

Examining how Development Studies as a Faculty in Our Kenyan Universities is Promoting Socio Economic and Ecological Development in Kenya, A Case Study of Maseno University

Evans Momanyi Getembe¹

¹Maseno University

Publication Date: 2025/04/19

Abstract: The increasing recognition of Development Studies as a faculty at Kenyan universities presents opportunities for researchers, students, and scholars to examine the role the field plays towards economic advancement, and prosperity. This discussion delves into the historical evolution of Development Studies, the state of Development Studies in Africa, and the Kenyan economy. Through the review of peer-reviewed literature, it discusses the role of Development Studies in promoting socio-economic, and ecological development in Kenya, the challenges faced by the faculty, and probable solutions to the challenges.

How to Cite: Evans Momanyi Getembe (2025). Examining how Development Studies as a Faculty in Our Kenyan Universities is Promoting Socio Economic and Ecological Development in Kenya, A Case Study of Maseno University. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10(3), 3227-3232. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25apr1444>

I. INTRODUCTION

Development Studies is a field that has been gaining prominence in the recent past, especially post World War II due to the social, economic, and geopolitical issues that affected the Global South (Roberts et al., 2018). Development Studies majorly focuses on the strategies, challenges, and processes that are linked to the political, social, and economic developments globally. Development Studies incorporates an array of topics including but not limited to; international relations, human rights, global inequalities, sustainable development, and poverty alleviation. Equally, the field encompasses key areas of study like; economic development, environmental sustainability, globalization, technological advancements, macroeconomic policy, and social development. Besides, development studies incorporates several disciplines like international relations, history, geography, anthropology, political science, sociology, and economics. The incorporation of such disciplines enables a researcher, student or scholar to holistically understand the challenges linked to Development Studies, and formulate real-time solutions. Several skills can be developed from Development Studies. They include but not limited to communication, critical thinking, and analytical, and research skills. They aid in conducting quantitative, and qualitative research, critical assessment of development strategies, and policies, and strong presentation, and writing skills crucial not only in the research process but also advocating development policies. Furthermore, Development studies as

a faculty provides stakeholders with career opportunities in innumerable sectors including; Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), International Organizations like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the United Nations, academia and research, Corporate Social Responsibility, and other government institutions (Ouellett, 2019).

According to Goulet (2017), Development Studies majorly focuses on equipping students, researchers, and scholars with tools, and knowledge instrumental in the analysis, understanding, and addressing the multilayered hurdles faced by marginalized, and developing economies. It stresses on the environmental, political, social, and economic aspects which are crucial players and contributors of global disparities. As such, the faculty of Development Studies does not only focus on studying about poverty reduction. However, it encompasses an all-inclusive approach to address issues like environmental sustainability, gender equality, education, governance, and human rights.

II. THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AS A FACULTY

According to Roberts et al. (2018), Development Studies is a global discipline that has grown tremendously over the years, offering discernments into not only the causes but also the solutions to the interlinked, and intricate problems, and challenges facing nations particularly the

Global South, and Africa. The discipline plays an integral role in ensuring that professionals, scholars and students are adequately equipped with skills, and knowledge crucial in addressing issues linked to environmental sustainability, inequality, and poverty. The emergence of the Faculty can be traced back to the mid-20th century after World War II where the main intent for the emergence was improving people's living standards, with the major focus being the developing economies. As the years went by, Development Studies as a Faculty was expanded to ensure it incorporated policy debates, theoretical methodologies, and frameworks, thus making it a global discipline of study and research. Schiller (2019) contends that the main objective of Development Studies is to aid in the reduction of the disproportions between the Global South, and the Global North. Historically, imperialism, and colonialism was instrumental in shaping the current global order, where the West enjoyed massive economic supremacy while many economies in Latin America, Asia, and Africa were left behind. Development Studies promotes the understanding of the root causes of such disparities, and also offers ways that countries can embrace multidisciplinary techniques to ensure they promote environmental, economic, and social progress.

At the global level, Development Studies is integral in examining the role of regional organizations, and international institutions like IMF, World Bank, and the UN in shaping development policies, and equality. Development Studies acknowledges the fact that the sophistications in the global stage cannot be understood fully from one disciplinary angle. Equally, Development Studies draws upon an array of fields including but not limited to environmental studies, history, geography, anthropology, sociology, political science, and economics. Such a holistic approach enables the students to explore development from several angles, hence providing an insight on the current state of development disparities. For example, economics plays an instrumental role in providing an oversight on economic inequalities, poverty, and economic growth, and its drivers. Also, it is an eye-opener on policies that might hinder or promote economic advancement, microfinance, FDI or trade liberalization. Political Science on the other hand is instrumental in contributing towards the analysis and understanding of international relations, human rights, democracy, and governance, and how each shaped development outcomes globally. Anthropology, and Sociology on the other hand aids scholars and professionalism contextualizing development in the local setup, and social structures thus ensuring that the development mediations are customized to meet different societal needs, preferences and fashions globally (Hanvey, 2022).

Initially, researchers, and scholars of Development Studies delved mostly on modernization, industrialization, and economic growth, ideals that borrowed inspiration from the Western models of development. Over time however, the faculty has evolved to include the political, and social dimensions of development. The shift towards the political, and social aspects of development is as a result of the continued criticisms on the ancient development scopes, most

of which were advanced by development institutions like the IMF, and World Bank. Roberts et al (2018) argues that despite the fact that Development Studies as a faculty has gained prominence globally, and contributed to global development practice, and theory, it faces significant challenges. Key among the challenges is the ideological, and political tensions. He asserts that the global outlook of Development Studies as a faculty has not only affected teaching but it has also influenced research agendas. The field is always committed to promote equity, and social justice. Nonetheless, the field is sometimes at odds with prevailing political ideologies, especially in economies where neoliberal economic policies are dominant. Equally, ethical dilemmas is another challenge. Most of the faculty members in this field are believed to work with organizations, and communities in the Global South. Such a move has for a long time raised ethical questions concerning the role of scholars, and researchers, and the outcome of the development initiatives. Researchers, and scholars are advised not to be insensitive of the emerging issues linked to the exploitation of their works, representation, and power dynamics. Further, the multidisciplinary nature of Development Studies poses significant challenge. Whereas it is true that the faculty is widely enriched, it is in most instances problematic to develop a cohesive teaching and research framework, and establish clear boundaries. Such intricacy also poses challenges in the integration of the field into diverse theoretical methodologies, and perspectives, especially in a bid to create a uniform research agenda, and curriculum (Nafukho, 2009).

III. DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AS A FACULTY IN AFRICA

Development Studies as a faculty in Africa holds relevance due to the continent's exceptional development hurdles, geopolitical dynamics, and historical context. The faculty has evolved over the years in many African Universities to become a major academic discipline which is instrumental in providing insights into the political, and socio-economic conditions of Africa as well as providing solutions to emerging issues in Africa including but not limited to governance, environmental sustainability, inequality, and poverty. The emergence of Development Studies in Africa's academic institutions was largely attributed to the post-independence period, where African economies were keen to chart their own development paths that were distinct from those of the colonial masters of social inequalities, political subjugation, and economic exploitation. It aimed at promoting modernization, industrialization, and economic advancement. By the early 20th century however, Western models limitations were still evident. Though many of the African economies had made tremendous efforts to pursue economic growth, and modernization strategies, they still struggled with underdevelopment, political instability, unemployment, and poverty. The failure of Western development options to produce tangible results on African economies led to the reassessment of the initial initiatives, hence giving rise to new, inclusive, and more critical approaches to development studies. During the late 20th century too, many African nations were still not totally

dependent. Such a scenario meant that they were still grappling with colonialism legacies, most of which were designed to deliberately ensure that the African economies were still reliant on the foreign powers. The study on development Studies in Africa shifted from the simplest economic methodologies to understanding of the key concepts like sustainable development, governance, social justice, and human rights. As such, Development Studies as a faculty became a very instrumental tool to the researchers, and scholars in the understanding of the rationale behind Africa's underdevelopment, and the dire need to find solutions to such challenges.

Many African universities are increasingly offering doctoral, masters, and undergraduate programs in Development Studies as the field is instrumental in policy formulation, and academic inquiry. The faculty is instrumental in the provision of research outcomes, and knowledge production as it officers researchers, and students with opportunities to explore, and conduct studies on an array of topics like environmental sustainability, health, gender equality, governance, and education. Usually, research in the field is centered on fieldwork, enabling scholars to work with the local communities to offer an insight on the impact of development initiatives, and policies. Equally, Development Studies in Africa is pivotal in provision of policy advice to NGOs, international organizations, and governments. Research in the field can be utilized in advancement, and analysis of development strategies, governance reforms, social programs, and economic policies. As such, Development Studies in African Universities is not only academic centered but it is instrumental in advancing Africa's development agenda (Nafukho, 2009). Further, Development Studies as a faculty in Africa is crucial in providing training to development professionals through undergraduate or graduate programs. It equips students, researchers, and scholars with experience, skills, and knowledge that can enable them to work in an array of development sectors like the private sector, NGOs, international organizations, and the government. Students across Africa are offered programs tailored to ensure they attain knowledge that will promote development. Such subjects include; Human Rights, environmental studies, anthropology, sociology, politics, and economics. Such subjects are also pivotal since they promote the gaining of an in-depth understanding of factors shaping development outcomes in Africa, and providing problem-solving, and critical thinking on intricate development issues (Clemens & Kremer, 2016).

IV. THE KENYAN CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AS A FACULTY

In Kenya, Development Studies has evolved over time thanks to the ever changing economic, political, and social dynamics. Initially, Kenya's development was influenced by the pre-colonial desires to address issues linked to lack of infrastructure, inequality, and poverty. With time, scholars, researchers, and other policymakers felt that there was need for the development of a curriculum especially at the universities to address such issues. The main objective for Development Studies thus was to analyze and address hurdles

to equitable, and sustainable growth in Kenya. The faculty today covers a myriad of issues including environmental sustainability, education, governance, urbanization, and poverty. One of the key themes of Development Studies as a faculty in Kenya is inequality, and poverty. Since independence, Kenya has made tremendous strides in various spheres of development. Nonetheless, it still struggles to curb poverty, and inequality as many people are still living below the poverty line, in informal settlement, and with low income. Kenya also faces hurdles linked to limited market access, poor infrastructure, and low agricultural productivity, which poses developmental setbacks. Development Studies stresses on the need for inclusive growth aimed at addressing the disparities through provision of opportunities to marginalized communities, social protection, and equitable access to resources. Rural development and urbanization is also another key theme of Development Studies in Kenya. Kenya is increasingly becoming urbanized courtesy of rural-urban migration in search of better opportunities. Such migration has nonetheless promoted strain in the provision of social amenities, transportation, and housing. Mathare, and Kibera for instance are the major informal settlements in Kenya which are home to millions of residents in Nairobi who live in unwarranted conditions with scarce healthcare, clean water, and sanitation resources. Development Studies equally strives to uncover the challenges of the rural-urban migration to the rural sector. As most Kenyans migrate to the urban areas, the rural areas are left with few productive people to perform agriculture, which is a key pillar for economic development in Kenya. Also, the rural set up is faced with climate change, low productivity, and land fragmentation. Thus, Development Studies stresses on the need for the holistic approach to rural development with a high emphasis on enhancement of rural-urban linkages, promotion of agro-processes, and improvement of agricultural practices. Furthermore, social justice, and gender is another theme of Development Studies in Kenya. The major focus here is the role of women in development, and the available frameworks to promote women empowerment, and eradicate barriers to development in women like limited economic opportunities, healthcare, and education. With the enactment of the 2010 constitution, and the introduction of the Gender Equality Bill, women's access to the development sector has improved. Social justice ensures that the rights of the indigenous communities, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities are upheld. It also promotes equal access to development opportunities, which is a major social, an economic prosperity in Kenya (Kanyinga, 2016).

In Kenya, development is affected by inequality, poor governance, corruption, climate change, and population growth. Kenya has a rapidly growing population which puts immense pressure on the already existing scarce resources like infrastructure, water, and land. Such a pressure on the limited resources, slows development. Also, Kenya's climate has been highly vulnerable in the recent times to the extent that it changes irregularly, hence affecting agriculture; the backbone to the economy. The changing weather patterns exacerbates displacement, food insecurity, and poverty. Whereas Kenya has made massive progress economically, inequality is still a hurdle. There is a very huge gap between

the poor and the rich, especially in the rural communities, and urban areas. Such a challenge hampers inclusive development. Moreover, corruption continues to hamper development struggles in Kenya. There are several reported cases of mismanagement of funds not only in the national government but also the county governments. Likewise, there is limited accountability in the government institutions, and parastatals which undermine the effectiveness of development initiatives, and value for money. Several universities in Kenya offer Development Studies in Kenya. Key among them is the University of Nairobi. It is among the leading education and research institutions in Kenya. It offers postgraduate, and undergraduate programs through its Institute of Development Studies (IDS). The course is tailored to enlighten students on the African development challenges. Egerton University offers Development Studies customized to offer insight on community-centered development initiatives, sustainable agriculture, and rural-urban migration. Besides, Kenyatta University offers an array of programs in Development Studies, and emphasizes on governance, environmental sustainability, and socio-economic development. Maseno University on the other hand offers degree and postgraduate studies on community development, with the course outline tailored to offer students skills to work in international organizations, government institutions, and NGOs (Kanyinga, 2016).

V. DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AS A FACULTY AT MASENO UNIVERSITY

Maseno University is a premier university in Kenya that offers a wide range of disciplines including Development Studies. At Maseno University, Development Studies programs are offered in the School of Development, and Strategic Studies. The curriculum is customized to cover aspects like; sustainable development, poverty reduction, community development, policy analysis, and formulation, social justice and governance, and global development contests. The degree, and postgraduate programs offered at Maseno University combine theory with practical skills to ensure that students and graduates are adequately prepared to work and fit in development-centered organizations, NGOs, government agencies, and international organizations. Equally, the curriculum draws on insights from geography, anthropology, sociology, political science, and economics to address issues linked to sustainable development, inequality, and poverty. At Maseno University, Development Studies is an instrumental area of academic inquiry which contributes tremendously to the provision of practical solutions to current, and future global, and local problems as well as academic scholarship. It thus plays an instrumental role towards shaping the future researchers, scholars, and leaders to tackle development issues (Karani, 2011).

At Maseno University, Development Studies is offered at specific levels, with the key programs being Bachelor of Arts in Development Studies, Master of Arts in Development Studies, and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Development Studies. The undergraduate curriculum offers students with a foundation broadly focused on theory, and practiced. Also, it focuses on community development, social policy, human

development, and sustainable development to ensure that students are thoroughly equipped with practical, and analytical capabilities to address socio-economic challenges locally, and internationally. The post-graduate programs on the other hand focus on cementing the foundation at undergraduate level, ensuring that students get a deeper insight into development challenges like global development frameworks, rural development, gender equality, and poverty alleviation. Furthermore, it provides knowledge and skills that promotes thorough academic writing, critical thinking, and research crucial in advancing policy, and development agendas. At Maseno, Development Studies also stresses on community engagement. Since Development Studies is mostly a theoretical concept, it calls for an in-depth understanding of the local contexts, and the challenges faced by the local communities. Located in Western Kenya, Maseno University offers an exceptional opportunity for the students, and researchers to work closely with the community, especially on community-linked programs, and projects. The students, and researchers can work with the students on looking for solutions on a range of issues related to healthcare access, education, environmental degradation, and poverty. Such research is critical in advancing development programs, and policies aimed at improving the livelihoods of local populations. Moreover, faculty members usually participate in collaborative research with other stakeholders, both local and international to ensure that the objectives of Development Studies are attained (Apondi et al, 2014).

VI. HOW DEVELOPMENT STUDIES IS PROMOTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC, AND ECOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

Development Studies as a faculty is integral to Kenya's economy in advancing its socio-economic development, and skills advancement agenda. Firstly, it enhances capacity building, and education. Kenya faces fabulous hurdles ranging from high unemployment among the youth, and poverty. Development Studies programs offered at Maseno University and other universities equip learners, researchers, and students with analytical skills critical in addressing such issues. The curriculum covers aspects of project management, gender studies, and development economics, which promotes the implementation of initiatives to curb inequality, unemployment and access to primary services. It has in the recent past promoted the rise of vocational and entrepreneurship centers for the informal sectors as students and researchers are offered trainings on renewable energy, technology, and agribusiness. Through promoting skills advancement, Development Studies aids in the bridging of the gap between the research sector, and practical solutions, which ultimately impacts on their contributions towards economic prosperity, and reduction on dependence on subsistence livelihoods (Kinyanjui & Misaro, 2013)

Further, Development Studies as a faculty promotes socio-economic development, and ecological development through inclusive growth, and policy formulation. The analyzed data on education, health, and poverty is critical as it aids in recommending the strategies that are instrumental in

promoting inclusive growth. It has ensured smooth devolution, under the 2010 Constitutions, which is anchored on independence decision making, resource transfer, and decentralized governance. Scholars have devised techniques for equitable resource allocation, which is ideal to the county governments since it aids in addressing decentralized needs like infrastructure, and healthcare. Besides, the faculty has been instrumental in supporting policies that are tailored to the marginalized groups like the rural populations, the disabled persons, and women. The Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) program, which is a product of development research offers financial aid to these marginalized groups hence reducing paucity, and improving livelihoods. On the other hand Women Enterprise Fund plays a pivotal role to the female entrepreneurs by providing ready funds at affordable interest's rates hence enhancing their economic prospects. Such interventions are indications on how Development Studies translates theory into actionable policies for uplifting the disadvantaged groups, hence economic prosperity (Akubue, 2015).

Moreover, Development Studies enhances sustainability, and ecological advancement in Kenya. Kenya is currently struggling with biodiversity loss, deforestation, and climate change with its key ecosystems like Lake Victoria, and Maasai Mara facing threats linked to environmental degradation, and human activity. Development Studies contributes towards sustainability, and ecological development through promoting renewable energy and green technologies use. Being a global powerhouse for geothermal power, particularly the Olkaria Geothermal power, Development Studies stakeholders have offered insights on the socio-economic impact of the project, ensuring that the local community is prioritized on the aspects of infrastructure development, and job creation. Also, it has influenced several policy initiatives including the National Climate Change Action Plan 2018-2022 whose main aim is the reduction of emissions from the greenhouses, and promoting sustainable solutions to the vulnerable populations. Conservation and afforestation strategies equally cement the role of Development Studies' successes through the initiatives like the Green Belt Movement, and the Payment for Ecosystem Services. The Green Belt Movement, which was initiated by Wangari Maathai highlights the role of development principles in mobilizing communities towards restoration of degraded landscapes, combating soil erosion, and planting trees. The Payment for Ecosystem Services on the other hand is an initiative where farmers in the Aberdare Ranges receive compensation depending on their watersheds conservation initiatives. Such initiatives not only play a critical role towards the protection of the country's natural resources but it also enhances livelihood status as it links the economic incentives to ecological health (Khan, 2011).

VII. CHALLENGES FACED BY DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AT MASENO UNIVERSITY

Whereas Development Studies as a faculty in Maseno University has played a pivotal role in many aspects, it has also faced numerous challenges. One major challenge is the

ever-evolving nature of development itself. Globalization, political instabilities, and climate change in many areas around the globe implies that factors linked to development are evolving regularly. Staying adaptable, and flexible on such new developments is not only time consuming but it is also resource consuming. Development issues are mostly dynamic due to shifts in environmental, economic, and political conditions, and most of development factors are always reshaped by unpredictable global patterns like global migration, technological advancement, and climate change. The other key challenge linked to Development Studies as a faculty in Maseno is scarce resources for community, and research projects. Moreover, fieldwork in Development Studies is always resource-intensive, and time consuming while much of the fieldwork, especially in rural setup call for partnership with the local community, outreach, and data collection; which are all costly. Also, international funding for the researchers and students is always limited, with more funds used in STEM fields. Even though Maseno University has made massive strides for the expansion of its capabilities, funding for development-linked research has always been constrained, especially in community engagement (Karani, 2011).

VIII. CONCLUSION

To sum up, Development Studies is a faculty that is rapidly evolving not only in Kenya but also globally. At each level from the global context to the case level, Development Studies presents a myriad of challenges and opportunities which when well exploited, they will promote economic development. The faculty has promoted socio-economic and ecological prosperity through promoting sustainability, and ecological development, grassroots development, and community empowerment, inclusive growth, and policy formulation, and promoting equality. In realizing its potential however, it faces a myriad of challenges ranging from limited funding for research, disconnect between the academics, and policymakers, population growth, and urbanization which promotes strain on scarce resources, and corruption. To address the challenges, there is need for international collaboration on aspects of development at Maseno Universities, and embracing emerging technologies on development.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Akubue, A. (2015). Appropriate technology for socioeconomic development in third world countries. *Journal of Technology Studies*, 26(1).
- [2]. Apondi, M. U., Okelo, N. B., & Oginda, M. (2014). Assessment of the contribution of income generating activities on performance of maseno university–Kenya. *International Journal of Marketing and Technology*, 4(8), 45-56.
- [3]. Clemens, M. A., & Kremer, M. (2016). The new role for the World Bank. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 30(1), 53-76.
- [4]. Goulet, D. (2017). Development ethics: a new discipline. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 24(11), 1160-1171.

- [5]. Hanvey, R. G. (2022). An attainable global perspective. *Theory into Practice*, 21(3), 162-167.
- [6]. Kanyinga, K. (2016). Devolution and the new politics of development in Kenya. *African Studies Review*, 59(3), 155-167.
- [7]. Karani, F. A. (2011). The Role of the University in Rural Development in Kenya. *Working with Rural Communities Participatory Action Research in Kenya*, 75.
- [8]. Khan, H. (2011). Measurement and determinants of socioeconomic development: A critical conspectus. *Social Indicators Research*, 24, 153-175.
- [9]. Kinyanjui, K. D., & Misaro, J. (2013). Socio-economic status and participatory development in Kenya. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(1), 183-193.
- [10]. Nafukho, F. M. (2009). The role of universities in promoting cooperation between social and pure scientists for human development in Kenya. *Journal of Third World Studies*, 16(1), 87-100.
- [11]. Nafukho, F. M. (2019). The role of universities in promoting cooperation between social and pure scientists for human development in Kenya. *Journal of Third World Studies*, 16(1), 87-100.
- [12]. Ouellett, M. L. (2019). Overview of faculty development. *A Guide to Faculty Development*, 2, 3-20.
- [13]. Roberts, J. T., Hite, A. B., & Chorev, N. (2018). *The Globalization and Development reader: Perspectives on development and global change*. John Wiley & Sons.
- [14]. Schiller, N. G. (2019). A global perspective on migration and development. *Social Analysis*, 53(3), 14-37.