Assessing the impact of devolution on the emergency management system (EMS) in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study advocates for a cohesive legal and regulatory framework to rectify the disjointed state of emergency management in Kenya. It comprehensively surveys existing literature, such as scholarly articles, laws, policies, and institutional structures, using a desk review method to identify gaps and suggest solutions. The study indicates that Kenya's current emergency management system is not functioning effectively due to unclear lines of responsibility between the national and county governments, as well as inconsistent funding for disaster management. This approach leads to poorly planned interventions that only happen when there is an emergency. The proposed framework is based on Article 4 of the Kenyan Constitution, which says that Kenya is a sovereign, multi-party democratic state that follows national principles of governance. These values outlined in Article 10 comprise the rule of law, democracy, public participation, human dignity, social justice, and long-term growth. All these aspects are important for an emergency response system that works well and respects people's rights. The study argues that Kenya can meet its constitutional obligation to safeguard human rights and deliver public services by establishing a cohesive framework that delineates standards for command authority, funding mechanisms, and communication protocols across all tiers of government. This framework would make emergency responses more coordinated and effective by getting national and county governments, as well as non-governmental organizations, involved. It would also protect core values and rights, such as the right to life and access to emergency services for all citizens.

Keywords: Article Four, Disaster Financing, Fragmentation, Interoperability, Legal Framework, National and County Governments

I. INTRODUCTION

Kenya has experienced devastating disasters for decades, with the April/May 2024 floods being the most recent one, killing over 250 people and causing damage estimated at four billion Kenya shillings (US$35 million). [1] The floods adversely affected both rural and urban areas, highlighting Kenya's ongoing lack of disaster preparedness. The delay in mobilizing emergency agencies took several weeks due to uncertainty over whether the national or county governments should respond. The National Disaster Risk Management Bill (Republic of Kenya, 2023) has not been effectively implemented. [2] This failure is rooted in institutional dysfunction and inconsistent disaster financing, which undermine effective emergency management by hindering preparedness, response, and recovery. Key challenges include weak coordination, inadequate resources, limited training, and a persistent gap in policy implementation.

Kenya is a middle-income country in East Africa with a population of around 47.56 million and an area of 582,650 square kilometers (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), 2019). The population comprises people who live in both urban and rural areas. Approximately 78.5% of the population resides in rural areas, while 21.5% resides in cities. Kenya has forty-seven devolved entities, and most people who live in cities live in informal settlements (slums) that are at risk of floods, fires, and disease outbreaks. On the other hand, those who live in rural areas, on several occasions, endure flooding, landslides, droughts, and the resultant fights for limited resources.

The Constitution of Kenya (2010) established devolution as a vital instrument for promoting Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and resilience, explicitly assigning disaster management to county governments under Article 188 and reinforcing climate resilience, protection of vulnerable groups, and preservation of the ecosystem (Nyandiko, 2020). This policy has been part of a movement across the continent since 2005 to make disaster risk reduction a permanent feature of government (Van Niekerk, 2014). The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (2004) emphasizes, on the other hand, that meaningful progress depends on having both political will and resources. Kenya adopted the National Policy for Disaster Management (2009) and, more recently, the National Disaster Risk Management Bill (2023). The most prevalent calamities in Kenya include fires, droughts, floods, terrorism, technological accidents, and disease outbreaks. Therefore, these two regulations aim to facilitate disaster response by simplifying planning and

[1]https://www.preventionweb.net/news/kenya-badly-prepared-floods-four-steps-reduce-devastation-and-deaths
[2]https://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/bills/2023/TheNationalDisasterRiskManagementBill_2023.pdf

budgeting at both the national and local levels. Through a presidential directive, the National Disaster Management Unit (NDMU) was established under CAB/NSC/14/2/32. The important aspect of this framework is that it has a strong command structure, a budget, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that aid Vision 2030's goals of keeping Kenya's social, economic, and political pillars safe from calamities. The unit's National Emergency and Disaster Plan, signed in 2014, is supposed to help with recovery, leadership, and coordination, as well as getting all government departments and commercial partners to work together.

The purpose of this study is to assess the efficacy of Kenya's decentralized emergency management system (EMS) through a comprehensive literature desk review. The study identifies specific challenges, including persistent centralization despite devolution and disparities in resource allocation across regions (such as arid counties and vulnerable urban areas like Nairobi and Mombasa). To ensure that county and national efforts work together better, it is important to have clear rules for communication, especially interagency agreements, and structured ways to request help, like the National Response Framework and the National Incident Management System. Individuals use these frameworks to think of ways to make the national emergency response work better and more smoothly. The 2010 Constitution indicates that national and county governments should work together to address disasters, but the system does not work efficiently because the line of authority is not clear and has insufficient resources, which leads to slow responses and long waits.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya has adopted devolution to enhance disaster risk reduction and resilience; however, its emergency management system remains fragmented. The April/May 2024 floods are an example of how overlapping responsibility, unclear lines of authority between national and county governments, inconsistent funding, and lack of interoperable communication have led to slowed and poorly coordinated emergency responses. These systematic problems make it harder for Kenya to fulfill its constitutional duty to protect people's rights to life and emergency services. A unified legal framework is critical to delineate responsibilities, standardize funding mechanisms, and enforce interoperable communication protocols, thereby facilitating timely, effective, and integrated emergency response.

1.2 Research Objective

To critically assess Kenya's devolved emergency management system, pinpoint obstacles to efficient disaster response, and recommend legal, financial, and operational reforms to enhance coordination and resilience in emergency management.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Decentralization and Devolution Theory

This theory underpins the rationale for transferring authority, resources, and responsibilities from national to county governments (Cornell & D'Arcy, 2016). It posits that county/local governments are more responsive and adaptive to local needs, leading to improved service delivery, including disaster preparedness and response (Craig-Scheckman et al., 2025). It works on administrative, political, and fiscal matters (Nyandiko, 2020). Despite its aims, devolution can exacerbate regional inequalities and fail to genuinely empower communities (Warner et al., 2024). In Kenya, the devolution of disaster management is challenged by strategic issues such as misinterpretation of the new Constitution and political interference, operational gaps including limited capacity and weak communication, institutional weaknesses, and funding constraints (Mbugua, 2019). These challenges impact both the future trajectory of devolution and the successful execution of disaster management policies.

2.1.2 Institutional Collective Action (ICA) Theory

This theory elucidates the dilemmas that emerge when multiple independent agencies work together. Public agencies are responsible for managing disasters; however, their fragmented authority and overlapping responsibilities often hinder effective collaboration, especially in decentralized policy systems (Jung & Song, 2015). These institutional collective action (ICA) dilemmas unfold when short-term decisions by one authority negatively impact others. This underscores the need to encourage cooperation through appropriate incentive structures. ICA theory suggests that misaligned incentives and ambiguous roles existing in Kenya's devolved Emergency Management System hinder effective collaboration, leading to delayed or inefficient disaster response.

2.1.3 Resource Dependency Theory (RDT)

RDT emphasizes that organization rarely possesses all the resources they need and must interact, negotiate, and sometimes compete with others to secure vital resources. Resource Dependency Theory (RDT), as delineated by Sarkis

et al. (2011), offers a fundamental framework for understanding the interactions and collaborations among organizations within a supply chain for collective advantage. RDT asserts that no firm operates in isolation; instead, all organizations are situated within a network of resource exchanges. These resources can be anything from materials and information to technology and even legitimacy. All these attributes are necessary for an organization to stay alive and grow over time. RDT's main idea is that businesses need outside groups to gain access to these important resources. Resource dependency theory shows how the national agency and newly empowered county governments in Kenya's devolved emergency management system work together in a complicated way. Devolution is meant to make it easier for various levels of government to share resources like money, disaster response equipment, technical knowledge, and information (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2025, p. 28). RDT stresses that county EMS units are becoming more independent, but they still need help from national organizations and outside partners to acquire important resources that they may not have on hand. Taking these factors into account, the effectiveness of Kenya's developed EMS depends on how well counties can negotiate, coordinate, and keep resource exchange going with other network actors.

2.2 Empirical Review

Empirical studies reveal that despite the legal devolution of disaster responsibilities, Kenya continues to experience delayed and poorly coordinated responses to emergencies such as drought, floods, and disease outbreaks. Filed data from recent disasters (e.g., the 2024 floods) indicate that confusion over roles between national and county governments leads to slow mobilization of resources and aid. Coordinated emergency management and interagency collaboration are essential to successful disaster response and recovery. A unified and efficient approach draws on various resources and expertise (Friedman et al., 2007). Through partnerships between government agencies, nonprofits, businesses, and the public, these efforts streamline communication, enhance preparedness, and improve overall response outcomes. This multi-agency cooperation is of enormous significance in preventing redundant efforts, clarifying roles, and ensuring that resources like equipment, personnel, and funding are shared effectively, eventually maximizing impact.

Interagency collaboration involves different organizations working together to exchange information, share resources, adjust activities, and enhance each other's capabilities to achieve mutual benefits and common goals through shared risks, responsibilities, and rewards (Himmelman, 2002). The key advantage of this type of collaboration within a care system entails eliminating redundant work, creating more cohesive and integrated services, and improving services to individuals (i.e., children who have been exposed to violence) (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2000). According to Marana et al. (2018), successful partnerships are built on leveraging the unique strengths of each participating entity and depend on the cooperation of all parties to reach the collaboration objectives. Therefore, joint efforts function better when partners take the time to educate each other about their specific roles, responsibilities, available resources, and areas of expertise, thereby enhancing the collaboration's overall effectiveness.

Successful partnerships recognize distinct capabilities and require teamwork to achieve common goals, with success enhanced by a collective understanding of each partner's responsibilities and resources. Wolf Fordham (2020) says that American emergency response begins at the local level, where officials are closest to the people who need help and can respond faster. The best method to address problems, like COVID-19, is to involve everyone in the community and the government. There are, however, major gaps between local public health and emergency management authorities. To achieve the best emergency preparation and response, these areas need to work together, and the current silos need to be eliminated.

Wachira and Martin (2011) point out that the process of devolution offers the potential for creating localized solutions to health challenges; however, it also risks creating a fragmented and poorly coordinated care system. Many areas in Kenya's health system lack the necessary readiness to manage emergency conditions effectively, compounding this issue. The primary difficulty in collaboration efforts lies in managing adverse groups of people and agencies, each operating with different skills, procedures, knowledge, and competencies, in addition to dealing with the complexity of the incident itself (Olsén et al., 2023; Eide & Skjetne, 2014). This, therefore, requires an understanding of agencies' organizational structures and their roles in emergencies. Understanding, coordination, and cooperation will enhance efficiency across jurisdictional boundaries.

According to Were (2021), the absence of a coordinated, multi-agency approach among Kenya's authorized agencies significantly impacts the country's response to disasters. This shows how important it is to have coordinated systems for civil defense and disaster management, along with a strong policy framework to keep people safe and reduce risks. These issues should be the top priority. There are still collaborative projects and plans in the works, though. Government ministries, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and the Red Cross collaborated to create these plans.

Rotich (2019) asserts that key ideas form the foundation of the Kenyan response framework. This involves safeguarding everyone's rights and implementing disaster risk reduction (DRR) to enhance everyone's safety. This

method also prioritizes decentralization and public participation to ensure individual accountability and information sharing. The goal is to let communities produce their own ways to manage disasters. Consequently, for the government to manage disasters well, it needs to use a multidisciplinary approach that includes climate data in planning and works with international organizations (Lahiri et al., 2021). Kenya is still working to build its capacity by training people and adding disaster risk information to the school system to become ready for future events. The framework "on paper" is meant to protect everyone's rights and make things safer, but in practice, it does not always work well or quickly in all counties. Kenya's response mechanisms have historically been criticized for being reactive, which is the opposite of what they say their goals are: initiative-taking and anticipatory.

Bridge collaboration and coordination among all levels of government have been evaluated and confirmed as effective during emergency response. They improve governance among partners who have an interest in emergency communication by making everyone in the community responsible, from traditional emergency responders and supporting organizations to the people they serve. They also address interoperability problems that arise because of fast technological progress and more information. They guarantee the timely delivery of crucial information to the appropriate individuals. This collaborative approach changes how a country responds to emergencies, showing how powerful it is to work together to address threats (Department of Homeland Security, 2003).

Additionally, an interoperable communication system is yet another emergency management mechanism. Establishing seamless communication channels across all levels of government for responders and agencies is of paramount importance. This feature acts as a solution for the reforms' goal of seamless communication, and it aims to dismantle communication silos that cripple emergency response efforts. Adopting and funding a shared platform and communication standards can achieve these objectives, fostering necessary partnerships among various levels and response disciplines. Interoperability provides public safety personnel and first responders with the ability to communicate across state and local agencies, on demand, and in real time (Verizon, 2010). Interoperability is essential to reduce the risks to law enforcement and emergency services personnel, alert first responders to any immediate hazards, and support decision-making at an individual level or as a collective group.

Coordination/collaboration in humanitarian responses to disasters is not simply a specific set of actions but rather an approach to emergency response that attempts to maximize the benefits and minimize inefficiencies. This involves various stakeholders, such as the government, international organizations, civil society, and affected communities, coming together to provide an appropriate, efficient, and inclusive response to disasters. The process includes coordination and collaboration through distinct phases of the response, including planning, operations, data collection, information management, and resource mobilization. The immediate aftermath of a disaster is characterized by an extraordinarily complex (albeit chaotic) situation, as common knowledge dictates. Emergency collaboration and coordination are crucial to achieving efficient EMS. Entering formal mutual agreements among agencies will address the multifaceted social concern (Gooding et al., 2022).

In short, clear leadership and lines of authority across all levels of government during an emergency can help make emergency response coordination and collaboration work. Therefore, putting the chain of command into law gives it a legal structure that is easier to follow. This mechanism directly supports reforms that aim to eliminate confusion, stop conflicting orders, and hold people accountable by making clear, legally binding rules for who is in charge during a disaster. The reform also aims to replace the current ad hoc leadership model with a standardized, universally understood system. This change is only possible if the hierarchy is officially required. In 2004, the Department of Homeland Security developed the National Incident Management System (NIMS) (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2024). It provides local, tribal, state, and federal governments and non-governmental organizations with a standard template that they can all use to work together to become ready for, stop, respond to, and recover from any kind of incident. The purpose of this unified incident structure is to ensure that all agencies respond the same way in an emergency. The national and county governments must have a clear line of authority for working together in an emergency to fulfill their constitutional duty to protect the public, which is one of the state's main responsibilities (Title 4 of the Kenya Constitution). This collaboration is necessary to ensure an effective, coordinated response to emergencies, thereby bridging the national and county levels through a defined structure, as outlined in the Constitution's provisions for the division of power and functions between the two levels of government.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative desk review methodology to comprehensively analyze secondary data related to emergency management in Kenya. The sources examined included peer-reviewed academic publications, official government documents, legal frameworks, policy briefs, and institutional reports. To ensure that the data collection was thorough and valuable, it adhered to a methodical approach of identifying, sourcing, and critically evaluating literature published from 2009 to 2024.

3.2 Data Collection

Data management was done by putting sources in order based on important themes, such as governance, resource allocation, and legal frameworks. This method made it possible to look at the literature in depth, which helped find patterns that kept coming up, new themes, and gaps in the research. Reference management software was employed to organize the sources so that they were easy to find and accurate. This organized process not only helped keep data handling consistent, but it also set the stage for the next steps in data analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized to synthesize findings and extract key issues impacting the effectiveness of Kenya's devolved EMS. The analysis informed recommendations for policy and practice, ensuring validity through triangulation of multiple reputable sources.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Challenges and Solutions in Kenya's Emergency Management System under Devolution

The independent variable in this study is devolution, which refers to the transfer of authority, resources, and responsibilities from Kenya's national government to county governments. The dependent variable is the effectiveness of the country's Emergency Management System (EMS), assessed by its coordination, response, and resource allocation during emergencies. The research assesses the impact of devolution-induced modifications on the EMS's ability to function efficiently and protect citizens during disasters.

This study established that the overlapping mandates between agencies like the National Disaster Management Unit (NDMU), county Emergency Operation Centers (EOCs), and the Ministry of Health (MOH) can cause command paralysis during emergencies. The confusion over roles and responsibilities can delay critical decisions and responses. Therefore, codifying the transfer of command through the Incident Command System (ICS) (established under the National Incident Management System Framework) can bridge these gaps by establishing clear, documented procedures for transferring authority (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2018). Second, unpredictable and delayed funding significantly hinders the emergency response. The result disrupts essential services, delays aid, and undermines agencies' long-term preparedness. Trigger-based, or "bridging," disbursement would make funding releases more official by linking them to specific conditions. This procedure makes the response faster and more predictable. The more planning that occurs before a disaster strikes, the quicker, more coordinated, and ultimately more effective the response (Lung, 2020). Third, an incompatible emergency impedes mutual aid by creating communication gaps, complicating the allocation of resources, and hindering real-time decision-making. Overly complex reporting structures and fragmented information systems restricted effective data sharing, with privacy concerns further constraining access to critical information. Interoperability issues make it even harder for disaster response agencies to share information smoothly (Abbas & Miller, 2025). Conversely, bridging these incompatible systems in Kenya would enforce shared protocols, leading to more efficient, coordinated, and timely emergency responses that save lives.

4.2 Enhancing Awareness and Understanding of Institutional Capacity and Resource Allocation

Understanding institutional capacity and resource allocation in emergency management is critical for ensuring effective and efficient responses to crises. A robust understanding of these factors helps with planning, coordinating, and executing response efforts, saving lives, and minimizing damage. Being aware of the capabilities of different organizations (e.g., government agencies, nonprofits, and the private sector) is crucial for determining which resources are available to meet specific needs. This comprises assessing their staffing, training, equipment, and communication systems. Knowing what resources are available, their capabilities, and how they can be best allocated is essential for an effective emergency response. This procedure entails identifying potential resource gaps and ensuring that resources are deployed efficiently. In essence, a strong emergency management system relies on a thorough understanding of institutional capacity and resource allocation to ensure that the right resources are in the right place at the right time and that different agencies can work together effectively to respond to emergencies (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2021).

Sartini et al. (2022) note a link between congestion in the Emergency Department (ED) and higher death rates among patients. Patients are twice as likely to have delayed resuscitation efforts (2.0) on busy days, and they are more likely to die. Conversely, a reduction in both the Door-to-Door Time (DTDT) and the duration of stay in the ED correlates with a decline in the total mortality rate from 1.5% to 1.3%. ED congestion is a complex issue with numerous contributing factors, and the correlation between overcrowding and mortality may vary across different patient populations (Barbara et al., 2023). Furthermore, supplementary research suggests that crowding may have a more

indirect impact on certain high-acuity diseases, such as patients with ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction (Tekwani et al., 2013).

Counties that do not have enough emergency medical services (EMS) coverage, especially trained staff, can make injuries worse and cause deaths that could have been avoided. On the other hand, studies have demonstrated that high-quality EMS can reduce the rates of preventable illness and death. Emergency standards refer to the possible harm to health or worsening of injuries that people may face if they do not receive immediate intervention or treatment. It is not always easy to define an emergency, which makes it difficult for Emergency Medical Services to decide whether to send an ambulance (Cheraghi et al., 2019). Emergency responders like ambulance crews and firefighters are also crucial links between systems and resources that are available. They are trained to use resources and follow the right procedures for the type of emergency that requires them to go to the scene of the incident. Established systems delineate the precise functions and responsibilities of each responding agency during an emergency (Pandey et al., 2023).

According to Sawe (2024), emergency medical conditions create a significant strain on healthcare systems, yet emergency medical care often lacks adequate funding and political backing, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Despite this, there is growing momentum in these countries, especially in Africa, to follow the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations to strengthen emergency health care systems. The Arnold framework outlines three stages for emergency medicine development: underdeveloped, developing, and mature. Kenya's emergency healthcare system is currently underdeveloped. Furthermore, while some emergency departments use triage, comprehensive patient care and management protocols are absent.

To make the best use of emergency resources, it is important to set up a trigger-based funding (TPF) emergency mechanism. This will speed up the distribution of disaster relief funds to the communities that need them (Katz et al., 2017). The mechanism is designed to help the reform's goal of getting financial aid out faster. The TPF system automatically releases pre-approved funds once certain disaster thresholds are met, so you do not have to wait for long damage assessments and bureaucratic approval. This distribution of funds among the federal cabinet has made management gaps worse and slowed down the building of a strong disaster safety net. This process has been especially difficult for state and local governments, which are the main recipients of federal disaster aid. Some federal funding streams are interchangeable for state and local governments with a lot of power, which leads to mission duplication and application burdens. At the same time, low-capacity authorities have trouble getting help because they must confront conflicting rules from different agencies and programs. Federal services incite competition among local and state governments for scarce resources, leading to an ineffective and unjust allocation of resources (Martin et al., 2023).

In summary, allocating sufficient resources for emergency management is not merely a practical concern but a constitutional imperative in Kenya, which is directly tied to the state's obligation to uphold the fundamental rights enshrined in Chapter Four of the Constitution, particularly the right to life and the right to the highest attainable standard of healthcare, which includes emergency medical treatment. The focus on having enough staff, equipment, supplies, and money for a quick and effective response is in line with the constitutional duty of the State to protect rights and basic freedoms. These resources are a practical mechanism by which these rights are protected during an emergency crisis. The concept of a "trigger-based emergency mechanism" can be viewed as the operational framework for activating these constitutionally mandated obligations, ensuring that when specific conditions are met, the state is legally and operationally poised to deploy the necessary resources to mitigate impact and enable community rebuilding, thus fulfilling its duty to protect vulnerable individuals as mandated by the supreme law.

4.3 Reinforcing Legal and Regulatory Frameworks Aims to Enhance Emergency Coordination, Disaster Governance, and Financing Among Both Vertical and Horizontal Entities.

The Constitution and the National Disaster Risk Management policy are two examples of Kenya's legal policy frameworks that are especially important for how people respond to disasters. They influence the decisions that individuals and communities undertake (Nyandiko, 2020). These frameworks, such as a specific Act of Parliament that establishes a disaster management committee, can prevent disasters from escalating by providing individuals with a legal and systematic method to mitigate the risk of their occurrence. However, there is still a need to make the legal and regulatory links between national and local governments stronger so that they can work together effectively in an emergency.

A robust system is crucial for effective disaster management. The Disaster Management Act of 2002 in South Africa is a good example (Republic of South Africa, 2003). It has significant components, such as setting aside resources for disaster relief and forming important management groups. This framework presents the system with all the resources and institutional structures it needs to manage all aspects of disaster control, including prevention, mitigation, readiness, response, and recovery. South Africa's Disaster Management Act of 2002 is commendable because it has a sensible, risk-reduction-focused regulatory structure. However, implementation is difficult due to insufficient funding (Olsen et al., 2023), staffing shortages, and a lack of intergovernmental collaboration.

After the 9/11 attacks and the anthrax incidents that followed, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other government and non-governmental groups put a lot of money into improving public health emergency preparedness and response infrastructure, systems, and science (Khan, 2011). The CDC Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Capabilities: National Standards for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Public Health has been guiding public health agencies since 2011. Its goal is to build and keep strong systems for preventing, protecting against, quickly responding to, and recovering from future public health emergencies (Hughes & Gerberding, 2002). Nonetheless, despite considerable post-9/11 investments and the establishment of the fifteen foundational capabilities, significant vulnerabilities in the United States endured and were exposed during subsequent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Fraser et al., 2021).

McDonald et al. (2020) assert that the United States adopts a bottom-up approach to disaster response. This suggests that local officials are considered the most effective in determining immediate actions. Local governments, typically at the county level, initiate the initial response. If they need more help, they can request it from the nearest local government and then the federal government. This customized approach ensures that every community member's needs are satisfied. In the U.S., emergency response is founded on local sovereignty. However, for it to work as a coordinated national system, it needs strong bridge-coordinating mechanisms.

In Kenya, the national government leads the development of disaster management policies, laws, procedures, and regulations, working in collaboration with semi-autonomous county governments, health stakeholders, and the public. There is a draft of the Constitution (Government of Kenya, 2009), but it is not complete and requires a revision to align with the Constitution of Kenya. At the moment, there is no single legal framework for disaster management besides this policy and the National Disaster Response Plan. Instead, the field is guided by different sectoral acts, regulations, and rules that help with disaster management.

Kenya's approach to disaster management is especially rooted in the 2010 Constitution's Fourth Schedule, which divides responsibilities between national and county governments as guided by the risk reduction priorities outlined in Vision 2030. Despite these frameworks, the country's historical response has been criticized for being primarily reactive and short-term, a consequence of insufficient legal and institutional structures, underinvestment in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and the outdated strategy aligned with the Hyogo Framework. This strategy highlights a crucial need to establish, streamline, finance, and strengthen disaster risk management institutions, coordination mechanisms, and regulation nationwide. The National Disaster Risk Strategy (Ministry of Interior and National Administration, 2025) identifies five priority areas: the establishment of an institutional and legal framework for DRM; the enhancement of DRM capacities within institutions; disaster information management; strengthening resilience at national, county, and local levels to the impacts of disasters and climate change; and mainstreaming disaster risk management into sustainable development policies, strategies, and plans at all levels and across all sectors.

The history of how people have reacted to disasters suggests that there is a clear need for a comprehensive and unified emergency response framework to fill the gap between existing policy and how it is put into practice. This framework would stress the need for quick action in five important areas: building a strong legal and institutional base, improving the abilities of institutions, making information management easier, making all levels of government more resilient, and including disaster risk management in long-term development plans to verify that the country is ready for disasters.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Drawing on a desk-based review analysis of literature on Kenya's devolved emergency management landscape, this study demonstrates that fragmented legal authority, inconsistent disaster financing, and unclear intergovernmental roles continue to undermine timely and coordinated responses to emergencies. By advocating for a comprehensive "bridge framework" firmly anchored in the Constitution, the study contributes to knowledge and policy, offering a structured approach to unify command, standardize funding triggers, and enforce interoperable communication protocols across the national and county governments. For operationalization of this, the following are the recommendations:

5.2 Recommendations

Codifying a clear, legally mandated command hierarchy to eliminate role confusion. This can be achieved by establishing an explicit, written structure of authority and responsibility within a system and embedding this structure into the law of formal regulations to ensure that every member of the organization or institution understands who has decision-making power at each level, to whom they are supposed to report, and their specific duties within the chain of command. Institutionalizing trigger-based, pre-authorized funding mechanisms. It can be attained through establishing formal systems in which funds are automatically released or assigned whenever specific, predefined conditions

("triggers") are met to ensure rapid and efficient financial response whenever needed. Establishing shared communication platforms and protocols to foster real-time information sharing among all stakeholders. This can be achieved through creating unified systems and standardized procedures for communication across different entities, to ensure that all stakeholders can exchange information quickly, accurately, and securely. Prioritizing these reforms will not only align Kenya's emergency management systems with constitutional imperatives for public service and human protection but also enhance resilience, reduce response times, and save lives during disasters.

Declaration of Interest

The author declares that he does not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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