

Development Projects as Mechanisms for Delivery of Public Services in Kenya

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Introduction

The provision of public services is an important role of governments in developing economies like Kenya. Citizens look to their governments to provide responsive, quality and timely services. The poor state of public services has sparked public reform initiatives in a number of developing countries including Kenya. For example in Kenya, public reforms like performance contracting were introduced as a result of Kenyans' concern about the poor state of public services (Opiyo, 2006). Thus, the push for the provision and delivery of quality and timely public services has come to play a critical and envious role in public sector reforms in the country.

However, while the provision and delivery of public services has come to occupy a special place in the public sector reform architecture in Kenya, few Kenyans appreciate and understand the strategic role that (development) projects play in the production and delivery of these services. Abuya (2016) argues that development projects in Kenya have become the principal mechanisms through which governments deliver public services. Understanding this strategic role is important because few politicians and citizens appreciate the role that development projects play in the delivery of essential public services. We argue in this paper that most of the critical services that citizen care about, like mortorable roads, clean and safe rural and urban water, public education, security, electricity and a host of other services, are delivered through well designed development projects.

Importance of Public Services

Public services are services provided by government to citizens living within its jurisdiction, either directly through public sector agencies, or by financing provision of services through private organizations. Even where public services are publicly funded or privately financed, for social and political reasons, they are usually subjected to governmental regulations.

Public services are distinctive because they are characterized by claims of rights by citizens to services that have been authorized and funded through some democratic process (Moore, 1995). These services are called public services because governments have direct responsibility for them (Martin, 2004). However, this does not mean that private sector organizations cannot provide these services. But the '*publicness*' of these services must remain distinct, whether they are delivered by private, government, or through government/ private sector partnerships (Haque,2001). Irrespective of who provides these services, these services are essentially delivered through projects.

To appreciate the critical role and importance of public services, we review Van de Walle and Scott (2001) conceptualization of public services. Van de Walle and Scott (2001) argue that one

of the reasons why the provision of public services is critical for governments the world over, is because these services make governments to be visible to its citizens, since they (public services) often form the principal tangible link between the government and its citizens. This means that the government's visibility can be illuminated through the quality of public services it provides to its citizens, and the responsiveness of these services.

Van de Walle and Scott (2001) propose a second reason for the criticality of public services. They argue that apart from the fact that public services provide tangible link between the government and the citizens, public services also carry and diffuse the values of the government in power and contribute to the bonding of the government and its citizens (Van de Walle and Scott (2001). The value of an existing government is seen in the type and quality of public services that it provides to its citizens. A government that cares about the welfare of its people provides quality and timely services, while a non responsive government may not care much about the quality and timeliness of the public services it provides (Makanyeza, Kwandayi, & Ikobe, 2013).

The third reason for the critical role of public services is that they provide a direct link between citizens and their government. According to Van de Walle and Scott (2001), public services are citizen's direct link to the government: they make the government tangible through an almost daily interaction with its citizens. The daily interactions that citizens have with public services, provides a critical avenue for citizen assessment of the responsiveness of their governments. Citizens see their government in the services that the government provides (Newton and Norris, 2000).

This means that citizens interact with government through public services. In fact, citizens 'feel', experience and develop trust in their government through the public services provided. For example, citizens feel and experience their government through public healthcare, road transport, water and sanitation. When these services are provided within a timely and quality framework, most citizens will applaud their government as an effective and working government, but when these services are not available or are poorly delivered, citizens will complain about the absence of government (Newton and Norris, 2000).

Van de Walle and Scott (2001) posit that governments are shaped by images and practices, and that public services provided by governments contribute to the creation of these images and practices. Citizens perceptions of their government are influenced to a greater extent by quality of the public services it deliver. The provision of quality and timely services has become an impression making strategy especially for the Kenyan government.

For instance the services that are provided by the national government under the *Huduma Center*, a one stop-shop public services project, has received positive public approval in terms of the quality and the timeliness of the public services provided by the Huduma project (Price Water Coopers, 2012; Abdalla, et al, 2015). The national government has consistently used the huduma project, and the services provided by the project, to project an image of a responsive and caring government. These public services, positively rated by most Kenyans, have significantly shaped a more positive image of the national government.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: Public Value Theory

This paper proposes a public value theory of development projects. The public value theory was developed by Moore (1995, 2003) as a framework for guiding strategic management in public sector organizations. Public value theory posits that government investments must deliver what is valuable to the public (Benington, 2011). According to Moore (1995, 2003), just as the goal of private sector organizations is to create private (economic) shareholder value, the goal of public sector organizations (government and their agencies) is to create public (social) value. Thus, public value describes the value or benefit that an organization contributes to society.

Public value theory holds that government should provide services that the public values (Moore, 1995, 2003; Benington, 2011). While public value theory has been applied in public administration research, few studies have proposed plausible mechanisms through which valuable and desired public services are produced. We argue in this paper that the *valuable and desirable* public services and public goods are delivered through a strategic governmental decision ‘chain’, (White, 1998), that starts from policies, which must be translated into broad programmes. But for governmental policies and programmes to be effective, they must be executed through targeted projects, which must produce unique, valuable and desired public services and or public goods.

The formulated policies are then turned into targeted development programmes and projects. In other words, for government policies to be effective and executable, they have to be translated into programmes and projects. The programmes and projects are thereafter implemented to produce, what Moore (1995) calls public value. According to Moore (1995) public resources must be utilized to produce and maximize value for the public/ citizens. For citizens, public value is demonstrated in the quality, responsive and timely public services; and projects are effective mechanisms for delivering and maximizing these valued public services.

Moore (1995, 2003) argued that for governmental interventions to be referred as providing public value, it must produce valuable and desirable outcomes for citizens. According to Moore (1995, 2003), these programmes and projects must deliver value to the public. Thus critical role that development programmes and projects play is evident in the public value that they create in the delivery of quality and timely public services.

In this respect, the policies and projects developed by governments are important because they are expected to produce public value; something valuable and needed by the public. Thus, a public value theory of development projects is proposed to explain the critical role that development projects play in the production of valuable services to the public.

The public value theory of development projects is illustrated in the conceptual framework in figure 1.1 below:

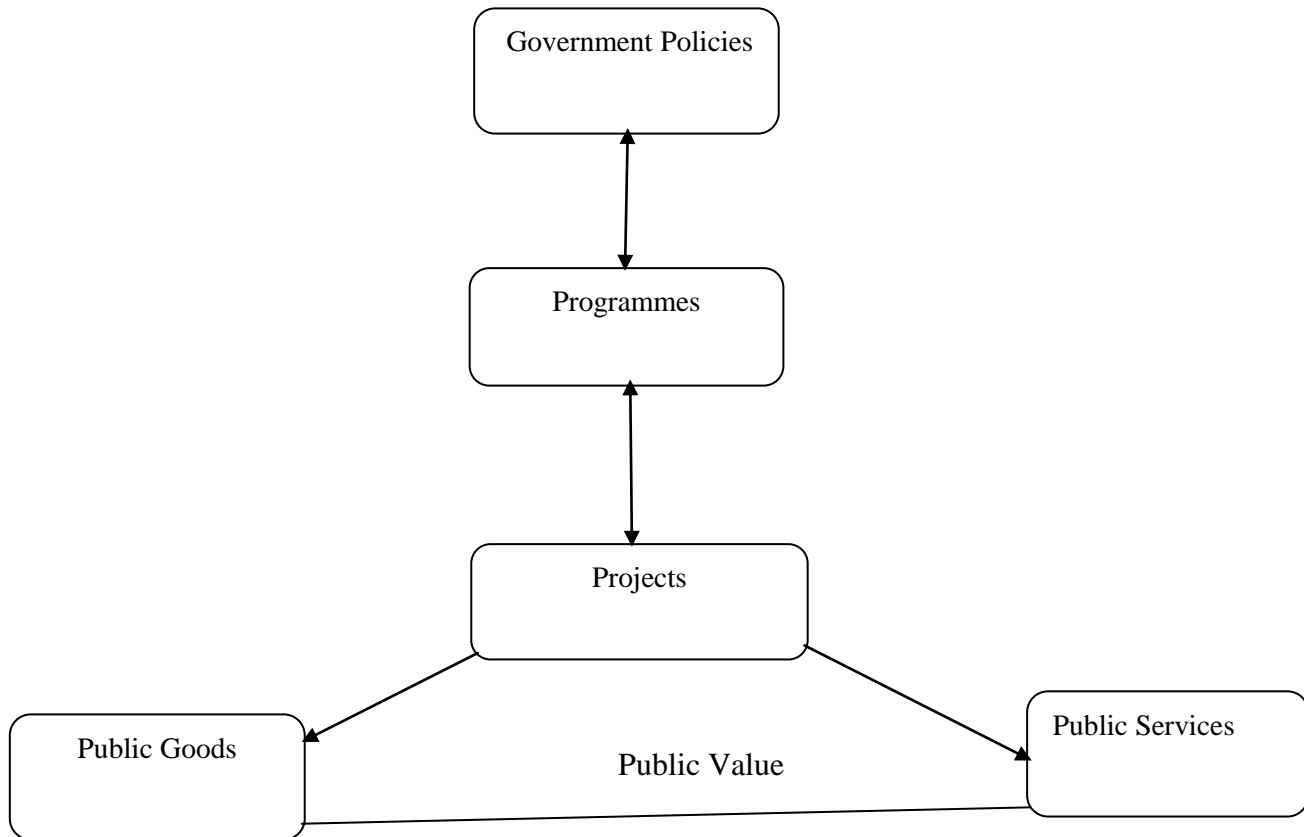


Fig. 1.1: A conceptual framework of the public value theory of projects

The value maximization of projects has been captured by Karzner and Saladis (2009), in their premier publication, *Value- Driven Project Management*, in which they argue that projects must provide some appreciable value when completed in addition to meeting the objectives associated with the triple constraints. They point out that most project managers and project based organizations believe that achieving the parameters of the triple constraints means providing value, and points out the error in such thinking. Project management decisions based entirely on the triple constraint, with little regard for the final value of the project, may result in extreme stakeholder dissatisfaction or significant opportunity cost (Karzner and Saladis, 2009).

Karzner and Saladis (2009) question the rationale for assigning resources to projects that provide no measurable and documented near term or long-term value. They posit that assigning of scarce resources to projects that provide no appreciable value internally and or externally to a client is an example of truly inept management and poor decision making, since the ultimate goal in project management is to define and deliver value to stakeholders.

Development Projects and Delivery of Public Services

The link between public services and development projects has not been given much attention in project management research. The paucity of research on the link between public services may be explained by the *taken for grantedness* attitude that is prevalent in service provision in the public sector. The critical role that development projects play in the provision of quality public services is evident in the critical position of development/ flagship projects in Kenya's Vision 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

Vision 2030, Kenya's development blue print for the next 30 years, is premised to be delivered through high impact development projects (Republic of Kenya, 2013). A number of projects that are expected to turn Kenya into a middle industrializing economy by 2030, play a critical role in delivering essential public services, like quality and competitive education, improved healthcare, safe and clean water for both domestic and industrial use, security for Kenyans, and improved infrastructure and transport (Republic of Kenya, 2013). In fact, Vision 2030 is expected to be delivered through five-year targeted projects. While these projects are expected to serve a higher goal of turning Kenya into a middle income economy, they are also expected to support the government in providing critical public services (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

Abuya (2016) argues that development projects have become the principal means through which governments in Kenya deliver essential services. He argues that development projects have come to occupy a special place in the psyche of most Kenyans because both the county and national governments have come to appreciate that quality and timely delivery of public services can be delivered through development projects.

For Abuya (2016), the success and support for county government leaders, and by extension their re-election will be pegged on the quality of the development projects, and the extent to which the implemented development projects deliver valued public services to the over expectant citizenry. Abuya (2016) argues that the contest between members of the county assemblies (MCAs) and the governors in Kenya, with regards to control and management of the development projects at the electoral ward level is due to the utility and public value of development projects and their capacity to deliver essential public services.

Development Projects and Sustainable Water Services in Kenya

In this section of the paper, we use the case of sustainable water services to briefly demonstrate the critical role that development projects play in the delivery of public services. Both the national and county governments have used key flagship projects to deliver water to Kenyans. Safe and clean water is one of the most important public services that a government must provide to its citizens. In countries where water has been privatized, governments still play a critical regulatory role in ensuring that water services are provided safely to its citizens. Provision of safe and clean water is one of the critical public services that governments all over the world provide to their citizens (Harvey & Reed, 2007; ADF, 2005; Baumann, 2009; Baur & Woodhouse, 2009). While water services have been privatized in most parts of developing and devolved countries, water still remains an important public service. To deliver safe and clean

water in a sustainable way, governments all over the world have designed and implemented rural and urban water projects.

Harvey and Reed (2007) argue that governments, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations all over the world have implemented water projects to provide safe and clean water for their citizens residing in rural and urban areas. Water projects are therefore the principal means through which governments and the private sector organizations deliver safe and clean water to the public in a sustainable manner. There is a strong reason why the provision of water must remain a public service, irrespective of who delivers it: it is a public good, and even if it is privatized, the government must still regulate it. In this part of the paper, the case of water services in Kenya is used to demonstrate the critical role that development projects have assumed in the delivery of public services in the country.

The Kenya national and county governments have designed and implemented a number of water projects aimed at delivering sustainable water to all Kenyans. The Vision 2030 recognizes the critical role that development projects play in the delivery of water to Kenyans (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The Vision of the water sector is to ensure water and sanitation availability and access for all Kenyans. This vision is being realized in blocks of five year. For Kenya to realize this vision, both the national and the county governments are designing and implementing five-year development plans and projects (Republic of Kenya, 2013). To execute the water strategies, the following four flagship projects have been identified to ensure the achievement of the first and second medium implementation goals:

Water Resource Information and Management Project: This flagship project entails rehabilitation of the hydro metrological network to reactivate 600 stations that are not functioning. In order to provide water to the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) in Kenya, ground water hydro-geological mapping is being undertaken in Turkana and Isiolo Counties.

Water storage and Harvesting Project: Given the importance of water storage and harvesting in increasing the area of under irrigation and flood control and water supply, the governments of Kenya are designing and implementing water storage and harvesting project in the country. This project is being delivered through two multi-purpose dams with storage capacity of 2.4 billion m³ along Rivers Nzoia and Nyando. Construction of 22 medium sized multi-purpose dams with a total capacity of 2 billion m³ is also being undertaken to supply water for domestic, livestock and irrigation in the ASAL counties.

Water Supply and Sanitation Project: A key flagship project is the rehabilitation and expansion of the Mzima-pipeline, which is expected to supply to all coastal towns in Kenya. Rehabilitation and expansion of urban water supply and sanitation in the satellite towns around Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru and Kisii are also being undertaken alongside 15 medium-sized towns that have the potential to support manufacturing and tourism activities. To improve water and sanitation infrastructure, a number of strategies are being pursued, including designing and implementing innovations in rural waste disposal combined with relevant incentives; encouraging transition from traditional pit latrines to adoption of improved versions. Under the Vision 2030, a research and development (R&D) project is has been commissioned on

improvement and application of improved toilets and community sanitation. Promotion of the use of ventilated and improved pit (VIP) latrines and septic tanks in rural areas targets schools adhering to the ratio of one toilet for every 35 boys and one toilet for 25 girls. This project is boosting the achievement of improved access to safe rural sanitation.

Irrigation and Drainage Project: The main development (flagship) project in irrigation is the construction of the Tana Delta project. The other areas of focus in irrigation include the rehabilitation and expansion of the schemes in Bura, Hola, Kano Plains, Nzoia (Upper, Middle and Lower), Perkera, Kerio Valley, Mwea, Taita Taveta, Ewaso Nyiro, Ngurumaini (Kajiado) irrigation projects.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the role of (development) projects in the delivery of public services. Public services play a critical role including being the link between the government and its citizens, show the value of the government, and demonstrate the responsiveness of the government to its citizens. Using the public value theory (Moore 1995, 2003), a conceptual framework is developed to illustrate the role of (development) projects in the delivery of public services and goods. Lastly, using the case of water services provision in Kenya, the paper identifies critical projects that both the national and county governments are designing and implementing to deliver sustainable water in the country. To develop this debate further, theoretical and empirical studies need to be conducted to demonstrate the role of projects in the delivery of public services.

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About the Author



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Isaac Odhiambo Abuya has over 10 years' experience in designing, planning and implementing high impact development projects in Kenya. Before joining Kenya's county government of Homa Bay in 2013 as the county's Chief of Staff responsible for coordinating the executive office of the Governor and the county government's development policies, Isaac served as World Vision Kenya's Project Director, and was responsible for designing and implementation of a high impact social determinants of health project for vulnerable communities, families and children in Kenya. Isaac also coordinated the first multi-county USAID/ PEPFAR HIV and AIDS prevention and care project that targeted over 1 million youth in Kenya and Tanzania with behavioral change and care interventions.

Isaac provided high level project leadership in the roll out of voluntary medical male circumcision interventions in non-circumcising communities in Kenya, and served as one of the principal consultants to USAID's effort in promoting voluntary medical male circumcision programming in the Royal Kingdom of Swaziland. He has provided technical support to a number of county governments and non-governmental organizations in Kenya on performance based management and contracting and currently serves as the national chairman of the Performance Management Association of Kenya.

Isaac Abuya holds a Bachelor of Education degree from Egerton University, Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology from Kenyatta University, Master of Arts degree in Project Planning and Management from the University of Nairobi, and is waiting to graduate with a PhD in Project Planning and Management from the University of Nairobi, with a specialization in Project Design, Planning and Implementation. He is pursuing a second PhD in Public Administration and Public Policy at Kisii University.

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