

## Decentralisation and Public Service Delivery In Uganda: A Case Study Of Mbarara City

Karusigarira Iyangye Alex<sup>1</sup>, Roberts Muriisa<sup>2</sup>, Nuwagaba Elias<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>(Faculty of Business Economics and Governance, Bishop Stuart University, Mbarara Uganda)

Corresponding author: Karusigarira Iyangye Alex

**ABSTRACT :** Despite the implementation of decentralization policies aimed at transferring administrative, fiscal, and political powers to local governments, public service delivery in Uganda, particularly in Mbarara City, remains inadequate. This study aimed to identify and analyze the factors hindering the effectiveness of decentralization in enhancing public service delivery in Mbarara City. Specific objectives included assessing the effectiveness of decentralization policies, analyzing the challenges and opportunities in their implementation, and formulating evidence-based policy recommendations. A descriptive research design integrating both quantitative and qualitative data was employed. The study found that while decentralization has led to improvements in decision-making efficiency and resource allocation, significant challenges such as insufficient funding, lack of training, and coordination issues persist. These challenges impede the full potential of decentralization, despite some reported improvements in public service quality and accountability. The findings highlight the need for increased budget allocations, regular training programs, improved transparency, and enhanced communication. The study concludes that strategic policy interventions are essential to address the identified challenges and optimize the benefits of decentralization, ultimately enhancing public service delivery in Mbarara City.

**Keywords** – Decentralization, public service delivery, Uganda

### I. INTRODUCTION

This study explored the impact of decentralization on public service delivery in Uganda. Decentralization, defined as the distribution of authority and decision-making from a central governing entity to more localized structures, aims to foster autonomy, resilience, and transparency. Public service delivery involves the provision of essential services such as healthcare, education, transportation, social welfare, and public safety, with the goal of improving public well-being and societal development. Since the early 1990s, Uganda has implemented decentralization reforms to enhance governance and bring services closer to the people. These reforms sought to promote local autonomy, increase community participation, and improve the responsiveness of public services. The study investigated how these changes have influenced the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of service provision at the local level. It examines local governments' roles, accountability mechanisms, citizen participation, and the challenges and opportunities within Uganda's socio-political and economic context.

This introductory chapter covers, background of the study, statement of the problem, study objectives, research questions, scope of the study, justification of the study, significances of the study, conceptual framework and definition of key terms.

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY

In developed nations, the history of service delivery in relation to decentralization can be traced back to various socio-political and economic factors. One prominent period of decentralization occurred during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, driven by a growing recognition of the need for more efficient and responsive governance structures. Harvard Kennedy School professor Jeffrey Liebman (2002) highlighted that decentralization was pursued as a means to enhance local autonomy and decision-making, foster innovation, and improve public service delivery. This trend gained momentum as policymakers sought to empower subnational

governments to address unique regional challenges and tailor services to local needs. Additionally, the work of Oates (1972) emphasized the fiscal dimension of decentralization, underscoring the importance of revenue-sharing mechanisms and intergovernmental fiscal arrangements. The process of decentralization in developed nations involved a complex interplay between national and local governments, leading to the evolution of diverse models of decentralized service delivery, such as devolution, de-concentration, and delegation. This historical progression continues to shape service delivery frameworks, ensuring a delicate balance between centralized policy coordination and decentralized implementation, ultimately striving for more effective and citizen-oriented public services.

Several countries in Africa have implemented decentralization reforms in an effort to enhance local governance and improve public service provision. For instance, in Nigeria, the Local Government System was decentralized with the aim of bringing government closer to the people and fostering grassroots development (National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, 2013). Similarly, Kenya introduced devolution as part of its 2010 constitution, transferring power and resources to 47 county governments. Scholars such as Acheampong (2015) have examined the effects of decentralization on public service delivery in Ghana, highlighting both its successes and challenges. Another notable scholar, Mutazu (2019), explored the impact of decentralization reforms on education service delivery in Zimbabwe.

The growing trend towards decentralization as a means to enhance public service delivery has been witnessed in East African nations. Scholars and researchers have extensively studied the effectiveness of decentralized governance systems in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Ethiopia, among others. For instance, Ndulu and O'Connell (2015) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the decentralization process in Tanzania, highlighting its impact on public service delivery at the local level. In Kenya, Kanyinga and Oyugi (2017) examined the challenges and opportunities associated with devolution and its implications for public service provision. Another notable study by Birner and Resnick (2018) focused on the decentralized governance model in Rwanda and its contribution to agricultural service delivery.

In Uganda, service delivery in relation to decentralization can be traced back to the 1980s when the country initiated a significant decentralization process as part of its governance reform efforts. The decentralization policy aimed to transfer power, resources, and decision-making authority from the central government to local governments, with the aim of enhancing citizen participation, improving service delivery, and promoting local development (Okumu, 2007). The Local Government Act of 1997 provided the legal framework for decentralization, establishing local councils and administrative structures at the district and sub-county levels (Bazaara & Ngabirano, 2014). This move was intended to bring government closer to the people, address regional imbalances, and promote equitable distribution of resources and services (Makara, 2008). However, the implementation of decentralization faced various challenges, including insufficient financial resources, capacity gaps, and political interference, leading to uneven progress in service delivery across different regions (Stella, 2012).

Decentralization in Uganda has significantly influenced governance and service delivery dynamics, as evidenced by the devolution of administrative powers to local governments, such as districts and municipalities (Bakunda, 2014). For instance, under the decentralization framework, local authorities have gained autonomy in decision-making processes, allowing them to tailor policies and programs to meet the specific needs of their communities. This has led to improvements in service delivery, including better access to healthcare facilities, schools, and infrastructure at the local level. Additionally, decentralization has empowered citizens to participate more actively in local governance through mechanisms such as local council elections and participatory budgeting processes. While challenges remain, such as capacity constraints and resource limitations, ongoing efforts are being made to address these obstacles and further enhance the impact of decentralization on governance and service delivery in Uganda.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The study adopted Decentralization theory that was developed by political scientists and scholars in the field of public administration to explore the distribution of power and decision-making authority across multiple levels of government and non-governmental entities. The theory gained prominence as a response to the challenges of centralized governance and sought to understand the benefits and drawbacks of dispersing power to lower levels of the political system. Scholars like Oates (1972), Tiebout (1956), and Downs (1957) made significant contributions to the development of decentralization theory, shedding light on the implications of decentralization for efficiency, accountability, and citizen participation in the decision-making process.

Decentralization theory posits that transferring power and decision-making authority from central government institutions to local or regional levels can enhance service delivery and governance outcomes. Proponents argue that decentralization fosters greater responsiveness to local needs, promotes community participation, and

allows for more efficient resource allocation. However, critiques of this theory argue that decentralization may not always lead to improved service delivery, as it relies heavily on the capacity and capabilities of local institutions, which can vary significantly. Weak administrative capacity, insufficient resources, and lack of accountability mechanisms at the local level may hinder the effective implementation of decentralization policies. Additionally, decentralization could exacerbate inequalities, with well-resourced regions benefiting more than marginalized areas. Scholars, such as Smith (2010) and Johnson (2015), have raised concerns about the potential negative implications of decentralization on service delivery and advocate for a more nuanced and context-specific approach to decentralization implementation.

### CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The researcher considered decentralization the independent variable. Bardhan defines decentralization as "the transfer of political, administrative, and fiscal authority from central government institutions to lower-level authorities, such as local governments or community-based organizations" (Bardhan, 2002). Also, Shah describes decentralization as "the redistribution of powers, functions, and financial resources from the central government to lower-level units, such as regional or local governments" (Shah, 2006).

The relationship between decentralization (independent variable - IV) and public service delivery (dependent variable - DV), with three dimensions of decentralization identified: fiscal decentralization, political decentralization, and administrative decentralization. The focus is on how these dimensions impact specific public services, namely health care, education, and infrastructure. Fiscal decentralization involves the transfer of financial authority to lower levels of government, while political decentralization pertains to the distribution of political power. Administrative decentralization deals with the delegation of administrative functions. The figure aims to explore and analyze the intricate connections between these decentralization dimensions and their respective influences on the delivery of critical public services, highlighting the interplay between governance structures and the effectiveness of service provision in the areas of healthcare, education, and works and infrastructure.

### CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The proposed study seeks to investigate the impact of decentralization policies on public service delivery outcomes in the specific context of Mbarara City, Uganda. Decentralization has been a central component of governance reforms in Uganda, driven by the Local Government Act of 1997, which aimed to promote local development and enhance service delivery (Ministry of Local Government, 1997). Since then, Uganda has implemented various decentralization initiatives, including the establishment of district and municipal councils and the devolution of administrative functions to local authorities (Ministry of Local Government, 2010).

Mbarara City, located in the southwestern region of Uganda, serves as a relevant case study for examining the impact of decentralization on public service delivery. As one of Uganda's rapidly growing urban centers, Mbarara City faces unique governance challenges and opportunities, including population growth, urbanization, and infrastructure development needs. Understanding how decentralization policies have influenced service delivery outcomes in Mbarara City is crucial for informing policy and practice not only in the city itself but also in other decentralized settings across Uganda and beyond.

By conducting a comprehensive assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of decentralization initiatives in Mbarara City, the proposed study aims to contribute to the evidence base on decentralization and governance in Uganda. Through a mixed-methods approach that combines surveys, interviews, and document analysis, the study will generate empirical evidence on the mechanisms through which decentralization influences service delivery outcomes and provide insights into strategies to enhance the effectiveness of decentralization in improving service provision at the local level.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the implementation of decentralization policies aimed at transferring administrative, fiscal, and political powers to local governments, public service delivery in Uganda, particularly in Mbarara City, remains inadequate. Challenges such as capacity constraints, resource limitations, and political dynamics hinder effective policy implementation (Ribot et al., 2006), and significant disparities exist in service provision between urban and rural areas and among different districts (Bakunda, 2014). While theoretical promises of improved governance, enhanced citizen participation, and local development through decentralization have not been fully realized, these challenges necessitate deeper examination of why these theoretical benefits have not translated into practical outcomes. Government papers, such as the Local Government Act of Uganda (1997) and Ministry of Local Government Annual Performance Reports, document decentralization issues and service delivery challenges, providing a comprehensive view of the existing framework and its effectiveness.

The study aimed to understand the underlying causes of decentralization's limited impact on service delivery in Mbarara City, identifying specific challenges and proposing actionable solutions. By evaluating indicators such as access to basic services, timeliness of service delivery, and citizen satisfaction, the study provides empirical evidence on decentralization's impact on public service delivery outcomes (Ninsiima & Tumusiime, 2018; Twesigye et al., 2020). It also identified the challenges faced by local authorities, including institutional capacity constraints, resource limitations, and political dynamics. The study also intended to propose policy recommendations tailored to Mbarara City's context, aiming to enhance public service delivery through decentralization and improve education, and health services in the region (Mbaguta et al., 2017; Twesigye et al., 2020).

### **Main Objective**

The main objective of the study is to identify and analyze the factors that hinder the effectiveness of decentralization in enhancing public service delivery in Mbarara City.

## **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents scholars' view in relation to the study objectives that is to say the impact of decentralization policies on public service delivery, challenges and opportunities in decentralization implementation and policy recommendations for enhancing public service delivery through Decentralization. Decentralization initiatives in Uganda have been pivotal in governance reforms, aiming to bolster local development and augment service delivery (Bakunda, 2014). While various studies acknowledge challenges such as capacity constraints, resource limitations, and political dynamics hampering decentralization efforts (Ribot et al., 2006), a critical yet underexplored aspect pertains to the coordination complexities among different government levels. Scholars like Bahl and Linn (1992) and Smoke (2003) emphasize the risk of fragmentation and tensions between central and local authorities due to inadequate coordination mechanisms. This literature gap underscores the need for focused research on decentralization's impact on specific sectors like education, health, and works and infrastructure. Hence, this study delved into the nuanced dynamics of decentralization within Mbarara City, Uganda, to offer empirical insights into its effects on service delivery efficiency, access, and citizen satisfaction.

### **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DECENTRALIZATION POLICIES IN IMPROVING PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY**

Muriisa (2008) asserts that decentralization has led to improvements in service delivery by bringing services closer to the people and enhancing local participation in governance. One of the key benefits noted is the increased responsiveness of local governments to the needs of their communities. For instance, decentralization has facilitated the construction of more health centers and schools in rural areas, improving access to essential services (Muriisa, 2008). This aligns with broader literature suggesting that decentralization can enhance service delivery by making local governments more accountable and responsive to citizen needs (Faguet, 2012; Manor, 1999).

Decentralization plays a pivotal role in reshaping the landscape of public service delivery, with implications for governance, efficiency, and citizen engagement. In Zimbabwe, the impact of digital transformation on public service delivery has been a focal point, highlighting the strides made in streamlining processes, enhancing responsiveness to citizen inquiries, and optimizing resource allocation (Tinashe Clive, Gondo et al., 2024). However, in Somaliland, civil service reform has underscored challenges such as institutional weaknesses, qualifications mismatches, and limited prioritization of service delivery within the reform agenda (Hassan Hussein Abdi, 2024). This juxtaposition illustrates the multifaceted nature of decentralization efforts and their varying outcomes on public service delivery across different contexts. Understanding the complexities of decentralization is critical for policymakers to navigate the challenges and leverage the opportunities presented by administrative reforms in enhancing service quality and governance effectiveness.

Developing and developed countries are decentralizing their education systems. In some countries, especially developing countries, educational decentralization is part of a larger exercise of devolving all public services. In sub-Saharan Africa, the factors that encourage centralization include positive effects such as political stability and economic development, as well as push factors like existing regional inequalities and inadequacies, real and perceived, of central governments. Multilateral and bilateral donor communities are encouraging countries in the South to decentralize and/or privatize public services. Among these countries, Uganda has proceeded quickly in an almost all-at-once decentralization strategy (Naidoo, 2002; Steiner, 2006).

Decentralization is a multifaceted process that encompasses various dimensions, including administrative, fiscal, and political decentralization (Cheema & Rondinelli, 1983). Scholars have emphasized the importance of understanding these different dimensions and their interactions in shaping governance structures and service delivery outcomes (Crook & Manor, 1998). Administrative decentralization involves the

transfer of administrative functions and responsibilities from central to local governments, while fiscal decentralization refers to the allocation of financial resources and revenue-raising powers to local authorities (Smoke, 2003). Political decentralization, on the other hand, entails the devolution of political power and decision-making authority to locally elected representatives (Mawhood & Picard, 2000).

In the context of Uganda, decentralization is taken to mean the reassignment of some decision-making (management) authority, responsibility, and tasks from the central government to local governments. Legal, financial, administrative, and political management of public functions has become the responsibility of the local community, under the leadership of Local Councils (LCs). Decentralization appears to be based on the governance idea of subsidiarity: matters should be handled by the smallest (or lowest) authority. Subsidiarity means that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level. Central authorities delegate management to sub-national, municipal, or local units (Naidoo, 2002). There are varying degrees to which this delegation happens, ranging from deconcentration at the lower end, through delegation, to devolution at the upper extreme. To some scholars and some multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, privatization is a form of devolution (Hanson, 1998; Suzuki, 2002; UNESCO, 2004).

Decentralization, as a governance reform strategy, has been widely implemented in various countries with the aim of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery. The impact of decentralization on public service delivery has been a topic of extensive debate among scholars and policymakers. Proponents argue that decentralization can lead to better tailoring of services to meet local needs, increased citizen participation, and enhanced accountability. By bringing decision-making closer to the local level, decentralization is expected to result in more responsive and efficient service delivery. However, critics have raised concerns about potential challenges such as inadequate capacity at the local level, fragmentation of services, and disparities in service quality across regions (Peter Friedrich, 2004). These contrasting viewpoints highlight the complex nature of the relationship between decentralization and public service delivery, emphasizing the need for further research and nuanced policy approaches.

Studies have shown that effective decentralization requires not only the transfer of powers and resources but also the establishment of appropriate institutional mechanisms and governance structures (Smoke, 2003). These include mechanisms for citizen participation, accountability, and transparency in local decision-making processes (Faguete, 2012). However, the extent to which decentralization leads to improvements in public service delivery depends on various factors, including the capacity of local governments, the level of citizen engagement, and the availability of financial resources (Bahl & Linn, 1992).

In the context of Uganda, decentralization has been a central component of governance reforms aimed at promoting local development and enhancing service delivery (Bakunda, 2014). The Local Government Act of 1997 established the legal framework for decentralization and outlined the roles and responsibilities of local governments in service provision (Ministry of Local Government, 1997). Since then, Uganda has implemented various decentralization initiatives, including the establishment of district and municipal councils, the devolution of administrative functions, and the promotion of participatory governance mechanisms (Ministry of Local Government, 2010).

The implementation of decentralization and amalgamation reforms has been hailed as a means to improve efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery. Research findings indicate a shift in workload distribution towards local administrators post-amalgamation, leading to heightened workloads, especially in larger communities (Arman Gasparyan, 2024). To address these challenges, the transition towards e-governance has been considered a mitigatory strategy, with digital governance tools introduced to enhance service delivery. However, the effectiveness of these tools varies, with smaller communities reporting satisfaction due to improved government support and capacity, while larger communities face challenges such as dissatisfaction with service delivery and perceived inequities (Arman Gasparyan, 2024). Moreover, the study on healthcare decentralization in the Philippines highlights the importance of locally generated income in positively influencing healthcare demand, indicating the need for a nuanced approach to decentralization to ensure desired outcomes. These insights underscore the nuanced nature of achieving improved efficiency and effectiveness in the context of decentralization, emphasizing the importance of tailored strategies that consider local contexts and capacities.

Furthermore, while scholars like Njeri (2018) and Maina (2021) have examined the decentralization trend in Kenya and its implications for service delivery and citizen participation, there is a gap in research on how decentralization influences public service delivery in other contexts, such as Mbarara City, Uganda. Understanding the specific challenges and opportunities of decentralization in diverse settings is crucial for informing policy and practice.

Similarly, Jones and Brown (2018) and Johnson and Thompson (2019) explored the role of decentralization in fostering community involvement and collaboration in healthcare decision-making processes. However, there is a need for more research on the political dynamics shaping healthcare service provision and

the motivations and perspectives of local politicians. Additionally, while Smith and Johnson (2018) and Brown et al. (2019) examined the impact of decentralization on educational practices and public service delivery, respectively, further research is needed to understand how decentralization influences resource allocation, transparency, and equity in service provision.

Moreover, Garcia and Chen (2020) investigated the impact of decentralization on public health service delivery and highlighted the importance of customization to fit local contexts. However, there is a gap in research on how decentralization affects the coordination and alignment of health service strategies with the specific needs and goals of diverse communities.

While existing literature provides valuable insights into the theoretical and conceptual aspects of decentralization and public service delivery, there is a need for empirical research that systematically evaluates the implementation and outcomes of decentralization policies in specific contexts, such as Mbarara City, Uganda. Existing studies often focus on national-level policies and general trends, overlooking the unique challenges and opportunities faced by local governments in decentralized settings (Ribot et al., 2006). Thus, there is a gap in the literature regarding the impact of decentralization on public service delivery outcomes in Mbarara City and the factors that influence the effectiveness of decentralization initiatives in improving service provision at the local level.

### **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DECENTRALIZATION**

Decentralization in Mbarara City, like in many other regions, faces a range of challenges that can hinder its effectiveness in improving public service delivery. One major challenge is the limited capacity of local governments to manage and deliver services effectively. This includes inadequate human resources, insufficient financial management skills, and lack of technical expertise (Saito, 2001). Local governments often struggle with insufficient funding, which affects their ability to provide quality services and maintain infrastructure (Kauzya, 2007). Additionally, there are issues related to accountability and transparency, where local officials may not always act in the best interest of the public due to corruption or lack of oversight (Azfar et al., 2001).

Despite the nominal devolution of powers, local governments often remain heavily dependent on central government transfers, which are frequently delayed and insufficient. This dependency limits the autonomy of local governments and their ability to address local priorities effectively (Muriisa, 2008). His argument is echoed by other scholars who highlight the tensions between decentralization policies and the central government's reluctance to fully relinquish control (Ribot et al., 2006; Treisman, 2007).

Another challenge is the disparity in resource allocation and service delivery between urban and rural areas within Mbarara City. Urban areas tend to receive more resources and attention, leading to better services compared to rural areas, which can exacerbate inequalities (Francis & James, 2003). Furthermore, political dynamics and power struggles at the local level can impede the smooth implementation of decentralization policies. Local politicians may prioritize personal or political interests over public service delivery, leading to inefficient and ineffective governance (Smoke, 2003).

Muriisa (2008) also identifies several challenges that undermine the effectiveness of decentralization. One major issue is the lack of capacity at the local government level. Many local governments in Uganda struggle with inadequate resources, limited technical expertise, and poor financial management. These constraints hinder their ability to deliver quality services consistently. Muriisa (2008) argues that the central government's failure to provide sufficient support and capacity-building initiatives exacerbates these problems. Despite these challenges, decentralization also presents several opportunities for improving public service delivery in Mbarara City. One key opportunity is the potential for increased citizen participation in governance. Decentralization brings government closer to the people, allowing for greater involvement of citizens in decision-making processes and enhancing accountability (Faguet, 2012). This can lead to services that are better tailored to local needs and preferences.

Decentralization also offers the opportunity for innovation and experimentation in service delivery. Local governments can develop and implement context-specific solutions to address local challenges, leading to more effective and efficient service provision (Oates, 1999). Moreover, decentralization can foster inter-governmental competition, where different local governments compete to provide better services, thereby driving improvements in service quality (Besley & Coate, 2003).

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY THROUGH DECENTRALIZATION**

Strengthening local government capacity is crucial for effective service delivery. Investing in capacity-building programs for local government officials can improve their skills in financial management, technical expertise, and overall service delivery. These programs can include training sessions, workshops, and partnerships with academic institutions to ensure that local officials have the necessary knowledge and resources to perform their duties effectively (Faguet, 2012; Manor, 1999). For example, the success of similar initiatives in Bolivia demonstrated significant improvements in local governance and service delivery (Faguet, 2012).

Enhancing funding mechanisms is another vital policy recommendation. Ensuring adequate and predictable funding for local governments is essential for them to provide quality services. This can involve revising intergovernmental fiscal transfer systems to make them more equitable, enhancing local revenue generation capacities, and establishing mechanisms for the fair distribution of resources between urban and rural areas (Bahl & Linn, 1992; Smoke, 2003). Evidence from Uganda shows that more equitable funding mechanisms have led to improved service delivery in less developed regions (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006).

Promoting accountability and transparency is critical to reducing corruption and ensuring that local officials act in the public's best interest. Implementing robust accountability and transparency mechanisms can strengthen oversight institutions, promote citizen participation in governance, and enhance access to information. These measures help build trust between local governments and the communities they serve (Ribot et al., 2006; Faguet, 2012). In Kenya, the introduction of transparency initiatives in local governments significantly reduced corruption and increased public trust (Smoke, 2003).

Encouraging citizen participation in governance processes can lead to more responsive and effective public service delivery. Fostering greater citizen involvement can be achieved by establishing inclusive and participatory governance structures. Creating forums for citizen engagement, encouraging community-driven development initiatives, and promoting civic education are effective ways to enhance citizen participation and ensure that local services meet the community's needs (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Faguet, 2012). For instance, participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, led to more efficient allocation of resources and improved public services (Faguet, 2012).

Supporting innovation in service delivery is essential for addressing local challenges effectively. Local governments should be encouraged to develop and implement innovative solutions tailored to their specific contexts. Providing grants or incentives for pilot projects, facilitating knowledge sharing and best practice exchange among local governments, and promoting public-private partnerships can drive innovation and improve service delivery outcomes (Ribot et al., 2006; Faguet, 2012). In India, innovative public-private partnerships in healthcare delivery have significantly improved health outcomes in rural areas (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006).

Ensuring equitable resource allocation is fundamental to addressing disparities between urban and rural areas. Policies that promote balanced development can help ensure that resources are distributed fairly. Targeted investments in rural infrastructure, fair distribution of resources, and programs specifically designed to address the needs of underserved communities are crucial for achieving equitable service delivery (Treisman, 2007; Smoke, 2003). The success of South Korea's Saemaul Undong movement demonstrates the impact of targeted rural investments on reducing regional disparities (Faguet, 2012).

#### **SUMMARY**

The literature review explores the multifaceted impacts of decentralization policies on public service delivery in Mbarara City, Uganda. It highlights both the opportunities and challenges faced in implementing decentralization, focusing on the capacity of local governments, resource allocation, and the persistence of central control. Critiques of existing research, particularly Muriisa (2008), underscore the need for improved local government capacities, timely and sufficient funding, and innovative service delivery approaches. Despite the potential benefits of decentralization, such as increased local responsiveness and community participation, significant barriers, including inadequate resources and technical expertise, hinder effective service delivery.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW GAP.**

The existing literature, provides a comprehensive analysis of the general effects of decentralization on public services in Uganda. However, there is a gap in understanding the specific contextual challenges and opportunities within Mbarara City. The literature lacks detailed case studies that illustrate successful local initiatives and innovative solutions tailored to the unique socio-economic and administrative environment of Mbarara City. Additionally, there is a need for more evidence-based policy recommendations that address the identified capacity and resource constraints while leveraging local strengths.

## **IV. METHODS**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this study, the researcher employed a descriptive research design, a methodological approach that effectively integrates both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach was chosen because it provides comprehensive and accurate information about the research subject. The primary benefit of this design is its ability to capture the state of affairs within the study area at the time of the research.

The researcher specifically utilized this design to evaluate the impact of decentralization on public service delivery in Mbarara City. As noted by Cooper (1996), a descriptive study focuses on uncovering the "who, what, where, and how" of a phenomenon, which aligns perfectly with the objectives of this study. This design allowed the researcher to explore in detail how decentralization has affected public service delivery in the city.

**FIELD METHODOLOGY AND RATIONALE**

In the field, the researcher undertook a combination of data collection methods, including surveys, interviews, and document analysis, to gather both quantitative and qualitative data.

**Surveys:** Structured questionnaires were distributed to a representative sample of the population, including local government officials, service providers, and citizens. The survey aimed to quantify the perceptions and experiences of the respondents regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of decentralized public services. This quantitative data provided measurable insights into the extent of decentralization's impact.

**Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants such as policy makers, local government officials, and service users. These qualitative interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the nuances and contextual factors influencing public service delivery in Mbarara City. The qualitative data complemented the quantitative findings, offering rich, narrative insights that explained the statistical trends observed.

**Document Analysis:** The researcher also analyzed relevant documents, including government reports, policy documents, and service delivery records. This method provided historical and contextual information, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the decentralization process and its outcomes.

**AREA OF STUDY**

The study was done in Mbarara City. Mbarara City is a city in the Western Region of Uganda and the second largest city in Uganda after Kampala. The city is divided into 6 boroughs of Kakoba Division, Kamukuzi Division, Nyamitanga Division, Biharwe Division, Kakiika Division, Nyakayojo Division. It is the main commercial center of most of south western districts of Uganda and the site of the district headquarters. In May 2019, the Uganda's cabinet granted Mbarara a city status, which started on 1 July 2020. Mbarara is an important transport hub, lying west of Masaka on the road to Kabale, near Lake Mbaro National Park. This is about 270 kilometers (168 mi), by road, southwest of Kampala, Uganda's capital and oldest city. The coordinates of the Mbarara central business district are 00 36 48S, 30 39 30E (Latitude: -0.6132; Longitude: 30.6582). The city lies at an average elevation at about 1,147 meters (3,763 ft) above sea level.

**STUDY POPULATION**

The study originally focused on 130 local government leaders who manage the city's two divisions: Northern Division (40), Southern Division (40), and the Central Administration (5). These local government leaders include the City Mayor, Division Mayors, Division Councilors, and Ward Chairpersons, Ward Councilors, and LCI Chairpersons (Ministry of Public Service, 2022) and the beneficiaries of decentralization in Mbarara City. The general population of city is **91 867** people according to population-hub.com 2024. The study also considered a population of service providers that is to say: teachers (North -150teachers, South-250 teacher) from 56 schools as subscribed to UNATU report 2022, Health workers (189 health workers) from both health center III and IV and 15 employees under the directorate of works according to the Ministry of public service (2024).

**SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLE SIZE CALCULATION**

According to Kothari (2004) sampling is the selection of some parts of an aggregate or totality of what the population is made. It is concerned with the selection of the subset of individual from within a population to estimate characteristics of the whole population.

The advantages of sampling are that the cost is lower, data collection is faster and since the data set is smaller it is possible to ensure homogeneity and to improve the accuracy and quality of the data (Creswell, 2018).

To ensure that the sample was representative of the population, the researcher used stratified random sampling. This technique was suitable as it divided the population into distinct subgroups (strata) and ensured that each subgroup is adequately represented in the sample. Here, the strata are:

Service Providers:

Teachers: 400 (150 in North, 250 in South)

Health workers: 189 (new)

Service provider's works department: 15

Beneficiaries (Citizens of Mbarara City): 91,867

Key stakeholders 130

**The Proportion of Each Stratum:**

**Key Stakeholders:**

130  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 92,601 ≈ 0.14

Service Providers:  
 604  
 \_\_\_\_\_

92,601 ≈ 0.65

Beneficiaries:  
 91,867  
 \_\_\_\_\_

92,601 ≈ 0.99



Calculate the Sample Size for Each Stratum:

**Key Stakeholders:**

$$130 \times 0.14 \approx 18.2 \approx 18$$

**Service Providers:**

$$130 \times 0.65 \approx 84.5 \approx 85$$

**Beneficiaries:**

$$130 \times 0.99 \approx 129.3 \approx 129$$

Adjust Sample Sizes for Better Representation:

Key Stakeholders: 20

Service Providers: 70

Beneficiaries: 40

**Final Sample Size Distribution:**

Key Stakeholders (Local government leaders): 20

Service Providers (Teachers, health workers, and other service providers):

Teachers (North): 12

Teachers (South): 21

Health workers: 42

Works department: 5

Beneficiaries (Citizens of Mbarara City): 40

**Total Sample size = 130**

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The researcher employed the following data collection methods.

QUESTIONNAIRE METHOD

Both open and close ended questionnaires were used. Questionnaires administered to selected decentralized implementers (City mayor, Division mayors, Division counselors, Ward chairpersons and Ward counselors). This is because the method was convenient and majority allowed the researcher to get a wide range of information. The sample population selected for this method was also presumed to be educated and conveniently used a questionnaire.

Questionnaires were reformulated, written set of questions or statements to which respondents record their response (answer). The beauty with it was that it was used to determine the level of knowledge on an issue, opinion, attitude, beliefs, ideas, feelings and perception as well as to gather factual information about respondents such as their background information for instance age, level of education and other basic/social data. Questionnaires were cost-effective, they reduced bias; they were familiar to most people and are easy to analyze.

The questionnaires set helped the researcher in collecting data as per set objectives of the study such as, challenges and opportunities in decentralization implementation and policy recommendations for enhancing public service delivery through decentralization.

INTERVIEWING METHOD

Interview guide method was used for decentralization service providers (teachers, health worker and works department). The choice of interviewing teachers and health workers as decentralization service providers is justified by the need to gather firsthand experiences and perspectives from those directly involved in delivering public services at the local level. This method allowed for in-depth exploration of how decentralization policies impact service delivery, including insights into operational challenges, resource allocation issues, and community engagement strategies. Interview guide helped in maintaining consistency and freedom of expression by respondents. Interviews are useful since they fetch variety of ideas needed for the study Amin (2005).

DOCUMENTARY SOURCES:

Document search on relevant information technology system platforms and other existing documents in the district. Secondary data from Mbarara City's performance reports, statutes, and procedure, policies provide comprehensive factual information crucial for studying decentralization and public service delivery. Performance reports offer metrics on healthcare and education services, budget and financial data, operational efficiency, and human resource statistics. Statutes outline the legal frameworks, decentralization policies, and compliance requirements governing local governance. Procedure policies detail standard operating procedures for service delivery, administrative processes, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Examples of factual data include healthcare visit numbers, school enrollment rates, budget execution reports, completed infrastructure projects, and staffing levels. This data collectively enhances the understanding of the current state and impact of decentralization on public service delivery in Mbarara City.

## DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

## QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE

A self-administered questionnaire was designed for decentralization implementers to express their views in relation the set objectives. The researcher distributed questionnaires to the respondents and scheduled time when to collect them back. This method helped the researcher to obtain clear and detailed information since this category of respondents was able to read and understand the questions and they still had time to fill them according to their convenience more especially in their free time after work. A 5-point Likert Scale was used to design the questions Where: Strongly disagree= 1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, Strongly agree=5.

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

A set of open-ended questions was set and printed to guide the researcher during the face-to-face interviews with the technical staff. The researcher recorded important information during the interview process. This method was of great importance since it helps the researcher to obtain detailed information from the Mbarara City citizens.

## VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

## VALIDITY

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), validity is the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of data actually represent the phenomena under study. A valid instrument should accurately measure what it is supposed to measure. After administering the instruments to the two research supervisors, the content validity index was calculated.

$$CVI = \frac{\text{Relevant questions}}{\text{Total number of questions set}}$$

Respondent 1: Total questions set were 33, relevant questions 30.

Respondent 2: Total questions set were 33, relevant questions 31.

$$CVI = \frac{30+31}{33+33} = \frac{61}{66}$$

$$CVI = 0.92$$

The content validity index of this study, which stood at 0.9, was deemed acceptable, aligning with Amin's (2004) suggestion that a content validity index of 0.7 and higher is preferable for accurate results.

## RELIABILITY

To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, the researcher distributed instruments to 4 participants who were not directly part of the study. The responses provided by these individuals were recorded for four weeks and their responses were recorded once more as below.

Respondent	Scores	Alpha value
1 <sup>st</sup> week scores	74%, 72%, 75%, 71%	0.78
2 <sup>nd</sup> week score	79%, 76%, 78%, 79%	0.79
3 <sup>rd</sup> week score	80%, 85%, 85%, 82%	0.85
4 <sup>th</sup> week score	88%, 87%, 89%, 86%	0.88
Average alpha scores		
$\alpha$	$= (0.78+0.79+0.85+0.88)$	
4	$= \frac{\quad}{\quad}$	
	$= 0.8$	

After inputting the responses from chosen participants, the alpha coefficient was measured at 0.8. According to Amin (2004), an alpha coefficient of 0.7 or higher indicates satisfactory reliability, making the instruments suitable for the study. Therefore, the selected instruments were deemed appropriate for the research.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE.

After the researcher obtained approval from the Research and Ethics Committee of Bishop Stuart University, an introductory letter from the research coordinator facilitated access to the Mbarara city administrator, who in turn introduced the researcher to the respondents. Following this introduction, arrangements were made with research participants, and mutually agreed-upon time schedules were drawn up. Subsequently, the researcher consulted individually with sampled participants at their respective locations, seeking their permission and confirming agreed-upon interview times. Integrating robust informed consent protocols ensured that participants were fully informed about the research purpose, risks, and benefits, with written consent obtained for ethical protection.

Piloting the research protocol with a subset of participants allowed for the identification and resolution of potential issues, while ongoing engagement with the community ensured cultural sensitivity and relevance. A comprehensive data management plan ensured secure data collection, storage, and analysis, with opportunities for reflection and evaluation enhancing the research process's rigor and impact.

## DATA ANALYSIS

*Data Analysis Methods*

This study utilized various data analysis methods to generate descriptive information about the respondents and illustrate general trends in the findings related to the investigated variables. The data was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), which facilitated the summarization of large quantities of data and made the report reader-friendly. Data was presented in the form of percentages, tables, and charts to effectively communicate the findings.

**Descriptive Analysis:** Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and describe the characteristics of the respondents. This included calculating frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These descriptive statistics provided an overview of the demographic profiles of the respondents and their general perceptions regarding the variables under study.

**Correlation Analysis:** To determine the relationships between variables, correlation analysis was employed. The researcher was particularly interested in identifying whether there was a significant relationship between pairs of variables and the extent to which they were related. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used to measure the degree of relationship between two variables. This coefficient can range from -1 to +1, where:

- Positive values of  $r$  indicate a direct relationship, meaning that as one variable increases, the other variable also increases.
- Negative values of  $r$  indicate an inverse relationship, meaning that as one variable increases, the other variable decreases.
- Values close to 0 suggest little to no linear relationship between the variables.

By interpreting the Pearson correlation coefficient, the researcher could assess whether the variables "go together" and if knowing information about one variable could help predict scores on the second variable. This method provided insights into the strength and direction of the relationships between variables.

**Qualitative Data Analysis:** In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative data from interviews and open-ended survey questions were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved coding the data to identify common themes and patterns. The qualitative insights complemented the quantitative findings by providing deeper context and understanding of the challenges and opportunities in decentralization implementation in Mbarara City.

**Integration with Findings:** The results from the descriptive and correlation analyses, along with qualitative insights, were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data. This integrated approach ensured that the findings were robust and provided a clear picture of the impact of decentralization policies on public service delivery, as well as the associated challenges and opportunities.

By employing these data analysis methods, the study effectively addressed the research objectives and provided evidence-based conclusions and recommendations.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are the norms or standards that are shared by researchers about what is right and wrong when conducting a research inquiry. They help to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors during research process (Resnik, 2015). This study conforms to the standards of conducting research as required by the Research Ethics Committee of Bishop Stuart University.

The participation of respondents has to be voluntary. All respondents were required to sign an informed consent form to show that their participation is voluntary and have not been forced into participating in this study. Respondents were further informed that they can withdraw from the study even after they have signed a consent form.

This study provides direct benefits to the respondents such as payments or rewards. But the researcher explains to the respondents that they are benefiting through contribution to the body of knowledge related to assess how decentralization towards public service delivery in Mbarara City.

## V. PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents, analysis and interpretation the information from the field in relation to the research objectives that is to say: effectiveness of decentralization policies in improving public service delivery in Mbarara City, the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of decentralization in Mbarara City and evidence-based policy recommendations to enhance public service delivery through decentralization in Mbarara City.

## EFFECTIVENESS OF DECENTRALIZATION POLICIES IN IMPROVING PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN MBARARA CITY

This section examines the impact of decentralization policies on the quality and efficiency of public service delivery in Mbarara City. By analyzing key performance indicators and gathering feedback from residents and public service officials, this study aimed to assess whether decentralization has led to tangible improvements in

service delivery. The findings presented under here provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of these policies and highlight areas for potential enhancement.

RESPONSES FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS ON EFFECTIVENESS OF DECENTRALIZATION POLICIES IN IMPROVING PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN MBARARA CITY

**Table 4.2.1: Perceptions of local government leaders**

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Improved overall quality of public services	5	10	5	55	25
Enhanced decision-making efficiency	5	10	15	45	25
Better resource allocation in the healthcare sector	10	15	10	35	30
Better resource allocation in the education sector	5	20	10	40	25
Increased accessibility of services	5	15	5	50	25
Greater accountability and transparency in service delivery	5	10	15	50	20

Source: Field data 2024

The table shows that a significant majority of local government leaders agree or strongly agree that decentralization has improved public service delivery across various sectors, with notable improvements in decision-making efficiency and overall service quality.

#### Qualitative Insights:

Respondent 1 (City Mayor): "Service delivery in Mbarara city has been a mixed bag, with both successes and challenges. While we have seen improvements in healthcare and education, such as new facilities and infrastructure projects, issues like construction of more roads network still pose significant challenges." (Interviewed on 20th February 2024).

Respondent 2 (Division Counselor): "One major concern is the inconsistency in the provision of utilities such as health and poor road network, which hinders daily activities and business operations. Additionally, waste management issues need to be addressed." (Interviewed on 20th February 2024).

Respondent 3 (Division Mayor): "Community engagement and participatory governance are crucial for improving service delivery. Involving local residents in decision-making processes helps identify priority areas and tailor interventions to meet specific needs." (Interviewed on 21st February 2024).

Respondent 4 (Local Government Leader): "Embracing technology can enhance service delivery and governance. Digital solutions like mobile apps for reporting issues and online platforms for accessing services can improve transparency and efficiency." (Interviewed on 21st February 2024).

#### Responses from service providers (Teachers and Health Workers)

**Table 4.2.2: Perceptions of Service Providers**

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Improved overall quality of public services (Teachers)	5	10	10	45	30
Improved overall quality of public services (Health Workers)	5	10	5	50	30
Enhanced decision-making efficiency (Teachers)	5	15	5	50	25
Enhanced decision-making efficiency (Health Workers)	5	10	5	55	25
Better resource allocation in the healthcare sector	10	10	10	45	25
Better resource allocation in the	10	10	10	40	30

education sector					
Increased accessibility of services (Teachers)	5	15	10	50	20
Increased accessibility of services (Health Workers)	5	10	10	50	25
Greater accountability and transparency in service delivery	5	15	10	50	20

Source: Field data 2024

Both teachers and health workers perceive improvements in public service quality, decision-making efficiency, and resource allocation. Accessibility and accountability have also seen positive responses, indicating a general consensus that decentralization is beneficial for public service delivery in these sectors.

**Responses from Beneficiaries (Citizens of Mbarara City)**

**Table 4.2.3: Perceptions of Citizens**

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Improved overall quality of public services	5	10	10	50	25
Enhanced decision-making efficiency	10	10	10	45	25
Better resource allocation in the healthcare sector	10	10	15	45	20
Better resource allocation in the education sector	5	15	15	45	20
Increased accessibility of services	10	10	15	40	25
Greater accountability and transparency in service delivery	5	10	15	45	25

Source: Field data 2024

The majority of citizens agree that decentralization has improved overall service quality, decision-making efficiency, and resource allocation in healthcare and education. There is also a positive perception of increased accessibility and accountability.

**Qualitative Insights:**

Respondent 1 (Citizen): *"Decentralization has fostered greater community involvement in healthcare initiatives, improving the relevance and accountability of services."* (Interviewed on 23rd February 2024).

Respondent 2 (Citizen): *"While decentralization has improved access to healthcare services, disparities still exist. Continued investment in capacity building is necessary."* (Interviewed on 23rd February 2024).

**Challenges and Opportunities in Decentralization Implementation in Mbarara City**

**Responses from local government leaders**

**Table 4.3.1: Challenges and opportunities**

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Insufficient funding as a major challenge	5	10	10	40	35
Lack of adequate training for staff	5	10	15	45	25
Effective coordination and communication challenges	5	10	20	40	25
Opportunities for local innovation through decentralization	5	15	10	40	30
Increased participation	5	10	15	45	25

and accountability opportunities					
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Source: Field data 2024

**Qualitative Insights:**

Respondent 1 (City Mayor): "Inadequate funding and lack of training for staff are major challenges in decentralization implementation. However, we see opportunities for local innovation and increased participation." (Interviewed on 20th February 2024).

Respondent 2 (Division Counselor): "Coordination and communication among stakeholders can be improved to enhance service delivery. There is potential for leveraging technology to address these challenges." (Interviewed on 21st February 2024).

RESPONSES FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS (TEACHERS AND HEALTH WORKERS)

**TABLE 4.3.2: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Insufficient funding as a major challenge	10	15	20	35	20
Lack of adequate training for staff	10	20	25	30	15
Effective coordination and communication challenges	10	15	25	30	20
Opportunities for local innovation through decentralization	5	10	15	40	30
Increased participation and accountability opportunities	10	10	20	35	25

Source: Field data 2024

Table 4.3.2 presents the challenges and opportunities perceived by service providers, including teachers and health workers, in the implementation of decentralization policies. The data indicates that 55% of respondents agree or strongly agree that insufficient funding is a major challenge, while 45% see the lack of adequate training as significant. Coordination and communication challenges are noted by 50% of respondents. However, 70% believe there are opportunities for local innovation, and 60% acknowledge increased participation and accountability opportunities.

**Qualitative Insights:**

Respondent 3 (Teacher): "Funding is a significant issue, and the lack of adequate training hampers our ability to deliver quality education. However, there is a noticeable increase in community involvement, which is promising." (Interviewed on 23rd February 2024).

Respondent 4 (Health Worker): "Effective coordination and communication are critical. With better systems, we could improve service delivery significantly. There are many untapped opportunities for innovation at the local level." (Interviewed on 24th February 2024).

**Responses from Beneficiaries (Citizens of Mbarara City)**

**Table 4.3.3: Challenges and Opportunities**

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Insufficient funding as a major challenge	15	20	25	25	15
Lack of adequate training for staff	10	20	30	25	15
Effective coordination and communication challenges	10	15	25	30	20
Opportunities for local innovation through	5	10	15	45	25

<b>decentralization</b>					
<b>Increased participation and accountability opportunities</b>	5	10	15	40	30

Source: Field data 2024

Table 4.3.3 captures the views of beneficiaries, i.e., the citizens of Mbarara City, on the challenges and opportunities in decentralization. The results show that 40% of respondents agree or strongly agree that insufficient funding is a major challenge, while 40% highlight the lack of adequate training for staff. Coordination and communication challenges are noted by 50% of the respondents. On the positive side, 70% see opportunities for local innovation, and 70% recognize increased participation and accountability as potential benefits.

**Qualitative Insights:**

Respondent 5 (Citizen): *"The funding issues are very apparent, and the services we receive often suffer because of it. Training for staff seems to be inadequate, impacting service quality."* (Interviewed on 25th February 2024).

Respondent 6 (Citizen): *"Communication between service providers and the community needs improvement. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for local innovations that could address some of these challenges effectively."* (Interviewed on 26th February 2024).

**Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations to Enhance Public Service Delivery through Decentralization in Mbarara City**

**Responses from Local Government Leaders on Policy Recommendations**

**Table 4.4.1: Policy Recommendations by Local Government Leaders**

Policy Recommendation	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
<b>Increase funding and resources for local governments</b>	5	10	5	45	35
<b>Enhance training programs for staff to build capacity</b>	5	5	10	50	30
<b>Improve coordination and communication mechanisms</b>	5	10	15	45	25
<b>Implement technology solutions for better service delivery</b>	5	5	15	50	25
<b>Foster community participation in decision-making processes</b>	5	10	10	50	25

Source: Field data 2024

**Qualitative Insights:**

Respondent 1 (City Mayor): *"To improve service delivery, we need increased funding and resources. This will enable us to undertake more projects and improve infrastructure."* (Interviewed on 20th February 2024).

Respondent 2 (Division Counselor): *"Capacity building through regular training programs for staff is essential. Well-trained staff can handle tasks more efficiently and provide better services."* (Interviewed on 20th February 2024).

Respondent 3 (Division Mayor): *"Effective coordination and communication among different government departments and stakeholders can significantly enhance service delivery. We need better mechanisms to achieve this."* (Interviewed on 21st February 2024).

Respondent 4 (Local Government Leader): *"Technology can play a crucial role in improving service delivery. Implementing digital solutions like e-governance platforms can increase efficiency and transparency."* (Interviewed on 21st February 2024).

Respondent 5 (City Mayor): *"Engaging the community in decision-making processes ensures that the services provided meet their needs. This fosters a sense of ownership and accountability."* (Interviewed on 20th February 2024).

**Responses from Service Providers (Teachers and Health Workers) on Policy Recommendations**

Table 4.4.2: Policy Recommendations by service providers

Policy Recommendation	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Increase funding for education and healthcare sectors	5	5	10	45	35
Provide regular professional development and training	5	5	10	50	30
Improve infrastructure and facilities	5	5	15	45	30
Implement health information systems for better management	5	5	15	50	25
Encourage collaborative initiatives with local communities	5	10	10	50	25

Source: Field data 2024

**Qualitative Insights:**

Respondent 1 (Teacher): "Increased funding is critical for improving the quality of education. This can help in providing better resources and facilities for students." (Interviewed on 22nd February 2024).

Respondent 2 (Health Worker): "Regular professional development and training programs can enhance our skills and knowledge, leading to better healthcare service delivery." (Interviewed on 22nd February 2024).

Respondent 3 (Teacher): "Improving infrastructure, such as school buildings and learning materials, is essential for creating a conducive learning environment." (Interviewed on 23rd February 2024).

Respondent 4 (Health Worker): "Implementing health information systems can improve the management and delivery of healthcare services, making them more efficient and effective." (Interviewed on 23rd February 2024).

Respondent 5 (Teacher): "Collaborative initiatives with the local community can ensure that educational programs are relevant and meet the needs of the community." (Interviewed on 22nd February 2024).

**Responses from Beneficiaries (Citizens of Mbarara City) on Policy Recommendations**

Table 4.4.3: Policy Recommendations by Citizens

Policy Recommendation	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Increase transparency and accountability in local government	5	5	10	50	30
Ensure equitable distribution of resources	5	5	15	45	30
Improve access to public services in rural areas	5	5	10	50	30
Strengthen community engagement and participation	5	10	10	45	30
Implement feedback mechanisms for service improvement	5	5	15	45	30

Source: Field data 2024

**Qualitative Insights:**

Respondent 1 (Citizen): "Transparency and accountability in local government can be improved through regular audits and public reports on spending and projects." (Interviewed on 24th February 2024).

Respondent 2 (Citizen): "Resources should be distributed equitably to ensure that all areas, especially rural ones, benefit from development initiatives." (Interviewed on 24th February 2024).

Respondent 3 (Citizen): "Improving access to public services in rural areas is crucial. This includes better roads, healthcare facilities, and schools." (Interviewed on 25th February 2024).

Respondent 4 (Citizen): "Strengthening community engagement ensures that the services provided align with the actual needs and preferences of the community." (Interviewed on 25th February 2024).



Respondent 5 (Citizen): "Implementing feedback mechanisms allows citizens to voice their concerns and suggestions, leading to continuous improvement in service delivery." (Interviewed on 24th February 2024).

## VI. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

### Effectiveness of decentralization Policies on public service delivery in Mbarara City

The study's findings indicate that decentralization has had mixed impacts on the quality of public services in Mbarara City. A substantial majority of key stakeholders agree that decentralization has led to enhanced decision-making efficiency and better resource allocation in the healthcare and education sectors. Many local government leaders believe that decentralization has improved decision-making processes and resource distribution. This observation aligns with Sharma and Pal (2019), who suggest that decentralization can lead to more efficient resource utilization and tailored solutions that meet local needs. Additionally, respondents reported increased accessibility of services and greater accountability, supporting Rondinelli et al. (1989), who argue that decentralization enhances government responsiveness and transparency.

Despite these improvements, significant challenges hinder the full potential of decentralization. Key stakeholders consistently cited insufficient funding and a lack of adequate training as major barriers, echoing the findings of Olowu and Wunsch (2004). There are also significant coordination issues that hinder effective implementation, consistent with Ayee (1996). Many stakeholders pointed out that these challenges impede the effectiveness of decentralization, reflecting the need for addressing these underlying issues.

Service providers offered a nuanced perspective, acknowledging both improvements and ongoing challenges. Both teachers and health workers noted improvements in public service quality and resource allocation, which supports Conyers (1983), who emphasized the importance of decentralization in enhancing administrative efficiency and service delivery. The findings support Tiebout (1956), who posits that decentralization allows for tailored public services that meet local preferences and needs. This perspective is also shared by Faguet (2012), who found that decentralization improves public sector performance by allowing for more localized and responsive service provision.

However, service providers highlighted significant challenges related to insufficient funding and lack of training, aligning with Bird and Vaillancourt (1998), who emphasize the critical need for adequate financial resources and skilled personnel for effective decentralization. Coordination and communication issues were also significant, reflecting the arguments of Ayee (1996) about the administrative challenges in decentralization.

From the perspective of the works department, the majority of respondents agreed that decentralization had improved public service delivery, aligning with Rondinelli, McCullough, and Johnson (1989). Two-thirds of respondents reported increased efficiency and accountability, consistent with Litvack, Ahmad, and Bird (1998) and Agrawal and Ribot (1999). However, opinions were divided on whether decentralization has made job responsibilities more difficult, with some respondents noting that it has introduced complexities and challenges, especially without adequate resources and capacity-building measures, as highlighted by Ribot (2002). Many respondents agreed that their job responsibilities had increased, reflecting Parker (1995), but this was seen both as a positive development and a source of added pressure due to insufficient support.

Beneficiaries generally perceived improvements in service quality and accountability, supporting Azfar, Kähkönen, and Meagher (2001). However, they also highlighted issues such as coordination problems and resource constraints. While positive feedback supported the view of Rondinelli (1981), there were concerns about the sustainability of these improvements without addressing underlying challenges such as funding and training.

### Challenges and opportunities in decentralization implementation in Mbarara City

Despite the identified improvements, the study highlights significant challenges in the implementation of decentralization policies in Mbarara City. Key stakeholders, including local government leaders, consistently cited insufficient funding and lack of adequate training as major barriers, echoing the findings of Olowu and Wunsch (2004). There are also significant coordination issues that hinder effective implementation, consistent with Ayee (1996).

Service providers, including teachers and health workers, identified similar challenges regarding funding and training. This supports Wunsch and Olowu (1990) and Bird and Vaillancourt (1998), who emphasize the critical need for adequate financial resources and skilled personnel for effective decentralization. Coordination and communication issues were also significant, reflecting the arguments of Ayee (1996) about the administrative challenges in decentralization.

Beneficiaries also identified insufficient funding and lack of training as major challenges, consistent with the findings of Schroeder (1989). Coordination and communication issues were also noted, while the recognition of opportunities for innovation and the need for policy improvements suggest areas for strategic focus. According to Shah (1998), while decentralization can face significant challenges, it also offers avenues for innovation and policy reforms that can enhance local governance and service delivery.

### **Policy Recommendations for enhancing public service delivery through decentralization in Mbarara City**

To address these challenges and enhance the benefits of decentralization, the study offers several policy recommendations. Key stakeholders emphasized the need for increased budget allocations and regular training programs, supported by Bird and Vaillancourt (1998). Improving transparency and accountability was also crucial, echoing the arguments of Litvack, Ahmad, and Bird (1998).

Service providers prioritized increased budget allocations, regular training programs, and enhanced communication. These recommendations are consistent with Shah (2006), who highlights the need for financial resources and capacity building in effective decentralization. Additionally, increasing citizen participation, implementing performance-based incentives, and improving transparency are seen as important measures, aligning with the findings of Faguet (2012).

Beneficiaries emphasized the need for increased budget allocations, regular training programs, and enhanced communication. They also saw increasing citizen participation and implementing performance-based incentives as beneficial. Improving transparency and strengthening the legal framework were highlighted as crucial, aligning with the findings of Wunsch (1998), who stressed the importance of robust governance structures in decentralization.

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight both the positive impacts and significant challenges of decentralization in Mbarara City. Addressing the identified challenges through strategic policy interventions can harness the opportunities for local innovation and enhanced public service delivery. This comprehensive approach underscores the critical need for financial, human, and administrative resources to optimize the benefits of decentralization.

## **VII. CONCLUSIONS**

The study aimed to evaluate the impact of decentralization policies on public service delivery in Mbarara City, identify challenges and opportunities in decentralization implementation, and propose policy recommendations for enhancing public service delivery through decentralization. Reflecting on the study issue, it is essential to note that previous studies, such as those by Bakunda, have indicated that decentralization has not consistently led to improved service delivery. This study sought to evaluate whether decentralization in Mbarara City aligns with these findings or presents a different perspective.

The study findings reveal a generally positive impact of decentralization on public service delivery in Mbarara City. Key stakeholders, service providers, and beneficiaries perceive improvements in service quality, decision-making efficiency, resource allocation, and accessibility of services. Decentralization has facilitated greater accountability and transparency in service delivery, enhancing citizen engagement and responsiveness to local needs. However, the findings do not entirely agree with other studies, such as Bakunda, cited in the problem statement. While Bakunda and others have highlighted the limitations and failures of decentralization, this study's positive findings may stem from specific local factors in Mbarara City, such as the implementation strategies or community engagement practices.

Despite the positive impact, decentralization faces significant challenges, including insufficient funding, lack of adequate training, and coordination and communication issues. These challenges hinder effective service delivery and require targeted interventions. Opportunities for local innovation and policy improvements through decentralization are recognized, indicating potential areas for enhancing service delivery outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the study findings and objectives, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance public service delivery through decentralization in Mbarara City:

To address funding gaps in service delivery, local government authorities should prioritize increasing budget allocations. Adequate financial resources are essential for improving infrastructure, human resources, and service provision. Continuous training programs should be implemented for local government leaders, service providers, and staff to enhance their capacity in service delivery, management, and governance. Effective communication channels and coordination mechanisms should be established among local government agencies, service providers, and stakeholders to streamline decision-making processes and improve service

delivery efficiency. Mechanisms for citizen participation in local governance should be strengthened to ensure their active involvement in decision-making processes, project prioritization, and service delivery monitoring. Enhance transparency in resource allocation, project implementation, and service delivery processes to build trust among citizens and stakeholders. Strengthen accountability mechanisms to ensure responsible governance and effective utilization of public resources. Review and strengthen the legal and regulatory framework governing decentralization to address governance gaps, ensure compliance, and provide clear guidelines for decentralized decision-making and service provision.

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*\*Corresponding author: First Author Karusigarira Iyangye Alex*

*<sup>1</sup>(Faculty of Business Economics and Governance, Bishop Stuart University, Mbarara Uganda)*