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The political economy of poverty reduction in Kenya : a comparative analysis of two rural countries.

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ABSTRACT

Employing empirical findings from Tharaka Nithi and Siaya counties, this thesis analyses the dynamics of citizen participation in development policy and planning process in Kenya and its effects on poverty reduction efforts in the rural parts of the country. The study is based on the premise that public participation enhances the quality and relevance of development processes and their outcomes and is, therefore, an important ingredient for achieving sustainable poverty reduction outcomes. It utilizes the political economy model and draws from the concepts of "power" and "interests" in understanding the poverty reduction 'enterprise' in the two rural communities in Kenya. The study finds that the elites, bureaucrats, and institutions have dominated Kenya's post-colonial development policy and planning space to the exclusion and disadvantage of ordinary citizens. The capture of public decision-making spaces, processes and development outcomes by elites is widespread and has affected the extent and quality of citizen participation in decision-making and poverty reduction in rural Kenya. Although ordinary citizens generally view themselves as the front line duty bearers in the fight against poverty, they hardly fulfilled their perceived role in poverty reduction. Faced with a web of dominating forces and constraints, ordinary citizens have become passive and peripheral actors in the poverty reduction 'enterprise' and local level development generally. As currently profiled, approached and directed, poverty reduction is an elitist project with its goals couched in populist terms, essentially in the service of powerful and influential people and institutions within the Kenyan society. This explains why, despite poverty reduction being a policy objective throughout the post-independence period, alarmingly high levels of poverty have persisted in Kenya, especially in the rural areas. The study concludes that the success of rural poverty reduction in Kenya is chiefly dependent on sufficient citizen participation in decision-making, quality of development planning, good leadership and the capacity and will of institutions at the grassroots to pursue sustainable development endeavors.

Key words: *Poverty reduction, citizen participation, development policy and planning, decision-making, leadership, elite capture, institutions, political economy, local level, Tharaka Nithi, Siaya, comparative analysis.*