

## **DEVOLUTION AND FOOD SECURITY IN WAJIR COUNTY, KENYA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Based on the subsidiarity principle, devolution is a mechanism of governance that transfers certain responsibilities that were formerly carried out by the central organization to a smaller, more manageable sub-center at a lower level. Devolution was meant to promote socioeconomic development, especially improving people's access to food. Access to adequate and safe food is a critical factor in the achievement SDGs including the good health and wellbeing. Food security is a dynamic area of research. The achievement of Kenya Vision 2030 also is anchored on a food secure country. Additionally, the Constitution of Kenya 2010 puts food access as basic human right. However, majority of households in Kenya remain food insecure. The research thus sought to explore the effect of devolution on enhancing food availability, to assess the effectiveness of devolution in enhancing food access and to evaluate the effect of devolution on food utilization practices. Three theories anchored this study and include public choice theory, fiscal federalism theory, entitlement theory of famine and agency of theory. The research utilized a descriptive research design. The targeted population was formed by the county's residents within the age bracket of 20 to 59 years. Both stratified simple random sampling techniques were utilized. Stratified sampling was utilized to pick participants from the different strata (sub-counties) of Wajir while simple random sampling was done to choose individuals randomly within each strata. Data was mainly gathered via structured questionnaires. After collection of data,

cleaning of data took place to find and rectify any incomplete or partial responses. Initially, the data was key in into Microsoft Excel, and afterwards it was imported into SPSS version 26 for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistical methods were applied to the quantitative data, which included calculation of percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations. The outcomes were displayed in the form of tables, charts, and graphs. From the results, the study concluded that devolution has significantly influenced food availability by decentralizing agricultural functions, aiming to enhance local production and food security. Devolution has empowered local governments to address region-specific challenges in food security. Devolution has enabled localized interventions that address dietary diversity and nutritional outcomes in a predominantly pastoralist region. To enhance food availability in Wajir County, the research recommends that the county government should focus on expanding climate-smart agricultural practices and infrastructure tailored to the region's arid conditions. The county government of Wajir should also prioritize sustained investment in climate-resilient agricultural infrastructure and capacity-building programs. Expanding irrigation schemes can boost of crops. Wajir county government should prioritize community-based nutrition education and capacity-building programs.

**Keywords:** Devolution and Food Security

## **INTRODUCTION**

Devolution refers to the lawful shift of power from a central government to subordinate governmental levels, including local, regional, or state authorities, and is viewed as a type of decentralization (Amah, 2018). It acts as a governance system based on the standard of subsidiarity, which assigns certain duties that were formerly overseen by the central authority to a more localized but competent organization (Jael, 2020). The main reason for devolution is to enhance the efficacy of service provision, as it pursues to transfer governmental roles to the most suitable level for making decision and implementation of policy. This transition is expected to improve information exchange and reduce transaction expenses (Muwonge et al. 2022).

Advocates of devolution believe that it fosters the essential broader engagement of the local community in the making decision process at the local level. Consequently, devolution provides a suitable institutional solution to the changing risk of human food insecurity (Jurlina Alibegović & Slijepčević, 2018). Devolution and decentralization offer various advantages, such as lowering development expenses, encouraging fair distribution of resources, and improving agricultural output. It represents a pragmatic method through which democracy can flourish, promoting citizen involvement and their capacity to affect political processes (Rondinelli, 2017). Devolution has been aimed at promoting socioeconomic growth, including improving food security for the population

Food insecurity is still a global problem, affecting millions of people and communities everywhere. It is defined as the inability to have enough food all the time for a healthy and active life and can be seen in different ways like malnutrition and chronic hunger (Ramos et al., 2022). The existence of food insecurity not only reveals economic disparities but also unearths concerns that are more profound like global warming, wars, and the unfair distribution of food. In many third world countries, poverty together with a lack of infrastructure and limited access to schools and clinics amplify the problem of food insecurity. As argued by Vamba, Kibutu and Musau (2023), rural communities often face significant challenges due to reliance on subsistence farming, susceptibility to climate-related shocks, and lack of market access. Additionally, rapid urbanization strains resources, leading to overcrowding, unemployment, and food deserts where nutritious options are scarce or unaffordable (Fanzo, 2023).

Worldwide, devolution takes place through various types of decentralization of public service goods and services. In China, fiscal decentralization, as a framework for distributing power between central and local authorities, greatly influences how efficiently and effectively local governments allocate fiscal resources. The tax-sharing reform in China that was introduced in 1994 tackled the issue of central and local governments' financial and administrative relations quite effectively. Moreover, China brought up a new phase of food security measures during the period when the resource and conditions for food production were getting more and more restricted. Along with the central special transfer payments, the provincial governors' accountability system for food security has become one of the critical factors that have led to local governments gradually increasing their financial support for agriculture. However, fiscal decentralization turned out to be a significant factor that negatively and heavily impacted the food crop agriculture in the main grain-producing areas (Li & Chu, 2024).

In Africa, the challenge of food insecurity continues to impact economic stability and social progress. Although the continent has immense agricultural potential, various factors lead to this ongoing problem (Jones, Ong & Haynes, 2021). Africa faces challenging climate issues such as droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall patterns that hinder agricultural output. Smallholder farmers, essential to the agricultural sector, frequently have limited access to contemporary farming methods, irrigation systems, and resilient crop types, increasing their susceptibility to climate-related disturbances (Mutuga, 2019). Moreover, the oversight of the agricultural sector, land resources, and access to farming inputs still encounters major challenges resulting in food insecurity.

Food insecurity is still a major problem for many households in South Africa, especially in the country's rural areas, even though the country yields enough food to meet its population's needs. Food insecurity is a possibility for many rural South African homes. Due to its estimated significant population increase, reliance on imports, and the effect of change in climate, South Africa is experiencing difficulties with food availability and access. In South Africa, which has a sizable population and economy, achieving complete food security is still a difficult task. The inability to access food because of poverty is the main cause of food insecurity (Ojogiza & Mubangizi, 2023).

In Ghana, internal revenue generation and resource restructuring to meet local needs drove intergovernmental transfer and the authority of Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs). This provided MMDAs with the power to determine the distribution of funds at the local level, encompassing both locally raised funds and funds sent from the central government. Through support to the agricultural sector, fiscal decentralization in Ghana could reduce household poverty (Agyemang-Duah et al., 2018)

There are several areas in Kenya, mainly in the semi-arid and arid areas, where food insecurity remains a challenge - along with recurrent shocks such as drought and environmental stress. Kenya, like most other nations in sub-Saharan Africa, faces a complex issue of food insecurity that is ultimately manifested in various forms across different areas (Jones et al., 2021). While some areas of the country include fertile agricultural districts and relatively stable food systems, semi-arid and arid areas face chronic food shortages and high levels of malnutrition. Differences in resource access, factors and environmental vulnerabilities contribute to disparity in food access and availability (Ramos *et al.*, 2022).

To improve governance, including the agriculture sector, Kenya began the process of devolution in 2013. Devolution was supposed to distribute powers and resources to specifically county governments to act on local priorities such as food security: food security was an area particularly emphasized in the context of the devolution of the Ministry of Agriculture from the national to the county government level, a significant outcome of devolution was the devolution of the Ministry of Agriculture to the county government level, increasing county autonomy and responsibility for agricultural development and food production (Vamba *et al.*, 2023).

The delegation of power from the Ministry of Agriculture to county governments enabled these entities to be more proactive in addressing agricultural development and food security challenges within their regions (Muhumed & Minja, 2019). Devolution aimed to promote greater community involvement and participation in decision-making about food security, allowing the disadvantaged to play a vital role in shaping and executing the initiatives established for their benefit. Mwenda (2020) claims that devolution, by passing down governance structures and resources, has also facilitated the more precise

and productive drawing out of funds for food security programs, thus making it possible to utilize the local expertise and abilities to tackle the problem of hunger where it is most acute.

Despite being semi-arid, Wajir County has started a number of projects and programs to increase its agricultural output after devolution. Building a massive water dam, boreholes drilling for irrigation, installing solar and wind-powered water pumps for irrigation, hiring more agricultural workers, creating an Agricultural Mechanization Services Centre, installing solar panel systems and windmills for shallow wells in Wajir town and neighbouring wells, giving farmers seeds, a revolving fund for farming collectives, agricultural extension training and information services are among the county's ongoing projects. (Minja & Muhumed, 2019)

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 brought about the devolution system of governance (CoK, 2010). The devolution constituted the transfer of some of the major functions that were undertaken by the national government to devolve units of governance called county governments or counties (Government of Kenya, 2010). County governments offer public services and undertake development projects as stipulated in the Kenya 2010 Constitution. Under devolution, some of fiscal, administrative and political functions were transferred to counties with citizens playing a central role in governance. Early childhood education, rural polytechnics, regional health services, county infrastructure and services, encompassing county transport, commerce growth and regulation, county planning and development, among others. To enhance local socioeconomic development, national responsibilities were assigned to counties

Kenya's devolution aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations and Kenya Vision 2030. By 2030, the Kenya Vision 2030 plan aims to make Kenya a newly industrialized nation. In a similar vein, the 16 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) uncovered by the United Nations are centred on eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting health and well-being, decent work and economic growth, sustainable communities, industrial growth, innovation and education, clean energy and the environment, access to water and sanitation, and robust institutions (UN, 2022). Devolution is therefore seen as a means of attaining sustainable socioeconomic progress and well-being in Kenya.

Kenya adopted a new form of government in August 2010, which included public engagement and the decentralization of authority and resources as essential elements (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). This suggested that different responsibilities are played by local and national authorities in achieving food security. While county governments are in charge of crop and livestock operations, livestock sales, county slaughterhouses, disease prevention in plants and animals, and fisheries, the national government is in charge of agricultural policy (Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

The national government's yearly allotment and each county's own revenue are the primary sources of funding for county governments. According to the CoK (2010), the distribution must adhere to Article 203(2) of the Constitution, which states that counties must receive an equitable share of at least 15% of the most recent audited national revenue that has been approved by the National Assembly. A little more than the minimal amount mandated by Article 203(2) of the Constitution, the Division of Revenue Bill, 2021 allotted 27.3% of the audited national revenue.

One of Kenya's 47 counties, Wajir County is situated in the country's northeast. The Somali ethnic group makes up the majority of its diversified population, which occupies an area of about 56,685 square kilometres. The northern Kenyan county of Wajir exemplifies the difficulties dry and semi-arid regions face in achieving food security. Characterized by sparse vegetation and erratic rainfall patterns, the county is highly susceptible to droughts, which devastate agricultural production and disrupt livelihoods (Vamba *et al.*, 2023). The predominantly pastoralist communities in Wajir rely heavily on livestock for sustenance and income, making them particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in weather conditions and market dynamics. In addition to environmental challenges, Wajir County grapples with systemic challenges like limited access to markets, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient government support. Naburi, Obiri and Mugalavai (2020) assert that the remoteness of many villages exacerbates these challenges, hindering the timely delivery of relief aid and agricultural inputs during times of crisis.

In Wajir County, devolution has led to some notable efforts to advance agricultural production and enhance food security. Local initiatives such as the promotion of drought-resistant crops, the construction of water harvesting infrastructure, and the provision of agricultural extension services have been initiated to prevent the effect of environmental shocks and build resilience among rural communities (Muhumed & Minja, 2019). A rising understanding of the need of tackling food insecurity at the local level is also demonstrated by the creation of local food security committees and the inclusion of food security considerations in county development plans. Nevertheless, Wajir County's food security results have not yet fully benefited from devolution. Progress is nonetheless hampered by enduring issues like insufficient financing, ineffective bureaucracy, and poor agency cooperation. According to Ramos *et al.* (2022), there is still uncertainty over the long-term sustainability of interventions, especially in light of changing and unpredictable climate trends.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Access to adequate and safe food is a critical factor in the achievement of SDGs including the good health and wellbeing. Food security is a dynamic area of research. The achievement of Kenya Vision 2030 also is anchored on a food secure country. Additionally, the Constitution of Kenya 2010 puts food access as a basic human right. However, majority of households in Kenya remain food insecure. As indicated by National Council for Population and Development (2022), 51% of Kenyans cannot access safe, adequate and nutritional food. In Wajir County, 52% of the households are food insecure with 11.2% of the households falling below the WHO threshold (National Drought Management Authority, 2024). The devolution of national county functions in 2013 paved the way for devolution of agricultural activities that forms a major portion in achieving a food secure nation.

The devolution process in Kenya, particularly in Wajir County, aimed to decentralize county tasks including agriculture. Nevertheless, nothing is known about how devolution has affected Wajir County's food security. Previous research, like Claudio *et al.* (2023), emphasizes the changes in resource redistribution and governance brought about by devolution, but it doesn't go into great detail about how it specifically affects food security. Merchany (2022) examines how devolution affects governance and service delivery, although it doesn't specifically look at food availability, access, and use in Wajir. Huho and Mugalavai (2020) highlight the paucity of research on the four main components of food security, access, utilization, availability, and stability but they make



no connection to devolution. Muhumed and Minja (2019) investigate how the devolution of the agricultural sector affects the livelihoods of Wajir County residents, with a particular emphasis on the agriculture sector. By offering a thorough examination of how devolution impacts these crucial facets of food security in Wajir County, this study aims to close these gaps.

### **Research Objectives**

- i. To investigate the effect of devolution on enhancing food availability.
- ii. To assess the effectiveness of devolution in improving food access.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In reviewing studies of previous, this section delved into theories guiding the variables, empirical literature and a conceptual framework.

#### **Theoretical Review**

Three theories anchored this research and include public choice theory and the fiscal federalism theory.

#### **Public Choice Theory**

James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock created public choice theory in 1962. It describes the process of providing public goods, how they are dispersed, and the matching criteria that are established. It is a notion of self-serving individuals governing through commerce. According to Zafirovski (2001), the theory criticises the bureaucratic form of administration since bureaucrats are seen as self-serving administrations where politicians strive to maximise their own interests rather than that of the state's local population. The idea is predicated on several premises. Most economic activity is sufficiently motivated by individual material self-interest, and most political actions are motivated by individual behaviour (Self, 2021).

Nevertheless, public choice theory has been questioned by some scholars. One of the points made by the critics is that the theory primarily points out the self-interested behavior of politicians and bureaucrats in the public sector. According to the opponents, this standpoint is very cynical as it declares that the main drive of public officers is personal gain, thus disregarding the influence of public service and democratic accountability (Spence & Cross, 2000). In addition, detractors claim that the individual incentives that the theory concentrates on can greatly oversimplify the complexity of political interactions, thereby disregarding the wider social, cultural, and institutional influences that affect political decisions. Lowering public behavior to economic self-interest, the theory comes to be viewed as an underestimation of the potentials for cooperative acts and collective decision-making that can occur in public governance (Schnellenbach & Schubert, 2014).

Public Choice Theory comes into play in the research as it points out the power of political incentives and responsibility brought about by the transfer of resources in determining policies at the grassroots level. The absence of robust accountability systems may lead to mismanagement and dishonest practices in the distribution of funds earmarked for food security. Hence, Public Choice Theory stresses the need for knowledgeable electorate to make their voices heard and also for good governance to

make devolution a factor for the betterment of food security in Wajir County, Kenya, in the long run.

### **Fiscal Federalism Theory**

Musgrave (1959) created the fiscal federalism theory. The theory addresses the allocation of governmental responsibilities and the financial relationships between governmental levels. According to the theory, distributing duties (including money) across the federal, state, and local governments increases economic efficiency and accomplishes a number of public policy goals. Musgrave (1959) argued that while state and local governments should be in control of resource allocation, the federal government should be responsible for stabilization of economic and redistribution of income. Bird (1999) claims that the notion of fiscal federalism deals with the prudent distribution of public-sector resources and responsibilities among different levels of government.

Fiscal federalism holds that a federal system of government may successfully and efficiently handle problems that countries currently face, like resource allocation, economic stability, and equal income distribution (Kapucu, 2016; Driessen & Hughes, 2020). Theoretically, fiscal decentralization has many advantages, including the ability to accommodate regional and local differences, administrative costs, lower planning competition among local governments that encourages political and organizational innovation, and improved political efficacy as a result of increased citizen influence (Oates, 2008; Chandra Jha, 2015). However, fiscal federalism has its own disadvantages, such as the abuse of state and local governments' independence from the federal government, which results in resource misappropriation, and their lack of accountability to their constituents.

The theory is pertinent to the investigation in order to comprehend the rationale for devolution. In the context of this study, it is crucial to divide government tasks among the lower tier levels of governments, such as counties, in accordance with the fiscal federalism idea. As grassroots citizens actively participate in their local government's prioritization of agricultural initiatives, the separation of functions improves economic efficiency. The economic effects of devolution can be assessed in this study within the framework of Wajir County's agricultural expansion.

### **Food Security**

One of the main tenets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which must be accomplished by 2030, is access to sufficient and secure food (Atukunda et al., 2021). Furthermore, achieving the other SDGs, such as excellent health and wellbeing, depends critically on having access to sufficient and safe food (Mustafa et al., 2021). However, food insecurity remains one of perennial problem confronting many households globally. According to United Nations report (2021), an estimated 720 million to 811 million people faced food starvation in 2020 up from 693 million people in 2019 worldwide. In 2021, 957 million people faced food starvation worldwide (UN, 2022). As the year 2030 nears, it is evidently clear that the achievement of the global commitment to zero hunger may not be achieved.

According to Global Hunger Index (GHI) data, the globe as a whole, and 47 nations in particular, would fail to reach a low hunger rate by 2030, as predicted in the SDGs. (World Health Organization, 2021). The Global Report on Food Crisis 2021 estimated that 155 million people in 55 crisis-prone countries were severely food insecure and in



urgent need of aid (FAO, 2021). The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation claimed that this was the greatest number of cases since 2016. By 2024, 20 million additional people are expected to experience food insecurity, a 12.9% increase from the 155 million in 2021.

Food availability, access, utilization, and stability make up food security. The existence of adequate amounts of food of suitable quality that are supplied to the populace through imports or domestic production is referred to as food availability. Assistance and contributions represent an additional method to ensure food accessibility. Food access refers to a person's capacity to obtain sufficient resources to obtain a wholesome and superior meal. Utilization concentrates on acquiring food through a sufficient diet, clean water, healthcare, and sanitation in order to achieve nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are satisfied. Regarding food security, stability signifies that a population consistently has sufficient food access; therefore, stability encompasses both food availability and accessibility (Mbow et al., 2020). Kenya's agriculture sector is a vital industry, as it contributes significantly to food security, employs over 75% of the population, and accounts for more than 25% of the country's GDP (Kogo et al., 2021)

### **Empirical Literature Review**

The review of earlier research on the subject is described in this part. The part is structured as per the study's goals.

#### **Devolution of the Agricultural Sector and Food Availability**

Muhumed and Minja (2019) investigated the impact of the agricultural sector's devolution on Wajir County people's means of subsistence. The study employed a descriptive survey methodology. All Wajir sub-county small-scale farmers and agricultural officers were part of the target population. The results show that food security, sources of income, and household empowerment in Wajir County have all been greatly impacted by the devolution of agricultural activity. The county government now offers extension services, financing, inputs like fertilizers, and credit for farming endeavours as a result of the decentralization of agricultural activity. This has increased food production, which has significantly improved income creation and food security. Nowadays, small-scale farmers raise cattle in addition to crops.

Kyambo (2023) examined how agricultural sector devolution affected agricultural productivity and the delivery of agricultural extension services in Kitui County, Kenya. Small-scale farmers and extension agents were chosen as the research's target population using stratified random sampling. The survey utilized primary and secondary data. The participants thought that the county government's performance in providing extension services was inadequate due to problems like inadequate transportation, delayed salary payments, incorrect staff promotions, ambiguous terms of service without duplication, an unfavourable work environment, and little support for extension activities. Due to the limited involvement of county extension workers in developing and implementing work plans, as well as the national monitoring and oversight, there is minimal contact between agricultural extension operations carried out by county and federal administrations.

In Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, Boor (2019) studied the relationship between improving food security and implementing a devolved agricultural form of governance. Souffle's decentralization theory served as the study's compass. The causal study design and a descriptive survey were employed. The outcomes revealed that food security is greatly improved by devolved public-private partnerships, devolved personnel, and devolved

funding. Food security is not considerably improved by devolved agricultural extension services.

Muia (2019) did a study in Lodwar, Turkana County, Kenya, to investigate the connection between rural populations' access to food and the devolution of agricultural extension services. The study evaluated the efficiency of decentralized extension programs in providing smallholder farmers with agricultural knowledge and technologies using a quantitative survey approach that was complemented by qualitative interviews. The outcomes uncovered a strong positive relationship between increases in agricultural productivity and, consequently, food availability and the degree of devolution in extension services. However, the study found a methodological flaw in the way food availability indicators were measured, highlighting the necessity of standardized metrics to support policy assessments and cross-study comparisons.

Vamba et al. (2023) performed a longitudinal examination in Makueni County, Kenya that scrutinized the long-term impact of devolution policies on agricultural investments and food supply in decentralized areas. The research based its findings on the application of agricultural economics theories, and the technique implemented for the analysis of the data was panel data analysis. The case revealed that the countries with devolved governance structures then to be more attractive to invest in agriculture, thus resulting in gradual improvements in food production and supply. Yet, the study noted a contextual gap regarding the different impacts of devolution across regions having administrative capacities and resource endowments that are at different levels.

Abdi and Minja (2023) examined the impact of county government practices on rural development, utilizing Wajir County as a case study. The authors based the research on stakeholder management, participatory development, and good governance. This research applied mixed methods, which produced a more rounded and trustworthy dataset. A typical sample of government employees in Wajir County was surveyed using structured questionnaires to obtain the quantitative data. The findings emphasized that governance practices are influential in rural development.

### **Devolution of the Agricultural Sector and Food Access**

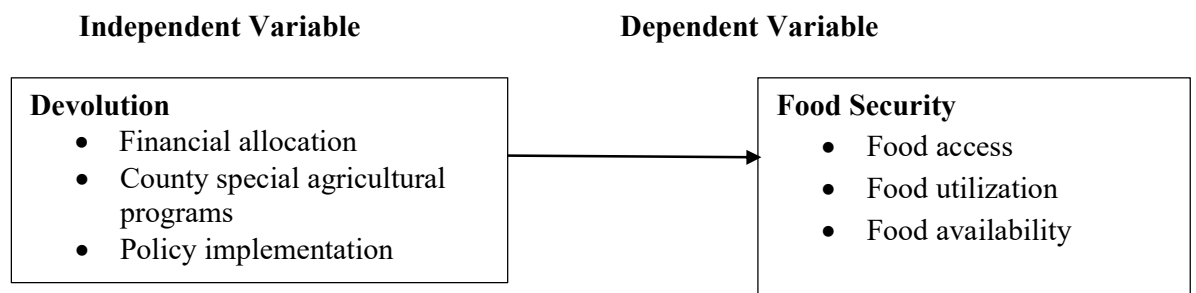
Resnick (2022) investigated accountability as potential factor that could undermine service delivery through the case of the impact of agriculture devolution in Ghana. The study sample consisted of district directors and households. Principle and secondary data were jointly employed for the research. One of the consequences of the research was the indication that expenditures and services in agriculture had been adversely affected by the transition. Devolution of the agricultural sector could ultimately lead to better food production and subsequently better food accessibility.

Desmond and Asamba (2020) made an extensive study concerning resource allocation, service delivery, food insecurity, and inequalities affecting the marginalized areas in South Africa by using decentralization and governance theories. The survey utilized a mixed-method approach that involved surveys, interviews, and econometric analysis and came to the conclusion that the inequalities in resource allocation and service delivery which were existing in the devolved counties in the southern part of the country, contributed to food insecurity in the marginalized areas. Nevertheless, a gap of context was revealed by them in the scenario of the specific socio-economic contexts that are influencing the impacts of devolution on food access outcomes.

Ndung'u (2019) focused on assessing the role of devolution in the economic development potentials in Kenya. The approach utilized in the survey encompassed governance theories, principal-agent theory, and institutional economics. The researcher then continued to analyze the collected data with the help of quantitative analysis through surveys and statistical modeling. The analyzed data indicated that devolution had positive impacts on agricultural extension services and infrastructure, which in turn, resulted to enlarged crop yields and incomes among the smallholder farmers in the devolved counties. However, they still pointed out the existence of a theoretical gap in indulgent the nuanced effect of devolution on governance structures and institutional dynamics shaping agricultural development.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This comprises a diagrammatic representation of the anticipated linkage between the identified variables in the research. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework.



### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This survey utilized a descriptive research design. This method seeks to methodically characterize and assess how devolution has affected Wajir County's food security. In order to address certain research issues, it entails gathering and evaluating data without changing any variables (Creswell, 2019). The research was done in the northern Kenyan county of Wajir. Wajir County was selected because of its distinct socioeconomic and topographical features, which offer an interesting setting for analyzing how devolution affects food security. Its remote location and underdeveloped infrastructure further exacerbate issues of food access and utilization. Wajir County's population relies heavily on pastoralism, making it highly vulnerable to climatic variability and resource-based conflicts (Vamba *et al.*, 2023).

The target population comprises the household heads in Wajir County. Based on 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, the total households of Wajir County were 127,932. Thus, the target population for the study were 127,932 household heads. The study also involved of the officials from Wajir County Government. Wajir County has eight sub-counties, namely Wajir North, Wajir East, Tarbaj, Wajir West, Eldas, Buna, Habaswein and Wajir South. The unit of analysis was households while the unit of observation was the household heads. Both stratified and basic random sample techniques were used in this investigation on how devolution affected food security in Wajir County. The sample was chosen using stratified sampling from the different Wajir County sub-counties, or strata. Simple random sampling was utilized to choose individuals at random within each stratum. This method reduces bias and enhances the

generalizability of the results by ensuring that every individual within a stratum has an equal chance of selection (Dhivyadeepa, 2018)

The research utilized Yamane's (1967) simplified formula to determine how many carers of beneficiaries will take part in the research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). A representative sample of 399 respondents was scientifically determined. Questionnaires were utilized to gather primary data. Households dispersed throughout Wajir County's Sub-Counties and ministry officials more especially, the Governor and CEC members of the county's several ministries were the responses. These techniques support the research topics by enabling a thorough examination of participants' viewpoints and experiences on devolution and its effects on food security indicators (Pawar, 2018).

Quantitative data analysis techniques were utilized in the investigation. Before being uploaded to SPSS software version 26 for statistical analysis, the quantitative data was cleansed to look for missing or incomplete data and entered using Microsoft Excel. Quantitative data was examined using descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis, including percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations, was exhibited via tables, charts, and graphs.

The Chi square ( $\chi$ ) statistic was utilized to explore the linkage between food security, as measured by food access, availability, and utilization, and devolution, as measured by financial allocation to agriculture, the existence of county special agricultural programs, and the implementation of agricultural policies. The model's significance level was tested using a 5% confidence interval.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

Out of all the 399 instruments distributed, 323 were properly completed and returned, yielding an 81% response rate. The research did not achieve a 100% response rate since the bank did not get all of the surveys, and some responders gotten the questionnaires but did not finish them. As per results, 48.9% of participants were men and 49.2% of respondents were women. As a result, women made up the majority of responders.

Data on age distribution indicated that, 15.2% of participants were between the ages of 20 and 30, 29.7% were between the ages of 31 and 40, 34.1% were between the ages of 41 and 50, 14.2% were between the ages of 51 and 60, 6.2% were over the age of 60, and 0.6% did not specify their age range. According to these findings, most participants were in the 31–50 age range. Data on education levels attained by the respondents indicated that 16.7% of the responders had KCSE as their highest level of education, 8.7% held certificate, 16.1% diploma, 15.2% degree while 42.7% of the respondents possessed other levels of education including uneducated, primary levels and masters level while 0.6% of the respondents did indicate their levels of education. Data on subcounty distribution indicated that .7% of the respondents were from Wajir North, 10.2% from Wajir East, 8.7% Tarbaj, 15.8% Wajir West, 13.6% Eldas and 44% of the respondents were from Wajir South. Data on livestock reared indicated that 2.8% of the respondents were rearing camels, 1.9% were rearing cattle, 9.3% were rearing sheep, 13.3% were rearing goats, 45.8% were rearing a mix of livestock including a mix of sheep, goats and

cattle while 26.9% indicated that they were rearing other types of livestock such as chicken.

### **Household Food Consumption after Devolution**

The study further conducted an analysis on household consumption after devolution and the results are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1: Household Food Consumption after Devolution**

		Days							
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
In the past week, how many days did your household eat cereal?	n	0	0	3	1	5	24	24	264
	%	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.3	1.5	7.4	7.4	81.7
During the past week, how many days has your family eaten tubers?	n	4	14	21	38	23	51	76	90
	%	1.2	4.3	6.5	11.8	7.1	15.8	23.5	27.9
In the past week, how many days did your household eat vegetables?	n	31	43	36	45	35	79	40	8
	%	9.6	13.3	11.1	13.9	10.8	24.5	12.4	2.5
In the past week, how many days has your household eaten fruit?	n	46	65	64	51	33	48	13	0
	%	14.2	20.1	19.8	15.8	10.2	14.9	4.0	0.0
In the past week, how many days did anyone in your household consume organ meats like beef, lamb, goat, chicken, liver, kidney, or heart	n	4	23	20	26	29	68	59	93
	%	1.2	7.1	6.2	8.0	9.0	21.1	18.3	28.8
In the past week, how many days has your household consumed eggs?	n	87	54	57	41	22	45	11	1
	%	26.9	16.7	17.6	12.7	6.8	13.9	3.4	0.3

From the results, the most consumed products by the respondents in Wajir County were cereals (81.7% of the respondents indicated that their households consumed cereals for 7 days in the past one week), sugar (70.9% of the respondents indicated that their households consumed cereals for 7 days in the past one week), milk/ milk products (72.8% of the respondents indicated that their households consumed cereals for 7 days in the past one week) and oil/ fat (65% of the respondents indicated that their households consumed cereals for 7 days in the past one week). The least consumed product was any fresh or dried fish or shellfish (89.5% of the respondents indicated that their households

had not consumed them completely in the past one week). It is notable that cereals were consumed by all the respondents for at least once a week. In addition, products such as tubers, vegetables, fruits, any beef, lamb, goat, chicken, liver, kidney, heart, or other organ meats and eggs were common among the households. Nayak (2019) underscored the importance of devolved governance structures in empowering local communities to manage natural resources effectively, thereby improving food availability and resilience to environmental shocks. van Wyk and Dlamini (2019) underscored the significance of decentralized governance structures in tailoring agricultural policies to local needs, thereby enhancing food production and availability.

### Awareness and Perception of Devolution

The outcomes of the research of respondents' awareness and perceptions of devolution are shown in the sections that follow.

**Table 2: Awareness and Perception of Devolution**

		Frequency	Percent
Are you aware of the devolved government system in Kenya?	Yes	272	84.5%
	No	50	15.5%
Do you believe devolution has improved food security in Wajir County?	Yes	164	50.9%
	No	93	28.9%
	Not		
	Sure	65	20.2%

On whether the respondents were aware of the devolved government system in Kenya, 84.5% of the respondents were aware while 15.5% of them were not. On whether the respondents believe devolution has improved food security in Wajir County, 50.9% believed that devolution has improved food security in Wajir County, 28.9% did not while 20.2% were not sure. In an interview with one of the key informants, the key informant had this to say, *“Devolution has empowered Wajir County to set its own development priorities that reflect the lived realities of pastoralism, drought, and rural poverty. This has led to more responsive, sustainable, and community-driven food security efforts.”* Another informant noted that, *“Devolution brought a sense of equality among regions. Devolution brought the concept of public participation. However, public participation forums are conducted in a bid to enhance citizen participation but most of the opinions captured are not featured in the implementation stage.”* Vamba et al. (2023) found that devolved governance structures incentivized increased investment in agriculture, leading to improvements in food production and availability over time. Additionally, Abdi and Minja (2023) remarked that governance practices play a significant role in fostering rural development.

The respondents were also asked on the government programs that contributed to food security in their area and the results are outlined in Table 3.



**Table 3: Government Programs**

	<b>Frequenc y</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Food distribution programs	53	16.4
Agricultural extension services	32	9.9
Livestock vaccination and support	47	14.6
Water projects for farming and livestock	34	10.5
Food distribution programs and agricultural extension services	11	3.4
Food distribution programs and livestock vaccination and support	18	5.6
Food distribution programs and water projects for farming and livestock	3	0.9
Food distribution, agricultural extension services, livestock vaccination and water projects for farming and livestock	42	13
Food distribution programs, agricultural extension services and livestock vaccination and support	10	3.1
Food distribution programs, livestock vaccination and support and water projects for farming and livestock	7	2.2
Agricultural extension services, livestock vaccination and support	4	1.2
Agricultural extension services and water projects for farming and livestock	8	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>100</b>

Among the government programs in place in Wajir county that have contributed to food security included food distribution programs (16.4%), livestock vaccination and support (14.6%), water projects for farming and livestock (10.5%) and a combination of food distribution, agricultural extension services, livestock vaccination and water projects for farming and livestock (13%). In an interview with one of the key informants, the informant had this to say, *“Some of the programs initiated by Wajir County towards enhancing food security include supporting farmers across the county with fertilizer and other farming tools, distribution of relief food, providing grants for farmers, tree planting, water infrastructural development and providing solar panels.”* Nayak (2019) underscored the importance of devolved governance structures in empowering local communities to manage natural resources effectively, thereby improving food availability and resilience to environmental shocks. van Wyk and Dlamini (2019) underscored the significance of decentralized governance structures in tailoring agricultural policies to local needs, thereby enhancing food production and availability. As per the Njagi et al. (2018), the constitutional necessity of public engagement was heavily emphasized during the planning process. The sector's share of the overall budget remained low, despite the fact that financing for it had increased in many counties. Once more, there was still room for improvement in terms of cooperation between the two levels of government and between county administrations.

Additionally, the participants were asked how satisfied they were with the county government's efforts to increase food security. Table 4 displays the findings.

**Table 4: Level of Satisfaction**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very satisfied	9	2.8%
Satisfied	128	40.0%
Neutral	98	30.6%
Dissatisfied	59	18.4%
Very dissatisfied	26	8.1%

From the results, 2.8% of the participants were very satisfied, 40% were satisfied, 30.6% were neutral, 18.4% were dissatisfied while 8.1% were very dissatisfied. Nayak (2019) underscored the importance of devolved governance structures in empowering local communities to manage natural resources effectively, thereby improving food availability and resilience to environmental shocks. Kyambo (2023) states that most of the people involved in the research thought the county government provided insufficient extension services. They largely attributed this to several problems like bad transportation, late salaries, wrong staff promotions, vague terms of employment, uncomfortable working conditions, and lack of support for the extension efforts. In addition, county extension personnel are hardly ever invited to participate in the development and execution of work plans or in the national monitoring and supervision processes, which causes a lack of interaction between county and federal agricultural extension programs.

The responders were also questioned about the difficulties they have in obtaining county food security programs. The outcomes are exhibited in Table 5

**Table 5: Challenges in Accessing County Food Security Programs**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Corruption and mismanagement	52	16.1
Poor information flow	24	7.4
Limited funding/resource	22	6.8
Corruption and mismanagement and poor information flow	41	12.7
Corruption and mismanagement and political interference	12	3.7
Corruption and mismanagement and limited funding/resources	20	6.2
Poor information flow and political interference	2	0.6
Poor information flow and limited funding/resources	31	9.6
Political interference and limited funding/resources	1	0.3
Corruption and mismanagement, poor information flow and political interference	57	17.6
Total	323	100

The most notable challenge faced by the respondents in accessing county food security programs in Wajir County was corruption and mismanagement, poor information flow and limited funding/resources (17.6%). In addition, 1.9% of the respondents also cited other challenges. In an interview with one of the key informants, the informant had this to say, *Corruption, ethnicity and misplaced priorities in development agendas. Other*

challenges include inequality, favoritism, nepotism, inadequate technical capacity as well as poor implementation and follow-up on food security projects.” Another informant noted that, “Climate change and drought - Wajir County is prone to drought, which can significantly impact food security. Policies addressing food and water security are often not implemented or are based on inadequate scientific evidence.” According to Njagi et al. (2018), planning was done with a strong focus on the constitutional mandate of public engagement. The sector's share of the overall budget remained low, despite the fact that financing for it had increased in many counties. Once more, there was still room for improvement in terms of cooperation between the two levels of government and between county administrations. Kyambo (2023) points out that in general, the respondents considered the extension services provided by the county government to be poor. They reported a number of problems such as: lack of means of transport, late payment of salaries, unfair promotions, unclear terms of service (with no duplication), bad working conditions, and low support for extension activities. Moreover, because the county extension staff are only slightly involved in making and executing workplans, and also in monitoring and supervising at the national level, there is a lack of integration between agricultural extension activities done by the county and the federal governments.

#### **Food Availability and Access**

The study also did an analysis on food availability and access and the outcomes are exhibited in Table 6.

**Table 6: Food Availability and Access**

		<b>Frequenc y</b>	<b>Percent</b>
What are your household's main sources of food?	Own farm produce	3	0.9%
	Purchased from markets	307	95.3%
	Food aid	1	0.3%
	Borrowing from neighbours	0	0.0%
	Others	11	3.4%
Number of meals per day	One	13	4.0%
	Two	59	18.3%
	Three	248	76.8%
	More than three	3	0.9%
Frequency food shortages	Never	4	1.3%
	Rarely (1-2 times a year)	182	57.1%
	Occasionally (3-5 times a year)	113	35.4%
	Frequently (More than 5 times a year)	20	6.3%
Causes of food insecurity	Drought	206	64.0%
	Floods	129	40.1%
	Poor road infrastructure	272	84.5%
	High food prices	216	67.1%
	Conflict/ insecurity	8	2.5%

	Others	7	2.2%
Coping with food shortages	Reducing meal portions	263	81.7%
	Skipping meals	117	36.3%
	Borrowing food or money	43	13.4%
	Selling livestock of assets	66	20.5%
	Migrating to another area	3	0.9%
	Others	10	3.1%
Receipt of Food Assistance	Yes	170	53.1%
	No	150	46.9%
From whom	County Government	135	44.7%
	National Government	104	34.4%
	NGOs/Donors	26	8.6%
	Others	126	41.7%
Sufficiency of food for the last ten years.	Yes	78	24.2%
	No	244	75.8%
food situation in the last 10 years	Yes	72	22.4%
	No	250	77.6%

From the results, 95.3% indicated that they purchase food from markets, 0.9% source from own farm produce, 0.3% from food aid and 3.4% from other sources. In addition, 76.8% of the respondents also indicated that they consume three meals per day, 18.3% two meals a day, 4% one meal a day and 0.9% more than three meals a day. Regarding the frequency of experiencing food shortages, 57.1% of the respondents indicated that they rarely (1-2 times a year) experience food shortages, 35.4% occasionally (3-5 times a year), 6.3% frequently (more than 5 times a year) and 1.3% pointed that they never experience food shortages. Ndung'u (2019) revealed that devolution led to improvements in agricultural extension services and infrastructure, resulting in increased crop yields and incomes among smallholder farmers in devolved counties.

The respondents were also asked on the causes of food insecurity in Wajir County and from the results, majority of the respondents (84.5%) pointed out poor road infrastructure, 67.1% of the respondents cited high food prices, 64% cited drought, 40.1% pointed out floods, 2.5% conflict/insecurity and 2.2% pointed out other causes. On the ways of coping with food insecurity, 81.7% indicated they reduce meal portions, 36.3% pointed to skipping meals, 20.5% indicated to selling livestock assets, 13.4% indicated borrowing food or money, 0.9% indicated migrating to another area and 3.1% indicated other ways. Nhede (2019) concluded that devolved governance structures facilitated the formulation and implementation of policies targeting agricultural development and poverty reduction, positively influencing food access indicators such as dietary diversity and nutritional outcomes. Further, Desmond and Asamba (2020) concluded that

persistent inequalities in resource allocation and service delivery across devolved counties exacerbated food insecurity in marginalized regions.

The respondents were also asked whether they receive food assistance and 53.1% indicated they receive, 46.9% indicated they do not. For those who receive food assistance, 44.7% received from county government, 34.4% from national government, 8.6% from Donors/NGOs and 41.7% from other sources. The respondents were also asked on whether they have been having sufficient food for the last ten years and 75.8% of the responders indicated that food was not sufficient, 24.2% indicated that food was sufficient. According to Vamba et al. (2023), devolution benefits mango growers by giving them more power to make decisions, providing subsidies for agricultural inputs, and generally improving their quality of life. Mango marketing and agricultural devolution were significantly positively correlated. The survey uncovered that the mango-marketing cooperatives helped the farmers but that the Makueni County government, on the other hand, did not give mango growers enough marketing opportunities. Consequently, the farmers received low prices for their products, got fewer loans, and had restricted access to markets.

On whether food situation has remained the same in the last 10 years, 77.6% indicated that their food situation has remained the same in the last 10 years while 22.4% were of the contrary opinion. A total of 52.2% of participants said the county government has been very engaged in agriculture over the past ten years, while 47.8% disagreed. In terms of food affordability during the past ten years, 82.8% of respondents said it has been affordable, while 17.2% said it has not. According to Ndung'u (2019), smallholder farmers in devolved counties saw higher crop yields and earnings as a result of improvements in agricultural extension services and infrastructure brought about by devolution.

On whether there is availability of more food variety today than there was 10 years ago, 83.9% of the respondents indicated that more variety of food has been available while 16.1% indicated that more variety of food has not been available. The results are consistent with the research of Muhumed and Minja (2019), who stated that the transfer of agricultural powers has greatly affected the food security in Wajir County, the sources of income, and the empowerment of households. The devolution has led the county government to provide extension services, funding, inputs like fertilizers, and credit facilities to farmers as a way of supporting the agricultural activities. Food production has expanded as a result, greatly enhancing income creation and improving food security. Nowadays, small-scale farmers raise both livestock and crops.

In an interview with some of the key informants in the study, they had this to say; *“The decentralized governance framework has supported small scale farmers by taking resources closer to the people including distributing free fertilizers, improved resource allocation, equipping farmers with the necessary agricultural skills and tools such as solar panels as well as improving infrastructure for food access. The devolved*

*governance system has also been effective in distribution of relief food to households affected by droughts and in timely and effective vaccination of livestock.” Another key informant had this to say, “Devolution has aided Wajir County government to respond very early to local food production shocks such as drought and floods leading better improvement of food security in the county.” In an interview with some of the key informants in the study, they had this to say; “Through county-level disaster preparedness, the county government has started boreholes and water pans and food and fodder distribution during dry seasons. There has also been increased collaboration with development partners and NGOs”.*

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

The process of devolution has made a marked impact on food availability, as it brought agricultural functions back to the local level, the very aim being to improve the local production and thus the food security. One of the positive effects of the devolution of agricultural services has been that the county is now in a position to offer extension services, farm inputs, and irrigation infrastructure. All this has resulted in an increase in food production and income generation, making less dependency on livestock and relief food. The county, although characterized by arid climate and heavily relying on pastoralism, is still growing the crops such as sorghum, maize, and horticultural items. Still, the agricultural productivity is being affected by frequent drought and poor infrastructure, made worse by below-normal rainfall.

Devolution has enabled local governments to tackle food security challenges that are specific to their regions. The devolved agricultural functions of the county government have introduced interventions such as irrigation schemes, providing farm inputs and extension services that have improved local production of food crops. Localized decision-making under devolution has encouraged region-specific responses with water pans and cash transfer programs that have increased food access and availability in parts of the county. Nevertheless, the progress made through devolution to improve food access in Wajir remains constrained by persistent challenges, including recurrent drought, poor infrastructure and funding. Food insecurity continues to exist due to unpredictable rainfall. Poor roads have inhibited the distribution of locally produced foods and reliance on relief food has revealed the thinking and oneth to formulate sustainable solutions.

Devolution has enabled localized interventions that address dietary diversity and nutritional outcomes in a predominantly pastoralist region. Through devolved agricultural programs, the county has promoted the cultivation of nutrient-rich crops like sorghum, cowpeas, and vegetables, diversifying diets traditionally reliant on livestock products. County-led extension services and nutrition education campaigns have encouraged better food preparation and preservation techniques, reducing waste and improving household consumption patterns. These efforts, driven by devolution’s



flexibility to tailor solutions to local needs, have incrementally improved food utilization despite the county's arid environment and limited arable land.

### **Recommendations**

To enhance food availability in Wajir County, the study recommends that the county government should focus on expanding climate-smart agricultural practices and infrastructure tailored to the region's arid conditions. Investing in scalable irrigation systems, such as solar-powered drip irrigation and mega water pans, can boost production of drought-resistant crops. Strengthening extension services by training more agricultural officers and providing subsidized seeds and fertilizers, can empower pastoralist communities to diversify into crop farming. Furthermore, establishing local seed banks and promoting agroforestry can enhance long-term food production resilience. These devolved interventions, supported by localized policymaking, can reduce the county's reliance on relief food. Developing rural road networks and storage facilities, such as cold chains for horticultural produce, would minimize losses and connect farmers to markets, stabilizing food supply chains.

The county government of Wajir should also prioritize sustained investment in climate-resilient agricultural infrastructure and capacity-building programs. Expanding irrigation schemes can boost of crops. Strengthening extension services and providing subsidized inputs can further empower smallholder farmers to increase yields and diversify food sources. Furthermore, improving market linkages through better road networks would reduce post-harvest losses and enhance access to local and regional markets, ensuring food reaches communities efficiently.

Wajir county government should prioritize community-based nutrition education and capacity-building programs. Devolved extension services can promote awareness of diverse, nutrient-rich diets by training community health workers and local leaders to educate households on preparing balanced meals using locally grown crops. Supporting women's groups with resources for small-scale food processing, such as solar drying or milling, can enhance the shelf life and usability of local produce, ensuring better food utilization.

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