

# DEVOLVED ETHNICITY IN THE KENYA: SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

This paper examines the ethnicity as an issue prevailing upon the Kenyan society and its implication on the social, economic and political dimensions in Kenya. Devolved ethnicity has been seen to be on the arise since the county's independence (1963) to date and therefore the distrust among communities is seen as an impediment to the socio-economic and political developments in Kenya. Moreover, the issues that arise include marginalization of minority ethnic communities towards accessing resources. Uneven distribution of national resources has led to underdevelopment of regions in Kenya thereby bring about regional imbalance in terms of distribution of national resources, which has negatively affected socio-economic development of the country. Negative ethnicity brings about marginalization, distrust and heightens ethnic tensions and this eventually leads to conflict, for example, the 1992, 1997 and the 2007/2008 post-election violence over the sharing and allocation of power and national resources. This paper examines ways in which ethnic problems in Kenya have been attributed to the social, economic and political perspectives and therefore provides the solution/medicine towards negative ethnicity.

*Keywords:* Ethnicity, Kenyan Society, Resources, Development, Problems

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity can be termed as all those aspects associated with a culturally constructed group identity. Ethnicity and the related concept of cultural identity are essentially ambivalent concepts; they may assume a positive as well as a negative connotation (Kuria, 1998). The concept of ethnicity focuses on the ways in which social and cultural processes intersect with one another in the identification of, and interaction between, ethnic groups (Kasomo, 2012). However, the negative aspects appear to be overemphasized in the societies. (Kasomo, 2012) It is for this reason that this paper may appear to overemphasize the negative connotations and their effects and its manifestation in the Kenyan society. Ethnicity can be viewed as the mobilization of groups sharing a language, culture and ancestry which is the main fulcrum around which national and local politics in Kenya revolves. The ethnic structure and the quest to control the centralized executive powers accounts for this. Notably, Kenya comprises many ethnic groups but none of the groups are large enough to dominate another. According to the GoK (2009) it is estimated that the country has about 42 groups of which the Kikuyu (17.15%), Luhya (13.82%), Kalenjin (12.86%), Luo (10.47%), and Kamba (10.07%). Their total share of the population is 64.4%. The second largest cluster constitutes 15.07% of the population. These figures show that over 35 groups comprise only 8% of the population. These include Kenyan Europeans and Asians, as well as minority and marginalized indigenous Kenyan groups. They are all poorly represented in elective bodies and in public service (NCIC, 2012). This paper aims to specifically focus on the social, economic and the political viewpoints of devolved ethnicity as a major contributor to discrimination to opportunities and underdevelopment in Kenya.

At the apex of Kenya's independence, ethnicity was seen to be based on regionalism with the premise that devolution of power from the major ethnic groups to the various regions would devolve power that was concentrated on the two groups, that is the Kikuyu and Luo communities (Ochieng, 1989). The resources especially the land that was confiscated from the British was granted to the Kikuyu for resettlement. This unequal distribution of resources built resentment and created infrastructure inequalities within the country and the initial victims became the perpetrators of the structural violence (Miguel, 2004). Furthermore, this aggravated alienation of the members of different ethnic affiliations has led to regional disparities in terms of distribution of resources, which have been further aggravated by negative ethnicity.

There are studies that have articulated on the impacts of ethnicity and have exhaustively provided discussions on the topic of ethnicity. However, few studies have focused on the devolvement of ethnicity from within communities in Kenya and how this has continued to date. It is against this background this paper provides an analogy of how ethnicity has been depicted in Kenya. This paper provides a critical assessment of devolved ethnicity in Kenya, by looking at the social, economic and political perspective of the Kenyan society. It addresses the forms of social, economic and political exclusion that require effective and efficient inclusive policies to overcome exclusion. The social, economic, and political gains of development have not been shared equally by these excluded groups. This paper further explains how this inclusion can be achieved by addressing issues of ethnicity and possible medicine to ethnicization in Kenya

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a desk review research design to critically review various studies on ethnicity in Kenya. The paper also analyses how negative ethnicity has affected the social, economic and political dimension of the Kenyan society. This paper further illustrates how the ethnicity has been developed since independence and how it has led to uneven distribution of national resources thereby marginalizing the citizens socially, economically and politically in Kenya.

### **Explanation of the Definition of Ethnicity**

Fredrik Barth (1969) as social anthropologists focused on ethnicity and thus the ethnic groups thereby establishing the boundary that exists between them. Barth portrays the typical and ideal definition of an ethnic group "largely biologically self-perpetuating, it shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms, it makes up a field of communication and interaction and it has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order."

Barth emphasized on the boundaries of identification and the differences between ethnic groups. Barth found that these boundaries of great importance, since they are produced and reproduced through social processes that includes interaction of members of one group with a member from another group, however maintains his group's identity. This maintenance clarifies a group's membership and exclusion of others. Additionally, boundaries are maintained in the social relations, where individuals interact and experience similarities and differences. Thus; "ethnic distinctions are the foundations on which social systems are built". Barth further points out how cultural differentiation can lead to 'us' and 'them' and the

differences between these two are what constitute an ethnic group. The differences of ethnic groups can be complimentary to each other, resulting in interdependence. This inter-ethnic contact may result in a general acceptance of different ethnic groups being a part of each other's everyday life. He further cons the term cultural ecology pointing out that different forms of interdependence may arise from this in the encounter between two or more ethnic groups.

The consequences of this encounter can lead to four different forms, that is, if it takes place in a stable situation. The first option can be that the groups discover how they can supplement each other by engaging different niches, and thereby the rivalry between them will be lowered as well as their interdependence. The second option, namely the division of territories, would on the other hand lead to greater competition for resources between groups, also involving political articulation. This form would very likely also result in a limited interdependence. The third option would be an encounter where groups supply each other with the same resources, even though they are in fact occupying shared resources. This form would increase the interdependence. In addition, Barth also highlighted the fourth and fairly common form, likely to take place in an unstable situation. This form can take place between groups competing within the niche. This situation can cause that one group tries to either remove an opposite group, or tries to adjust the other group, and thereby develops a strong interdependence.

Thus, to Barth "Ethnicity is a matter of politics, decision making and goal-orientation" Conclusively, Barth thinks that it is in the encounter with another group or person that one becomes aware of one's ethnic character. Thus, ethnic characterizations are socially constructed.

### **Social Perspective on Devolved Ethnicity**

In the works of Kasomo (2012) ethnicity in itself does not connote a negative attitude. On the contrary, ethnicity indicates a gift of God which makes us different for our mutual enrichment. It is God who makes each of us as what we are. He further stipulates that ethnicity gives us our social and cultural identity as well as our security. The individuals find their roots and values in their ethnic groups. Therefore, one should not apologize for belonging to a particular ethnic community. However, the political elite have taken into account the importance of ethnicity by manipulating the masses into forming groups. In this view, ethnic groups compete through overtly ethnic parties, vying for power. Even more often a dominant group discriminates against and exploits the others. Scholars as such have indicated the adverse social effects of ethnicity thus have stipulated the negative effects of it. Esman (1994) points out when an ethnic group gains control of the state, important economic assets are soon transferred to the members of that community.

Ethnicity helps enforce strong ties that lead to dominance of one group to the other. As Mann (2004) puts it, ethnic hostility arises where ethnicity trumps class as the main form of social stratification, in the process "capturing" and "channelling" class-like sentiments toward ethno-nationalism

The balkanization of regions in Kenya into "tribal units" happened in the Moi's era (Kioli, 2012). Ethnic dictatorship and ethnicizing government and politics in Kenya pervaded in the entire 24 years of Moi's rule (Wamwere, 2008). Caselli & Coleman (2012) note that the increase of the dominant group gaining, and hence its incentive to seek conflict; but it also increases the incentive for the losers to pass into the dominant group, enhancing the dilution effect from infiltration, and thus reducing the incentive for appropriation by the prospective dominant group. Hence, exploitation and conflict prevail for intermediate levels of the

expropriable-resource share in total wealth. This further predicts the outcome of the inter-group distribution of wealth, the pre-conflict relative size of the groups, and the destructiveness of conflict. They further stress that conflict will only arise in societies with deep ethnic divides. If the benefits of conflict are large enough, a group aiming to exclude the rest of the population may arise even in relatively homogenous societies: this group will tolerate a certain amount of leakage and/or will be willing to pay relatively large costs to setup artificial methods to enforce membership or party affiliation. The example is that of the ethnic clashes in Kenya during the Moi era of 1992 and 1997. The Kalenjin leaders convinced their people that it was Moi who was under siege. If he was removed from power, then the Kalenjin were not going to continue eating (Kasomo, 2012). This further created social divisions among the various tribes in Kenya. The social exclusion means that people in the grassroots cannot access proper health care service, education among other crucial social services.

Wanyande (2012) further demonstrates that socio-economic inequalities in Kenya have led to disunity among the Kenyan communities since many people perceive the inequalities to be as a result of a deliberate policy by those in power to marginalize some communities and regions or at least to perpetuate the regional inequalities that began with colonial policies. He further asserts that there are obtrusive socio-economic inequalities most of which have taken essentially ethno-regional dimensions and has thus had an effect of undermining national unity and at most a sense of common belonging.

Alesina et al., (2012) have shown that social inequality and ethnic diversity are particularly venomous when there is uneven access to wealth across ethnic or religious lines. For example, inequality in access of social services along ethnic lines is likely to exacerbate the salience of group identity, limit cohesion among social groups thereby increasing inter-group animosity, which will be an impediment to the development of institutions and this will in turn lead to tribal animosity and conflict. As Mitullah (2012) puts it that Kenya's development has focused on improving livelihoods, reducing illiteracy, disease and poverty that have marginalized the majority of the poor. Marginalization is the elimination of persons from the important aspects of social, political and economic development. Oloo (2007) as cited in Mitullah (2012) refer to marginalization of citizens to that of deliberate attempt to exclude the physically and mentally challenged, religious minorities, linguistic and cultural minorities, racial minorities, women, children and youth from governance process. In the devolved governments, there has been social execution in the attainment of the service delivery.

The exclusion means that some benefit more than others. In Kenya poverty levels remain high as a result of lack of proper re-distribution mechanisms. Additionally, social differences across ethnic groups in Kenya are often both the cause and the consequence of discriminatory policies that include the unequal distribution and provision of public resources across regions in the various parts of counties, therefore having an effect on devolution.

### **Economic Perspective on Devolved Ethnicity**

Accordingly, Caselli and Coleman (2012) have pointed out that each society is endowed with a set of wealth-creating assets, such as land and mineral resources, or wealth-redistributing assets that are control of the state. This has led to the development of the norm that those at the top (who are in power of influence) form a group to wrest control of these assets from the rest of the population, so that the few who are in control share the spoils exhaustively. Once a group has won control over the country's riches, however, there is exclusion of non-members. Caselli and Coleman (2012) further point out that those not

belonging to the winning group will attempt to infiltrate it, so as to participate in the distribution of the spoils. This can be seen through political cronyism where political loyalty shifts so to benefit from economic gain through employment, redistribution of resources so as to avoid economic exclusion and participate in the sharing of the national cake.

Land remains to be a very important asset towards economic development in Kenya. It however remains to be scarce for the majority of the poor. Accordingly, the subject of land in Kenya continually remains to be the most discussed in every part of the country from north to south, and east to west. Land was and still is at the focal point of Kenyans after the gaining independence. Land issues and problems have been perceived to historical right from when Kenya gained its independence from the British. The political class took advantage and thus land was no longer allocated for development purposes but as political reward and for speculation purposes (GoK, 2004). Lack of access to land is a major determinant of poverty in Kenya, as 85% of Kenyans live in rural areas and an estimated 80% of the population rely on agriculture for their primary livelihoods (FIAN 2010, 16)

Land grabbing had occurred and emphasizes how, particularly from the end of the 1980s onwards. This illegal land-allocation took place just after the end of the single-party era (Moi era). Rigon (2013) points out that political pluralism in Kenya seems to have generated two very negative outcomes: the intensification of politically-motivated ethnic violence, and illegal allocations of a substantial section of valuable public land and other assets. Southall (2005), indicates that the elite have acquired the most vulnerable land that can be categorized as: urban, state corporation, and ministry land; settlement schemes and trust land; and forestlands, wetlands, riparian reserves, national parks, game reserves, and protected areas. The resultant effect of this is that land grabbing direct impact on people through evictions, landlessness, and poverty; and indirect impacts on society and therefore missed development opportunities, significant losses of economic and natural resources. Land grabbing inexplicably victimizes Kenya's poor this is because of the land ownership patterns tend to favour the rich who may end up benefitting from the land speculations in terms of land prices. The poor have become landless because of a lack of understanding their needs and a lack of consideration given to them by successive land policies in Kenya. Ethnic groups who rely on land and natural resources for their livelihoods are subject to heightened vulnerability to climactic and material shocks due to large-scale privatization and fencing off of public or trust land. Such communities include the Maasai community who rely on access to grazing land for their livelihood (ILC, 2011).

The build-up of the 1992, 1997 and the 2007/2008 post-election violence have triggered the crisis of the internally displaced persons in Kenya. This is because in the mentioned election periods, the ethnic tensions have been seen to be the driving force towards the displacement of people and therefore many people have been driven out of townships and trust areas because of ethnic tensions that relate to the distribution of both land and wealth among Kenya's various ethnic groups. The ILC Report (2011) points out that perceptions of favouritism along ethnic lines for political posts and business dealings, have proved to be highly beneficial for some in terms of economic and other resources (including land), have led to violence. This in turn means that landlessness people are unable to maintain secure living/tenure arrangements in their homelands.

In an ethnic niche economy, one ethnic group may dominate certain occupations, displacing class resentments onto ethnicity (Mann, 2004). This has been in the public sector where at the organizations apex includes those who dominate ethnically. Public sector experience discrimination can be quite severe, this can be seen where the dominant group may institutionally be compelled to use their own ethnic language as the 'official' one. This has resulted to code-switching where a particular member of community decides to communicate

their own language living out the others. The public-sector reforms and the public service commission guidelines for public servants have targeted tribalism in the public service. This is by ensuring that the public servants use the two (2) official languages when serving the public: English and Kiswahili, however, this has failed. During the Moi era, quota system was used during departmentalization. However, the case today is that some departments are dominated by one tribe as compared to others.

In the 21st Century infrastructural projects are indeed realized in developing countries, political economy factors might lead specific groups or members of the population to gain from these projects as compared to others (Burgess et al., 2010). Infrastructure projects attract corrupt deals and therefore such projects are subject to high corruption risks (Transparency International, 2008). The placement of infrastructure projects itself can be influenced so as to disproportionately favour specific regions therefore disadvantaging others (Cadot et al., 2006; Bates 2008). It is often argued that African leaders use public expenditure to support individuals from their region of origin or who share their ethnicity (Miguel & Zaidi 2003, Moser 2008, Franck and Rainer 2009). In the long run, ethno-favouritism can lead to high regional inequalities and political instability, with long-term consequences being as dramatic as ethnic riots or civil conflicts (Montalvo & Reynal-Querol 2005).

### **Political Perspective of Devolved Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is also central to politics because of inequalities in ethno-regional development which stems from the colonial policy of developing areas occupied by the colonial settlers, namely the White Highlands (Magaga & Ogalo, 2012). The settlers favoured central Kenya and the highlands in the Rift Valley (Kanyinga, 2014; Magaga & Ogalo, 2012). These regional disparities in development also coincide with ethnic inequalities because the regional boundaries correspond to ethnic settlement patterns or territories. Groups in marginal and poorly developed regions blame successive governments for the failure to invest resources in their regions (Magaga & Ogalo, 2012). This intensifies conflicts because they view access to and control of political power as synonymous with access to development resources. There is the view that a region from which the president comes is favoured in terms of development resources allocation. Therefore, ethnic coalitions are formed on the promise of sharing power (Kanyinga, 2014).

Kenya's political dynamics has been seen to be dominated by the elite political class. That is the Kenyattas and the Odingas. Since independence, Kenyatta's patronage politics favoured the Kikuyus, who still occupy the majority of political and economically powerful positions. Raila Odinga is a Luo and his father, Oginga Odinga, was the main representative of the Luos in the nationalist. Accordingly, it is important to bring to light that Kibaki is a Kikuyu, the main Kenyan ethnic group, and the same ethnicity as the first president (Rigon, 2013). Uhuru Kenya is also a beneficiary of this political process. However, he was supported by the large chunk of the Rift-valley region which may Kalenjin dominated and who constitute the largest in the region and whose king pin is William Ruto (Kenya's current deputy president 2013- 2017 & 2017 – To date, now serving his second term).

In various part of the country (Kenya), ethnic blocks have emerged as a result of political affiliations. Ethnic politics and personality differences partly have adversely affected and led to the formation of political parties into different factions with different interests (Mitullah, 2012). This has been as a result of the 2013 political campaigns and the elections that took place. The main camps being CORD coalition (Dominated by those coming from the Nyanza, Coastal region and some parts of Western regions) and JUBILEE coalition (Dominated by those coming from the Rift-valley region and the Central region including

those from Eastern parts of the country). The actions by elites from the president's community, once in power, do not assuage fears of groups whose leaders fail to capture power.

According to Kanyinga (2014) when there is assumption to power and control by the successive presidents in Kenya, the appointments to public service favour the regions of those in power. Therefore, during the presidential elections it is a winner takes all situation and as Kanyinga puts it that the influential elites and the area where the president originates tends to benefit from the share of senior public-sector positions than those of other groups. This perception has been entrenched by the actions of the Kikuyu elites in power under President Jomo Kenyatta and President Mwai Kibaki and by the actions of the Kalenjin elites under Daniel Arap Moi. According to NCIC Report (2012) the members of the president's communities have been dominant in all senior and strategic positions in government ministries and departments. Moreover, the distribution of cabinet posts has been skewed in favour of the country's leadership communities. The norm is when the leadership wins the elections they share the spoils in terms of political appointments to powerful positions of influence thereby accessing the economic resources including land.

Scholars that include Norris and Mattes (2003) pointed out that ethnicity does play key role in determining support for ruling parties. Political elites tend to mobilize support on an ethnic basis. Scarrit and Mazaffar (2005) demonstrate that both ethno-political fragmentation and the geographical concentration of ethnic groups are important factors in explaining the number of political parties. The political shape of the country has been formed on the basis of ethnicity; hence the citizens themselves have been ethnically polarized. Chandra (2004) argues that voters tend to collect information on candidate's background and the intention end up costly, while ethnicity is readily observable. Hence, they use ethnicity as a noisy but low-cost signal of candidates' propensity to favor them in allocating public goods and transfers. Given this behavior by voters, it can be rational for parties to be organized along ethnic lines. As Ghai and Ghai (2011) put it that Kenyan politics have arguably become the politics of ethnicity.

Historically, colonial policies led to the current ethnicity as this is the focal to politics of inequalities in ethno-regional development (Kasomo, 2012; Kanyinga, 2014; Ghai & Ghai, 2011). The colonial settlers favoured the central Kenya and the highlands in the Rift Valley which were fertile, thus improved agriculture in the region. Kanyinga (2014) further states that there have been regional disparities in development that concur with the ethnic inequalities because the regional boundaries correspond to ethnic settlement patterns or territories. There has been also the tendency that after every election marginalized groups and under-developed regions blame consecutive governments for the failure to invest resources in their regions. This has intensified regional conflicts. As Kanyinga (2014) puts it that 'It is our turn to eat' becomes a slogan for bringing ethnic groups together with the view to gain access to and control of political power. Accordingly, leaders appointed to office are seen to be persons who will favor tribesmen and who will adequately share the national cake to the selected few who will in turn become wealthy. In some case ethnic blocks are formed on the basis of sharing power and socio-economic development.

Political exploitation can be seen to exist since the political class holds the common resource which is land, to the exclusion of the members of the other groups from acquiring and utilizing it. As discussed earlier under the economic perspective, land remains to be an important asset that the majority, of who are poor seems to not have acquired it. Caselli and Coleman (2012) postulate that exploitation is costly when the political class decides to seize control; hence a fraction of all the country's resources is lost. They further point out that exploitation may exist in the form of excluding talented members of group from

administrative and managerial posts. This paper acknowledges the fact that exclusion results to acquisition of the resources by the few thus excluding the rest. As a result, people lack faith in the governance structures set aside to promote their livelihood.

The inception of devolution by the constitution 2010 of Kenya has seen the establishment of the county governments and structures. Devolved government seeks to foster national unity by recognizing diversity (Mitullah (2012)). The aim is to foster togetherness, hence national cohesion and appreciation of a common national culture. However, majority of the leadership at the various county government levels may be seen to be coming from the same tribe or clan/community. Lack of tribal diversity can be seen to cripple service delivery down to the local level. In the long run this will have an effect in the county service delivery. For instance, some of the county governments have seen to employ people who belong to the region or the dominant ethnicity where the county government is located. This has been seen to be on the rise. This negative ethnicity stalls service delivery and thus development. These counties have seen massive looting by the various county government leaderships. When the leadership offers economic opportunities to the few (from their ethnic enclave) it becomes a challenge and an issue to the other communities.

### **The Medicine (solution) to devolved ethnicity in Kenya**

#### **1. Fostering Institutional Development (National Cohesion & Integration and Ethics & Anticorruption Commission)**

The solution to ethnicity in Kenya can be through supporting institutions that have been mandated to safeguard cohesion and unity. This can be done through the institutions or independent bodies such as the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) which has the mandate to eliminate discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and to promote tolerance among Kenyans. Although the NCIC is there, they lack the prosecutorial powers to enforce laws among the hate mongers. Such laws need to be reinforced with the support of the Kenyan parliament.

The Ethics and Anticorruption Commission (EACC) needs to be given prosecutorial powers to fight corruption and negative ethnicity propagated by the political class. They have remained dormant as they lack the 'teeth' to curb such vices. Such bodies are independent and have been mandated to promote transparency and accountability among the Kenyan citizenry.

#### **2. Establish laws that will give judiciary the teeth to deal with hate mongers**

Although the law prohibits victimization and even harassment on the basis of ethnicity, it remains unclear whether the judiciary has the laws to effect with regard to hate speech. Law have been established that prohibit discrimination. However, there has been no prosecution of the law breakers with this regard. Hate speech has played an important role in promoting ethnic divisions. Strict laws need to be enacted by the parliament to prohibit persons from the use of threatening and abusive language intended to arouse ethnic hatred and animosity.

#### **3. The Constitution 2010**

Kenya has been on the forefront of advocating for devolution through the passing of the 2010 constitution. The 2010 constitution also outlaws discrimination on the basis of ethnicity. It specifically identifies non-discrimination towards and the protection of



marginalized groups as part of Kenya's national values and principles of governance. The constitution also provides for equality and freedom from discrimination. It is emphatic that neither the state nor any person can discriminate against another person on the grounds of ethnicity, among a comprehensive range of other grounds.

#### 4. Creating a sense of belonging

There is need for people of Kenya to develop a sense of common belonging then is to develop an ideology with which people can collectively identify (Wayande, 2012). He further points out that our ideology must also be such that its implementation can result in tangible common benefits and it has to be powerful enough and have the capacity to endure beyond a serving president or government. This can only happen if we embrace each other as Kenyans and not our ethnic enclaves. Negative ethnicity prevents this by showing the superiority of our tribes.

#### 5. Implementation of the Truth Justice Report and the Ndung'u Land Report

The Truth Justice report and the Ndung'u land report implementation will help sought out the injustices that have prevailed over the years. The reports provide for extensive solutions towards the animosity that has existed since independence. These solutions should be addressed socially, economically and politically. The paradox is that we have the solution to the problem and we seem not to address these reports for the possible solution.

#### 6. Introduction of quota system of employment

This system was introduced in the Moi era to reduce over employment of persons from one region; however, this policy has stalled. The introduction of quota system will ensure that people get access to employment in the public service. This will break the cycle of devolved ethnicity in the public sector.

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