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## Devolution and Gender Responsive Service Delivery in Kenya: A Gender Analysis of Siaya County

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### **Abstract:**

*Kenya adopted a devolved system of government after adopting of a new constitution in 2010. The devolved system of governance took effect with the formation of County governments after a general election in 2013. This study examined the extent to which devolved services are gender responsive, taking the case of Siaya County. The main objective of the study was to establish the gender responsiveness of the services offered by Siaya County government. Specifically, the study conducted a gender analysis of the socioeconomic challenges in Siaya County, including food insecurity, unemployment/ underemployment, water, sanitation and health; and a gender analysis of the County budget. This study established that challenges such as food insecurity, unemployment/underemployment, water, sanitation and health affect women more than men. The study further found that the funding of these challenges is inadequate, and even though health received a bigger allocation than the other issues, the bulk of the allocation goes into salaries and recurrent expenditure. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the County government of Siaya invests more in easing these challenges for women.*

**Keywords:** Gender responsive, devolution, gender, Siaya

### **1. Background**

The concept of gender responsive delivery of government services may be defined as a holistic effort to include women in need identification, design, implementation and evaluation of all government activities and development interventions. Gender responsive service delivery involves three key components: 1) deliberate efforts to identify historical, socio cultural and economic factors that contribute to the marginalization and exclusion of women; 2) involving both women and men in need identification, design, implementation and evaluation of development projects; and 3) involving both men and women in the management of service delivery by ensuring that qualified men and women occupy decision-making positions. This study was conducted in Siaya County, Kenya.

Siaya County is located in the Western part of Kenya, along Lake Victoria, which is the third largest fresh water lake in the world. It is bordered by Busia, Kakamega, and Kisumu Counties to the North and North-West, North-East, and South-East respectively, and Homabay County across the Winam Gulf to the South and South-West. Siaya County is divided into Gem, Ugunja, Ugenya, Alego-Usonga, Bondo and Rarieda sub-counties, which are also parliamentary constituencies. The constituencies are further divided into 30 County assembly wards. The County covers a surface area of 3,535 square kilometers with an estimated population of 950,000, out of which approximately 495,000 are female, with an estimated density of 372 persons per square kilometer. The County is predominantly populated by the Luo community. Agriculture is the backbone of the county's economy and the main source of livelihood. The main agricultural activities include fishing, small-holder rain-fed cultivation and livestock production.

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### **2. Methodology**

Data for this study was collected from 132 main respondents who included 97 women whose ages ranged between 18 and 67 years. Data from the main respondents was complimented by information from key informants, drawn from among senior County government officials, and community own resource persons (COPRs), among them teachers, chiefs and gender activists. Data from the main respondents were collected through a questionnaire and focus group discussions (FGDs). This was complemented by key informant interviews and secondary data. Qualitative data were

subjected to a thematic analysis while quantitative data were analyzed through the statistics package for social sciences (SPSS)

### 3. Findings and Discussions

#### 3.1. Gender Analysis of Socioeconomic Challenges in Siaya County

An analysis of both quantitative and qualitative primary and secondary data reveals that the key gender issues in Siaya County are poverty-related. When asked to freely list and prioritize gender-related challenges in the County from the most to least severe, key informants identified food insecurity, lack of clean and safe water, and insufficient healthcare services, in that order, as the most severe challenges, as shown in Figure 1.

##### 3.1.1. Food Insecurity

As revealed in Figure 1, food insecurity was identified as the most severe gender related challenge in Siaya County. Food insecurity has been identified as a gender-related challenge because women suffer from its effects more than men due to the cultural belief, among the Luo community, that the role of feeding the family rests with the woman. According to one of the key informants:

“While it is true that the man is the head of the household, women are expected to feed the family, whether the man brings food or not. This forces the women to be proactive and look for food, mostly by engaging in small scale trading”. Newly elected member of County Assembly (MCA)

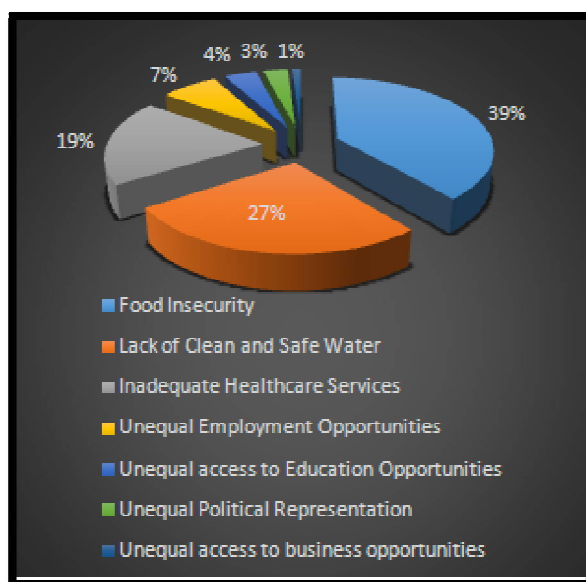


Figure 1: Prioritized Gender-Related Challenges in Siaya County as Identified by FGD Participants and KII Respondents

This perspective was reinforced by FGD discussants, one of whom said:

“It is us women who are expected to feed the family, even though the men call themselves heads of the family. A man can even eat out there and come back late in the night to sleep. But a woman cannot eat when she is not sure that the children have food. Therefore, when there is no food in the home, it is the woman who suffers most.”

The food insecurity situation in the County may be attributed the fact that while most of the land in the county is suitable for farming, farming activities are heavily reliant on rains, which have failed several times in recent years, resulting in poor yield (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Further, only a small fraction of the population has embraced modern farming methods, which alleviates the problem of unreliable rains, since modern farming methods, including fish farming, irrigation, green-house farming, modern poultry farming and zero grazing, could increase agricultural yield even with unreliable rains. The insufficient food production therefore makes the County a net food importer.

##### 3.1.2. Unemployment and Underemployment

Insufficient food production in the County is compounded by a high rate of poverty, which is attributed to unemployment and underemployment. This study found that only 10.7% of the respondents were engaged in formal employment, while approximately 80% were in the informal sector, as shown in Table 1.

Nature of Employment	Population			
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	Cumulative (%)
Formal Employment	6.2	4.5	10.7	10.7
Fishing from the Lake	11.3	0.1	11.4	22.1
Fish trading	3.6	6.2	9.8	31.9
Merchandising and small-scale trading	8.5	13.1	21.6	53.5
Artisan Trading	7.6	1.2	8.8	62.3
Motorbike taxi riding	8.4	0.1	8.5	70.8
Subsistent Farming	5.9	14.1	20	90.8
Commercial Farming	0.8	0	0.8	91.6
Other Employment	0.9	0.6	1.5	93.1
Not currently employed	5.2	1.7	6.9	100
	57.4	42.6	100.00	100

*Table 1: Distribution of Types of Employment by Gender*

The data in Table one corresponds with the information in the Siaya County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) (Siaya County Government, 2014). The data in Table 1 further indicates that although most of the workforce in Siaya County is engaged in some form of employment, most of them are in informal employment. Although informal employment is not bad per-se, the nature of activities involved usually determines socio-economic stability. In Siaya County, a majority of the workforce in the informal sector are involved in subsistent small-scale farming, fishing, small-scale artisan entrepreneurship and small-scale merchandising, as shown in Table 1. Thus, while more than 90% of the population is employed, the net returns from such employment amounts to underemployment since the activities cannot adequately sustain the population.

A further gender analysis of the patterns of employment as shown in Table 1 reveals that there are more men than women in formal employment. Similarly, an analysis of the gender distribution patterns of those in formal employment reveals that women are mostly engaged in lower cadre jobs, while men occupy higher and better paying jobs. This pattern is replicated even in the County government, where most of the senior administrative positions are occupied by men. The data in Table 1 also reveals that in the informal sector, there are more women involved in non-skill-based livelihood activities like merchandising, fish trading and subsistence farming. This data points at two issues. First, it reinforces the sentiments expressed in the discussion after Figure 1, which indicates that women are heavily engaged in fending for their families. Secondly, it points to a skills deficiency among women in the County. Skill-based livelihood activities are predominantly undertaken by men. This could be attributed to cultural beliefs surrounding certain skills. For instance, among the Luo, who are the predominant ethnic group in the County, there are certain taboos that prevent women from fishing. Similarly, although not prevented by taboos, motorcycle riding is perceived to be a male job, as much as most artisan skills are traditionally seen as a male preserve. This data was reinforced by statistics from the County Education office, which show that there are more men enrolled in technical training institutions than women. Finally, the data in Table 1 discloses that more men are unemployed than women, which validates the sentiments in the discussion after Figure 1.

Therefore, as revealed by the data in Table 1, while women are actively engaged in livelihood activities, the income they earn is less than that earned by men due to the nature of their employment. This is despite the fact that women are heavily relied upon to manage the food security situation in the County.

### 3.1.3. Water, Sanitation and Health

According to the Siaya County Statistical Abstracts, only 36.1% of the population has access to Access to Safe Water Sources (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). This was confirmed by qualitative data from FGDs, which affirmed that indeed, access to clean and safe water is a major challenge for women in the County. While access to clean and safe water is a population-wide challenge, it affects women more than men, because the onus of providing water for domestic use lies with women. As verbalized by one of the FGD participants:

"The water problem is essentially a woman's problem. It is the duty of the woman to make sure that there is enough water for domestic use, and sometimes even including water for animals. Our culture does not allow men to fetch water".

The challenge of inadequate access to clean and safe water is a big gender issue because women are forced to spend many hours in search of water, yet they are also expected to engage in livelihood activities, in addition to their other domestic responsibilities.

With regard to sanitation, the situation is equally depressing. Currently, there is no sewage system in the entire County. The households with toilet facilities are in the minority, with only 25.7% of the population having pit latrines with a slab, as shown in Table 2.

Sanitation Facility	Population	
	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
No sanitation facility	15.8	15.8
Open pit latrine	50.4	66.2
Pit latrine with a slab	25.7	91.9
Indoor toilet	8.1	100

Table 2: Household Access to Sanitary Facilities

As illustrated in Table 2, the percentage of households who rely on open defecation in Siaya County is quite high, at more than 15%. This data corresponds with the County Statistical Abstracts (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Further, even among those households with a pit latrine, the majority have open pit latrines, which is equally a health hazard.

The twin challenges of inadequate access to clean and safe water, and poor access to healthy sanitary facilities, contribute to the poor health outlook in the County. According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey, 2014, Siaya County's infant mortality is 112 deaths per 1,000 live births, while maternal mortality rates are also above the national averages (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Water-borne diseases are also common due to the twin challenges of inadequate access to clean safe water, and poor sanitation.

Furthermore, women are more vulnerable to ill health than men. For instance, the HIV prevalence among women in Siaya County is 26.4% compared to 22.8% for men (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). In a free listing, respondents identified several factors that increase women's vulnerability to ill health, as shown in Table 3.

No.	Health Condition	Risk Factors
1.	HIV	Poverty, fish for sex, cultural practices such as wife inheritance and taboos revolving around occasions when sex is mandatory
2.	Respiratory Infections	Use of wood fuel as the most prevalent source of energy
3.	nutrition related infections and diseases	Poor access to healthcare services

Table 2: Risk Factors Increasing Women's Vulnerability to Ill Health

Qualitative data revealed that female fish traders are compelled to have sex with fishermen in order for the former to be allowed to buy fish, which exposes them to HIV infection. This particular finding corresponds with the results of a previous study by Camlin, Kwena, & Dworkin (2013).

Access to healthcare services is also generally low among the population in the County due to inadequate health facilities. According to the county statistical abstracts, Siaya has only 664 registered healthcare practitioners, out of whom only 23 are doctors (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). This translates to a doctor: population ratio of 1:42,000, which is way below the WHO recommended 1:1,000 (World Health Organization, 2018).

Qualitative data further revealed that public health facilities are perceived to offer poor quality services, and have inadequate facilities and resources (both FGDs and KIIs revealed that some facilities are only manned by one nurse, many do not have functional ambulances, and drug stock-outs are a common occurrence). Qualitative data also revealed that healthcare practitioners are perceived as being unfriendly, and that the health information system at the county referral hospital was reportedly poor, with cases of lost medical records, results and reports being common. The perceived poor health service is compounded by frequent industrial action by healthcare practitioners.

Nevertheless, FGDs established that women demonstrated better healthcare-seeking behaviour than men. This was confirmed by KIIs with healthcare practitioners, who indicated that available health facility data shows that women utilize healthcare services more than men. This is partly attributed to the social role of women as domestic caregivers, thus the onus of taking children to health facilities falls on women.

### 3.2. Gender Analysis of Fiscal Plans, Budget Allocations and Service Delivery

In order to find out if women issues are prioritized by the county government, a budget analysis was conducted to find out its gender responsiveness. As shown in Figure 1, the key gendered socioeconomic challenges in Siaya County include food insecurity, access to water and sanitation, access to healthcare services and access to employment opportunities. Table 4 provides a budget summary for the year 2016/2017. The figures have been disaggregated by County government ministries.

S/N	Ministry/Office/Agency	Recurrent expenditure	%	Development expenditure	%	Total	%
1	County Health Services	1,314,749,264	34	311,899,663	20	1,626,648,927	28
2	Roads, Transport & Public Works	93,017,366	2	809,015,212	32	902,032,578	16
3	Education, Youth Affairs, Culture, Sports & Social Services	284,303,377	7	296,376,283	18	580,679,660	10
4	County Executive	406,007,037	11	38153192	1.4	444,160,229	8
5	Agriculture, Livestock & Fisheries	239,328,162	6	177,240,483	7.7	416,568,645	7
6	County Assembly	599,914,472	16	80,000,000	2.6	679,914,472	6
7	Finance, Economic Planning and Vision 2030	319,239,793	15	30,000,000	0.9	349,239,793	6
8	Water, Environment & Natural Resources	96,644,646	3	177,981,843	9.4	274,626,489	5
9	Trade Development & Regulation	46,590,591	1	170,971,350	5.4	217,561,941	4
10	Tourism and ICT	112,525,207	3	46,027,122	1.3	158,552,329	3
11	Lands, Housing, Physical Planning & Development	54,504,388	1	38,000,000	1.1	92,504,388	2
12	Total	3,566,824,303	100	2,175,665,148	100	5,742,489,451	100

Table 3: Siaya County Budget Allocations for the 2016/2017 Financial Year

While the both the Siaya County CIDP and budget cite poverty eradication and food insecurity as key focus areas, the allocations that could be perceived as directly addressing these concerns have not received commensurate funding. Sectors such as agriculture, water, trade and tourism each received less than 10% of the budgetary allocation.

Further, the County government has also implemented several poverty eradication and wealth creation projects. Some of these include the purchase of tractors, which are then hired out to farmers at subsidized rates. Others include support for the fisheries sector, and incentives for women entrepreneurs, in which 30% of all County government tenders are set aside for women.

Siaya County food insecurity intervention strategies are faced with two main challenges. The first is lack of a clear strategy for livelihood diversification. Due to over-reliance on rain-fed agriculture, food production in the County is inadequate and unsustainable. The second challenge is at the implementation level. There appears to be a disconnect between planning and implementation. For instance, only three of the tractors purchased by the County government are in a working condition, thus resulting in unfulfilled objectives. According to one of the FGD participants:

“One cannot rely on the County government tractors. You can wait for it until the end of the season and it will never come”

Regarding water, there does not appear to be a clear focus on the provision of alternative water sources. Sanitation has also not received adequate attention, with very little funding allocated for awareness on the dangers of open defecation and the need for every household to a healthy sanitation system.

From Table 4, it is noticeable, and commendable, that the health sector received the highest budgetary allocation. However, as the data in Table 4 shows, more than four fifths of the health sector allocation went to recurrent expenditure. The County budget office attributed this to the fact that health is one of the governance functions that was fully devolved to County governments in Kenya's constitution. County governments therefore have to fully fund healthcare delivery, as explained by a senior County government officer:

“Most of the health allocation is eaten up by salaries. The wage bill for healthcare practitioners, especially doctors and nurses, is a heavy burden for all County governments.” Senior officer in the County budget office.

The free maternal healthcare program is also responsible for a large chunk of the health sector budget, which is a step in the right direction.

The main gap in health funding is the lack of a gender focus in the long-term strategy for health. Both the budget and CIDP fail to recognize that women are the main users of healthcare services, and therefore require a special focus. For instance, while it is commendable that maternal health has received a reasonable allocation, the program is focused only on delivery care, leaving out post-partum care, which is an important component of maternal health. Further, while provision of sanitary towels to school-going girls receives a mention in the CIDP, it is not backed up with adequate funding. Finally, even though the CIDP mentions the need for client-centred service delivery, qualitative data reveals that little is being done to transform attitudes of service providers.

Table 4 also shows that the Education, Youth Affairs, Culture, Sports & Social Services ministry received the third largest allocation. This is similarly commendable because this ministry is equally capable of impacting on the status of women in the County. Similarly, commendable is the fact that for this ministry, slightly more than 50% of the allocation was set aside for development. A further analysis reveals that most of these funds were set aside for construction and equipment of ECD centres, youth polytechnics and women, youth and social programs.

Statistics from the County education office reveal that enrolment in technical and vocational training centres is skewed in favour of men. This is fueled by the perception that certain technical courses are the preserve of men. There is an absence of public awareness on the fact that skills are not gender specific and that women can perform just as well as men.

The last CIDP public hearing was conducted in the County headquarters, Siaya town. This implies that most of the participants could have been from only one constituency, that is, Alego Usonga, in which Siaya town is located. This scenario was compounded by the fact that hearing sessions largely involved county executive officers reading their proposals, as evidenced by reports of the sessions that were seen by the consultants for this evaluation. The public was not aided to have meaningful engagement in the planning process. The level of women's participation in the county planning and budgeting process has greatly been affected by lack of information. Most of the women FGD participants did not know when the public hearings are going to take place and how to participate in those forums. Beyond the foregoing, there is a general culture of handouts in the county created by NGOs. People only attend meeting when there are transport allowances.

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study established that challenges such as food insecurity, unemployment/underemployment, water, sanitation and health affect women more than men. The study further found that the funding of these challenges is inadequate, and even though health received a bigger allocation than the other issues, the bulk of the allocation goes into salaries and recurrent expenditure. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the County government of Siaya invests more in easing these challenges for women.

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