the devolved funds are put on the notice boards of various places of worship. Religious leaders relay information about the funds to their members. Some of the groups formed to participate in the devolved funds, are made up of people from the same place of worship or religious backgrounds. Religious centres do offer public meeting points for the devolved funds, e.g. Church grounds form vital meeting points for the devolved funds community gatherings. According to Theuri (2013) since the colonial times, religion has played a great role in moulding, nurturing, developing the political mind of the people of Kenya and creating political awareness on its adherents.

Political institutions do influence citizens' emancipation in devolved funds. Some of the funds are as a direct result of political party manifestoes or election promises. Political leaders are able to mobilise their supporters to take part in the funds. They create publicity for the funds in their political meetings. Bureaucrats in Ministries can resist implementation of projects for fear of losing power (Kauzya, 2007). Political leaders determine allocations in the national assembly that is normally channelled through State Ministries and have a lot of sway among the people they lead as well.

Informal rules that influences participation in devolved funds include traditions, customs, moral values, and religious beliefs. For a long time, women and the young people have been known to traditionally organize in groups. Religious backgrounds, place of residence, age group, or age set, place of work or business, etc., bring people together who in turn may form a groups of association. The groups end up being used to access the devolved funds.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study established that various socio-demographic characteristics influence citizens' emancipation in devolved funds. The normative institutions- work norms and habits, are crucial for the working and operations of the funds. This form the ethical and moral system of the society. Cognitive institutions include beliefs and values. It embodies cultural systems, values, beliefs and assumptions (Palthe, 2014). The change values are internalized and they give social identity and personal desire. The study established that cultural values around patriarchy might lock out women in participation in the funds.
The scale of this debate is not exhaustive. Although attempts have been made in this study to document citizens' emancipation in devolved funds, important information is still lacking. The current study was conducted on a limited scale. To produce achievable policy strategies and development targets with regards to devolved funds, there is need for some further studies to allow for comparisons of the results on the subject.

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The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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