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KENYA'S RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS ROLE IN DEVOLUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the role of religious institutions in the success of devolution in Kenya. Politics influence almost every aspect of life and so does religion. The misuse of power, bad politics, hypocrisy of democracy and corruption were identified as obstacles to devolution and the development of a country. These aspects were championed passively by powerful and privileged minority political elites who hinder national development. It is said that whenever a state fails in the proper governance, people always turn to religious institutions for solace. It would be perilous to wait until the country gets to such a state. The community of faith in Kenya has a big role to play in the success of devolution both at the national level and the county level for sustainable development and for attainment of the Vision 2030. It is a tool for empowering and mobilizing the people to become the agents of their own development and liberating themselves from these dysfunctional structures that devalue them and their dignity. For long the church has been seen to be on the opposing side, opposing transitions, especially the new constitution and blocking the path for reforms, but not all. Some clerics have bled, been detained and others have died for the course. The article recommends vibrant involvement of the religious society in governance.

Key words: *Devolution, Development, Governance, Democracy, Religion*

INTRODUCTION

Churches are viewed as a central institution within people's life, because religion provides the moral foundation of self-restraint and community awareness necessary for the success of self-government. Many believe that one would not succeed without the moral training churches provide to citizens. Churches, surely, have contributed to the success of Kenya by encouraging virtue. Research has also shown that churches provide direct and indirect economic and social benefits to communities. Churches provide valuable contributions to communities in the areas of direct economic contributions, social services and community volunteering, education and civic education training, and reduced levels of deviance and illiteracy.

These benefits positively improve communities in direct and indirect manners, and they enhance political stability and the long-term health of communities. This paper will outline some examples of each cited by prominent social science researchers, developing the argument that churches bring benefits to communities that outweigh the loss of revenue from their tax exempt status. In fact, if it were not for churches, government would have to expend public funds to replace the community benefits that churches provide. Overall it is clear that churches bring positive benefits to communities, and their role in the community as a beneficial, nonprofit institution should be maintained.

Statement of the Problem

For long, Kenya has experienced episodes of political instability which have had adverse effect on the country's economic performance and social cohesion. For example, the 2007 PEV Kenya witnessed following the disputed national elections. Kenya also experiences other problems from time to time i.e. corruption, economic stagnation, inequalities and poverty. These can be attributed to the quality of governance (Kimenyi and Meagher, 2004). Quality of governance is in turn dependent on institutions. These institutions can take different forms ranging from constitution to local authority by-laws to self-regulation in informal businesses. It is these institutions that collectively determine governance framework in a country which in turn determines development plans in a country. If then this is the case, then faith based institutions will have to be incorporated in development and success of devolution through the private-public partnership for sustainable development in the path of achieving vision 2030.

Objectives

- To determine the position of the church in devolution
- To determine the role of faith based institutions in development of community and country at large
- To encourage the church to take up a bigger part in devolution
- To encourage the clergy to be included in vetting commissions

Significance of the Study

The information obtained will enhance better strategies and measures to promote involvement of churches. The results of the study will help us come up with new and improved ways of supporting devolution. This knowledge will help enhance better planning, improve development programs and proper government policy making.

Justification of the Study

The relation between religion and politics continues to be an important theme in political philosophy, despite the emergent consensus on the right to freedom of conscience and on the need for some sort of separation between church and state. One reason for the importance of this is that religions often make strong claims on people's allegiance, and universal religions make these claims on all people, rather than just a particular community. Religious beliefs and practices also potentially support politics in many ways. The extent and form of this support is as important to political philosophers as is the possibility for conflict. Moreover, there has been a growing interest in minority groups and the political rights and entitlements they are due. One result of this interest is substantial attention given to the particular concerns and needs of minority groups who are distinguished by their religion, as opposed to ethnicity, gender, or wealth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

African countries have increasingly adopted devolution as a strategy to improve governance and remedy institutional deficiencies. In November 2005, Kenya held its first ever national plebiscite to ratify a new constitution for the country. The National referendum was the culmination of a process in the quest for constitutional reforms. It involved the setting up of the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC) to examine the existing constitution and draft a bill on a new constitution.

A National Constitution Commission (NCC) was then convened to deliberate, amend and adopt the draft Bill. Held in several phases, the deliberations of the NCC, culminated in an initial draft known as the Bomas Draft. There was failure to arrive at a consensus between a section of the government and other members of parliament (MPs) on certain provisions. This led to the amendment and development of a final draft constitution by the government section opposed to the Bomas Draft. The draft termed as WAKO draft was presented to a Referendum and Kenyans rejected the proposed constitution therefore generating a the constitution review process.

Devolution of power was among the key contentious issues that precipitated the stalemate between the government and other policy makers ensuing rejection of the Wako Draft. Devolution entails an understanding of the complex dynamics of decentralization from which devolution is premised. Scholars have come up with several definitions of devolution/decentralization Ndegwa (2002), Muia (2008) argue that decentralization refers to the transfer of public authority and resources including personnel from nation to to sub-national jurisdiction.

Rondenelli's and Neli's (1986) as cited in Muia (2008) define decentralization as the transfer of delegation of legal or political authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from central government or functional authorities and local government or non-governmental organizations. Presently in Kenya we are operating under the devolved government both at the national level and the county government level. In this, despite the fact that the

church has always had a direct influence in the political arena, there has not been active engagement in the enhancement and support for the success of devolution. Religion in a community plays a vital role(s) in shaping it.

The opposition of Kenya's Christian churches to constitutional reforms is in part rooted in a new and disturbing hostility to Islam. This attitude marks a significant retreat from the churches' past role in Kenya's democratisation, Branch, D, (2010). Many Kenyans as well as foreign observers have welcomed the result of Kenya's constitutional referendum on 4 August 2010, which gave overwhelming approval to the document. The relief at the clear outcome and peaceful process indeed makes it tempting to see this moment as a new beginning. But it is also as well to be cautious, for we have been here before. Over the past fifty years, Kenya has witnessed many moments of apparent transformation followed by disillusionment and despair.

Most pertinent of all in this series is the lesson of the constitutional referendum of 2005. Then, a large majority of Kenyans angered by government manipulation of the reform process rejected a much watered-down constitutional draft as it failed to deliver the widely demanded devolution of power and limits on the presidency. The peaceful conduct of that referendum, coming so soon after the similarly (relatively) calm elections of 2002, fooled many into believing that Kenya had turned a page in its political history. But that hubris was shattered by the violence that followed in the wake of the elections of 27 December 2007.

In this perspective, the most striking feature of the constitutional referendum was not the result. Instead, it was the stance taken on the new constitution by Kenya's churches. In the 1980s and 1990s, the churches were at the forefront of the sustained campaign for constitutional reform. Today, the churches stand accused of attempting to block the path of reform. The men and women of the cloth stood alongside an unedifying bunch of politicians at the head of the "no" campaign on the grounds of the inclusion in the draft constitution of clauses related to abortion and Islamic courts. The religious opposition to the proposed constitution was led by the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK, the main umbrella-body of the Protestant church), the Catholic hierarchy in the country, and some of the largest Pentecostal churches.

Church leaders followed the lead of Canon Peter Karanja, the NCCCK's secretary-general, in actively campaigning for Christians to vote "no" in the referendum. True, not all clergy agreed. Some veterans of the democratization struggle (including Revered Timothy Njoya, Archbishop David Gitari and Father Ambrose Kimutai), as well as individual independent churches, supported the proposed constitution. The churches here are revisiting much older arguments. For despite the churches' role in Kenya's democratization movement from the mid-1980s onwards, there has been continuing if only half-voiced internal dissent to that involvement in secular affairs. Indeed, the uneasy relationship between religious groups and the Kenyan state is the ostensible reason for at least the Protestant churches' objections to the proposed constitution. Timothy Njoya of the Presbyterian Church, although retired as a church leader, was an active campaigner in the referendum campaign as part of the Katiba Sasa ("Constitution Now") consortium of civil-society groups. When Njoya speaks about constitutional reform, Kenyans listen. He has been a consistent and courageous advocate of reform from the mid-1980s onwards, even in the face of consistent harassment by the state. On Easter Sunday, 4 April 2010, Njoya spoke to the press of the price the churches will likely pay for their opposition to reform. "If the church campaigns for a "no" vote and fails to garner support among Kenyans, that will be the end of its responsibility for the Kenyan society. It will have caused its own abortion." That has now come to pass, and as a result Kenyans are all the more vulnerable to the excesses of the powerful.

RESULTS

Faith-based institutions Provide employment

Presence of churches in the community brings direct economic benefits to the local area. Church organizations provide jobs for the community, and churches support a variety of local businesses. Churches bring individuals from surrounding areas to the community where the church is located, and these individuals provide economic support to local establishments. Thus, churches aid in bringing additional revenue communities. Churches are also an attractive component to local communities. Much like strong school systems, many families and individuals consider the presence of local religious organizations when making decisions about moving to communities and purchasing property. The presence of churches aids in families choosing to establish residence in a local community. This, in turn, helps support local businesses and contributes to property tax payments. Therefore, churches provide direct economic benefits to the community by encouraging growth, job creation, and overall economic vitality.

Churches Provide Social Benefits

Beyond direct economic benefits, churches also provide social benefits that have economic value. Several researchers have identified the social benefits that churches bring to communities, including: providing help to poor and vulnerable individuals in the community, improving marriage relationships, decreasing violence among women, increasing moral community obligations, and promoting charitable contributions and volunteering. Social scientists consider it irrational to participate in moral and volunteer projects, because they have such a low personal benefit. However, being a member of a religious community increases one's duty to serve others in the community, countering the "free rider" problem. Churches help communities complete vitally important social projects, for which the government would need to fund if churches did not provide such support.

A comprehensive study of religious congregations in six metropolitan communities found that 91 percent of religious congregations provided at least one social service (Cnaan et al. 1999), and, similarly, 87 percent of the congregations in a Philadelphia survey provided at least one social service to the community (Boddie et al. 2001). While some argue that this percentage of churches is overestimated because it overlooks smaller churches, even conservative estimates claim that larger congregations, representing approximately 75 percent of the religious population in America, provide at least one social service to the community (Chaves 1999).

In a recent, detailed study of churches in Philadelphia, researchers found that churches do much more community aiding work, including helping the poor and making positive social inroads in the community, than previously realized by scholars. The authors declare, "If it were not for the impressive collective effort of some 2,120 local religious congregations, life in Philadelphia would have become extremely harsh" (Cnaan et al. 2006; p. 291).

In a similar study in Philadelphia, congregations, on average, provided 2.33 different social programs (Boddie et al. 2001). Another study shows that a typical church provides financial support, volunteers, space, and in-kind donations to six community programs each year (Ammerman 2001). In categorizing these community programs, Ammerman finds that congregations, on average, aid two direct service programs, two educational, health, or cultural programs, and one community development or political/social advocacy program (Ammerman 2001).

The presence of churches in the community will also increase the religiosity of locals, and increased religiosity results in positive social contributions for the community. For example, religiosity influences individuals' obligations to perform non-religious moral acts. Individuals who are religious have been shown to have increased propensity to participate in community-building, moral projects, such as giving blood (Ortberg, Goruch, and Kim 2001). Additionally, church affiliation and religiosity increase community volunteering as well as intra-church volunteering (Park and Smith 2000). One scholar finds that churches contribute volunteers to three organizations on average, though some churches provide dozens of volunteers to different projects (Ammerman 2001). A 1990 national study finds that church members volunteer 56 million hours each year to organizations outside their local congregations, aiding with human service projects, educational attainment, cultural awareness and training, and environmental improvement (Hodgkinson 1990).

Because it can be difficult to quantify the exact value of the volunteering and community building benefits churches provide to local areas, many scholars have sought to quantify the "replacement value" of the social and volunteering benefits that churches provide to communities. The replacement value calculates monetary donations and in-kind support, staff and congregant volunteer hours, utilities, and the value of space (Tirrito and Cascio 2003). Cnaan valued that churches in large metropolitan communities provide support equal to one full-time social service employee (Cnaan 1999), and in a comprehensive study of Philadelphia scholars valued community services at \$115,009 per congregation and \$230,018,400 for all the religious congregations in the city (Boddie, et al. 2001). The accuracy of this figure can be debated, but it is clear that by building up and sending out volunteers to the community, churches provide significant economic and social benefits, helping improve communities.

Churches Promote Education and Civic Engagement

Along with creating social programs and serving as a foundation for community volunteers, churches also improve the educational success of students and provide training and skills that promote civic engagement. For students, religious involvement is positively correlated with higher math and reading scores and greater educational aspirations (Regnerus 2000; Regnerus 2001).

Students who frequently attend church have improved ability to allocate time and achieve goals (Freeman 1985), and religiously connected students are five times less likely than their peers to skip school (Sloane and Potvin 1986).

Parents' involvement in churches also improves their children's educational capacities and achievements. Parents with higher levels of religiosity raise children who more consistently complete homework, attend class, and complete degree programs (Muller and Ellison 2001).

Churches provide educational, psychological, and moral training and resources, which result in positive present and future educational outcomes for students. Several cross-national and community based studies also show that churches help members obtain civic skills, such as public speaking, networking, organizing, and participating in politics (Schwadel, 2002).

The church environment provides a training ground for individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds, affording individuals the skills to succeed in industry, business, education, and politics. In sum, the education and civic engagement training and motivation that church institutions foster has great social and economic benefits to societies. As education and civic engagement increase, deviance and crime decrease and economic growth and political stability increase. Churches are important institutions in the development of educational, life, and social skills necessary to succeed in society.

Churches Help Decrease Crime and Deviance

In addition to providing social programs and community volunteers, churches decrease the occurrence of crime and deviance in communities and among local youth. Reduced levels of crime and deviance make communities more safe, stable, and productive, and safe and stable communities encourage economic growth, through business expansion and attracting new residents. Several studies find that churches decrease crime and deviance, helping promote these economic benefits of a safer community.

Being involved in a church consistently decreases levels of deviance and crime. Religious involvement decreases domestic violence among both men and women, according to a national study (Ellison and Anderson 2001). Church attendance has also been associated with decreased levels of assault, burglary, and larceny (Bainbridge 1989), and religiosity promotes decreased levels of violent crime both at the individual and the state level (Hummer, et al. 1999; Lester 1987). Increased levels of religiosity also directly decrease deviant behavior, such as drug use, violence, and delinquency among at risk youth (Fagan 2006). Decreased levels of deviance aid in bringing about social order, increase the likelihood that businesses will expand into local areas and bring economic opportunities, and decrease government expenditures into programs and institutions that reduce, punish, and compensate for deviance.

Churches Promote Mental and Physical Health

Churches also promote a variety of health benefits for the community, improving the vitality of the community and decreasing government expenditures. Studies have consistently shown that religiosity is related to increased longevity (Johnson et al., 2002; Fagan 2006). The average religious individual lives seven years longer than the average nonreligious individual (Hummer et al., 1999; Fagan, 2006).

Research by Johns Hopkins scholars shows that nonreligious individuals have increased risks of dying from cirrhosis of the liver, emphysema, arteriosclerosis, cardiovascular diseases, and suicide (Comstock and Patridge 1972; Fagan 2006). Religious attendance has also been shown to decrease alcohol abuse and drug use (Fagan 2006; Gartner et al., 1991; Hasin et al., 1985). A study in San Diego, California also shows that nearly two-thirds of all churches provide health promotion programs and participate in community health programs (Elder et al., 1989).

Church programs and religious practices promote physical health, and a healthy community is more productive and less of a strain on local resources. By helping improve physical health, churches provide a significant benefit to the community. In addition to physical health, church attendance also promotes mental health. In a comprehensive survey of mental health studies, 81 percent of 91 studies showed that religion is positively associated with mental well-being (Johnson et al., 2002; Fagan 2006). Religious attendance has been shown to decrease stress, increase self esteem, and give individuals hope and a greater sense of life purpose (Fagan 2006; Johnson et al., 2002).

Increased religious practice also is associated with decreased levels of depression and suicide (Johnson, et al. 2002; Ellison, 1995). In sum, church involvement has been shown to improve mental health, and having strong mental health makes individuals more productive and less at risk for committing crimes. Churches provide mental health benefits to individuals, and improved mental health directly aids communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Churches have diverse positive impacts on communities, ranging from increased trust, improved mental and physical health, decreased crime, and enhanced levels of volunteering and community outreach. These attributes build norms and values that encourage political stability and economic performance. Churches contribute to vitally important components of successful societies, and their presence in communities provides many benefits that cannot be measured solely by direct revenue.

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