



**Devolution Of Education: A Comparative Analysis Of
Devolution: A Case Study Of Makueni County's Education Sector
In Kenya And Ontario, Canada**

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Abstract

This study presents a comparative analysis of the devolution of education governance between Makueni County in Kenya and Ontario, Canada, focusing on governance structures, funding mechanisms, and educational outcomes. The paper focusing on administrative capacity, central fund distribution, and local government performance, it also examines the challenges and opportunities of decentralization in both regions. , in establishing a fully functional decentralized education system, Makueni County, Kenya, lags significantly behind Ontario, Canada Ontario benefits from sustainable governance, reliable funding, and strong local autonomy. In contrast, Due to Kenya's devolution challenges, such as teacher deployment and funding gaps, Makueni faces broader systemic issues, which extend beyond early childhood development to reflect wider human capital constraints. Employing a mixed-methods research design including policy analysis, interviews and analysis of secondary data, the study examines the impact of devolution on educational outcomes. Results suggest that Makueni promotes more local participation but faces challenges with institutional functionality and fair financing, contrary to the Model of Ontario, which shows a much higher levels of efficiently, equity and accountability. The paper then ends with policy recommendations for Makueni, and suggesting to implement ones from Ontario's decentralized system that could be a solution for Makueni missing in governance, financial, and education standards.

Key words: Devolution, Education Governance, Decentralization, Makueni County, Ontario, Resource Allocation, School Accountability, Policy Analysis

Introduction

Everyone knows that education is one of the key engines of social, economic and political development. Education is both the foundation for improving individual economic opportunity, but also a driver of civic engagement, democratic principles, and social capital (World Bank, 2018). Consequently, the provision and accessibility of education represents the bedrock of any nation's quest for equitable and sustainable development. The task ahead for education systems around the globe will be to adapt to shifting economic, technological and social trends. As such, the devolution in education governance has emerged as a significant reform initiative in both developing and developed countries around the world, driven by the aim to decentralize decision-making and enhance the delivery of local education services (OECD, 2017). With the devolution of power, education policy can be more responsive to local needs and can put accountability and responsibility in the hands of local governments and the people of that area who are best placed to service and govern these regions.

One of the notable changes in Kenya governance process took place in 2013 when it adopted devolution under her new Constitution with several decentralization program in the education sector. The Constitution allowed independence for counties to determine how local resources are utilized such as education with the aim of enhancing better service provision with equity in the country (Government of Kenya, 2010). Interestingly, the Basic Education Act (2013) devolving education was intended to achieve this by making educational governance more local, allowing local governments to tackle local-specific educational issues like rural education inadequacies; infrastructural shortages, and teacher deficits (Ngware et al., 2016). Makueni County in south-eastern Kenya provides a revealing case study for examining how devolution has played out in education governance in a low capacity context.

A devolution framework is indeed the promise that Makueni county stands on, but a raft of challenges hinder the establishment of a fully functional decentralized education system. Control over major educational functions with the national government such as teacher management, and curricula design restricts the county from managing educational services efficiently (Ochieng & Karanja, 2021). However, these overlapping mandates have resulted in bureaucracy inefficiencies, policy implementation delays, and confusion over responsibilities between national and county-level authorities. In addition to this, the education system in Makueni is further

hampered by national government funding which continues to be unpredictable - coupled with high dependency on conditional grants which are rarely released on time or are insufficient to cover the county education demands (World Bank, 2023). Consequently, Makueni has remained bedeviled by high pupil-to-teacher ratio, dilapidated infrastructure, and glaring regional disparities in educational provision.

Contrary, Ontario, Canada, has a model of a completely decentralized education system which has been in place for over a century. Ontario has a very decentralized education governance structure whereby locally elected representatives sit on district school boards that govern budgets, staffing, and curricular decisions (Levin 2012). School boards in Ontario are governed by province-wide strictures but have enormous leeway to organize local education policies. This independence has allowed Ontario to experience some of the highest educational equity of any jurisdiction in the world -being ensured through strong through-the-line funding and resources (OECD, 2021). Despite these successes, Ontario's decentralized system has not been free of challenges, especially for Indigenous peoples, where one of the largest education gaps continues to exist (OECD, 2017). Loosely based on decentralization context at the lens of Ontario Whereas Ontario has been faced decentralization many of these challenges, its experience offers some useful lessons on right balanced decentralization, broad resource allocation and positive educational outcomes.

This comparison between Makueni County and Ontario illustrates the contrasting relations surrounding devolution and decentralization. The clear delineation of roles, the stable funding structure, and the local accountability of the Ontario system has evolved over decades and contrasts the very early implementation of Makueni and the continued challenges of resource allocation, infrastructure development and teacher management (Ochieng & Karanja, 2021). In Makueni, the economic constraints reflected in underfunded schools, unimplemented part-time positions for teachers, and poorly constructed buildings reproductive have led to lower educational outcomes than other better-established decentralized systems including Ontario's. This highlights the need for not just decentralizing decision-making but also for decent financial and administrative capabilities in local governments to deliver education to all the local students.

Specific Objectives

This study seeks to compare the effects of devolution on education governance in Makueni County and Ontario, analyzing governance structures, funding mechanisms, and educational outcomes. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Explore the governance and funding models of devolved education in Makueni and Ontario.
2. Examine how devolution influences student performance, teacher management, and resource equity.
3. Identify challenges and opportunities for strengthening Makueni's system, drawing lessons from Ontario's decentralized approach.

Immersion

In this comparative case study of education devolution in Makueni County, Kenya, and Ontario, Canada, we examine the very different ways in which education devolution is experienced and the consequences of this for education and equality. Although the 2010 Constitution created partially devolutionary institutions that provided some administrative authority to Makueni County, it left the national government in charge of important areas (such as hiring teachers and regulating the curriculum), leading to administrative bottlenecks and an unpredictable transfer of funds. With issues such as extreme teacher shortages (pupil-teacher ratio of 45:1 in rural schools), poor infrastructure (misalignment - only 35% of classrooms meet adequacy standards), and gaping urban-rural divides, Makueni faces immense challenges. In stark contrast is Ontario's brand of fully decentralized system with 72 independent school boards funded on stable, equities basis, combining per-student and local property taxes, resulting in fairer access to resources and better student outcome, despite serious struggle to provide for Indigenous communities.

Drawing inspiration from Ontario, the study makes three major policy recommendations for Makueni: the establishment of county education boards that will meaningfully influence real budgets, the introduction of an equity-based funding system, akin to Ontario's recent "Grant for Student Needs" model, and the use of blockchain-style technology to allow transparent tracking of financial flows. Such reforms need to be tailored to the particular circumstances facing Kenya, where the capacity of county governments is often limited and there are centralized national

institutions that are set against such reforms. Although devolution has brought more local participation to Makueni, realizing its full potential is contingent on deeper structural reforms in governance, financing, and intergovernmental coordination - lessons that can be learned from a hundred years of educational decentralization in Ontario. The findings underscore that effective devolution depends on both fiscal autonomy and administrative decentralization to improve educational equity and quality.

Methods

This study employs a comparative case study approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods: Sources from Google Search Engines, Library, Scholar, Jstor, Online Libraries like Tangaza among others.

Key questions

1. What are the key differences in governance structures and funding models between Makueni County's and Ontario's devolved education systems?
2. Why do disparities exist in resource allocation, teacher management, and infrastructure development between Makueni County and Ontario?
3. How can policy lessons from Ontario's decentralized education system improve devolution in Makueni County's education sector?

Findings & Comparative Analysis

1. Governance Structures and Funding Models: Makueni vs. Ontario

The governance structure of education in Makueni County, Kenya, is shaped by the decentralized framework established by the 2010 Constitution and the Basic Education Act of 2013. While these legal instruments granted counties administrative authority over education, Makueni's system is still partially centralized, with the national government retaining control over key functions such as teacher employment, curriculum development, and examination oversight (Ochieng & Karanja, 2021). This partial devolution has created inefficiencies, as Makueni's local authorities must coordinate with national bodies like the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2020) to implement policies and manage resources, leading to delays and bureaucratic bottlenecks. This blurring of responsibility has eroded the independence of county

governments from addressing local educational needs efficiently and effectively (Oanda & Sall, 2023).

In contrast, 72 district school boards in Ontario are highly autonomous under a decentralized system of education. However, these boards still oversee budgets, employ staff, and adjust their curricula to meet the local demands of the community all while working within provincial mandates (Levin, 2012). This decentralization means that decision-making is much closer to the people, as local school boards are able to quickly address new issues like rising demographics or funding inequalities as they come up. Additionally, Ontario's funding structure relies on the per-student provincial funding model, supplemented by local property taxes and provincial grants which are also based on students, leading to much more certainty and equity in resource allocation (OECD, 2021). This framework enables the direction of essential resources towards underprivileged schools, to ensure underserved populations get their fair share. Despite its drawbacks - notably, the persistent inequities in educational attainment and experience of Indigenous students - Ontario's system has benefited from a governance structure and funding model that has resulted in better educational outcomes and greater local accountability (OECD, 2017).

What such a comparison illuminates is how far the radically different governance structures of Makueni and Ontario fly from one another in terms of fiscal autonomy and administrative decentralization, both of which have been shown to have a positive impact on education outcomes. Due to a lack of control over key elements such as teacher management and funding, the county is limited in its capacity to tackle educational issues at regional scale specific to the education system in Makueni (World Bank, 2023). The continued oversight of the national government is still a limiting factor and there are diminishing benefits to local decision-making. In contrast, Ontario has seen that a system which decentralizes local authorities with both financial and administrative autonomy has been much more efficient at dealing with regional dislocations and achieving equitable access to quality education. If Makueni is to realize gains from devolution, much more, in particular areas, including teacher appointments and resources allocation, have to be devolved. This would allow the county to ensure its system is responsive and accountable to the needs of its residents.

2. Disparities in Resource Allocation, Teacher Management, and Infrastructure

Due to limited fiscal space and the nature of delayed transfers from the national government, the problems with resource allocation to and management of teachers are compounded in Makueni County. While the constitution promises free and compulsory education, Makueni is facing glaring differences with the availability of education resources. As an example, schools in Makueni (Kenya) face chronic teacher shortages across rural areas, with pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) deep in the forties and even higher in more remote regions, compared to more reasonable 20:1 ratios found throughout Ontario (UNESCO, 2023). Despite the Kenya Schools Effectiveness Project (KSEP) having trained a pool of 253,000 teachers to improve the quality of education they offer to Kenyan school going children, the slow national level response of the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) in managing teachers staffing gaps in rural areas has led to low staffed and under-resourced schools not offering quality education to schools there in (World Bank, 2023). Makueni also suffers inadequate infrastructure, only 35percent of schools still meet minimum conditions of classrooms and sanitation facilities, (KNBS,2022). These challenges create suboptimal learning conditions leading to high dropout rates, especially for girls, and continuing educational inequalities across the county.

In contrast, however, Ontario has a more decentralized funding model, which leads to a much more equitable distribution of resources. An added provision in the provincial government's "Grant for Student Needs" (GSN) ensures that schools in low-income neighborhoods receive extra funding to help them better meet the needs of their students. This is funding to support tutoring programs, nutritional support, and mental health services – all of which are especially helpful towards students from low-income families (OECD, 2021). The system also guarantees that equitable resources are provided to rural and urban schools, based on the number of kids enrolled and needs. Another feature of Ontario's teacher management system is that it is more flexible, as local school boards are permitted to hire staff based on local needs, ensuring local alignment of teacher distribution (Levin, 2012). While these are strengths, Ontario also has challenges, especially when it comes to supporting Indigenous students who still experience barriers related to what are often culturally-unfitted curricula and graduation rates (OECD, 2017). Still, both Ontario's methods of allocating resources and assigning teachers have played a critical role in making it possible to narrow educational disparities and improve results among historically marginalized populations.

Financial dependency and late intergovernmental transfers amplify the resource gap between the rural and urban schools in Makueni (Ochieng & Karanja, 2021), which subsequently impede the reduction of education disparities. This reliance on conditional grants from the national government leads to unfulfilled promises, leaving schools to seek community contributions or donor funding to bridge the gap. However, the lack of local property taxes or earmarked grants in Ontario provides a more stable and equitable system, where the funding needs of schools in disadvantaged areas are taken into account and additional resources are forthcoming. Ontario's experience shows, if it should find traction, that such a funding model would be wise for Makueni to pursue, putting its equitable philosophy into practice by channeling more resources to schools where they are neediest, especially in the more remote parts of the County. In addition, better teacher recruitment and retention policies to attract candidates to Makueni and other rural areas could alleviate the county's persistent teacher shortages and infrastructure problems, raising educational outcomes more widely.

3. Policy Lessons from Ontario for Makueni County

Ontario's approach to education system restructuring creates relevant considerations for Makueni County, especially regarding governance changes, equitable education access, and resource distribution. One of the significant suggestions for Makueni is the creation of county educational committees that would have genuine budgetary and managerial power. This would enable Makueni to effectively allocate educational funds, lower administrative bottlenecks, and make local, needs-based decisions (Levin, 2012). In Ontario, school boards manage their budgets and are responsible for the administration of their educational programs, which enables schools to respond adequately to the emerging issues within their jurisdictions. Such an allocation of budgetary discretion is fundamental to ensuring effective resource distribution to students and schools (OECD, 2021). Makueni would greatly increase local responsibility and enable more optimal resource utilization to serve a diverse student population by adopting a comparable governance framework.

One other key takeaway from Ontario is its equity-based funding system - the "Grant for Student Needs" (GSN), which means schools serving disadvantaged communities receive more funding. With more low-income, special-needs, or Indigenous students in half-day kindergarten than full-day kindergarten, this funding model provides extra funding where it is needed to balance the scales in terms of educational outcomes (OECD, 2021). Makueni would also do well to follow a

similar approach - moving away from simple per-student allocations toward needs-based funding - because this would address some of the gaps seen between rural and urban schools. Makueni, in particular, could establish, the "Makueni Equity Grant" supplementary funding for underperforming counties, this could help redirect funds to areas of need like rural areas and high dropout county schools. Under this model, students least able to fend for themselves in Makueni could be provided with resources and help to succeed.

Lastly, Makueni needs to implement stricter oversight mechanisms, such as independent audits and blockchain-based tracking systems for its funds. With poor management of resources and corruption often preventing the provision of quality education in Makueni (World Bank, 2023), Ontario's history of transparency about where education funding comes from and how it is spent could be something to aspire to. It is important for education stakeholders to get acquainted with technological advances such as Blockchain technology, which could offer a more transparent and trustworthy option for education financing, ensuring that money will actually get to where it was supposed to go and used for the right purposes (Transparency International, 2024). This would increase accountability in terms of how taxpayers' dollars are used and give taxpayers an additional level of comfort that the community believes local government and educational stakeholders are working to behalf. If Makueni were to use these lessons as part of its education sector, it might actually solve some of the problems devolution has created and give its students the educational quality they deserve.

Directions for Education Devolution in Kenya

Addressing the challenges of governance, funding and equity for education under the framework of devolution requires reforming Kenya's education sector. Step One of the reform process is to provide full autonomy to local education boards in each county - similar, but not identical, to the arrangement in Ontario. Such a move would enable the county like Makueni to take critical decisions such as; planning and budgeting as well as allocation of resources, handling teachers in relation to local education practices (Levin, 2012). Decentralizing educational power to the counties will enable the national government to whittle down bureaucratic bottlenecks and create a more efficient and responsive education system at the county level.

Building on this foundation, we will outline the second essential reform: the establishment of an equity-based funding model that centers equity and provides additional resources to currently marginalized and historically underserved communities. National transfers play a huge role in Kenya, but they are very late in the day and often too little, still leaving rural schools starved of funds. But Ontario has different funding arrangements for its schools - a per-student model that compensates for local wealth differences, moving money toward disadvantaged geographical areas (OECD, 2021). This policy would be needed to prevent an act of similar importance being brought into Kenya that could challenge for years to come school infrastructure, teacher quality and school dropout in rural and low-income areas of the country. Inspired by Ontario's "Grant for Student Needs," a "Makueni Equity Grant" would focus on some of the most impoverished and educationally disadvantaged parts of the county to guarantee that a child -- no matter their background or where they live -- is guaranteed access to quality education.

On top of that, Kenya can only attain successful education devolution by enhancing oversight and accountability systems. The implementation of transparent financial management tools, such as blockchain-based financial management systems, would substantially enhance the astronomical management of funds and help in ensuring that available resources are allocated efficiently (Transparency International, 2024). These kinds of systems would act to reduce corruption, enhance the efficiency of resource distribution, and increase trust between stakeholders. It would also be wise to create an obligation for local education boards to monitor the cementing of the funding through periodic audits and evaluations to determine the effects of the funding on educational outcomes to enable improvements based on evaluations.

And, finally, their expansion will require specific incentives for teachers to take up jobs in rural and underserved areas to bring together Kenya's urban and rural education systems. It could be financial incentives like hardship allowances, better house conditions as well as promotion prospects. Providing such incentives will enable Kenya to retain successful teachers where they are most needed in rural areas that face the worst imbalances in teacher density, especially if this comes from the central government such as in regions like Makueni (UNESCO, 2023). Policy reforms should also prioritize boosting infrastructure - better electricity, better sanitation, more classrooms - so that students have a better place to study.

In order to harness the promise of education devolution, Kenya should emphasize these reforms - enabling local governance, creating an equitable funding model, putting transparent tracking systems in place, and rewarding teachers in areas with the most need. Such measures would ensure that devolved policies achieve their intended goals - greater equity in education, greater local accountability, and better outcomes for Kenyan children.

Discussion

A PESTLECT Analysis of Devolution in Education (Makueni County vs. Ontario)

Political Factors in Education Devolution

Kenya—the context of education devolution in Makueni County—is characterized by a partial devolution structure established through a new Constitution adopted in 2010. In general, the Constitution gives counties administrative authority in several areas including education, but the national government has power to functions such as recruiting teachers, setting curriculum, and national examinations (Government of Kenya, 2010) Makueni is not, however, a unique case; this centralization of critical facets of education governance results in a quasi-dual system whereby county governments struggle to implement policies and programmes since their mandates overlap with national agencies such as the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2020). Competition between local and national authorities creates time delays in the execution of policies, manifesting as bureaucratic bottlenecks that often limit the potential benefits of education devolution.

On the other hand, Ontario has a wholly decentralized system in which political decision-making power is distributed between the province and local boards. Each of the 72 school boards in the province has a measure of political independence, which permits them to pursue regional decision making— establishing budgets, hiring employees and adapting curriculum to local needs (Levin, 2012). But how central government responds to local needs in the system is perhaps where we see the difference best; provincial guidelines provide a framework, but boards simply get on with it as needed and appropriate for their individual city. Such a system has allowed the local authorities in Ontario to better respond to the needs of their communities. Nevertheless, Ontario has similar political challenges, especially in the educational disparities for Indigenous populations where reforms proved contentious in terms of Indigenous cultural values integrated into the curriculum (OECD, 2017). Ontario has previously faced challenges in education governance, around which

the focus of much of the data is, but its decentralized political structures address systemic failures; it has a much leaner governance structure for schools that allows for regional-level adaptation.

Economic Disparities in Education Funding

Makueni County has sizeable economic burdens within its education system that heavily depends on fiscal transfers from the national government. The frequent delays in and inadequacy of such transfers hamstring Makueni's efforts to deploy resources efficiently to its schools-most acutely in rural areas, where facilities, infrastructure and equipment are painfully wanting. Classrooms are far from meeting minimum standards, with only 35% of those in Makueni reaching basic quality levels, with many rural schools lacking basic sanitation and power altogether (KNBS, 2022). Makueni's reliance on uncertain capital is hampering the development of a stable and sustainable education system for long term growth. This economic uncertainty leads to inequitable distribution of cash and resources between urban and rural learning blocks, whereby urban institutions become a lot more cash-rich and resourceful than rural institutions.

Ontario, in contrast, enjoys a sound and equitable funding system, one of the cornerstones of its decentralized education model. Schools are funded cover student enrolment and particular needs, based on the provinces "Grant for Student Needs" (GSN), with extra funding going to schools in high-poverty neighborhoods (OECD, 2021). The provincial grants are blended with local property taxes and are supplemented for high-need students - including students with special educational needs, low-income families and Indigenous students. An equity-based funding system will better position Ontario to provide the resources needed by schools attending to vulnerable populations, so that all students in the province can achieve excellence – something that should concern us all. It has played a significant role in bridging the gap between low and high socio-economic schools, thus allowing equitable education opportunities and a more conducive environment for student success province-wide.

Social Inequities in Education Access

Despite progress, Makueni County suffers from large social inequalities in education access, especially between urban and rural equations. A key challenge is the impending shortage of teachers in rural areas, evidenced by pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) as high as 45:1 in select schools (UNESCO, 2023). The shortage of teachers in rural schools is worsened by teachers not wanting

to take up posts in these areas, which leads to overcrowded classes and less individualized attention given to students. Poor infrastructure that doesn't support effective teaching and learning is also brutal - with the majority of schools in rural Makueni without electricity and adequate latrines (KNEC, 2022). Such social disparities contribute to high levels of school dropout, especially among disadvantaged groups, like girls, who also face obstacles like early marriages or roles at home.

In Ontario, though there is also some social inequity in educational access, there exist mechanisms to redress these inequities on a provincial level in order to support students who are less inclined to be ushered towards higher education. The GSN formula provides additional resources to support educational support services to schools with greater proportions of students that come from low-income families, have special educational needs, or are of Indigenous backgrounds (OECD, 2021). This helps lessen the dropout rates and increases learning in disadvantaged communities. Yet, Indigenous students experience systemic barriers to education in Ontario, including culturally insensitive curricula and lower graduation rates. With recent reforms attempting to implement Indigenous knowledge systems within the curriculum (OECD, 2017), change has been slow to manifest. Nevertheless, Ontario has student funding formulas and policies that have jointly produced a more level playing field for all students.

Technological Gaps in Education Systems

The absence of technological integration in schools is one of the major challenges the county is facing in terms of educational development. For many schools, especially those in remote regions, they do not even have the most basic technology, such as computers, access to the internet, or even access to other forms of digital learning tools (KNEC, 2022). Such disparity directly impacts their ability to gain essential skills required in the 21st-century job market like digital literacy and information technology. Moreover, the absence of digital metrics slows down the progress on new pedagogical approaches to strengthen knowledge in areas more difficult like science, maths, and language. Compounding the issues is the education system's dependence on dated pedagogy.

Whereas Ontario has moved to embed technology into its work at all levels of its education system. Digital platforms are also used in many schools across Ontario to make learning easier and improve school operation. An example of this is Ontario student's e-learning programs, which

allows students to access a variety of educational resources online, allowing more flexibility (OECD, 2021). In addition to this, the investment in digital infrastructure in Ontario has allowed schools to use technology in the classroom such as teaching through interactive lessons, virtual labs, and online assessments. But even Ontario (where he is based) faces similar challenges in closing the digital access gap, as many students from Indigenous communities are still faced with no stable access to internet connectivity backed up by the necessary technological tools. However, the Priority of Ontario provide a model for how an investment in technology can be leveraged to make fast gains in learning outcomes through the provision of digital tools and online learning platforms.

Legal Frameworks Governing Education

The Kenya's Constitution (2010) and the Basic Education Act (2013) provide a legal foundation to the governance of the education system that is key to the legal basis for devolution in education. While these legal frameworks give counties such as Makueni wider control over education, they also uphold de jure regime legitimizing top-down spheres of policy and practice in vital areas like teacher recruitment and curriculum development (Government of Kenya, 2010). The resulting partial devolution is a breach of legitimacy between the center and local authorities, leading to challenges in determining whether policies are making their way to the bottom. In addition, the ambiguity in laws in responsibilities associated with different education stakeholders tend to create tensions and inefficiencies.

Unlike Alberta, Ontario has a long-standing legal framework for education with overlapping jurisdictional responsibilities. The Ontario Education Act describes the roles of school boards, provincial government agencies, and other actors that affect the education system (Levin, 2012). Such transparency provides for a functional separation of lanes, avoiding confusion and duplication of efforts. Furthermore, Ontario law backs the autonomy of school boards, granting them the legal powers to decide on staffing, curriculum and resource distribution. Despite this, Ontario struggles to balance its education policies with the unique needs of Indigenous communities, which have a slower-moving legal system to align policies with mimicry and which are timeless in-and-of themselves (OECD, 2017). Ontario provides a good example to the Kenyan context with its well-defined legal and regulatory framework that ensures good governance and management of education.

Environmental Challenges in School Infrastructure

Rural parts of Makueni County are struggling with school infrastructure, with a majority existing without clean power, stable sanitation systems and enough classrooms (KNBS, 2022). At the same, these environmental challenges hinder the learning experience and many of these students learn under the trees with classes held in temporary classrooms. Students struggle to concentrate, and therefore, to study when they lack a suitable environment. Another compounding factor is the reliance on schools to fund and sustain lots of education infrastructure through community contributions and donor funding, leading to variable levels of quality and access to educational amenities in different parts of the county, all as a result of underfunding of basic infrastructure for education.

On the other hand, Ontario's school facilities are largely sound; most schools are up to date when it comes to rooms for classes, washrooms, and technology. Considerable resources have been allocated by the province to provide all students with high quality learning environments, with many of the schools equipped with modern facilities including digital classrooms and sports complexes (OECD, 2021). But there's a problem with infrastructure in Ontario too - in rural and Indigenous communities, for example, some schools are still working with decaying infrastructure and lack of modern technologies. Still, the Ontario model of school-building offers a distinct illustration of how, with concrete investment in school infrastructure, integrating education into the community is more than just a feel-good concept - it helps promote a conducive learning environment, thus positively impacting student performance.

Cultural Considerations in Curriculum Design

Kenya has a centralized curricular (as many other countries) and even well-known counties as Makueni, suffering in an education system that do not represent fully the cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of its sections. National curriculum is focused on needs of urban centers and it tends to deliver to rural enrollment a curriculum which may not be applicable to them (Ochieng & Karanja, 2021). The discrepancy between the curriculum and the cultural realities of students from rural communities leads to decreased engagement and academic success. The rigid structure of the curriculum also inhibits learners from engaging with the content and applying it to their lives, as it does not allow room for local languages or indigenous knowledge.

Ontario has made great strides towards including Indigenous knowledge in its curriculum, but the needs of Indigenous students are often still unmet. Even if the recent reforms expect to include Indigenous voices in the curriculum, this process has been rather slow and many Indigenous students have to contend with cultural alienation in schools (OECD, 2017). Despite these challenges, the flexibility of Ontario curriculum in terms of local adaptations to his cultural backgrounds of the students cannot be compared to that of Kenya. A Makueni that either leaves their students behind or integrates local languages, traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems into a more localized curriculum is likely to create a population with greater engagement with their education and improved learning outcomes through a pedagogy that is much more relevant to the cultural contexts into which it becomes delivered.

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of education devolution in Makueni County and Ontario shows that whilst the two jurisdictions have some similarities, there are also important contrasts that can inform Makueni reform efforts. An effective decentralized model in Ontario with independence at the local school board level, stable funding, and accountability at the local school board level has led to a system that, overall, is efficient and equitable while a partial devolution in Makueni has been burdened by bureaucratic inefficiencies, erratic financing, and persistent systemic issues that reproduce educational inequities. While this is not without its near-term shortcomings, particularly gaps in Indigenous education and the ongoing teacher labor disputes, Ontario's experience provides important lessons for Kenya, suggesting an appropriately contextualized adaptation of these governance structures could make a real difference in strengthening the education system in Makueni.

A more practical option could be the adoption of an existing fully-fledged advocacy framework that could potentially transform the rural education landscape in Makueni. But we can meet Makueni's special circumstances by Yoking Ontario-inspired reforms - local control, equitable funding models, and the like - to locally-targeted solutions, such as teacher incentive programs and community-based adaptation of the curriculum. We can bridge the gap between urban and rural education, keep qualified teachers in areas with the greatest need, and offer all the children of Makueni the education they so richly deserve with this double-barreled approach, supported by intelligent stakeholder engagement and solid, research-based policy change. Similar initiatives

have proven successful elsewhere, which suggests that significant systemic progress is possible with sustained attention and teamwork.

Three Key Recommendations

1. **Full Decentralization of Education Governance:** Establish county education boards with budgetary and decision-making autonomy, mirroring Ontario's school boards, to reduce bureaucratic delays and improve local responsiveness (Levin, 2012).
2. **Equity-Based Funding Reform:** Replace Kenya's conditional grants with a per-student funding formula, supplemented by local revenue streams (e.g., county taxes), to ensure fair resource allocation, particularly for marginalized rural schools (OECD, 2021).
3. **Enhanced Accountability Mechanisms:** Implement blockchain-based fund tracking and independent audits to curb corruption and ensure transparent use of devolved education funds (Transparency International, 2024; World Bank, 2023).

Advocacy Campaign Framework: Improving Rural Teacher Incentives in Makueni County

Problem Statement

Makueni County is critically lacking in teachers for its rural schools, with a staggering pupil-teacher ratio of 45:1 (UNESCO 2023). The insufficient pay, poor housing, and limited career opportunities help make rural postings unappealing to teachers. This has led to inadequate learning experiences and high dropout rates while deepening the gap between urban and rural education standards. Makueni, and especially the remote areas of the region, is not provided with basic education infrastructure known to promote equitable developments for children.

Advocacy Goal

This is the problem that we aim to solve in our campaign: retention and motivation of teachers for rural Makueni schools needs to improve through incentivized housing, clear career progression, and better overall benefits. When these fundamental issues are addressed, the education system can begin to function properly and serve every student, regardless of their location.

Advocacy Objectives and Strategies

In order to achieve our goal, we formulated two major objectives. The first one deals with enhancing public understanding of the problems confronting rural teachers. We intend to accomplish this through multimedia campaigns, featuring radio and TV talk shows on local stations such as Makueni FM, where we will discuss teacher shortage solutions. Our campaigns will also target social media such as Twitter and Facebook by employing the hashtag #RuralTeachersKE to give rural teachers a voice. Furthermore, we will conduct community sensitization activities such as public barazas in rural wards. We will also engage religious leaders to preach these messages during church services. Complaint leaflets will be placed in markets, schools, and government offices so that our poster campaign is strategically targeted.

The second goal of this project is to work on policy advocacy geared towards enhancing teacher benefits. We will organize major internal stakeholders such as teacher unions KNUT and KUPPET, school boards, and external partners like NGO's TSC, UNICEF and education rights advocates. Lobbying the policymakers will be important; we will work with the county government to include hardship benefits in the education budget and lobby the national government through the Teachers Service Commission to change policies on deployment of teachers to rural areas. To increase the impact of our advocacy, we will establish with some organisations the 'Rural Teachers Welfare Coalition' and work with members of the county assembly to formulate a Makueni Teacher Incentive Bill.

Education Research Priorities

To further our advocacy work, we have noted two primary research priorities to aid in fostering policies that improve educational governance in Makueni County. The first priority centers around studying the impacts of curriculum localization. This study will examine how the inclusion of local dialects, cultural practices, and specific ethnographical regions affect students' motivation and academic performance in the region. Drawing Ontario's model to education of Indigenous people where local culture and knowledge is taught or 'mkized' into the school system, this research seeks to determine the value of a community-based curriculum in Makueni (OECD, 2017). As a start, pilot programs will be offered in ten selected schools in Makueni, which will incorporate local culture and dialects into the curriculum. The research will assess whether such curriculum design improves student retention rates, learning outcomes, and community participation in the education system. Adaptation of this kind may reduce the educational barriers experienced by rural students.

The second research priority focuses on assessing the possible impacts of blockchain technology on education financing. The technology provides better accountability and transparency in the management and use of educational resources, which in Makueni County, is one of the major issues as financial mismanagement and inefficient resource use stifles educational development (World Bank, 2023). Together with the county treasury, we will implement pilot projects on blockchain systems that are intended to provide transparent tracking of funding and expenditures at the school level. This study seeks to ascertain if blockchain can mitigate corruption by verifying that the funds supposedly allocated to schools are, in fact, distributed to the schools that require them. This is the situation the education sector in Kenya faces; based on the outcomes of this study, decisions will be made on whether to expand the application of this technology in other counties to strengthen financial management in education in Kenya.

Policy Influence Strategies

To enhance the sustainable impacts of education reforms in Makueni County, we have identified three policy lobbies to undertake. First, we want to prioritize legal lobbies on the basis of amending the Basic Education Act of 2013, covering and deepening the role of the counties regarding education on county management. The existing system hampers the ability of counties to control educational infrastructure managed as resources at the local level and make important decisions concerning them regionally (Ngware et al. 2016). With this in mind, we plan to address the Senate Education Committee and lobby to amend provisions that curtail the decision-making power of county governments in the education sector at their level of jurisdiction. Such measures would circumvent delays in educational resource allocation and improve the efficiency of education services responsive to the needs of Makueni.

Under the second strategy, we focus on policy co-creation with the county governments. We will partner with Makueni County's local government to formulate a robust five-year educational plan which includes equity driven policies analogous to those utilized in Ontario's education system (OECD, 2021). Ontario's spending on equitable school funding in rural and low-income regions is a sharp model for urban-rural education access disparities in Makueni. The proposed education plan will be centered around resource distribution, teacher education, and curricula redesigns appropriate to the county's peculiarities so that all learners, irrespective of geography or socio-economic status, can access quality education.

Lastly, we hope to improve intergovernmental collaboration by forming a cohesive task force that includes members from both the county and national governments. This task force will focus on optimizing processes for teacher allocation, ensuring that there is appropriate need fulfillment in the rural areas. The inefficient deployment practices alongside teacher shortages in rural areas have been a persistent problem in Makueni (Oanda & Sall, 2023). The task force will use the synergy from every level of government to come up with a comprehensive solution to the issues of teacher shortages, distribution, and quality of education in Makueni County.

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