

Rural Development Programs in Kenya: Challenges Facing Constituency Development Fund in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency

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ABSTRACT

Most developing nations are still struggling for efficient use of their resources. In order to overcome physical and administrative constraints of the development, it is necessary to transfer the power from the central government to local authorities. Distribution of power from central government to local authorities improves the management of resources and community participation which is considered key to sustainable development. Kenya has initiated various rural development programmes to enhance rural development. The constituencies Development Fund is the latest rural development strategy by the Kenyan government. Since its inception, CDF has had tremendous impact among the rural communities in Kenya. However, the funds face myriad challenges that hinder transformation of lives if rural dwellers in the country. The author concludes that rural development programs are integral in improving the lives of people in the rural settings. Therefore, these programmes should be put at the top of the national agenda by the government. They should be fundamental to all national and rural policies that mitigate underdevelopment. The paper recommends that government should consider allocating more resources particularly to infrastructure such as roads to ensure that rural areas are easily accessible by all stakeholders who want to participate in rural development. In addition, there should be independent structures at the grassroots to track the progress of development projects as well as discourage misappropriation and mismanagement of CDF funds.

Keywords: Constituency Development Fund, Rural Development, North Mugirango/Borabu, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) was established in 2003 through the CDF Act in The Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 107 (Act No. 11) of 9th January 2004. The fund comprises an annual budgetary allocation equivalent to 2.5% of the government's ordinary revenue. Seventy five percent (75%) of the fund is allocated equally amongst all 290 constituencies. The remaining twenty five percent (25%) is allocated as per constituency poverty levels. CDF is managed through 4 committees, 2 of which are at the national level and 2 at the grassroots level. The budgetary allocation of these funds as per the year 2011 was about Ksh 9.35 billion a year and with 210 constituencies in Kenya, each of them receiving Ksh 44.54 million. The fund aims to control imbalances in regional development brought about by partisan politics. It targets all constituency-level development projects, particularly those aiming to combat poverty at the grassroots and to relieve members of parliament from the heavy demands of fund-raising for projects which ought to be financed through the Consolidated Fund (Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, 2008; Chweya, 2006).

The legal provision of the establishment and operation of the Act suggests that the fund is essentially a model for decentralization of development planning and implementation. In this case, the organization and operation of the fund lies squarely within the domain of administrative decentralization. Decentralization as a means for fostering development has been a focus of intense academic, policy and even popular debate in the World. Most of the developing nations are still struggling for efficient use of their resources. In order to overcome physical and administrative constraints of the development, it is necessary to transfer the power from the central government to local authorities. Distribution of power from central government to local authorities improves the management of resources and community participation which is considered key to sustainable development (Manor, 1995; Mills, Vanghan, Smith, and Tabibzadeh, 1990). Decentralization is therefore a source for bottom up participatory development, thus improving local governance resulting to poverty reduction in rural areas. The whole purpose of development is being redefined to bring people to the central stage.

The idea of decentralization in Kenya can be traced back to the period immediately after independence as espoused in the Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya (Mapesa and Kibua, 2006). Before independence in 1963, the British introduced a system of administration in Kenya which emphasized departmental independence where development matters were left to the individual heads of technical departments. During this period there was no integrated organizational framework within which decision making for development took place at the sub-territorial level therefore projects were identified within departmental framework with the officers at the sub-territorial level working under close instructions from the centre (Oyugi, 1978).

At independence Kenya sought to pursue a development strategy that was informed by African Socialism. The policy placed emphasis on rapid economic growth and human development and assumed that poverty, ignorance, health, unemployment and income disparities would improve as a result of a robust economy (Misati and Mwenzwa, 2010).

The government therefore embarked on decentralization programs to promote community participation in development so as to achieve goals set in the African Socialism policy. The most notable decentralization programs include the majimbo system (1963), District Development Grant Program (1966), the Special Rural Development Program (1969/70), District Development Planning (1971), the Rural Development Fund (1975), and the District Focus for Rural Development (1983/84). These programs failed as a result of inadequate funding, lack of government commitment, and failure to actively involve beneficiaries in development projects among other factors (Institute of Economic Affairs, 2010).

Failure of the above decentralization programs led to development challenges in the country which made the Kenyan government to initiate the Constituencies Development Fund to foster development in the country. Unlike other development funds that filter from the central government through larger and more layers of administrative organs and bureaucracies, funds under this program go directly to local levels and thus provide people at the grassroots the opportunity to make expenditure decisions that maximize their welfare through establishing development projects among the health and educational programs which are perceived as the main challenge facing community development since independence (Kimenyi, 2005). Although the fund has had positive impact in most parts of the country, studies by Kagundu (2008), National Taxpayers Association (2009), and Baskin (2010) among others have revealed that CDF is facing numerous challenges ranging from corruption, low community participation, poor monitoring of the fund utilization to unequal

distribution of the funds in constituencies. It is on this background that this paper examines the challenges facing the funds in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is an outcome of the research that was conducted in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency in Nyamira County. The Constituency has thirteen wards and borders West Mugirango and Kitutu Masaba on the west, Kasupul Kabondo to the north, Nyaribari Masaba to the south and Belgut and Sotik constituencies to the east. The climatic conditions in this area are hot and wet and the major economic activity is farming of crops such as tea, coffee, bananas, corn, and arrowroots. The author's focus on North Mugirango/Borabu constituency is based on the fact that the constituency was ranked among poor performing constituencies in Kenya with regard to utilization of CDF fund (Mureithi, 2011). Therefore the author interested to establish the challenges facing CDF in the constituency resulting to its ranking among poor performing constituencies in Kenya. The study employed descriptive research design to yield qualitative and quantitative data required to answer research questions using questionnaire and interviews. According to Kerlinger (1986) points out that descriptive studies are not only restricted to fact finding, but may often result in the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solution to significant problems. They are more than just a collection of data. They involve classification, analysis, measurement, comparison and interpretation of data. Similarly, Kothari (2009) argues that descriptive design describes the state of affairs as it exists at present and allows for discretion on the part of the researcher. The design was suitable for this study because it enables researchers to gain in-depth understanding of phenomena like challenges facing CDF in the constituency.

This paper critically emphasizes on the challenges facing the fund and the strategies by CDF committee to address them. The paper concludes by giving recommendations to the government and other relevant stakeholders for policy decisions on how to curb the challenges.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Challenges Facing CDF Development in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency

The main theme of this study was to unearth the challenges facing CDF in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency and establish strategies by CDF administration to address them. Figure 1 shows that 6.2 % of the respondents identified poor project planning as the challenge the funds the constituency, 25% mentioned low level of local participation with almost equal number, 23.1% citing sustainability as an impediments to successes of CDF projects. More than quarter of respondents, 30.4% identified poor leadership while 15.4% mentioned unequal CDF distribution as the challenges facing CDF in the constituency.

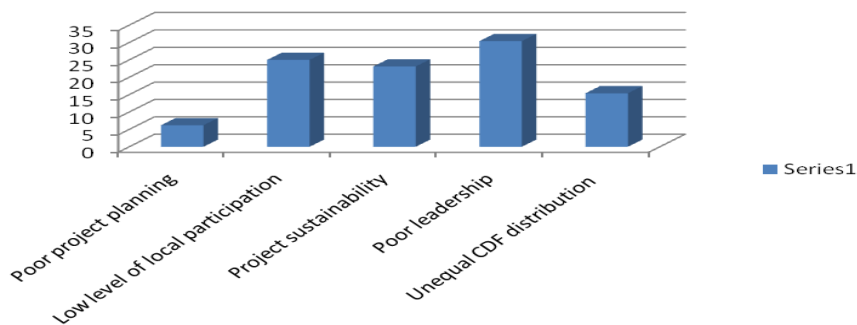


Figure 1. Challenges Facing CDF in North Mugirango Constituency

Source: Field Data

The data shows poor leadership as the major challenge facing CDF in the North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency and the challenge was largely attributed to recruitment process of committee members. The study established that almost all CDF committee members were nominated by the Member of Parliament who rewards his friends without taking into account academic qualifications, experience and leadership ability of the nominees. Since constituents were not involved in choosing location representatives, they fail to provide necessary support to the leaders (location representatives) perceived to be having been imposed on them. In addition, there were no checks and accountability mechanisms to ensure proper utilization of funds allocated to various projects because the MP's nominees (CDF committee) hardly reveal cases of misappropriation.

Similarly, during key informants' interviews, a CDF committee member said that he supported the MP during campaigns and after winning he selected him to serve in the committee. There were no interviews for the positions and community members were not involved at all. To support the committee member's claim, the study established that six of the CDF committee members had secondary education as their highest academic qualification, three had P1, two diplomas, and two had degrees. Most of the educated committee members were trained primary and secondary teachers with no or minimum knowledge and experience in project management. This implies that academic qualifications were not the main factor influencing recruitment of persons to serve in CDF committees. As a result, failure to recruit qualified individuals in the committee enhances poor leadership in the implementation of projects.

Furthermore, low level of community participation (25%) was another challenge facing CDF in the area of study. This challenge was attributed to failure to involve community members in selecting CDF committee members and in identifying CDF projects. One chief observed that community members were sometimes not consulted by CDF management before a CDF project was designed and implemented in their locality. This shows that even if the aim of CDF was to provide residents at the grass root the opportunity to decide on and implement projects that address their most felt needs, constituents of the North Mugirango/Borabu do not participate in such decision making. Similarly, a CDF committee member said that not all projects required community consultation. He gave an example of constructing classrooms and purchasing of equipment for health facilities where few management of institutions take part.

The chiefs and CDF Committee members' argument above validates respondent's claim that there is low level of community participation in designing and implementing CDF projects. Failure to involve community members reduces their participation in those projects and hinders accountability and monitoring of the utilization of resources. This practice can easily lead to misappropriation of the funds.

Furthermore, lack of CDF projects sustainability (23.1%) was another problem cited. The main reason floated by respondents was that most CDF projects were not based on felt needs of the community and that beneficiaries were generally mostly not involved in identification of projects hence some projects remain unutilized after completion. This leads to wastage of tax payers' money in initiatives that never change living standards of locals. During key informant interviews one chief said that:

Some projects have been initiated by CDF but community members are not utilizing them. For example some cattle dips were established by CDF but locals are not utilizing them. This leads to wastage of resources that could be used to initiate other important projects to the community

It is therefore important for the CDF management committees to organize public *barazas* to gather views of locals concerning their felt need(s) and how these can be addressed. Failure to consult community members may lead to withdrawal of community support, a key ingredient in community development.

In addition, unequal CDF distribution criterion (15.4%) was cited as a challenge facing CDF in the Constituency. Respondents argued that distribution of funds to initiate community development projects never took into consideration regional balance. Some regions perceived to have greatly contributed to victory of the Member of Parliament tend to get larger share development which leads to development imbalance in the Constituency. To support respondents' arguments, Nyagesiba (2011) observed that:

Five members of the North Mugirango/Borabu CDF committee led by their chairman have resigned citing frustration from the area MP Wilfred Ombui.... the five have also moved to court seeking to freeze the CDF alleging corruption and favouritism in allocating funds for projects

A CDF committee member interviewed collaborated this and said that all regions in the Constituency never obtained an equal share of the funds. Equality is only evident in distribution of CDF to build classrooms in schools (primary and secondary) and to some extent establishment of health facilities in the Constituency. However, according to the CDF committee member, inequality was seen on the construction of road, distribution of HIV/AIDS CDF fund, and equipping schools with important facilities like computers. In addition, Mureithi (2011) argued that:

Most MPs are patrons of their respective CDF and are not involved in the day to day operations of the CDF kitty. They however have great influence in deciding how the money is spent and on which projects especially in instances where they have appointed their cronies to the CDF committees

The above statement clearly indicates that CDF distribution and operations depends on the whims of the MP. Since the MP and his cronies are involved in the funds management they tend to channel more resources to various regions based on the MP's relationship with the locals in those areas.

Lastly, poor project planning was another challenge facing CDF in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency as reported by 6.2% of the respondents. This was attributed to lack of project management skills among CDF committee members most of whom had been handpicked by the Member of Parliament. Such leaders do not usually understand the intricacies involved in project management, which involves the participation of community members in all stages of the project cycle. Poor project planning hinder sustainability of such development initiatives, or lead to implementation of projects that do not address the most felt needs of community members. This argument was confirmed during key informants' interview where the researcher established that six of the committee members had secondary education only as their highest academic qualification, three had P1 grade, two diplomas, and two had degrees. Thus lack of project management knowledge among CDF committee members hinders effective initiation and implementation of community development initiatives.

In conclusion, the most challenge facing CDF in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency is leadership characterized by incompetence and favoritism that affect development in the Constituency. Ten key informants (CDF committee members) and 62% of respondents agreed that indeed there are several challenges facing CDF but management of the funds is particularly more important,

Strategies by CDF Management to Solve the Challenges Facing CDF in North Mugirango Constituency

To have in-depth understanding of the challenges facing CDF in North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency, CDF committee members and manager interviewed were asked to comment on steps that have been taken to address them. They pointed out that CDF management committee has resorted to strict monitoring of project implementation. During interviews North Mugirango/Borabu Constituency CDF committee member revealed that:

CDF management is monitoring projects to ensure they are well implemented and that funds are adequately utilized. There is a team from among the CDF committee whose responsibility is to ascertain how the funds are utilized

The step is aimed at reducing anomalies associated with implementation of CDF projects where cost of materials and other operations are hiked for the benefit of implementing team. Therefore, through strict monitoring of CDF corruption cases have been curbed.

CONCLUSION

Each society in the world is striving to achieve development. Even the developed countries are currently struggling to maintain their steady economy through development programs that have become fundamental in improving the lives of people in the rural settings. CDF has played a significant role where most people are able to access healthcare services and education among other social services easily within their villages more than before it was introduced. However, there are some challenges that exist and partly hinder the delivery of services to the rural people, which include, poor leadership, lack of community participation and involvement and poor sustainability strategies. The paper recommends that the government should consider initiating more programmes of this caliber and promote greater participation from the local populations.

Furthermore, for these programmes to be effective they should be based on rational and transparent procedures that encourage and foster sustainability. Sustainable development must be put at the top of the national agenda by the government and should be the fundamental principle, which underpins all national and rural policies that mitigate underdevelopment through equal educational and health investments in enhancing people's well-being. The government needs to have independent structures at the grassroots to monitor the progress of development projects and put in place strong measures to discourage misappropriation of CDF.

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