Decentralised governance & climate change adaptation:

Exploring differential impacts & expectations at the subnational & local levels in East Africa

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Governance of adaptation in East Africa

- While decentralisation remains an important policy item in East Africa, there exists limited empirical evidence on its effects on local adaptation processes. Mixed successes elsewhere.

- Examines the impacts of decentralised governance structures & planning processes on adaptation in water & disaster risk reduction & various governance dimensions – from policy drivers, planning processes to local interactions.

- Case studies in Awash, Ethiopia & Isiolo, Kenya (representing some of the driest regions of East Africa)

- Based on diverse perspectives from a range of stakeholders at national, subnational & community levels

- Semi-structured interviews & group discussions during fieldwork in Kenya (March’16 & Feb’17) & Ethiopia (April’16 & Nov’17). In total, 44 interviews (26 in Kenya & 18 in Ethiopia).
Potential impacts of decentralised governance of water & DRR

Conceptual framework

- National
- Sub-national
- Local

Decentralisation

- Water sector
- Disaster risk reduction (management of droughts & floods)

Governance of adaptation

Potential impacts and outcomes of decentralised governance

- Connects & disconnects across sectors & scales
- Transfer of power & authority
- Access to services & information
- Availability of resources
- Capacity & skills
- Participation & inclusion
- Flexibility & learning
- Conflict resolution

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: potential impacts of decentralised governance of water and DRR
Impacts of decentralisation

1) Connects & disconnects across scales & sectors

- Lack of coordination & integration between different sectors & levels of government & with activities of other non-state actors; incoherence between planning & development cycles; more pronounced disconnects between national & sub-national units

- Good practice: The **County Steering Group**, coordinated by the NDMA in Kenya includes representatives from county & national governments, development partners, CBOs & NGOs.

2) Transfer of power & authority

- Varying degree of transfer of authority in two countries (despite incomplete devolution, substantial power at county & local levels in Kenya; fragmented transfer of authority in Ethiopia)

- Positive impacts: Devolved power enabling lower levels to respond to the local needs more effectively; NDMA’s setting up of Ward & County Adaptation Planning Committees – better coordination.
3) Access to services & information

❖ Improved water management having positive impacts on livelihoods, especially for pastoralist women & children. However, mixed expectation of service delivery at the local level (e.g. devolution ridiculed as ‘devil-ution’ in Kenya).

❖ Pastoralists & agro-pastoralists have better access to climate services & the exchange of climate & weather data between the national agencies & sub-national departments has been good.

4. Availability of resources and budgets

❖ In Kenya, there are increased resources available to the county & local levels but more bureaucracy & competition between different sectors.

❖ In Ethiopia, Woreda & Kebele levels have problems of resource constraints. E.g. Woreda governments do not receive additional money (only food aid) during drought & floods.
5. Capacity, staffing & leadership skills

❖ **Capacity deficit** is a major concern, particularly at the lower levels. Sub-national & local actors & institutions face a lot of pressure when emergencies happen. **Lack of effective tools** - reactive approach as against forward-looking one.

❖ **External support** (such of CARE for early warning systems on floods & drought in Ethiopia; IIED for Kenya’s Adaptation Consortium) has been useful.

6. Participation & inclusion

❖ **Notable but varying degrees of success** in strengthening participation. E.g. public consultation as a mandatory process in Kenya; creation of **new hybrid spaces** (e.g. formalisation of customary Dedha committees).

❖ Political patronage and clan-based system still persist. Participation of marginalized groups is still **symbolic or tokenistic** rather than being genuine or substantive.
7. Flexibility and learning:

- There has been **enhanced flexibility and learning** in innovating & adapting what works & what does not in responding to water crisis & climate risks.

- E.g. Isiolo government’s attempts to improve water services, protect water resources & avoid unnecessary costs for vehicles and emergency response; **formalisation of customary institutions** not only offering flexibility in water management but also having **equity impacts**.

8. Conflict resolution:

- **Reduced conflicts due to improved water access & use & better DRR responses.** The role of local communities (e.g. WRUAs in Kenya, water point committees in Ethiopia) & local elders also has positive impacts.

- However, there are **also increasing contestations** regarding dam site decision, agricultural intensification, cross-boundary issues, betwn. pastoralists & agro-pastoralists, betwn. politicians & bureaucrats.
Conclusion

- One cannot just cherry-pick what they like about devolution. There are some unintended consequences too. Both positive & negative impacts need to be compared & contrasted to understand its overall effects.

- Decentralisation is creating **new spaces for governance of water & DRR sectors**, with both opportunities & challenges that may enhance or undermine adaptation.

- Decentralisation is by no means a guarantee for successful adaptation governance if it is not accompanied by attendant capacity building, knowledge transfer, policy synchronisation, devolution of power & resources, & wider participation of local actors.

- **Need of horizontal & vertical integration** incorporating the cross-scales & sectors of adaptation governance, particularly in linking different levels of decision-making & addressing issues of coordination, nestededness, capacity building & knowledge sharing.
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