

# Policy Brief



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## A Primer on Area Based Programming<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

Area based programming (ABP) has become a buzzword over the past years, emerging as a central to addressing challenges of specific geographical areas, in this case regions, where the degree of vulnerability and disadvantage distinguishes those areas from the rest of the country. In such contexts, ABP aims to reduce the disparities between areas and groups, narrowing the gap through integrated, participatory and inclusive sustainable investments in subnational governance initiatives, resilience, education, health and livelihoods. Further, given the decreasing financial base of UNDP in Kenya, it is of increasing importance to focus the limited resources geographically and jointly working with other UN Agencies, to reach the maximum potential for the benefit of the most vulnerable populations with higher impact, and in keeping with the vision of *leaving no one behind*. Despite the growing interest in ABP, there is a lacuna on why it would achieve greater impact in Kenya as opposed to sectoral/issue based approaches. Thus, to better understand ABP, this *Policy Brief* defines ABP and its benefits in addressing Kenya's complex development challenges.

### 1. Introduction

Kenya has recorded a robust average annual economic growth of 5.9% during the period 2010-17 and graduated to a lower middle-income country (LMIC) in 2014<sup>2</sup>. Kenya has made progress in human development as reflected in the improvement of its Human Development Index (HDI) from 0.473 in 1990 to 0.555 in 2015, an increase of 17.3%. Although progress on social indicators has been significant, more effort is required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>3</sup> There remains a high level of poverty and exclusion

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<sup>1</sup>This policy brief is an output of the Strategic Policy Advisory Unit (SPAU) in the UNDP Kenya Country Office. The Unit focuses on upstream policy interventions in the areas of human development, pro-poor policy analysis, Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. It also supports the national and county governments in the design and implementation of evidence-based national development plans, county integrated development plans and other relevant policy instruments.

The views expressed in this policy brief are those of the SPAU, and do not represent the views of UNDP, the United Nations or any of its affiliate organizations

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<sup>2</sup> Preliminary GDP figures show that the economy grew by 5.7% in the first quarter of 2018. (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Kenya Voluntary National Report, 2017.

despite a decline in the poverty rate from 46.6 percent in 2005-2006 to 36.1<sup>4</sup> percent in 2015/16.<sup>5</sup> Spatially, across the 47 counties, overall headcount poverty (proportion of poor individuals) widely ranges from a low of 16.7 percent in Nairobi City County to a high of 79.4 percent in Turkana County. In 2015/16, the poorest four counties were Turkana (79.4 percent), Mandera (77.6 percent), Samburu (75.8 percent) and Busia (69.3 percent). People in the same regions face formal financial exclusion as high as 42% compared with the national average of 17.4%.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, the four counties with least poverty include Nairobi (16.7 percent), Nyeri (19.3 percent), Meru (19.4 percent) and Kirinyaga (20.0 percent).<sup>7</sup> The counties with high poverty levels are also characterized by low human indexes and high multi-dimensional poverty indexes.<sup>8</sup>

Recent Government of Kenya policy initiatives as pronounced in the Medium-Term Plan III (MPT III) 2018 -2022, Big 4 Plan, and Budget 2018/19 indicate an increasing commitment of the Government to broader poverty reduction, social protection, and the human development approach to development. To support these initiatives, the UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD) 2018 – 2022 *aims to: (a) better respond to varied localized governance contexts through area-based and integrated programming to reach the marginalized in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) and border counties, including women, youth and persons with disabilities; (b) support alignment of subnational policy with the 2030 Agenda; and alignment of national macroeconomic policy to national targets; and (c) in line with Sustainable Goal 17, drive sustainability through philanthropic and private sector partnerships and with international financial institutions (IFIs)*<sup>9</sup> to realize the country programme's strategic three priorities; (i) governance, peace and security; (ii) inclusive growth and structural transformation; and (iii) environmental sustainability, climate change and resilience.

ABP has become a buzzword over the past years, emerging as a central to addressing challenges of specific geographical areas, in this case regions, where the degree of vulnerability and disadvantage distinguishes those areas from the rest of the country. In such contexts, ABP aims to reduce the disparities between areas and groups, narrowing the gap through integrated, participatory and inclusive sustainable investments in subnational governance initiatives, resilience, education, health and livelihoods. Further, given the decreasing financial base of UNDP in Kenya, it is of increasing important to focus the limited resources geographically and jointly working with other UN Agencies in the spirit of Delivering as One (DAO), to reach the maximum potential for the benefit of the most vulnerable populations with higher impact, and in keeping with the vision of *leaving no one behind*.

Despite the growing interest in ABP, there is a lacuna on why it would achieve greater impact in Kenya as opposed to sectoral/issue based approaches. Thus, to better understand ABP, this **Policy Brief** defines ABP and its benefits in addressing Kenya's complex development challenges.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey, (KIHBS) 2015/2016. This is based on the monthly adult equivalent total consumption expenditure per person below KSh 3,252 in rural and peri-urban areas and below KSh 5,995 in core-urban areas as national poverty lines (KNBS, 2018. Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey (KIHBS), 2015/16).

<sup>5</sup>Using the US\$1.90 2011 PPP, the poverty rate declined from 43.6% in 2005/06 to 35.6% in 2015/16 (World Bank, 2018). Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey, 2015/2016. This is based on international poverty of \$1,90 at 2011 PPP.

<sup>6</sup>Central Bank of Kenya and Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2016) The 2016 FinAccess Household Survey, February 2016.

<sup>7</sup> KIHBS 2015/2016.

<sup>8</sup> Kenya National Human Development Report 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Country Programme Document for Kenya (2018-2022).

<sup>10</sup> Building on the current Ethiopia – Kenya Cross Border Programme, Turkana Country Joint Programme, UNDP Devolution Project, possible area programming interventions could include economic recovery and diversification, conflict resolution, infrastructure, basic services such as education, healthcare, and WASH), agriculture and natural resource management, development of the energy

## 2. Defining area based programming

ABP has gained traction in recent years among UN agencies seeking to provide a package of support aimed at improving economic, social or environmental outcomes within tightly defined geographical areas. Area based programming “**targets specific geographical areas** in a country, characterized by a **particular complex development problem**, though an **integrated, inclusive, participatory** and **flexible** approach”.<sup>11</sup>

ABP’s **territorial focus** derives from the understanding that the **space or area** in which people live should be the central point for improvement. In other words, the selected area basically corresponds to the geographical zone where a definite development challenge is faced. It could thus refer to a region or even county (or neighbourhood) in any given country, or to a cross-border zone including a variety of towns and individuals from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, provided they are all afflicted by a common problem or set of problems.

As a result, a different dynamic from the targeting approach is introduced given that the main purpose under the ABP approach is to serve the entire population within the area in question, rather than pre-establishing categories of potential beneficiaries (UNDP, 2009). ABP **targets and includes entire communities** (and not community segments or individuals), thus avoiding discriminatory practices among potential beneficiaries. In ABP, special emphasis is given to the **participation** of all stakeholders as a necessary condition to correctly define an appropriate solution to the problem at hand. This reflects the tendency in development approaches to see rapid development and democratic participation **“as complements, to stress the need for voice and participation as a means of ensuring that reforms are politically sustainable, and to recognize as a fundamental right of individuals having a say over the decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods”** (Sen, 1999, as quoted by Hoff and Stiglitz, 2001).

The ABP approach is concerned with identifying root causes (and avoiding undesired symptoms) from a **multi-sector perspective** that integrates the views of stakeholders (Harfst, 2006). A differentiating factor of the ABP approach is that the tools which are considered relevant to tackling the unique problem or problems at hand are applied simultaneously and in an **integrated** manner. The tools may not be novel in themselves but the fact that they are implemented in an inter-related, inter-dependent manner is decisive in the ABP approach. Therefore, the ABP approach renders itself highly **flexible** and convenient to address complex development circumstances that can be pinned down to a precise geographical area. The main idea is to help disadvantaged areas and address in detail the basis of regional disparities.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the expected outcome from an ABP approach is a tailored intervention programme for the specified development situation in the selected area (Harfst, 2006). Ultimately, the ABP approach is expected to reconcile long and short-term objectives that secure regional sustainability and welfare.

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sector (particularly rural renewable energy; and local governance mechanisms with gender, HIV/AIDS, environmental protection, climate change and disaster risk management as cross cutting issues).

<sup>11</sup> This definition comes from UNDP/RBEC Area-Based Development Practitioners Workshop, Crimea, Ukraine, 29-31 October 2003 and is used in Harfst’s (2006) Practitioner’s Guide to Area-Based Development Programming.

<sup>12</sup> Such disparities are said to emerge from one or more of the following issues (UNDP, 2009): geographical isolation; climate factors and physical disadvantages frequent natural disasters, man-made disasters, demographics (low population density, persistent outmigration), economic factors (industrial restructuring, collapse of agriculture), conflict (internal/external), or ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic barriers.

The ABP approach relies on widely accepted principles that are common to rural development models, in the sense that ***inclusion, participation, bottom-up*** initiatives and ***flexibility*** are key features. In addition, in ABP, horizontal linkages (i.e.; between peers and stakeholders at the same level) and vertical linkages (i.e. between different levels of planning and decision making) reinforce the ***multi-dimensional*** aspect of the approach.

It is interesting to highlight that in recent years, the integrated programming approach of ABP has also gained traction with integrated rural development. For instance, nowadays it is widely recognized that sustained rural development may not be achieved by focusing on agricultural issues alone. As a result, policy packages tend to ***integrate*** environmental<sup>13</sup>, sociopolitical and institutional aspects. In addition, it has become evident that projects that do not obtain ***commitment and involvement*** from the beneficiaries can hardly ever secure a long-term effect (FAO, 2007). Overall, there has been a shift from a top-down, subsidy-based strategy to ***bottom-up*** initiatives that focus on ***local assets*** and investment to improve regional competitiveness (OECD, 2006). In this respect, the ABP approach has not only embraced the previously stated trends but goes one step further since it concentrates on specific geographical zones that suffer a particularly unique development challenge.

### 3. Some theoretical insights on area based programming

The main ABP features or principles can be related to identifiable theoretical insights. For instance, the integrated, participatory and inclusive traits of ABP are coherent with the idea or concept that development is not just about increasing goods and services provided and consumed by society. It also involves enabling communities to have greater control over their relationship with the environment and other communities (Shortall and Shucksmith 1998). In other words, a holistic and multi-sectorial perspective is embedded in the design of ABP strategies and initiatives. This perspective also justifies ABP interest in the analysis of vertical and horizontal linkages and the promotion of capacity building. The latter links back to the Putnam's (1995) theories of social capital<sup>14</sup> and North's (1990) consideration of effective institutional coordination.<sup>15</sup>

Another theoretical stand which supports the ABP approach is the conviction that local governance allows for 'tailoring levels of consumption to the preferences of smaller, more homogeneous groups' (Wallis and Oates, 1998); thus, making on-site, localized, area-based planning more responsive to area-specific needs (Faguet, 2004)

Given the conflict-related origins of the ABP approach, it is also possible to trace the theoretical inputs from the conflict literature which influence the scope and timeframe of the ABP approach. For instance, Lederach (1997) implies that developing an infrastructure for peace building that tackles the crises stage should take two to six months, issues of people and their relations - one to two years, and the institutions or sub-systems – five to ten years, while moving towards sustainable peace and desired future may take generations. This translates into ABP programmes which are required to be highly specific in the definition of the outcome, objectives and time length of their interventions (Harfst, 2006). Equally, Vrbensky (2008) states that the specifics of each post-conflict or special developmental context determine the exact set of strategies and measures to be included in

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, policy makers increasingly emphasize the need to identify and valorize the wide range of resources of rural areas and their use (i.e. natural systems related to water, air, and land). The stewardship of the multiple features of rural sites has thus become a key pillar of rural development policies (OECD, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> According to Putnam (1995) 'features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions'.

<sup>15</sup> For North (1990), higher coordination within socioeconomic agents (which stems from appropriate institutional framework) implies a reduction in transaction costs, thus leading to a positive impact on productivity. Favourable institutions to economic growth include any (formal and informal) convention, norm or statute which secures clearly defined property rights, sets cost efficient ways to enforce contracts, solve conflicts, condemn opportunistic behaviour, guarantee easy access to information, etc.

the programme. Clearly, this calls for a **comprehensive** and **flexible** approach that allows for a multi-tool, multi-agent, multi-sector, multilevel implementation and evaluation in the context of a realistic time framework. This characteristic is inherent to the definition of ABP.

It can further be argued that some of the key theoretical concerns that are embedded in the ABP principles or key features are rooted on the notion of **endogenous development**. Ray (2000) states that **endogenous development** is understood as the hypothesis that improvements in the socio-economic well-being of disadvantaged areas can best be brought about by recognizing and animating the collective resources of the territory (Nemes, 2005).

#### 4. The benefits of area based programming in Kenya

The idea of addressing development and conflict situations through targeted geographical action has been around for a long time, but ABP in its current guise started with the UNOPS-executed PRODERE (Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees in Central America) in 1989 in six Central American Countries, four of which had just emerged from violent civil war. Since PRODERE, ABP approaches have been actively applied across the world by UNDP, UNOPS and other organizations in support of crisis prevention and post-conflict recovery objectives (Harfst, 2006). ABP approaches are recommended as appropriate in environments with problems that fall into the following four main categories:

1. *Conflict-related*: pre- or post-conflict situations affecting a specific area of a country that require preventive development actions, post-war reconstruction, peace-building and reconciliation, reintegration of returning refugees, IDPs, former combatants, etc.
2. *Disaster-related*: natural and/or man-made disasters that affect a specific area of a country, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, drought, land erosion, nuclear disasters, etc.
3. *Poverty-related*: related to “spatial poverty traps” that have emerged because of geographical isolation, climate, terrain, demography, economic restructuring, etc.
4. *Exclusion-related*: related to groups/categories of people concentrated in a specific part of a country, such as regional ethnic minorities, that feel or are marginalized and excluded from participating in society (UNDP/RBEC, 2003).

Based on the categorizations above and Kenya’s complex development challenges, it could be argued that Kenya presents a suitable environment to apply ABP. Evaluations of ABP programmes implemented by international organizations suggest that it is often **very effective in responding to complex conflict characteristics on sub-national levels** across the world. Yet be that as it may, the benefits of APB in Kenya are:

1. Allowing for holistic solutions and encouraging horizontal linkages and cross-sector responses even if problems are sector-specific as development and conflict prevention requires addressing several issues holistically to become sustainable;
2. High potential for increased participation and better coordination since it promotes cross-sector partnerships and division of labor;
3. Utilization of economies of scale, facilitation of inter-county cooperation and trust building, establishment of regional institutions and investment in regional infrastructure;
4. Understanding and taking into account specificity of the local situation, high level of insight and closeness to issues and beneficiaries;
5. Local empowerment, building of human capital, local people as agent of change;

6. Promotion of integration, inclusiveness and non-discrimination through the involvement of the entire community rather than specific group, promotion of participation and transparency, avoiding stigmatization and mentality issue, reduction of perception of social inequality;
7. Promoting decentralization, capacitating local administration, supporting institutional development and organizational reform leading to increased effectiveness;
8. Focus on manageable size allowing for integrated, comprehensive approach, keeping programme relevant in changing context; and
9. Better monitoring of results and reflection of lessons learned, improved cost efficiency through coherent approach avoiding duplications and addressing needs.

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