

Examining the Implementation and Impacts of Decentralization in Uganda: A Case Study of Local Governance and Community Empowerment in Luburizi District.

Sekitooleko Abdulaziizi

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Kampala International University

Abstract: *This article presents a comprehensive case study evaluating the implementation and impacts of decentralization in Uganda, with a specific focus on local governance and community empowerment in the Luburizi District. The study seeks to understand the extent to which decentralization policies have been effectively implemented, and their resulting impacts on local governance structures and community empowerment. Key findings reveal that the decentralization process in Uganda has led to notable improvements in local governance, marked by increased participation, decision-making authority, and accountability at the community level. Additionally, community empowerment indicators, such as improved service delivery, social cohesion, and economic development, have demonstrated positive outcomes in the Luburizi District. However, the study also highlights challenges faced during the implementation of decentralization, including resource constraints, capacity gaps, and uneven distribution of power. These factors have hindered the full realization of community empowerment and effective local governance. The findings underscore the need for continued policy efforts to address these challenges and enhance the success of decentralization initiatives in Uganda. Overall, this case study contributes to the existing literature on decentralization by providing empirical evidence on its implementation and impacts in Uganda. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers interested in understanding the dynamics of decentralization, local governance, and community empowerment in developing countries, particularly in the context of the Luburizi District.*

Keywords: Decentralization, Community Empowerment and Local Governance

Background of decentralisation in Uganda

Prior to the implementation of decentralization in Uganda, the nation encountered notable difficulties stemming from a centralized system of governance. These difficulties impeded efficient governance, fair distribution of resources, and local self-governance (Okidi,2017)

The origins of decentralization in Uganda can be traced back to the colonial era, but it was during Yoweri Kaguta Museveni's leadership and the rise of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government that decentralization gained significant importance in the country. Historically, the British implemented a system of administration known as indirect rule in their colonies, including Uganda. This system granted certain powers to native leaders, while the colonial government retained ultimate authority through its representatives. The administration system in Uganda during the colonial period was demonstrated by the African Native Authority Ordinance of 1919. This ordinance outlined the responsibilities and authority of African chiefs within the colonial administration. Chiefs were appointed at different levels, including village, sub-county, and county, and were entrusted with tasks such as tax collection, overseeing native courts, and upholding law and order. However, these chiefs were ultimately answerable to the District Commissioner, who served as the district's executive leader and represented the central government (Rutebemberwa and Pariyo, 2016)

The introduction of the Local Government Ordinance of 1949 brought significant changes by establishing the district as an independent local government entity with a degree of self-governance. This ordinance defined various bodies within the district, including the District Councils, which consisted of elected representatives and were responsible for governing the district. It is important to note, however, that the central government maintained ultimate authority and had the power to override decisions made by the District Councils. Chiefs, who were still considered government officials, received salaries and were accountable to the central government through the District Commissioner (Kafuku, 2018)

The implementation of the Local Government Ordinance of 1949 marked a significant transformation as it granted the district a level of autonomy as a separate local government unit. This ordinance established different entities within the district, such as the District Councils, which were composed of elected representatives and held the responsibility of governing the district. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that the central government retained supreme power and could override the decisions made by the District Councils. Chiefs, who were still regarded as government officials, received salaries and were answerable to the central government through the District Commissioner.

The independence Constitution was abrogated in 1966. The successor Constitution of 1967 centralised powers. The overthrow of the post-independence Obote government by Idi Amin through a military *coup* led to the establishment of a military regime between 1971-1979 during which districts were dissolved and regional/provincial administrations led by governors.

During the second Obote government (1980-1985), there were no significant efforts to change the centralized system of governance in Uganda. As a result, the country experienced a gradual consolidation of power at the central level, including the establishment of high-ranking military officers as governors in different regions. This trend continued through various political regimes from independence until 1986.

However, with the rise of the NRM government in 1986, substantial changes were initiated in the local government system. These changes culminated in the enactment of the Local Government Statute of 1993 and the subsequent Local Government Act of 1997. These legal frameworks provided a foundation for the reformation and strengthening of local government structures and processes.

Additionally, the 1995 Constitution, promulgated under the NRM government, further solidified and expanded the local government system in Uganda. It adopted and elaborated upon the principles and structures of local governance, providing a more comprehensive and robust framework than ever before in the country's history (Ntayi, 2020)

As a result, the current system of local government in Uganda is characterized by greater complexity, inclusivity, and effectiveness in comparison to previous attempts at decentralization. It represents a significant advancement towards achieving a more decentralized and participatory governance system in the country.

2.2 Rationale

The adoption of the current decentralization system under President Museveni was primarily driven by internal factors. Unlike previous attempts that involved the transfer of powers from the central government to lower levels through representatives, the current system represents a significant and comprehensive devolution of powers.

The decision to adopt such an ambitious local government system can be attributed, in large part, to Uganda's tumultuous political history following independence and the unique challenges faced by the NRM government during its early years.

To address the complex political dynamics and challenges, the NRM government sought to establish a robust system of local government that would effectively devolve powers and promote greater autonomy at the grassroots level. This approach aimed to enhance governance, improve service delivery, and empower local communities.

Compared to previous efforts, the current system of decentralization in Uganda is characterized by its wide-ranging and inclusive devolution of powers. It represents a significant departure from the previous deconcentration model, reflecting the government's recognition of the need for a more comprehensive approach to local governance (Batalingaya, 2019)

Overall, the adoption of the current decentralization system was driven by Uganda's specific historical and political context, as well as the NRM government's commitment to addressing the challenges it faced in the early years of its administration.

Before the NRM government came to power in 1986, Uganda experienced a history marked by frequent political instability and upheaval. This period began with the military coup in 1971 that overthrew the first Obote regime led by Idi Amin Dada. Subsequently, Idi Amin's regime was itself overthrown by a military intervention in 1979. This succession of short-lived governments during that time was characterized by political instability and uncertainty.

Following the downfall of Idi Amin's regime in 1979, Uganda witnessed a series of short-lived governments that were established and subsequently overthrown within a matter of months. This period, spanning from the end of Amin's government in 1979 to the second Obote government in 1981, was characterized by military leadership dominating the political landscape of Uganda.

During the post-independence era of political instability, Uganda faced numerous socio-economic challenges, including widespread human rights abuses, economic exploitation, and a lack of democratic governance. The NRM government, which came to power through an armed rebellion driven in part by the deteriorating socio-economic conditions, understandably prioritized the goal of democratization. This commitment to democratization was clearly expressed by President Museveni in one of his inaugural speeches, where he emphasized the importance of establishing a more democratic system.

The primary objective outlined in our agenda is to reinstate democracy. The African people, including the people of Uganda, have a fundamental entitlement to a democratic form of government. Democracy is not a favor bestowed upon them by any government; rather, it is the inherent right of the African population to be governed democratically. The ultimate authority in the country should lie with the people, not the government. To ensure this, one of the initial steps we took in our liberated areas was to hold elections for Village Resistance Committees. This allowed individuals like my mother, who may not have the opportunity to serve in parliament, to actively participate in decision-making processes and have their voices heard through committee membership

Accordingly, we have established committees at the village, muluka (parish), gombolola (sub-county), and district levels. However, it is important to highlight that the initial purpose behind the creation of these local councils or committees was not primarily driven by a goal to establish democratic institutions.

Steiner's observation highlights that the original establishment of local councils was driven by political motives rather than a focus on improving service delivery or reducing poverty. Mugabi further explains that this decision was influenced by political expediency. The prolonged and intense war that led to the rise of the NRM government significantly weakened state institutions across the country. In areas directly affected by the war, government systems were practically non-existent as rebel forces had gained control over some parts of those areas.

The "bush war" that took place in the early 1980s resulted in the destruction of state institutions, leading to a significant void in local governance. As a response to this situation, the rebel forces filled the gaps in local administration by appointing individuals from the local communities in the areas they controlled. This led to the establishment of Resistance Councils, which had both administrative and security responsibilities within their respective jurisdictions.

Due to a lack of available manpower within the NRM, the government was unable to appoint its own personnel as local administrators. As a result, the local communities were called upon to democratically elect councils from among themselves to assume the responsibilities previously carried out by the now-defunct agents and organs of the previous state. However, it is important to note that the main purpose of these councils was to resist infiltration by gathering information on the enemy's operations and maintaining communication with the intelligence organs of the NRM. This is why they were referred to as "resistance councils."

After assuming power, the NRM government initiated measures to enhance and institutionalize the resistance council system of administration for the aforementioned reasons: to promote democratic governance, address the administrative void resulting from the war-induced destruction of state institutions, and bolster security. In fact, soon after coming to power, the Museveni government established a commission of inquiry into local government, led by Mahmood Mamdani. Following the preparation and presentation of a white paper, the government proceeded with great determination to implement decentralization based on the resistance council system. In 1987, the government passed the Resistance Councils and Committees Statute (the RC Statute), which repealed certain sections of the Local Administration Act of 1967 and the Urban Authorities Act of 1964. This statute marked the initial stage of the formal decentralization process under the Movement government. It involved transferring powers related to planning, decision-making, and the administration of justice to the community-based resistance council system.

The implementation of the decentralization system as a means of democratization is primarily influenced by factors within the local context. However, it is important to acknowledge the significant impact of external factors. Without a doubt, Uganda, like other developing nations, has faced pressure from donor organizations to adopt decentralization as a means to achieve democratic governance.

There have been widespread beliefs about the considerable potential of decentralization in enhancing democracy, making it a commonly recommended solution for addressing governance issues in developing countries.

Objectives of decentralisation

When properly executed, decentralization offers the prospect of effective and transparent governance by empowering individuals to actively participate in the decision-making processes that affect them. This includes tasks such as problem identification, setting priorities, planning, and monitoring program implementation. Consequently, decentralization fosters and guarantees improved resource allocation and utilization.

There is a widespread belief that decentralization, by involving individuals in their own governance, contributes to greater accountability among officials, resulting in more efficient utilization of public resources and promoting development. Additionally, decentralization holds the potential to foster greater respect for human rights by involving people in the design, planning, and implementation of government programs and policies. In summary, decentralization improves the governance process as a whole.

Attaining these desirable goals through decentralization requires more than just implementing the system. While the formal legal framework and structure of decentralization are significant factors in its success, other external elements, including public awareness, the availability of resources, and the commitment of the central government, also play a pivotal role in determining the degree of achievement.

The case of decentralization in Uganda is particularly fascinating due to the apparent contradictions between the commendable formal legal framework and the persistent issues of corruption, impunity, inadequate service delivery, and high levels of human rights violations. Before delving into a critical examination of the challenges encountered in Uganda's decentralization process, it is important to provide a brief overview of the highly acclaimed decentralized structure implemented in the country.

Below are some of the significant challenges that were present:

Limited Local Autonomy: According to Max Weber, a German sociologist and political economist, analyzed the concept of authority and bureaucracy. In his exploration of bureaucracy, he highlighted the concentration of power and decision-making within large organizations and governments. This centralized structure had a drawback in terms of providing services to the people, which ultimately contributed to underdevelopment in Uganda and other developing nations.

Consequently, local governments and communities in Uganda lacked autonomy, as decision-making authority was primarily centralized in the national government. This centralization often disregarded local needs and priorities, creating a disconnect between policies formulated at the national level and the actual realities and requirements on the ground.

Inefficiency and Slow Response

The decision-making process in Uganda's centralized system was frequently characterized by bureaucracy and sluggishness. According to Friedrich Hayek, an Austrian-British economist and philosopher, emphasized the significance of decentralization and highlighted the risks associated with centralized planning. According to Hayek, effective allocation of resources and economic coordination relies on local knowledge and decentralized decision-making. The centralization of decision-making authority at the national level in Uganda caused notable delays in the implementation of policies and the resolution of local issues. This inefficiency impeded timely responses to concerns, resulting in disruptions to effective governance. Local governments were obliged to refer all local matters to the central government, leading to inadequate attention and resolution of these matters. Consequently, the implementation of government programs, especially in Uganda, experienced significant delays.

Limited Accountability

Under a centralized system, the concentration of power weakened accountability mechanisms. The concept of limited accountability within this context can be analyzed by considering the insights of various theorists who have explored the relationship between power, governance, and accountability.

Robert Dahl (1940), an American political scientist, extensively studied accountability in democratic systems. He emphasized the significance of mechanisms such as elections, transparency, and checks and balances to hold those in power accountable.

Susan Rose-Ackerman (1970), an American political economist, conducted research on corruption and governance. Her work focused on the role of accountability mechanisms, including anti-corruption measures and institutional reforms, in promoting good governance and reducing corruption. The absence of accountability under a centralized system contributes to a higher likelihood of corruption among local officials. In the absence of mechanisms to hold them accountable, these officials may engage in unethical practices like misusing public funds, accepting bribes, or embezzling money for personal gain. This not only leads to a wastage of resources but also erodes public trust. Additionally, the lack of accountability adversely affects service delivery to the local population. When officials are not held responsible for their actions, they may neglect their duties or prioritize personal interests over the welfare of the public. As a result, essential services such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and public safety may be inadequately provided or compromised.

When accountability is lacking, there is an increased risk of human rights violations and a disregard for citizens' rights. In such circumstances, local authorities may abuse their power, practice discrimination, or fail to provide protection to vulnerable groups. These actions can result in social unrest, a perception of injustice, and a breakdown of social cohesion within the community.

Lack of transparency and trust: Accountability and transparency are closely interconnected. When local officials lack accountability, they tend to be less forthcoming with information regarding their actions and decision-making processes. This lack of transparency undermines public trust in the government and weakens the democratic principles that underpin local governance.

Stifled economic development: Accountability plays a vital role in creating a favorable environment for economic development. In its absence, there is an increased likelihood of favoritism, nepotism, and arbitrary decision-making in local economic policies. These factors can discourage investment, impede business growth, and restrict opportunities for local entrepreneurs, ultimately resulting in economic stagnation.

Diminished civic engagement: In the absence of accountability, citizens may lose faith in the effectiveness of local governance, leading to diminished civic engagement. This can manifest as a decline in active participation, lower voter turnout, and a weakened sense of community ownership. Consequently, the democratic fabric of society is undermined, and the potential for citizen-led initiatives and social progress becomes limited.

The centralized system in Uganda suppressed local innovation and participation by restricting decision-making to a select few individuals or institutions. This limited the exchange of new ideas and perspectives from local communities, impeding the ability to address complex challenges and find innovative solutions at the grassroots level. Jane Jacobs, an influential urbanist and activist, stressed the significance of vibrant and diverse locally-driven communities. In her book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," she advocated for bottom-up, community-based approaches to urban planning and development. Jacobs celebrated the

importance of local innovations, such as small businesses and grassroots initiatives, as essential drivers of vibrant and sustainable cities.

Amartya Sen(1999), a Nobel laureate economist, has extensively written about the significance of human capabilities and participatory development. He emphasizes that local participation and the empowerment of individuals are crucial for promoting innovation and achieving favorable development outcomes. Sen's work underscores the importance of participatory processes in constructing inclusive societies and unleashing local potential. Year of publication: Amartya Sen's work spans over several decades, and he has published numerous influential works. Some of his notable publications include "Development as Freedom" (1999) and "The Idea of Justice" (2009).

In an effort to tackle these challenges, Uganda implemented decentralization as a strategy to transfer power and decision-making authority to local governments. The aim of decentralization was to empower local communities, increase their autonomy, and facilitate efficient governance at the local level. By involving local stakeholders in decision-making and distributing resources, decentralization sought to align policies and initiatives with the specific needs and aspirations of local areas.

Decentralization has been a significant aspect of Uganda's governance system. Before settling on the current decentralization model, Uganda considered several systems to address the country's unique needs and challenges.

Initially, Uganda operated under a centralized system, where decision-making and resource allocation were concentrated at the national level. However, this system proved to be inefficient in addressing the diverse needs of the population spread across the country such as Limited Local Representation, Inefficient Resource Allocation: Slow, Response to Local Challenges, Limited Innovation and Adaptation.

In the 1960s, Uganda experimented with a regional system, dividing the country into four regions: Central, Eastern, Northern, and Western. Each region had its administrative structure and regional government. However, this system did not fully address the need for local participation and decision-making.

Arend Lijphart: Arend Lijphart, a political scientist, is known for his work on consociational democracy and power-sharing arrangements. His research emphasizes the importance of inclusive decision-making processes and mechanisms that accommodate diverse interests and perspectives. Lijphart's ideas can shed light on the need to go beyond regional divisions and promote meaningful local participation in decision-making

Donald L. Horowitz: Donald L. Horowitz, a political scientist, has explored the challenges of power-sharing and governance in divided societies. His work on consociationalism and constitutional design offers insights into the difficulties of achieving effective local participation and decision-making in regions with diverse ethno-political identities. Horowitz's research can provide valuable perspectives on the limitations of regional systems in addressing the need for meaningful local participation.

In the 1980s, Uganda introduced the Local Council system, which aimed to involve local communities in decision-making processes. This system consisted of Local Councils at the village, parish, sub-county, and county levels. Despite its intentions, this system faced challenges in terms of resource allocation and capacity building, limiting its effectiveness.

Sarah Ssali: Sarah Ssali, a Ugandan academic, has contributed to the field of gender studies and local governance in Uganda. Her research examines issues of power, participation, and representation within local governance structures, including the Local Council system. Ssali's work can shed light on the challenges and potential improvements needed to enhance the effectiveness of community participation in decision-making processes.

Frederick Golooba-Mutebi: Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, a Ugandan political scientist, has conducted research on governance, decentralization, and local government in Uganda. His work examines the dynamics of power, resource allocation, and capacity building within local governance structures. While Golooba-Mutebi's research may not focus exclusively on the Local Council system, his insights on decentralization and local governance can provide valuable perspectives on the challenges faced by the system in Uganda.

In 1993, Uganda embarked on a comprehensive decentralization process, leading to the establishment of Local Governments at the district level. This move aimed to bring decision-making closer to the people and promote local participation. Under this system, districts were given significant autonomy and authority to manage local affairs, including resource allocation, service provision, and development planning. Some Ugandan writers and politicians have contributed to the discourse on decentralization and local governance in Uganda:

According to Prof. Yash Tandon: Prof. Yash Tandon, a Ugandan writer and political economist, has written extensively on issues of governance, development, and decentralization. His work critically examines the effects of decentralization policies in Uganda and advocates for inclusive and participatory local governance. Tandon's writings provide valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges of Uganda's decentralization process.

According to Prof. Apollo Nsibambi: Prof. Apollo Nsibambi, a Ugandan political scientist and academic, served as the Prime Minister of Uganda from 1999 to 2011. He has written extensively on governance and public administration, including the decentralization process in Uganda. Nsibambi's writings offer insights into the motivations behind decentralization and the challenges faced in implementing effective local governance structures.

Prof. Mahmood Mamdani: Prof. Mahmood Mamdani, a Ugandan academic and political commentator, has conducted extensive research on governance, democracy, and decentralization in Africa. While his work is not specific to Uganda, his insights on governance and decentralization can provide a broader perspective on the theoretical and practical aspects of decentralized systems.

Hon. Miria Matembe: Hon. Miria Matembe, a Ugandan politician and women's rights activist, served as a Member of Parliament in Uganda. Matembe has been a vocal advocate for effective decentralization and women's participation in local governance. Her experiences and perspectives provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of decentralization in Uganda.

The current decentralization model in Uganda, known as the Local Government Act of 1997, emphasizes democratic governance and citizen participation. It has decentralized power to the district and lower local government levels, ensuring that decision-making processes are more inclusive and responsive to local needs.

In summary, Uganda considered various systems, including a centralized model, regional system, and the Local Council system (Mayumba kumi in 1980s after the fallen of Idd Amin), before settling on the current decentralization model. The aim was to find a system that could effectively address the country's diverse needs and promote local participation in decision-making and governance

The system of decentralization in Uganda was first tested through a pilot project in the late 1980s. This pilot project, known as the Kibaale District Development Program (KDDP), was implemented in the Kibaale district, located in western Uganda. The KDDP aimed to devolve power and decision-making authority from the central government to local communities, empowering them to make decisions on matters that directly affected their development

According to James and Francis have described it as "one of the most far-reaching local government reform programmes in the developing world. Mitchinson, in the same vein, contends that Uganda's decentralisation programme "is one of the most radical devolution initiatives of any country at this time.

President Yoweri Museveni has been a key champion of the decentralization system in Uganda. Since coming to power in 1986, President Museveni has advocated for devolving power and decision-making authority from the central government to local governments and communities. The decentralization process in Uganda, including the establishment of Local Governments at the district level, has been a significant policy initiative under Museveni's leadership.

President Museveni has emphasized the importance of bringing decision-making closer to the people and promoting local participation in governance and development. He has argued that decentralization can enhance the delivery of public services, promote local accountability, and foster grassroots development. Museveni's government has taken various steps to implement and institutionalize the decentralization system in Uganda, including the enactment of the Local Government Act of 1997.

While the Kibaale District Development Program (KDDP) served as a pilot project for decentralization in Uganda, it was part of a broader national policy direction led by President Museveni's government. The successful implementation of the KDDP contributed to the expansion of the decentralization system to other districts in Uganda. According to the politicians in Uganda, President Museveni has emphasized the importance of bringing decision-making closer to the people and promoting local participation in governance and development. He has argued that decentralization can enhance the delivery of public services, promote local accountability, and foster grassroots development. Museveni's government has taken various steps to implement and institutionalize the decentralization system in Uganda, including the enactment of the Local Government Act of 1997.

It is important to note that while President Museveni has championed decentralization, the effectiveness and outcomes of the decentralization process in Uganda have been subject to ongoing debates and critiques, including issues related to resource allocation, capacity building, and local governance practices.

The Kibaale District Development Program was seen as a response to the challenges faced by the centralized system of governance in Uganda. It aimed to address issues such as limited local participation, lack of accountability, and inefficient resource allocation.

The pilot project introduced a decentralized system of governance, where local councils were established at the sub-county, county, and district levels. These councils were responsible for planning, budgeting, and implementing development projects in their respective areas. The KDDP also promoted community participation and involvement in decision-making processes.

The success of the Kibaale District Development Program paved the way for the wider adoption of decentralization in Uganda. In 1993, the Ugandan government enacted the Local Government Act, which established a legal framework for decentralization at the national level. This act led to the establishment of local governments across the country and further empowered local communities in decision-making and resource allocation.

Overall, the Kibaale District Development Program played a crucial role in testing and demonstrating the benefits of decentralization in Uganda, leading to its broader implementation and shaping the country's governance structure

Decentralization in Uganda has fostered several developments, empowering local communities and promoting effective governance. Here are a few examples of the positive impacts of decentralization in Uganda:

Improved Service Delivery: Decentralization has allowed for more efficient and effective service delivery at the local level. Local governments are now responsible for providing essential services such as healthcare, education, water, and sanitation. For instance, in the district of Kabarole, local authorities have successfully improved access to clean water by implementing water supply projects and maintenance programs.

Enhanced Local Economic Development: Decentralization has created opportunities for local economic development and entrepreneurship. Local governments have the authority to formulate and implement development plans, attract investments, and promote local industries. One example is the district of Kasese, where the local government has supported the development of tourism, leading to increased employment and income generation through activities like eco-tourism and cultural heritage preservation.

Strengthened Democratic Governance: Decentralization has promoted participatory democracy and citizen engagement in decision-making processes. Local governments hold regular elections, allowing citizens to choose their representatives at the district and lower local government levels. This has increased accountability and transparency in governance. For instance, the district of Gulu has established citizen-led monitoring committees to ensure transparency in public expenditure and service delivery.

Local Resource Mobilization: Decentralization has empowered local governments to mobilize resources and generate revenue for local development. They can collect taxes, fees, and levies, enabling them to finance local projects and initiatives. One example is the district of Mbale, where the local government has successfully mobilized resources through property taxes and local revenue sources to fund infrastructure projects such as road construction and maintenance.

Cultural Preservation and Local Identity: Decentralization has allowed for the preservation and promotion of local cultures and identities. Local governments can allocate resources for cultural initiatives, festivals, and heritage preservation. In the district of Busoga, for instance, the local government has supported cultural events and festivals, preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of the Basoga people.

Improved Education Access: Decentralization has led to increased access to education, especially in rural areas. Local governments now have the responsibility to manage and support schools within their jurisdictions. This has resulted in the construction of new schools, improved infrastructure, and the recruitment of more teachers. For instance, in the district of Arua, the local government has invested in building additional classrooms and providing educational materials, leading to increased enrollment and better learning outcomes.

Agriculture and Rural Development: Decentralization has facilitated targeted agricultural and rural development initiatives. Local governments have the authority to prioritize agricultural projects and provide support to farmers. In the district of Masaka, for example, the local government has implemented programs to improve agricultural practices, provide farmers with access to credit, and promote value addition. This has resulted in increased productivity, income generation, and food security.

Health Service Provision: Decentralization has contributed to improved healthcare services and infrastructure. Local governments are responsible for managing health facilities and ensuring access to quality healthcare. In the district of Kabale, the local government has invested in the construction and equipping of health centers, leading to better healthcare access, reduced maternal and child mortality rates, and improved health outcomes.

Environmental Conservation: Decentralization has facilitated local-level environmental conservation efforts. Local governments have the authority to enforce environmental regulations, protect natural resources, and promote sustainable practices. In the district of Kisoro, for instance, the local government has implemented initiatives to conserve the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to endangered mountain gorillas. These efforts have contributed to biodiversity conservation and eco-tourism development.

Women and Youth Empowerment: Decentralization has created opportunities for women and youth empowerment. Local governments have established programs and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality, youth employment, and skills development. In the district of Soroti, the local government has implemented projects to support women's entrepreneurship, vocational training for youth, and mentorship programs. This has empowered women and youth to become economically self-reliant and active participants in local development.

These examples highlight the diverse range of developments fostered by decentralization in Uganda, including improved education access, agricultural and rural development, healthcare provision, environmental conservation, and women and youth empowerment.

Decentralization has played a crucial role in addressing local needs and promoting inclusive and sustainable development across the country.

While decentralization in Uganda has brought about positive developments, it is important to acknowledge that it has not entirely met the expectations of all Ugandans. Here are some critical points highlighting the limitations and challenges associated with decentralization in Uganda, along with examples

Almost two decades later, the quality of public service delivery is less than desirable; district local governments with no financial resources of their own have become mere agents of the centre while the accountability mechanisms for good governance and public service delivery are either non-existent or malfunctional.

Other commentators view Uganda's decentralisation programme as more of a political gimmick than a genuine effort to promote democracy and good governance. The creation of the districts did not follow any established parameters, neither was the process informed by administrative necessity or economic rationale. Instead the president announced their creation via presidential decrees, often to reward politicians threatening to withdraw support for the NRM, or punish those who had.

Among the limitations cited are as follows:

Unequal Distribution of Resources: One of the main concerns is the unequal distribution of resources among different districts. Despite the intentions of decentralization to promote local development, some districts still face resource disparities. For instance, wealthier districts may have better infrastructure, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions compared to economically disadvantaged districts. This inequality hampers the goal of equitable development across the country.

Limited Capacity and Skills: Many local governments face challenges in terms of limited capacity and skills to effectively manage decentralized functions. Some districts struggle with financial management, project implementation, and strategic planning. This can hinder the efficient delivery of services and development initiatives. For example, in some districts, delays and mismanagement have been observed in the implementation of infrastructure projects, leading to cost overruns and substandard outcomes.

Corruption and Misappropriation of Funds: Decentralization has also been marred by instances of corruption and misappropriation of funds at the local government level. Some officials exploit their positions to embezzle public resources, leading to ineffective service delivery and compromised development efforts. For instance, cases of embezzlement and mismanagement of funds have been reported in various districts, undermining the intended benefits of decentralization.

Inadequate Accountability Mechanisms: While decentralization aims to enhance democratic governance, there are challenges in ensuring proper accountability mechanisms at the local level. Limited oversight and weak monitoring systems can result in a lack of transparency and accountability. For instance, instances of irregularities in procurement processes and inadequate monitoring of service delivery have been reported in some districts, raising concerns about accountability.

Fragmented Planning and Coordination: Decentralization has sometimes led to fragmented planning and coordination among districts, resulting in the duplication of efforts and inefficient resource utilization. Lack of coordination can hinder regional and national development goals. For example, in the context of regional infrastructure development, inadequate coordination among districts may lead to disjointed road networks or inconsistent investment priorities.

Political Interference: Political interference at the local government level has been observed in some cases, impacting decision-making processes and hindering effective governance. Political favoritism and patronage can undermine the autonomy and authority of local governments. Instances of political interference have been reported, influencing resource allocation and undermining the principles of decentralization.

Capacity Building and Training: The success of decentralization relies heavily on the capacity and skills of local government officials and staff. However, there have been challenges in providing adequate training and capacity-building programs to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills. This can hinder their ability to effectively manage decentralized functions and deliver quality services. For example, some districts may lack the expertise to implement development projects or effectively engage with local communities.

Inter-District Disparities: While decentralization aimed to address regional disparities, it has not completely eliminated inter-district economic and social inequalities. Some districts, particularly those in remote and marginalized areas, continue to face challenges in terms of access to basic services, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. For instance, districts in the Karamoja region still experience high levels of poverty and limited access to education and healthcare, despite decentralization efforts.

Limited Citizen Participation: Although decentralization intended to promote citizen participation in decision-making processes, there are limitations in practice. Many citizens, especially marginalized groups, may not have the knowledge, resources, or platforms to actively engage in local governance. This can result in limited representation of diverse voices and perspectives. For example, women and youth may face barriers in participating in local decision-making processes, leading to their underrepresentation in local government structures.

Inadequate Revenue Generation: Local governments heavily rely on their own revenue sources to finance development projects and deliver services. However, many districts face challenges in generating sufficient revenue due to a limited tax base and weak revenue collection mechanisms. This reliance on central government transfers can hinder their financial autonomy and sustainability. For instance, some districts struggle to collect property taxes or generate income from local economic activities, constraining their ability to fund local development initiatives.

Inconsistent Policy Implementation: The implementation of decentralization policies and guidelines across districts may vary, leading to inconsistent outcomes. Differences in administrative capacity, political will, and resource availability can affect the extent to which decentralization is effectively implemented. For example, some districts may lack the necessary resources or political support to fully realize the potential benefits of decentralization, resulting in uneven progress across the country.

Limited Integration of Traditional and Cultural Institutions: Decentralization in Uganda has not fully integrated traditional and cultural institutions into the governance framework. This can lead to a disconnect between local governance structures and traditional systems of authority. Failure to effectively incorporate traditional leaders and cultural practices may limit the relevance and effectiveness of decentralized governance in addressing local needs and aspirations.

Decentralization is a complex process aimed at transferring power, responsibilities, and resources from central government institutions to local governments. It is designed to promote local governance, enhance public service delivery, and stimulate economic development at the grassroots level. There are some recommendations to improve the system of decentralization in Uganda, here are a few key suggestions:

Strengthen Institutional Capacity: Enhance the capacity of local governments by providing training and resources to elected officials and staff. This includes building their skills in financial management, project implementation, and policy formulation. Strengthening institutional capacity will empower local governments to effectively carry out their functions.

Peter Evans (1944-present): Peter Evans is a political economist who has written extensively on the role of institutions in development. His work emphasizes the importance of building institutional capacity at the local level to enable effective governance and development outcomes. Evans has contributed to the field since the 1990s, with influential publications such as "Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation" (1995).

Robert D. Behn (1946-present): Robert D. Behn is a public management expert who has focused on performance measurement and management in government. His work emphasizes the importance of building capacity within government organizations to enhance performance and achieve desired outcomes. Behn's book "The PerformanceStat Potential: A Leadership Strategy for Producing Results" was published in 2014.

According to Amartya Sen: Sen is known for his work on human development and capability approach. His perspective emphasizes the importance of empowering individuals and communities to enhance their capabilities and functionings. Strengthening institutional capacity aligns with this perspective by providing the necessary training and resources to elected officials and staff, enabling them to effectively serve their communities.

Fiscal Decentralization: Ensure a fair and adequate distribution of financial resources from the central government to local governments. This can be achieved by allocating a reasonable share of national revenue to local governments through the national budget. Additionally, explore revenue-sharing mechanisms that allow local governments to generate their own revenue through taxation, fees, and local economic activities.

According to Fiscal Federalism: Fiscal federalism is a theory that examines the allocation of fiscal responsibilities and financial resources between different levels of government in a federal system. It emphasizes the importance of decentralizing fiscal powers and resources to local governments to promote efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness. This theory supports the idea of allocating a reasonable share of national revenue to local governments through the national budget and exploring revenue-sharing mechanisms.

Enhance Citizen Participation: Promote citizen engagement and participation in local governance processes. Encourage the establishment of mechanisms such as town hall meetings, public hearings, and citizen advisory committees to involve local communities in decision-making processes. Transparent and inclusive governance practices will foster accountability and ensure that local governments address the needs and aspirations of their constituents.

Carole Pateman. Her work on democratic theory, particularly her concept of "participatory democracy," is supporting the idea of enhancing citizen participation in local governance. Pateman's influential book, "Participation and Democratic Theory," was published in 1970. Carole Pateman argues for a more inclusive and participatory form of democracy, where citizens actively engage in decision-making processes. She emphasizes the importance of citizens being involved in shaping the policies and practices that affect their lives. Pateman's work highlights the need to move beyond representative democracy, where citizens only vote for elected officials, and toward a model that encourages direct citizen participation.

Strengthen Intergovernmental Coordination: Improve coordination and collaboration between different levels of government (central, regional, and local) to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure coherent policy implementation. Establish clear communication channels, forums for dialogue, and mechanisms for sharing information and best practices. This will facilitate effective coordination and cooperation among all levels of government.

According to Vincent Ostrom (1919-2012): Vincent Ostrom was a political scientist known for his work on public choice theory and polycentric governance. His research focused on the importance of intergovernmental coordination and cooperation in solving collective action problems. Ostrom's influential book, "The Organization of Government in Metropolitan Areas: A Theoretical Inquiry," was published in 1961.

Richard S. Grossman (1943-present): Richard S. Grossman is an economist and political scientist who has extensively studied intergovernmental coordination and federalism. He has written on topics such as fiscal federalism, intergovernmental grants, and the impact of intergovernmental relations on policy outcomes. Grossman's work has been published in various journals and books, with contributions spanning several decades.

Capacity Building for Local Service Delivery: Focus on improving the delivery of essential services at the local level, such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation, and infrastructure development. Provide technical support, training, and resources to local governments to enhance their ability to plan, implement, and monitor service delivery initiatives. This will help address the specific needs of local communities and contribute to their overall development.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation system to assess the progress and impact of decentralization efforts. Regularly evaluate the performance of local governments, identify challenges, and share lessons learned. Use this information to guide policy adjustments and improvements in the decentralization process.

According to Michael Quinn Patton (1945-present): Michael Quinn Patton is a renowned expert in the field of evaluation. His work emphasizes the importance of utilizing evaluation as a tool for learning and improvement. Patton advocates for the use of participatory and utilization-focused evaluation approaches, where stakeholders are actively engaged in the evaluation process and findings are used to inform decision-making. His book "Utilization-Focused Evaluation" was first published in 1978 and has been influential in shaping evaluation practices.

Carol H. Weiss (1927-2021): Carol H. Weiss was a prominent figure in evaluation research and policy analysis. Her work emphasizes the utilization of evaluation in decision-making processes. Weiss developed the concept of "enlightenment evaluation," which emphasizes the importance of evaluation findings being used to increase understanding, inform policy choices, and improve program implementation. Her influential book "Evaluation: Methods for Studying Programs and Policies" was first published in 1972.

Promote Regional Balance: Ensure that decentralization efforts prioritize equitable development across different regions of the country. Implement policies and programs that address regional disparities in terms of infrastructure, service provision, and economic opportunities. This will contribute to balanced national development and reduce regional inequalities.

Strengthen Local Revenue Generation: Encourage local governments to explore alternative revenue sources to reduce their dependence on central government transfers. This can be done by promoting local economic development, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, and implementing effective tax collection systems. Providing technical assistance and capacity building in revenue mobilization can help local governments increase their financial autonomy.

Enhance Inter-governmental Transfers: Review and refine the formula used for inter-governmental transfers to ensure it is equitable and responsive to the needs of different local governments. Consider factors such as population size, poverty levels, infrastructure gaps, and service delivery requirements when determining the allocation of resources. Regularly update the formula to reflect changing circumstances and priorities.

Strengthen Local Planning and Development: Support local governments in developing comprehensive and participatory development plans that align with national development priorities. Provide technical assistance in areas such as urban planning, environmental management, and disaster risk reduction. This will enable local governments to effectively manage their resources, identify development opportunities, and address local challenges.

Promote Gender Mainstreaming: Ensure that decentralization efforts prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment. Encourage the inclusion of women in decision-making processes at the local level and support initiatives that address gender disparities in service delivery and access to resources. Promote gender-responsive budgeting to allocate resources for programs that benefit women and girls.

Improve Access to Information: Enhance transparency and access to information by strengthening mechanisms for public disclosure and accountability. Develop user-friendly information systems, establish citizen help desks, and promote the use of technology for disseminating information on local government activities, budgets, and public services. This will empower citizens to actively participate in local governance and hold local governments accountable.

Foster Collaborative Partnerships: Encourage partnerships between local governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to leverage their resources, expertise, and networks. Collaborative initiatives can enhance service delivery, promote innovation, and facilitate sustainable development at the local level. Foster an enabling environment for effective collaboration through clear guidelines, incentives, and mutual accountability mechanisms.

Address Capacity and Resource Gaps: Identify and address capacity and resource gaps that hinder effective decentralization. Provide technical assistance and training programs to local government officials and staff, particularly in areas such as financial management, project monitoring, and data analysis. Allocate adequate resources for the implementation of decentralization reforms and ensure that they reach the local level.

Promote Knowledge Sharing and Learning: Facilitate knowledge sharing and learning platforms where local governments can exchange experiences, best practices, and lessons learned. Establish networks, forums, and platforms for peer-to-peer learning, research, and innovation. Encourage the documentation and dissemination of successful local governance models and approaches.

Remember, decentralization is an ongoing process that requires continuous learning, adaptation, and stakeholder involvement. It is essential to periodically evaluate the impact of decentralization reforms, solicit feedback from stakeholders, and make necessary adjustments to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.

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