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# The effectiveness of Poverty Reduction efforts in Kenya: An evaluation of Kenyan Government's policy initiatives on poverty alleviation

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**Abstract**

The Government of Kenya has since independence directed its efforts to fight diseases, ignorance and poverty as part of its development agenda. According to the Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965, the government recognized poverty, disease and illiteracy as the major constraints to human development. To date, various development plans, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Participatory Poverty Assessment Reports, National Poverty Eradication Plan, Economic Recovery Strategy and Vision 2030 policies, have spelt out the strategies to fight poverty. Despite these efforts, poverty levels continue to escalate. The government has since established the causes, constraints and the processes that engender and entrench poverty. In spite of these positive developments, poverty alleviation has remained elusive. Poor economic performance has led to increase in absolute poverty as most Kenyans go without adequate food and nutrition, and face inadequate access to basic services that include education, health facilities, safe water and decent housing. The poverty reduction efforts have been unsuccessful due to weak mapping and coordination of the lead institutions, duplication of efforts, inadequate coverage by region and even gender, competition among and between players, and lack of clear policy direction. It is against this background that this paper seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of government policies in poverty reduction programs in Kenya. The purpose of this study therefore is to analyze the capacity of development policies and institutions in addressing the poverty status, in participatory planning, budgeting and implementation of development programs. The study identifies and analyzes the policies and institutions involved in poverty eradication; and seek to determine how best institutions can network to address poverty issues. The paper further examines existing policies in poverty eradication and attempts to establish a framework that will ensure effective implementation of anti-poverty programs that are targeted, coordinated and executable. The study critically analyzes the bottlenecks to effective implementation of government policies on poverty alleviation in Kenya.

**Key words:** poverty Reduction, Policies, Kenyan Government

## 1.0 Background of the study

According to the UNEP Millennium Report (2000) more than 2.8 billion people, close to half the world's population, live on less than the equivalent of $2 per day. More than 1.2 billion people, or about 20 per cent of the world population, live on less than the equivalent of $1/day. The report reveals that South Asia has the largest number of poor people (522 million of whom live on less than the equivalent of $1/day) while Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of people who are poor, with poverty affecting 46.3 per cent or close to half of the regions' population. The report observes that nearly 1 billion people are illiterate; more than 1 billion people do not have access to safe water; some 840 million people go hungry or face food insecurity; about one-third of all children under the age of five years suffer from malnutrition. The estimated cost of providing universal access to basic social services and transfers to alleviate income poverty is $80 billion, which is less than 0.5 per cent of global income. The findings of the report shows that the top fifth (20 per cent) of the world's people who live in the highest income countries have access to 86 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP). The bottom fifth, in the poorest countries, has about one per cent. The assets of the world's three richest men exceed the combined GDP of the world's 48 poorest countries. Until recently, poverty was understood largely in terms of income. To be poor meant that one could not afford the cost of providing a proper diet or home. But poverty is about more than a shortfall in income. It is about the denial of opportunities and choices that are widely regarded as essential to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self esteem and the respect of others, possessing little money, little education, few skills for the marketplace and a multitude of health problems. Nearly half of all the people in the world live in poverty, without much opportunity to improve their lives. Poverty exists in many of the industrialized countries and characterizes whole regions of the developing world (World Bank Report, 2010). The roots of poverty lie in a tangled web of local situations combined with national and international circumstances. It is the product of economic processes occurring at a variety of levels, as well as a range of particular social and economic

 

conditions that appear to structure the possibilities of the individual. Since the economic crisis of the 1970s, unemployment-particularly youth unemployment has soared worldwide. In the developed world, 18 percent of the people aged 16-24 are jobless. The Middle East and North Africa have also very high youth unemployment rates estimated at 28 percent and 24 percent respectively. By contrast, only 10 percent of young people in East Asia and 9 percent in South Asia are unemployed. The world risks creating a lost generation with a global unemployment expected to reach 13 percent by 2018. Whatever the main factor underpinning high youth unemployment, income inequality undoubtedly exacerbates the problem (Project Syndicate, 2014).
The way in which public resources are mobilized and spent determines the kind of impact that it has on poverty. A fair and equitable public budgetary policy can also help to promote economic growth, reduce inequality and make development more pro-poor. Bringing about improvements in the quality of life, or reducing the level of deprivation, is a function not only of the resources available but also of the economic and social priorities and policies of government. Reducing the impact of the various dimensions of poverty is possible, even at low levels of income. Government spending on health and education, in combination with other policies that promote equitable growth, is particularly important in addressing poverty. Such social provisioning policies can help to reduce the experience of deprivation and poverty; increase peoples' productive capacities and possibilities; and reduce the amount that government must spend on dealing with the impacts of health or other crises and deprivation (MDGs, 2000; UNDP, 2000).
According to Nwanze, the president of IFAD, Africa is considered a starving and hopeless continent without adequate food security although the continent is endowed with abundance of resources. Ten years ago African nations signed the Maputo Declaration in which the African leaders committed to allocating at least 10 percent of national budget for agriculture and rural development for poverty reduction, inclusivity, and sound food security. Today, most African nations have not yet attained adequate food supplies to confront hunger and absolute poverty. It is estimated that if local resources are not well utilized, by 2030 Africa will account for 80 percent of the world's poor. The African Union has declared 2014 the food security but majority of the Africans continue to languish in poverty and hunger. The year 2015 is clocking in as the deadline of meeting the Millennium Development Goals whose goal number is to eradicate poverty and hunger (UNDP, MDGs, 2000). To acquire food security, the need to establish proper policies that encourage economic growth through rural transformation backed by local investment remains critical (Daily Nation, June 30, 2014, p. 13).
The government of Kenya has over the years initiated several anti poverty policies. Immediately after independence, the government identified poverty, diseases and illiteracy as the major hindrance to human development (Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965). Consequently, various development plans, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), Participatory Poverty Assessment Reports (PPAR), National Poverty Eradication Plan (NPEP), District Focus for Rural Development (DRFD), Mid-Term Expenditure Frame Work (MTEF), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and Vision 2030 have spelt out the strategies and policies to fight poverty. The government has since established the causes, constraints and the processes that engender and entrench poverty. Despite these positive developments, poverty alleviation has remained elusive in the country. Poor economic performance has resulted in absolute poverty whereby a large population goes without adequate food; education, health facilities, safe water and decent housing. This has been blamed on poor policy formulation, initiation, planning and implementation of poverty alleviation programs. The PPARs have broadened perceptions of the poor on the phenomenon of poverty. Studies conducted show that the poor have been excluded in formulating policies aimed at alleviating poverty. The poor have been for long reduced to passive participants in their own development; reducing their ownership of poverty alleviation programs. They are not involved in formulating the policies and identifying the specific projects that will raise the level of development. Consequently they are not adequately represented in various policy-making organs and institutions fighting poverty at the grassroots (Omiti, et al 2002).

## 1.1 Statement of the problem

The Kenyan government committed itself to poverty alleviation by 2015 through the adoption of the NPEP. This is an endeavor that needs to be supported by focused policies directed at raising the level of productivity of the economically weak through close cooperation of the institutions implementing the programs. A systematic analysis of poverty reduction efforts in the country shows that the role of institutions has neither been given attention, nor examined. Little effort has been made to relate policies, institutions and poverty reduction efforts. Although certain policy decisions have been made in the country, the overall policy environment has not been conducive, whereby local communities are not able to influence the direction of policy formulation and implementation as regards poverty reduction. Furthermore, little is known of the practical situation on the ground on issues concerning actual programs managed by the stakeholders on poverty; especially the involvement of communities in identifying and managing poverty programs. Studies conducted show that the poor have been excluded in formulating policies aimed at alleviating poverty. The poor have been for long reduced to passive participants in their own development; reducing their ownership of poverty alleviation programs. They are not involved in formulating poverty policies and identifying the specific projects that will raise the level of development. The poor are not represented adequately in various policy-making organs and institutions at the grassroots (Omiti, et al 2002). It is against this background that this study seeks to identify and analyze the policies and institutions involved in poverty eradication in Kenya. This paper focuses on the viability of poverty policies by the government and their impact on the beneficiaries. The study attempts to determine how best institutions can network to address poverty issues and make poverty initiatives effective.

## 2.0 Literature review

### 2.1 introductions

The government of Kenya initiated vision 2030 for sustainable, economic and social development of the nation. Vision 2030 aims to make Kenya a globally competitive and prosperous nation with high standards of living by 2030 However a study by IFAD (2012) reveals that poverty rates have remained steady at about fifty percent. This report reveals that, Kenya's rural poor include small scale farmers, household headed by women, unskilled and semi-skilled workers, herders, farm laborers, and people with disabilities and aids orphans. In the arid and semi-arid areas, the poor account for as much as 80% of the population with women and children comprising the majority. The high prevalence is reflected in decreasing life expectancy, increasing child mortality, inaccessible health-care, water and sanitation, poor housing, unemployment, hunger and malnutrition, illiteracy and increasing prevalence of diseases. Generally about 50% of Kenyan households are poor and do not have access to safe drinking water and only 4% of the population living in the rural areas have access to electricity. More than 47% of the urban dwellers live in informal settlements and in conditions of abject poverty characterized by, among others, unavailability of safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. It is therefore true to indicate that poverty rates have continuously remained high despite the state participation and interventions (SID, 2013; Kenya County Fact Sheets, 2013; Environmental Health Department, 2013, IFAD, 2012). Although the government of Kenya spends a lot of money on development, poverty rates have kept rising, necessitating the need for this study.

### 2.2 Government Policies related to poverty reduction in Kenya

The government of Kenya has produced several development plans since independence geared towards poverty reduction. Most of the development plans covered a five-year period although in 1994 the development plan was drawn to cover a three-year period. Initially, the government reasoned that plan objectives could be achieved in the medium term; hence the five-year plans. The various plans have continuously emphasized alleviation of poverty, which has proved elusive over time. Some policies related to poverty reduction in the development plans have been discarded in subsequent planning periods. The only policy that has been pursued consistently by the government over time is that of encouraging growth in national and per capita income. The government policies are generally aimed at providing expanded basic needs in education and health; instituting a market-oriented strategy to mobilize resources for economic development; and pursuing appropriate fiscal and monetary policies for improved economic growth and development (Omiti, et al 2002).

Immediately after independence, the Kenya African National Union (KANU) philosophy revolved around its objective of achieving the fastest economic independence for Kenya; to attain the fastest rate of economic growth and to secure a just distribution of the national income both between different areas of the country and between individuals (KANU Manifesto, 1963). In addition the manifesto intended to reduce the burden of taxation among the low income groups and to give priority to rural development by raising agricultural and nonagricultural infrastructure. The policies indicted in the manifesto focused more on economic growth, which on its own has not guaranteed poverty alleviation. Although economic independence by implication would mean reducing poverty levels countrywide, this was not explicitly brought out in the manifesto. Much as it recognized the role of the voluntary sector in helping achieve the desired ends, the manifesto failed to outline a realistic strategy and framework for implementing poverty alleviation activities. This is an indication that the genesis of weak poverty alleviation strategies or a lack of specificity in poverty based reduction programs began with the manifesto.

Shortly after independence the government of Kenya formulated the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1965.This policy document was prepared against a backdrop of ideological differences based on the effective economic system for the country. The document was to establish a system for political, social and economic progress that is embedded in pragmatism and a free market economy. It recognized the importance of both the public and private sectors in accelerating economic growth and development. The policy paper envisaged a growing economy providing for basic needs to the citizenry. Some of its striking features included emphasizing growth first and distribution later; foreign investments to boost growth; a limited ambit for state intervention and nationalization; and incentives for private enterprise development (Goldsworthy, 1975). Though the policy document intended to rejuvenate economic development, some of its critics argued that it was neither African nor socialist but merely introduced to close further debate within the party on patterns of development. This could be the truth for, in the introduction, it was indicated that the document .should bring to an end all conflicting theories and academic arguments that have been going on (Republic of Kenya, 1965). In the intervening period, the government was to continue producing regular policy documents aimed at poverty alleviation though not directly. The policies included: The Development Plans, Economic Surveys among others. These documents were intended to drum up support for the policy on economic development. In the 1970s, the government seemed to have adopted the Basic Needs Approach to development as seen in the policy pronouncements through the introduction of a number of subsidies in social service delivery. Consequently in 1973, the government abolished fees in primary education with the purpose of widening access to basic education. At the tertiary level, the government introduced a loan scheme to help those qualifying for university education to be able to finance their studies on their own and shift the burden of financing university education to the beneficiaries. The provision of health services was also fairly subsidized during this period. As most of the policies were politically loaded and issued in the form of decrees that had no legal or policy documents to back them up, it was almost impossible to implement them hence little or no impact on poverty alleviation. In 1981, the government issued Sessional Paper No. 4 on National Food Policy, which basically targeted the agricultural sector to raise the level of self-sufficiency in food production. The period preceding the 1990s marked an era of weak economic policies aimed at poverty alleviation leading to increases in poverty levels.

In 1983, the government of Kenya launched District Focus for Rural Development (DRFD). This was a decentralized development planning policy paper. The initiation of this policy document started quite early to stimulate active participation in development planning (Oyugi, 1985). The DFRD policy began shifting the planning and implementation of policies from the central government to the districts so as to stimulate rural development and encourage local initiatives to complement the government's effort in problem identification, prioritization, resource mobilization, project implementation at local level and ensuring equitable allocation of national resources on a more geographically. More funds were to be allocated to the less developed regions to encourage and support local development initiatives in order to raise income levels of the people at community level and by extension reduce poverty levels.

It was anticipated that DRFD could develop rural economies and thereafter promote national economic and industrial growth. Although planning was to be done at the district level, the central government provided the framework, the structures and conditions on who should sit on the DDCs. As a result, the District Commissioners, the Divisional Officers, and the Chiefs - all appointed by government, became the chairpersons of development committees at different levels. Memberships of DDCs were politicians - members of parliament, councilors and local leaders, church leaders, NGOs and communities were also co-opted. Though the politicians hold no positions in the DDCs, they influenced the activities of the committee. The intention of DFRD was to make the districts autonomous in preparing their annual development plans before submitting them to the central government for approval. They would receive allocations based on their needs as highlighted in the development plans and national priorities. However, the success of the policy was minimal because other stakeholders had no powers to influence formulation of policies or to hold the government officials accountable. This led to non-implementation of policies aimed at stimulating community development. In many instances, DDOs continued to plan in their respective offices without consulting people. The lack of logistical support lowered the pace of implementation and supervision of new and existing programs, and plans and budgets for community based projects. The decentralization policy therefore failed to stimulate growth, resulting in the weak economic position ( Omiti, et al 2000).

In 1986 the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth was initiated. This policy paper introduced a new economic management approach; from an inward looking structure to a more altruistic approach. This document was drafted against a backdrop of poor economic performance spanning a decade, and a worsening poverty situation. The economic shocks triggered by the 1973 oil crisis virtually eroded sustained economic growth enjoyed after independence. This policy outlined measures to tackle the problem of economic stagnation on three policy fronts: promoting the private sector, managing high budget deficits, and correcting restrictive foreign trade policies. Economic growth became the major objective of national development policy. The document approved the implementation of SAPs and liberalization of the economy which consequently made many Kenyans poorer leading to increased cost of living witnessed. Consequently, the prices of commodities and services including education and health went high. The implementation of the Policy Paper drifted the government away from its sustained efforts towards poverty alleviation to harsh poverty experiences through withdrawal of subsidies to social services.

In 1994 the Social Dimensions of Development (SDD) Program was launched. This document recognized that the economic reforms of the 1980s resulted in reduced provision of basic needs for the poor through cost sharing in services provision. This led to unemployment and reduction/removal of important government subsidies. The effects have accentuated the plight of the poor. The main task of this policy was to cushion the poor against the adverse effects engendered by the economic reforms of the 1980s. Consequently, in the 1994/95 budget, the government allocated Ksh. 5.58 million to the SDD program. The bulk of this money went into retrenchment payoffs, school fees/bursaries and supply of drugs in hospitals (Kenya government, 1995). However it was observed that this money was not enough to effectively cushion the poor against the adverse effects of cost sharing. Again, a significant amount of this money was spent on non-poverty alleviation projects. Equally, the little amount of money that was allocated for such schemes as bursaries eventually ended up benefiting the least affected: those who have a say in the disbursement process. Despite the much hype about SDD, little has been achieved in terms of changing the status of the poor with increasing numbers drifting into poverty (Kenya government, 1995)

The Kenya government formulated the National Poverty Eradication Plan in 1999. This document provides a national policy and institutional framework for action against poverty for the period 1999-2015. The policy was aimed to halt the increase in the incidence of poverty through implementation of well-planned poverty alleviation programs. This approach was initiated following the failure national development plans and programs to combat poverty in the country. The policy was therefore intended to bridge the gap between national development plans and the local needs of the poor. This policy paper aimed to come up with a charter for social integration setting out pro-poor policies and planning; improve access to essential services by low income households; develop a strategy for broad based economic growth; increase access to education for children of low income groups; eliminate shortfalls in the poor household's access to mother and child health care services; and enhance the assets and income streams of the poor to build and maintain group corporation (Government of Kenya, 1999). Once put in place, it was assumed that the productive capacities of the households would be improved for sustained economic growth. Through NPEP, the government of Kenya recognizes the need for balanced economic growth and poverty reduction. This could be achieved through facilitation capacities needed at local government levels; support from national level agencies delivering productive services; and balanced development for rural urban areas.

The specific goals and targets for the NPEP are to: reduce the number of the poor in the total population by 20 percent by 2004; and by a further 30 percent by 2010; increase enrolment rates by fifteen percent over the first six years of the plan; increase completion rates by 19 percent, especially for girls in the six-year period; achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015; universal access to Primary Health Care to within 5 km of all rural households or within one hour of local transport by 2010; and to increase by 8 percent each year until 2004, access to safe drinking water by poor households and create universal access to safe water by 2001. The plan also targeted to reduce time spent by women on fuel (wood) and water collection; publish "best practice" guidelines for rural and urban social development by 2000; enable 20 percent of communities to draw up action plans by 2004, and ensure that forty percent of all extension messages are relevant to very poor farmers To achieve its objectives, the implementation of the plan would be overseen by the Commission of Poverty Eradication (CPE) assisted by Poverty Eradication Unit (PEU) established to co-ordinate projects, ensure geographical targeting and provide links between policy, public sector leadership and community action planning. The partnerships would be encouraged from local to national levels. These would be "partnerships against poverty" at village, location, division, district and national levels. The Poverty Eradication Programs would be financed by Poverty Eradication Budget (PEB) drawn from the exchequer. Again, an Anti Poverty Trust Fund (APTF) would be managed outside government framework with in-built Monitoring and Evaluation (Government of Kenya, 1999).

The Kenyan government was compelled by the donors to formulate Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP, 2000-2003). This approach places explicit emphasis on the issue of participation because it provides room for interaction and encourages partnerships and shared efforts vital for alleviating poverty in Kenya. The society inputs are required in the formulation and implementation of these documents (World Bank, 2004). This comes after the realization by donors that government ownership of PRSP is crucial in poverty reduction (Renard & Molenaers, 2003: Godfrey & Sheehy, 2000). The PRSP outlines the priorities and measures necessary for poverty reduction and economic growth. This policy paper recognizes that the primary development goal for Kenya is to achieve a broad based sustainable improvement in the standard of welfare for all Kenyans, and that the role of the government should be to spearhead action and create a positive framework for poverty reduction measures. The document identifies other non-state actors as key stakeholders in poverty reduction efforts; and that economic growth on its own cannot ensure poverty reduction. The paper further identifies short time measures to directly address some critical causes and manifestations of poverty. The paper outlines four basic components and policy objectives in the fight against poverty: to facilitate a sustained, rapid economic growth; improve governance and security; increase the ability of the poor to raise their incomes; and improve the quality of life of all citizenry, especially the poor. Before then, poverty eradication efforts remained in the hands of the civil society such as NGOs, welfare associations (women, youth and religious organizations). So far, PRSP is the most comprehensive and most focused policy document in the fight against poverty since independence. This is because, it draws from the failures of the past policies and the consultative process that marked its preparation, and the involvement of stakeholders – government, the donors, civil society, the private sector and the citizens.

Second, the government is going through a budgetized expenditure within the MTEF which addresses short term, medium term, and long-term strategies of alleviating poverty. This particularly highlights projects which could be initiated and implemented to realize sustained development within clear time frame and budgeted resources.

The government of Kenya initiated the Mid-Term Expenditure Frame Work in 2003. This is a 3 years based development plan aimed to link policies, planning and budgeting. Following this strategy the government of Kenya formulated a budget through extensive consultation and inclusion of all the stakeholders (ERS, 2003). This strategy is based on 15 years plan. The government of Kenya, under the NARC administration, formulated ERS as a blue print to guide the government's economic policies over a 5 year period. The government started strategic measures of reforming the economy in order to attain high, sustainable growth. The main objective of ERS is to harmonize strategies for accelerated economic growth with the country's poverty reduction strategies and the ideals spelled out in the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) 2002 Manifesto. The government had prioritized economic recovery on top of development agenda in order to raise the quality of life of Kenyans. ERS proposed to meet several poverty programs covering: The Social Action Fund, Arid and Semi arid lands, Slum Upgrading and Low Costing Housing, Vulnerability Program, and Investment program (Kenyan Government, 2004). The NGOs and other stakeholders contributed significantly towards the economic recovery and poverty reduction campaigns (Gondi, 2005). The Jubilee government has launched the second Medium Term Plan (MTP). This is a five year implementation plan that runs between 2013 and 2017. Through this strategy the government of Kenya is urging county governments to align their development priorities to vision 2030 under the theme: Transforming Kenya: Pathway to Devolution, Social-Economic Development, Equity and National Unity. MTP prioritizes devolution to ensure rapid social economic development with equity as a tool for building national unity. The second MTP aims to build on the successes of the first MTP of 2008-2012, particularly in increasing the scale and pace of economic transformation through infrastructure development and emphasize on priority sectors under the economic and social pillars of vision 2030. Under this MTP, transformation of the economy is pegged on rapid economic growth on a stable macro-economic environment, modernization, of the infrastructure, diversification and commercialization of agriculture, food security, a higher contribution of manufacturing to our Gross Domestic Product and wider access to African and global markets. MTP also seeks to increase access to quality education and health and job creation targeting unemployed youth (The Standard, April 25, 2014 pp.12).

The government is committed towards the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs outlines strategic actions countries are intended to pursue in order to attain peace, security and development by the year 2015. The MDGs targets include; halving extreme poverty and hunger; promoting gender equality; reducing under five mortality by rates two thirds; reducing maternal mortality by three quarters; reducing the HIV/AIDs trend, Malaria and TB; ensuring environmental sustainability; developing global partnership for development. The MDGs are guided by the principles of national ownership, development of capacity for monitoring and use of data informed programming of activities and making of policies. The MDGs have linked together the government, NGOs and other stakeholders to meet the target and significant framework and initiatives have been put in place to address poverty by involving key stakeholders (UNDP, 2003).

**2.3 Bottlenecks to effective execution of anti poverty policies in Kenya**

In general, reviews of policies targeting poverty reduction indicate that the country is not short of the right policies. However, the increasing poverty levels create a worrying trend. Lack of political will to implement the policies: Non-implementation of policies has been blamed on lack of political will to implement the grand ideas contained in the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1965. Once it had accomplished the goal of silencing critics of the first KANU government that was about all. The document was subsequently shelved (Kenya government, 1965). The donor influence is inherent in most of the state programs. Policies have been forced on the country to qualify for development assistance, both multilateral and bilateral. Such policies have never given the role of local institutions, community and the people to benefit from the program any serious consideration to date. Such policies have partially been successful or miserably failed. The donors influence the PRSP process through funding, advisory and capacity building. There is direct participation of some donors while others enter the PRSP process through their NGO partners. The implication of this arrangement has made some Kenyans to view the participatory aspect of PRSP as mere cosmetic participation of the Kenyan CSO that is engaged to satisfy the donors' interests rather than new approach of addressing poverty (Omiti, et al 2002).

There is weak resource base among the institutions: A number of institutions, starting with the government, are seriously cash strapped with collapsed infrastructure. Poverty alleviation is a gigantic national undertaking requiring colossal amounts of resources. More fundraising would be required to pool funds for poverty alleviation programs if the trend is to be reversed (Kenya government, 1995)

A number of policies are neither serious nor authentic. Some policies are intended to appease the public at crucial times, mostly during elections. This is particularly true of the political manifestoes, which indeed are public relations exercises for political parties whenever elections are about to be held rather than addressing real issues such as initiating sustainable poverty alleviation program.

The exclusion of institutions involved in poverty alleviation programs: The role of institutions in poverty reduction programs has not been well appreciated. Further, the policies that govern the operations of most of the non-state operations are formulated without soliciting their input until recently. The nature of civil society participation in PRSP process has not been exhaustedly defined. The government of Kenya-for instance- initiated the PRSP in 2001 as a major step towards participatory approach in strategy formulation whereby almost all the stakeholders, notably, the poor and marginalized, civil society, private sector and the government linked to consult in writing a policy paper. Even though the methodology was participatory, many in the civil society observed the process as mere consultation to meet the donor conditions but not active participation to provide sustainable solutions to poverty (Hughes, 2002). The independent reviews of the participatory process initiated by PRSP claim that NGO inputs into the PRSP process are at times evidently filtered. This incident has necessitated the WB to request for specific PRSPs (Catholic Relief Services, 2007).

Even though the necessity to alleviate poverty was identified prior to independence, the numerous policies designed since then have lacked specificity and are deficient of cogent and realistic poverty alleviation strategies. The few that are mentioned such as rural and informal sector development are hardly given enough political will and resource allocation to spur their growth. An examination of previous poverty alleviation policies reveals that there has been an implicit assumption that the benefits of rapid growth of the key sectors such as industry, service and agriculture will automatically trickle down to all people. As a result, more effort has been spent on ways of improving their economic performance (export incentives, agricultural food processing, etc.) at the expense of promoting social based projects ( Omiti, et al 2002).

The poverty reduction efforts are influenced by policies, structures and capacities of institutions involved. This involves formation of partnerships against poverty through mobilization and deliberate allocation of financial and human resources towards pro-poor activities that are likely to stimulate economic growth. Appropriate policies, which would encourage stakeholder participation in poverty alleviation and stimulate economic development, would be a pre-requisite for successful poverty alleviation programs. Poverty reduction efforts which are hinged on partnership and collaboration, and supported by policies targeting the very poor, are devoid of conflict or duplication in implementation (Hughes, 2002).

The capacities of the institutions and their financial resource base determine the choice of poverty alleviation programs. Such choices would strongly be influenced by both physical and human infrastructure required to successfully implement the program. Institutions with wide range of capacities and adequate resources tend to undertake varied poverty reduction programs while institutions with limited infrastructure engage in less income generating activities. Again, the policies relating to poverty alleviation and contextual factors determine the types of programs undertaken. The community for instance, is important in the conceptualization, planning and budgeting and implementation of programs, which are beneficial to them and their ability to carry out the tasks on their own. The stakeholder context also includes external factors such as attitudes, policies, legal and institutional frameworks which influence the successful implementation of poverty alleviation programs. The benefits of poverty alleviation programs can be assessed more by communities and stakeholders who helped initiate and manage them while policies create an enabling environment for stakeholder participation in choosing and implementing programs. In all, the integration of institutional capacity with policies and stakeholders would influence the extent to which poverty alleviation programs would be sustainable (Omiti, et al 2002).

There is a weak linkage between and among organizations involved in poverty alleviation programs. The collaboration among institutions remains ineffective. Furthermore, duplication of efforts is evident, making it difficult for institutions to link their activities. On the other hand, the institutions lack requisite capacities as evidenced by less qualified personnel, weak physical infrastructure, ineffective networking within their areas of operation, weak management structures, and, imposing ideas on the communities rather than deriving development strategies from them. However some institutions are effectively reaching out to the people while others, though efficient, their activities are shrouded in secrecy. These have weakened their participation in poverty alleviation (Omiti, et al 2002)

The implementation of decentralization policy has not been successful in Kenya. The budgetary allocations to the DDCs were too little for any meaningful development activity to be implemented. For instance, the allocation to DDCs amounted to only 1.8 percent of planned national development expenditure and 0.7 percent of the total expenditure for 1979/83. Further, this allocation was centrally controlled and could only be disbursed after the holding ministry has been convinced about the viability of a given project (Oyugi, 1985). The selection of projects to be funded tended to favor areas with the right political connections hence those districts that have had powerful politicians in the government gained from the DRFD program, while those in politically wrong areas were often informed to wait until funds became available. The DFRD was based on the existing government structures and legal policy frameworks. It became difficult for districts to domesticate such frameworks to effectively plan and implement their development plans. The central government has been reluctant to delegate responsibilities to the districts because of the centralized political system and lack of confidence in local officers, fear of power sharing, mistrust of the development institutions, especially NGOs, need to control resources for development centrally, and weakness in the capacities of the headquarters to support and assist decentralization units. While decentralization programs have chiefly focused on shifting planning and management functions to the districts, little has been done on the implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), decision-making and financial management. Lack of accountability and transparency in the use of collected funds through self-help efforts, district based levies and even government funds has been constraining the centralized-decentralized DFRD. Finally, the creation of new districts almost every other time defeats the logic of long term planning. Often, the new districts have to share resources with the older ones, and in some cases, there are disagreements between politicians not only on the sharing of resources but also on the boundaries of the new districts. Given diminished government resources, the under financed districts barely do any planning, or, where plans are drawn, it is done as a formality (GoK, 1999; Owino, 1997; Ng.ethe, 1986; Oyugi, 1985, 1981). The decentralization approach has not changed the development strategy inherited from the colonial government. This is because the beneficiaries have been largely excluded from direct involvement in the process of project design and implementation, while a number of NGOs operating at community level implement poverty alleviation programs without consulting the people who are supposed to be empowered to get out of their impoverished status. The projects were thus seen as government and not community projects. Besides these, very little efforts were made to empower the people by strengthening social and administrative structures below the district level, even though these structures were closer to the people than those at district level. People were never trained on project identification, planning, management, budgeting, measurement and evaluation of the programs they are supposed to manage after donors phase out. This has led to the collapse of most donor-initiated projects, which had limited community involvement. In a significant number of cases, priorities for district projects were explicitly set by politicians and the district level staff, with little or no consultation at all with the NGOs, CBOs and religious organizations operating in the respective districts and lower tiers. This has continued to be the case even though it is obvious that the government is unable to meet its obligations to the citizenry. Consequently, there has been weak local support, ownership or commitment to projects. In short, the DFRD has not established the participatory and poverty alleviation processes it was meant to promote. Inability to involve the people in the development process has tended to alienate them from the projects a trend that has led to the collapse of most of the donor initiated development programs GoK, 1999).

## 3.0 Conclusion

The government is, perhaps, the largest institution involved in poverty alleviation programs. The role of the government includes managing food security and nutrition, availing infrastructure and technical assistance, and resources necessary for implementation of programs for improved productivity. The government’s performance in poverty alleviation programs shows that not much success has been achieved. From independence, the government expanded public provision of services without ensuring quality and equity in provision or access. Specifically, increased spending has not been translated into better living conditions for the citizenry as an increasing number still live in abject poverty. Some of the policies were populist and not supported by economic principles and prudence. Generally, management of government resources has been characterized by patronage, corruption and inefficiency. This bad negative publicity has increased the calls for good governance, reforms in key economic sectors and limited role of government in the provision of goods and services. This scenario has not augured well for the implementation of poverty alleviation strategies. Strengthening of institutional capacities is the most important step in the fight against poverty. The development agencies need to emphasize a capacity development agenda as a means of overcoming the institutional gaps present in many countries. It is urgent to build long-term capacity of local institutions and actors, and also analyze existing policies and practices. There is need to strengthen inter-organizational collaboration within sectors with guidance and infrastructural support from the government.

## 3.1 Recommendations

The government should formulate rules and regulations of society that allow markets to flourish and design policies that facilitate the efficient distribution and allocation of resources to enhance the welfare of citizens.

The government should provide institutional infrastructure such as laws, rules and regulations that protect life and property, as well as maintain public law and order; promote economic development by undertaking investments in infrastructure which go beyond the scope of private sector; and provide public goods such as education and health in order to raise the stock of human capital and its productivity in the long run.

The focus of institutions involved in poverty reduction differs by region, district or sector due to needs of

 

specific areas. In effect, each area and each institution should prioritize particular activities and sectors for the areas they operate in.
Alleviation of poverty requires adequate capacity in physical, human and financial resources. Only well resourced organizations are likely to make any significant impact in poverty reduction efforts. An assessment of the capacity of institutions to effectively address poverty alleviation should be carried out to examine the institutional, human, physical, financial and infrastructural capacities of the institutions involved in poverty alleviation.

Transparency and accountability is yet another critical factor in determining the effectiveness of institutions in addressing poverty. Research findings reveal that most of the institutions are not transparent and accountable to the people. Programs as well as opinions of other stakeholders are used to rank institutions according to perceived levels of accountability and transparency.
Communities should be involved in planning for poverty alleviation. The communities should be trained on how to monitor and evaluate projects. The beneficiaries should also be trained on measurement and evaluation to empower them to undertake these activities; incorporate the local elders and administrators e.g. chiefs in their program committees; and use opinion leaders to sensitize the community on the importance of poverty programs.
For effective and popular community participation in development, there is need to create a political space where people and their organizations can flourish and actively seek people's input into the decision making process. There should a working relationship between the people and their representatives in formulating development strategies with the aim of achieving self reliant and people centered development.
There is need for devolving power from the centre to the people, adapting government efforts to people's initiatives, and creating an enabling environment which makes genuine empowerment of people a reality. People should therefore be enabled to direct their own socio-economic transformation by giving recognition to their institutions and grassroots initiatives and developing cooperative partnership that reflect African priorities. Enabling communities to identify with poverty alleviation policies, programs and projects will in the long run ensure their sustainability.
For efficient and more effective poverty reduction efforts there is need to develop creative and mutually beneficial partnerships between public Institutions, Private sector and NGOs
Effective governance is a pre-requisite for efficient implementation of poverty alleviation programs. Arguably, responsive governance structures guarantee the full enjoyment of human and economic rights. In the end, it allows the various actors to participate effectively in poverty reduction. When citizens are aware and defensive of their rights, they are more assertive and are able to promote their own interests.
There should be effective and efficient co-ordination between state and non-state players to avoid duplication; creating an enabling environment that allows non-state actors to influence poverty alleviation policies; reforming existing government institutions and structures such as decentralized planning; and establishing County Poverty Alleviation secretariats to harmonize the activities of institutions involved in poverty alleviation at the local/grassroots level.
In order to successfully implement poverty alleviation programs, it is critical for the government to improve governance and make government institutions work for the poor. It is suggested that the government develop a clearer vision, develop stable and representative constitutional arrangements; decentralize through devolution of power; develop and enforce the rule of law; secure property rights and adjudicate disputes; invest in a healthy and knowledgeable citizenry; encourage private sector investment in infrastructure and production; manage resources transparently; and, deliver goods and services effectively to communities and firms.
The poor should have capacity to understand the operation of institutions involved in poverty alleviation. Subsequently, effective civil society development organizations should be supported by the public and private sectors. CBOs, NGOs and religious organizations should remain supportive in facilitating delivery of goods and services. However, they have not been able to reach out to all the needy people. This could be achieved by strengthening their capacities– financial, logistical and human to enable them adequately handle challenges of poverty alleviation.
The stakeholders in poverty alleviation should embrace bottom-up approach where communities are involved at every stage in the project cycle: conceptualization, planning and budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. To enhance project sustainability, communities should be sensitized to own and maintain development projects. Ideally, the community should formulate the objectives of the new projects before embarking on the actual implementation. Thereafter, the communities together with stakeholders should conceptualize the project and assess the needs in the context of possible alternatives. This would stimulate the mobilization of local resources, and final implementation of various programs. Regular reviews by lead institutions, local CBOs and the government in consultation with communities would ensure successful implementation and sustainability of projects. The development partners should be encouraged to initiative pro-

poor community interventions that would be beneficial to them and improve the economic status of the majority.

The role that civil society can play should be emphasized, as is the process of allowing and encouraging the participation of the poor themselves in the making of policies, especially those that affect them directly. There should be a clear link between empowering the poor and overcoming poverty.

Economic growth is one of the most important factors in helping to reduce poverty, but it is not sufficient. The effectiveness of economic growth in reducing poverty depends upon the structure of growth, existing levels of inequality and on how the benefits of growth are distributed. Inequality in income is a function of the distribution of economic assets (land, industrial and financial capital), and so-called "human capital" in the form of education and skills. Governments should work on creating more equity in the distribution of income and assets in order to have inclusive and broad-based economic growth:

The effectiveness of economic growth in reducing poverty depends on the extent of growth and employment opportunities created, and whether it takes place in areas and sectors where the poor are located. In most cases, there has not been sufficient employment generation in the formal sector of the economy. The government should therefore pay attention to the informal sector of the economy.

Honest and fair government practices, free of corruption; decision making open to the input of the public; and follow-up actions in accordance with decisions made, are measures that should be put in place to eradicate poverty. Of prime importance are good governance; transparency; open decision and accountability by ensuring that follow-up actions are in accordance with decisions openly arrived at, and that they can help ensure that the benefits of growth and poverty reduction policies actually reach the poor. Based on this assertion the government should promote good governance, accountability and participation in poverty reduction efforts.

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