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Fiscal Decentralization and the Efficiency of Public Service Delivery - A Case Study of Homabay County

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how fiscal decentralization affects the effectiveness of public service delivery in Homabay County. It uses a stochastic frontier method to estimate time-varying efficiency coefficients and investigates the effects of fiscal decentralization on those efficiency coefficients. The results show that, in some cases, fiscal decentralization can increase the effectiveness of public service delivery. Initially, the decentralization process needs appropriate political and institutional conditions or goodwill. Second, it would seem that good outcomes call for a high enough degree of expenditure decentralization. Third, there must be sufficient decentralization of both revenue and expenditure. Lastly, fiscal decentralization could make public service delivery less effective if these conditions are not met. The paper recommends the need for developing countries to adopt fiscal decentralization because it helps subnational governments raise revenues through enhancing tax administration and collection by the government as well as taxpayer compliance. It also supports legislation and policy changes that give subnational governments more fiscal authority.

Keywords: Fiscal decentralization; Revenue; Tax administration; Policy changes; Homabay County.

1.1. Introduction

This paper investigates how fiscal decentralization affects how the effectiveness of public services delivery. Focusing on the effectiveness of public service delivery rather than the outcome of policy advances prior studies. Increases in policy inputs (such as expenditure allocation) might increase policy outcomes; in contrast, efficiency is defined as the variation in policy outcomes over time and across countries under a given set of policy inputs (Glewwe, & Muralidharan, 2016). Also, a sizable sample of nations from rich, emerging, and developing economies are key in giving background to this study. Finally, it makes use of cutting-edge empirical methods to reach its conclusions and judge their viability.

The study's findings imply that fiscal decentralization can be used as a policy instrument to boost performance, but only in certain circumstances (Martínez-Vázquez, et al., 2017). Our research focuses on how effectively money is spent on health and education, among other key sectors and it shows that decentralization cannot improve public service delivery without a suitable institutional setting. These prerequisites include strong accountability at various institutional levels, effective local government autonomy, sound governance, and robust local capability (Kimutai, 2022). Furthermore, it appears that a sufficient level of expenditure decentralization is required to achieve a favorable result. And finally, for beneficial results, there must be a sufficient decentralization of revenue together with decentralization of expenditure. Fiscal decentralization can reduce the effectiveness of public service delivery if those prerequisites are not met (Glewwe, & Muralidharan, 2016).

1.2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Fiscal decentralization can improve the efficiency of public service delivery through desire matching and allocative efficiency (Kimutai, 2022). Local governments have an informational advantage over the federal government when deciding which provision of goods and services will best satisfy citizens' needs since they have better access to local

preferences. When public services are provided by the authority with control over the smallest geographic territory, costs, and benefits are fully internalized, which is expected to improve allocative efficiency (Mose, 2022).

By encouraging greater responsibility, fiscal decentralization can also improve efficiency (Omanya, 2021). Especially in social sectors like education and health, the geographical proximity of public institutions to the local population and the eventual beneficiaries encourage accountability and can enhance public service outcomes. To achieve productive efficiency, local accountability is intended to put pressure on local authorities to continually look for methods to develop and provide better public services with fewer resources. Accountability can encourage higher public investment and growth-promoting sector spending, including in health and education (Mose, 2022). A direct election of local officials by the local populace can improve local accountability.

Furthermore, the voting with one's feet argument suggests that fiscal decentralization can increase efficiency (Ruto, 2021). Decentralization increases the electoral power of the people over the government. It promotes competition among local governments to enhance public services; people can conclude the skill or goodness of their local officials based on the performance of surrounding governments. Fiscal decentralization may reduce interest group lobbying, skew policy decisions, and increase the waste of public dollars.

Conversely, if the scale economy is significant, fiscal decentralization could hinder the delivery of public services (Kimutai, 2022). If economies of scale play a significant role in the production and provision of some particular public goods, the devolution of public service delivery to a small local government may result in decreased efficiency and higher costs. For instance, it can be less efficient to move the production and provision of public services to a municipality with fewer government employees (producers and providers) and beneficiaries (Kimutai, 2022).

The central government's ability to distribute wealth can be hampered by fiscal decentralization (Makokha, 2018). Equalization transfers are frequently carried out by the central government to ensure a minimum level of public service and necessities for the entire population, which would be disrupted in circumstances of insufficient leverage on resources. The central government lacks the resources necessary to guarantee a basic level of equity across the entire area when a sizable portion of revenue and expenditure is transferred to local governments.

Delivery of public services may be hampered by fiscal decentralization if accountability is lax (Magani, 2018). Local governments would be motivated to allocate more decentralized spending to non-productive expenditure items if accountability is not broadly anchored in a local democratic process but is instead dependent on rent-seeking political conduct (Makokha, 2018). This can harm productivity, economic expansion, and macroeconomic performance as a whole.

1.3. Empirical Analysis

1.3.1. Methodology

In this article, the effectiveness of public service delivery in the areas of health and education is examined rather than just the results. Infant mortality rate and school enrolment rate are two examples of outcome indicators that can be used to measure how well a policy is working. By increasing policy inputs, such as spending on health and education, policy results can be enhanced. The efficiency study, on the other hand, emphasizes the improvement in

results while holding inputs constant. With this method, it is possible to examine how other policies, such as fiscal decentralization, can improve the delivery of public goods and services without focusing solely on inputs.

Estimating efficiency coefficients and examining the effects of fiscal decentralization on the latter are the two steps that make up the methodology (Alonso, & Andrews, 2019). Using stochastic frontier approaches, the effectiveness of public service delivery is first estimated. These methods offer time-varying coefficients that quantify how far the greatest public services in a given county in a given year are from the best public services offered using comparable inputs in the sample of nations taken into account in this research. This study calculates the implications of fiscal decentralization on the predicted efficiencies in a second stage. Bias-corrected coefficients are obtained using instrumental variable techniques. These techniques address issues with reverse causality that might affect the calculated parameters as well as endogeneity issues related to the decentralization process.

Efficiency coefficients are first computed using stochastic frontier methods. Efficiency estimation methodologies can be divided into two categories: i) a parametric approach and (ii) a non-parametric approach. This study employs *stochastic frontier analysis* (SFA) with a parametric method (Kumbhakar, et al., 2020). Due to the limitation on the number of variables, the SFA permits estimating models with numerous inputs as opposed to non-parametric models, which do not account for the impact of exogenous factors on the result variable. A multivariable model is more appropriate for the analysis since the outcome variables in this paper, namely infant mortality and enrollment ratio, are plausibly influenced by structural factors other than public expenditure, such as the socioeconomic features of the county. Moreover, the SFA enables the estimation of coefficients that are county- and time-specific.

No economic agent (i.e., county) can go beyond the ideal border, according to the SFA methodology. The infant mortality or enrollment rate created at the frontier is the highest level possible given the available resources, such as public spending. The unique indicator of a county's efficiency is the deviation of its output from this frontier at a given point in time. With a finite amount of public spending, efficient governments are those operating at or very near the frontier as they attempt to lower the infant death rate or increase enrolment.

The proportion of subnational fiscal variables over general government fiscal variables is used to measure fiscal decentralization. The primary projections in this study are based on the fiscal decentralization's spending side and use the proportion of subnational expenditure to general government expenditure. The main emphasis is on spending because it has a direct impact on efficiency and results in health and education (as opposed to revenue). The report also examines the effects of revenue decentralization on the effectiveness of public service delivery, utilizing the ratio of local government revenue to general government revenue, to ensure a thorough investigation. The political and institutional factors are primarily concerned with the extent of corruption, the level of regional autonomy, the quality of democracy, and the constitutional system (presidential or parliamentary).

The real GDP per capita, which serves as a barometer of development, along with population density and size, as well as the typical number of years spent in elementary and secondary education, serve as control variables in the stochastic frontier analysis. Infant mortality and secondary enrolment rates are both thought to be influenced by all of these factors. The ratio of subnational spending on health and education to overall government spending in each of the two sectors would be instructive, but for many of the sample nations, such information is not available. A

comparison between an analysis using aggregate spending ratio and an analysis using aggregate revenue ratio is made clearer because efficiency is influenced by factors other than expenditure.

Lag and instrument strategies that encourage the addition of new variables address endogeneity and causality issues. Including all explanatory factors, including fiscal decentralization, with a one-period lag is the first step in attempting to reduce any bias. In addition, two-stage least squares methods are used with three instrumental variables to analyze the fiscal decentralization variable. First, despite some exceptions, larger countries often tend to be more decentralized, making population size one of the key factors influencing the decentralization process. The justification for decentralization is that it is more challenging for central authorities in nations with big populations to have access to the information they need to focus on residents' needs. Second, the presence of natural resources may prevent decentralization because fiscal authorities that stand to gain financially from resource windfalls may engage in rent-seeking activities. In these conditions, starting a fiscal decentralization process would entail a subsequent personal loss for the existing authorities. On the other hand, quicker decentralization allows those who live in resource-rich areas to claim larger portions of those resources. The decentralization process may also be sparked by natural resources because windfalls may provide an extra source of cash to divide with the subnational governments. Third, the decentralization process may be impacted by government and legislative system fractionalization. The fractionalization rate is the likelihood that two randomly chosen legislators or members of the executive branch will represent opposing political ideologies. Due to political considerations, higher fractionalization may either slow down decentralization or speed it up. It is impossible to predict priori the expected effects of these latter two instrumental variables on the decentralization process.

1.4. Data Analysis and Presentation

The sample spans the years 2021 to 2022 for Homabay County expenditure estimates for the education and health sectors. The County Financial Statistics is the source used to compile the statistics. Although fiscal decentralization is more prevalent in advanced economies than in emerging economies and developing nations, it has recently increased in the latter two categories. Descriptive statistics of the primary variables utilized in this analysis are provided in Table 1 and Figure 1. Homabay County government implements 36.20 percent of public spending on average.

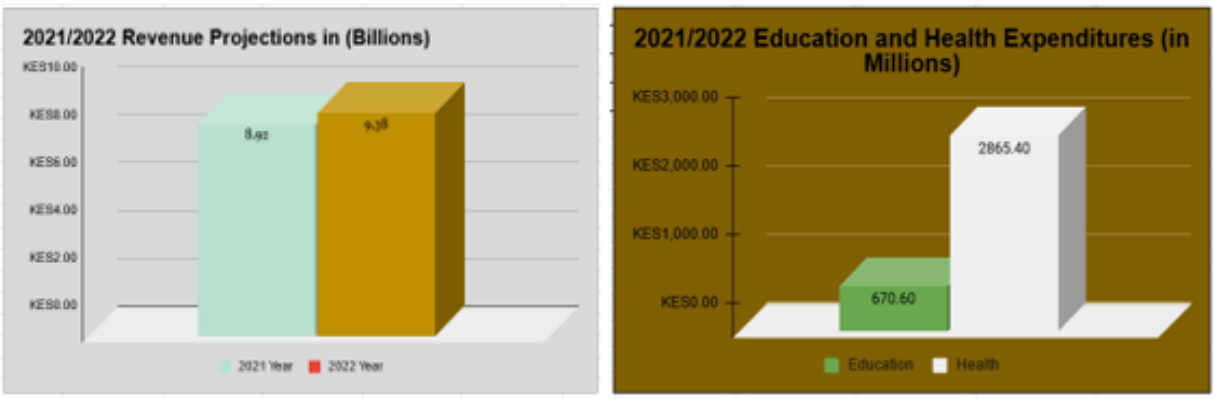

Figure 1. Revenue Projection and Education & Health Expenditure

SOURCE: HBC Budget Statistics

Comparing it to the national government, the legislative system seems to be considerably more fragmented. When compared to members of other county governments, a system with a higher corruption index is considered to be more corrupt; growing economies and developing counties appear to have higher levels of corruption overall.

Table 1. Summary Expenditure Projections by Sector (in Millions of KSh.)

County MTEF Sector	FY 2021/22 DRAFT ESTIMATES			FY 2022/23 DRAFT ESTIMATES			FY 2023/24 DRAFT ESTIMATES		
	Current	**Capital**	**Total**	**Current**	**Capital**	**Total**	**Current**	**Capital**	**Total**
Education	540.60	130.00	670.60	551.70	115.50	667.20	700.50	121.30	579.20
Health	2,422.10	443.30	2,865.40	2,582.30	532.00	3,114.30	2,739.80	650.40	3,390.20
Total Estimates	2,962.70	573.30	3536.00	3134.00	647.50	3781.50	3440.30	771.70	3969.40

1.5. Efficiency Estimates

About 85% of the production frontier is where the average efficiency of the sampled nations lies. The stochastic frontier analysis's expected efficiency for the health sector averages 82.2 percent and for the education sector 87.8 percent. When compared to a fully efficient county with similar input values, a county with an efficiency score of x percent will likely achieve x percent of the possible aim (such as lowering the infant mortality rate or raising the enrollment rate in schools) (such as public expenditure). Based on the suggested method, the benchmark efficiency estimates—columns (1) and (4) in Table 2—were created. Two more approaches are used to assess how reliable the results are. Columns (2) and (4) give efficiency estimates based on Jondrow and coworkers' (1982) work, whereas columns (3) and (5) display estimates that account for heterogeneity and Heteroskedasticity (6). The estimations from the different methods are quite closely connected.

Table 2. Stochastic Frontiers Estimates of Public Service Efficiency

	Estimated Efficiencies					
	Health			**Education**		
	Battese and Coeli	**Jondrow and coworkers (1982)**	**Heterog**	**Battese and Coeli**	**Jondrow and coworkers (1982)**	**Heterog**
Statistics	(1)	2	3	4	5	6
Mean of efficiencies	0.82	0.81	0.84	0.88	0.88	0.88
Standard Deviation	0.09	0.10	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.13
Minimum	0.30	0.29	0.31	0.33	0.33	0.27
Maximum	0.94	0.94	0.98	0.98	0.98	.099

1.6. Direct Channel and Non-Linear Relationship

Directly speaking, expenditure decentralization appears to boost the effectiveness of public service delivery in developed economies, while it has the opposite effect in rising and developing nations. The first stage of the two-stage least squares method, which involves estimating equation (3), indicates whether the instrument variables are appropriate. The latter are usually always significantly connected with the endogenous regressor (the corresponding p-values are 0.05). Moreover, the null hypothesis that "the equations are under-identified" can be rejected at the 5% level using Kleibergen-p Paap's values. Table 3 displays the outcomes of the second stage.

The effectiveness of public spending does not appear to be much impacted by fiscal decentralization when advanced economies, emerging markets, and developing economies are combined (columns 1 and 6). The sample is separated into two groups: advanced economies, and (ii) emerging markets and developing economies because the various countries display varying degrees of decentralization (as demonstrated in the preceding section). Fiscal decentralization has a favorable effect on the effectiveness of public health spending in industrialized economies (column 2).

To put a number on this, it could be said that a 5% rise in fiscal decentralization would result in 2.9 percentage points of efficiency benefits in the provision of public services. For education, the correlation is statistically insignificant (column 7). For emerging markets and developing economies, however, the effects are adverse (columns 3 and 8).

Although the magnitude of the parameters is slightly reduced, these beneficial and detrimental impacts of decentralization, respectively for the first and second group of nations, are robust to the inclusion of time dummies (columns 4,5,9, and 10). This seems to confirm that neither the time-trend evolution of the efficiency ratings nor similar shocks that impact all countries at the same time are what caused the outcomes.

According to a non-linearity analysis, beneficial effects require a high enough level of expenditure decentralization. Equation (4) is used to explore the non-linearity, and the findings are shown in Table 4. The efficiency of public services is considerably impacted across the board for the entire sample by the fiscal decentralization variable and its squared term (columns 1 and 4). It's interesting to note that the former's coefficient is negative while the latter's is positive.

This tends to imply that there is a U-shaped link rather than a linear one between budgetary decentralization and the effectiveness of public service delivery. Fiscal decentralization appears to be deleterious at low levels; to promote health and education, it must be higher than roughly 35.7% and 35.4%, respectively. To reap the benefits of fiscal decentralization, at least one-third of public spending must be transferred to local governments.

The significance of the scale economy in the creation and provision of public services may be implied by this non-linear connection. Since many public services have high starting fixed costs, if the scale of public services is too small at the local level, the local authorities may have to scale back service delivery to lower variable costs and make up for the high initial fixed costs. Be aware, however, that based on factors unique to each nation, the appropriate degree of fiscal decentralization probably varies among nations.

Table 3. Fiscal Decentralization and Public Expenditure Efficiency

	Dependent Variables: estimated efficiencies									
	Health					**Education**				
	All	**Advanced DC**	**EME & Dev C**	**Time dummies**		**All**	**Advanced DC**	**EME & Dev C**	**Time dummies**	
Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
FD	0.109	0.599**	0.322**	0.433**	0.187**	0.0373**	-0.453**	-0.872*	0.800**	0.616**
	(0.925)	(7.956)	(-2.919)	(5.211)	(2.737)	(0.126)	(-0.339)	(-2.545)	(3.674)	(-2.305)
Real GDP	0.035**	0.008	0.023**	0.061**	0.093**	0.020**	0.077**	0.007**	0.044**	0.070**
	(5.402)	(0.778)	2.730	(-3.286)	(-6.865)	(-2.200)	(-4.339)	(-0.386)	(1.284)	(-2.564)
Time Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of Observations	875	269	606	269	606	690	213	477	213	477
Counties	47	35	29	24	19	45	33	27	22	17
Fisher (p-value)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.056	0.000	0.041	0.000	0.249
Hansen OID (p-value)	0.000	0.008	0.000	0.000	0.007	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.042	0.000
KP-under	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.057	0.002	0.048	0.013	0.034
$FD_{(t-1)}$ instrumentation (p-value)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.052	0.000	0.029	0.019	0.029

Table 4. Fiscal Decentralization and Public Expenditure Efficiency (Non-linearity)

	Dependent Variables: estimated efficiencies					
	Health			**Education**		
	All	**FD<fd***	**FD<_E**	**All**	**FD<fd***	FD<_E
Variables	(1)	(2)	3	4	5	6
$FD_{(t-1)}$	-2.27**	-0.797**	0.210**	-1.307**	0.717**	**-0.061****
	(-3.518)	(-3.487)	(2.415)	(-1.963)	(0.980)	**(-0.395)**
$FD^2_{(t-1)}$	3.149**			1.847**		
	(3.622)			(2.259)		
Real $FGP_{(t-1)}$	-0.003	-0.032***	-0.006	-0.035**	0.049	**-0.047*****
	(-0.226)	(2.699)	(-1.056)	(-2.537)	(1.513)	**(-4.222)**
Number of Observations	(1)	2	3	1	2	**3**
Counties	47	35	29	45	33	27
Fisher (p-value)	0.000	0.000	0.049	0.036	0.311	0.000
Hansen OID (p-value)	0.010	0.000	0.188	0.011	0.051	0.176
KP-under	0.001	0.004	0.000	0.077	0.019	0.000
$FD_{(t-1)}$ instrumentation (p-value)	0.000	0.011	0.000	0.052	0.053	0.000
$(FD_{(t-1)})^2$ instrumentation (p-value)	0.000	0.000		0.006		

When the sample observations are divided into those below and those above the suggestive threshold, the U-shaped connection is further supported. A 1% rise in fiscal decentralization affects efficiency in the health sector by approximately 0.8 percentage points when it is below the estimated indicative threshold of 35.7%. (column 2 of Table 4). In contrast, decentralization increases the effectiveness of public service delivery when it reaches or is above the indicative threshold. The efficiency rises by 0.2 percentage points for every 1 percent increase in the decentralization ratio (column 3 of Table 4). When the sample observations are divided, the fiscal decentralization coefficients for education are not statistically significant. The disparate effects of fiscal decentralization in advanced economies, emerging markets, and developing countries confirm the conclusions about the U-shape relationship. According to Table 3, fiscal decentralization has a beneficial impact on public service efficiency in

advanced economies while harming efficiency in emerging markets and developing nations. It's interesting to note that advanced economies often have expenditure decentralization levels of approximately 40%, which is higher than the indicative threshold of about 35%. In contrast, emerging markets and developing nations have an average level of expenditure decentralization that is far lower—about 25%—than the suggested threshold of 35%.

1.7. Political and Institutional Conditions

Fiscal decentralization requires a suitable political and institutional context to enhance public expenditure efficiency. Mwiathi, et al., (2018) concurs that decentralization and its interactions with political and institutional factors seem to have a substantial impact on how well public services are delivered. The effects of fiscal decentralization on the effectiveness of public services are adversely affected by corruption. When corruption is taken into account, a 5 percent increase in the fiscal decentralization ratio is often related to a 2.5 percent drop in the efficiency of public expenditures relative to the mean efficiency. Moreover, local authorities may exercise more discretion and implement fewer regulations, which could allow for the leakage of public funds (Omanya, G. (2021).

On the other hand, the interaction between fiscal decentralization and the political system variables suggests that a parliamentary system combined with fiscal decentralization may increase public expenditure efficiency. Compared to national systems, county governments have more robust institutional frameworks that restrict the executive's latitude. Similarly, Ruto, (2021), observed that decentralization can also increase the effectiveness of providing public services more clearly. Also, the existence of legally independent territories produces statistically significant beneficial effects. Autonomous areas may not be subject to any vertical restrictions that might originate from the national level and affect how public spending is carried out locally. Since the technique was previously adjusted for this variable in the first stage, when measuring the efficiency, it is possible that real GDP per capita, which is utilized as a control variable in most circumstances, has no importance.

Magani, (2018) posits that advanced, rising and developing counties all appear to largely agree that a favorable political and institutional setting enhances the effects of fiscal decentralization on the effectiveness of public service delivery. Corruption has a detrimental influence on both categories and health and education, while the autonomy of regions has a good impact on the relationship between decentralization and public service efficiency. This is the anticipated outcome since poor local administration may induce a misappropriation of decentralized funds and resources, worsening the effectiveness of public service delivery. Local governments must have a sufficient amount of autonomy from the national government for preference matching and allocation efficiency to function well (Magani, 2018).

Appendix I. Homabay County 2021-2024 Budget Estimates

COUNTY MTEF SECTOR	Y 2021/22 DRAFT ESTIMATES			FY 2022/23 DRAFT ESTIMATES			Y 2023/24 DRAFT ESTIMATES		
	Current	Capital	Total	Current	Capital	Total	Current	Capital	Total
Agriculture, Rural and Urban Development	238.9	735.6	974.5	235.6	894.1	1,129.6	247.4	1,005.6	1,252.9
General Economic and Commercial Affairs	147.0	164.4	311.4	149.0	232.5	381.5	160.5	322.2	482.7

Energy, infrastructure, and ICT	75.3	1,237.7	1,313.0	92.5	1,508.3	1,600.7	111.6	1,790.5	1,902.1
Education	540.6	130 .0	670.6	551.7	115.5	667.2	579.2	121.3	700.5
Health	2,422.1	443.3	2,865.4	2,582.3	532.0	3,114.3	2,739.8	650.4	3,390.2
Social Protection, Culture, and Recreation	74.3	154.9	229.2	80.1	185.9	266.0	85.9	217.2	303.1
Environmental Protection, Water and Natural Resources	120.1	376.3	496.4	123.7	440.2	563.9	129.9	512.2	642.1
Public Administration and Inter-Government Relations	2,164.1	360.7	2,524.8	2,348.4	313.8	2,662.2	2,528.6	366.5	2,895.2
Total estimates	5,782.4	3,602.9	9,385.3	6,163.3	4,222.2	10,385.4	6,582.9	4,985.8	11,568.7

Declarations

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The author declares no competing financial, professional, or personal interests.

Consent for publication

The author declares that he/she consented to the publication of this research work.

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