

ASSESSMENT OF ROLES, STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES OF DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN THE GAMBIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper assessed the roles, strategies and challenges of decentralisation and local governance and how decentralisation improves service delivery to the public in The Gambia. The study used descriptive survey design through the administration of structured questionnaire of five-point Likert scale among the selected local government councils. Using random sampling, the sample size for the study was 325 respondents which comprised both administrative staff and service beneficiaries of sampled local councils in The Gambia namely, Kanifing Municipal Council, Brikama Area Council, Kerewan Area Council, and Mansakonko Area Council as well as the Ministry of Lands and Regional Government. A total of 325 copies of questionnaire were administered out of which 300 were retrieved from the field. This represents a response rate of 92 percent. Primary data were collected through questionnaire administration and conduct of interviews. The collected data were analysed using simple percentages and frequencies with the help of Stata version 13. Secondary data were obtained from policy documents, records, journals, relevant text books and the Internet. The study revealed that decentralisation and local government administration played a key role in local governance which impacted on the lives of beneficiaries of the local councils. The study concluded that decentralisation and local government administration faced formidable constraints which impede its efficient and effective implementation. These challenges include inadequate manpower and training of council staff, and ineffective communication and sensitisation among stakeholders on the roles and strategies of decentralisation. Added to that, political interference in the operations and administration of the internal affairs of local councils, created problems of inefficiency and bottlenecks in the smooth administration of local councils.

Keywords: Decentralisation, Local Government, Administration, Local Council, Central, Government, Service Delivery

JEL classification codes: H83, D78, G38, L38, L88, M10

1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralisation has played an essential role in the efforts of international development organisations to build their institutions and has been universally embraced and implemented universally, in different ways, by many developing countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Khan, 2021). From the global perspective, decentralisation is considered as a solution to cope with several development issues while good governance, improved efficiency, enhanced equity, quality service delivery and poverty reduction among others are frequently projected as the most commonly publicised goals of most decentralisation initiatives (Khan, 2021; Faguet, 2014; Khan, 2013; Ribot, 2001; Von Braun & Grote, 2002). Theoretically and practically, the term “decentralisation,” denotes a diverse form of organisational reforms that highly distinguish between “deconcentration” and “devolution” in which academics and practitioners have frequently used “decentralisation” to indicate both “deconcentration and devolution”, notwithstanding general consensus that they signify two dissimilar things (The World Bank, 2020; Pollitt 2007). Theoretically and practically, the term “decentralization,” denotes a diverse form of organisational reforms that highly distinguishes between “deconcentration” and “devolution” in which academics and practitioners have frequently used “decentralisation” to indicate both “deconcentration and devolution”, notwithstanding general consensus that they signify two dissimilar things (The World Bank, 2020; Pollitt 2007). Furthermore, the OECD (2019, 2020:1) describes “decentralisation as measures that transfer a range of powers, responsibilities and resources from central government to subnational governments, defined as legal entities elected by universal suffrage and having some degree of autonomy.” The term decentralisation could be described as “the transfer of power and authority from the central government to regional or subnational government units, according to the demands of the rural people” (Hossain, 2005, p.2). To Randinelli (1981, p.197), decentralisation is the “transfer of legal and political authority to plan, make a decision, and manage public functions from central government and its agencies to field organisations of those agencies, subordinate units of government, semi-autonomous public corporation”.

The World Bank (2020: 3) posits that “organisational deconcentration refers to the physical relocation of personnel from an organisation’s center to its peripheral units, with no connotation of power transfer between organisation members or units”. However, the term “devolution refers to the transfer of decision-making power from an organization’s center to its periphery, usually from higher-level authorities to lower-level authorities, or between an organisation’s headquarters and its field units, or both” (The World Bank, 2020: 3). Similarly, OECD (2020:3) argues that “devolution is perhaps the strongest form of administrative decentralisation because, in this case, decision-making and funding responsibility is transferred to the elected councils of subnational governments”. Empirically, “an examination of 33 OECD countries (except Chile, Mexico and South Korea) and 10 non-OECD countries suggests a positive association between regional authority and government effectiveness” (OECD, 2020:6) in which it was evident that “the correlation is stronger when the comparison is made between the subnational government share of general government revenues and government effectiveness” (OECD, 2020:6). Globally, the dominant strategy of governance by most governmental system at the grass root is the local government; indeed, virtually all forms of government or regime appear to have found the concept and practice of local government as an effective strategy for ensuring the development at the local level (Ani, 2013; Machebem, 2016). The expediency for the creation of local government anywhere in the world stems from the need to facilitate development at the grass root. As important as local government administration has been, there seems to be some constraints, which have been infringing on the operation over the years. These challenges range from political and undue interference of central government, coupled with high rate of bribery and corruption to embezzlement and gross inadequacy of well-trained and qualified human resources among others which have inhibited the smooth and effective operation of local government administration (Akhilpe, Fatile & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012).

From historical perspective, decentralisation was conceptualised and implemented by colonial administrators virtually in all colonised British West African countries such as The Gambia, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, as a political strategy to facilitate territorial administration through the appointment of chiefs and village heads by a colonial administrative system of governance called Indirect Rule. Historically the, purpose of Indirect Rule was to devolve power from the colonial administrative head office located in the colonial capitals to the provincial parts of the country called protectorate areas. These protectorate areas because of their vastness and enormous size to administer, instituted chiefs and village heads to rule on behalf of the colonialist. This system was the same as decentralisation, transferring political, fiscal and administrative power from the centre to the periphery of local areas. The chiefs and village heads were empowered to make socioeconomic and development decisions, and to determine their development priorities in a decentralised structure.

Decentralisation and local government administration in The Gambia derive their mandate from the 1997 Constitution of The Gambia; Local Government Act, 2002; Local Government Finance and Audit Act, 2004; and National Policy for Decentralisation and Local Development (2015-2024). Section 193 of the 1997 Constitution stipulates a “decentralised system of local government administration” which must be “based on a system of democratically elected councils with a high degree of local autonomy”. Section 193(4) of the Constitution “enjoins local government authorities to cooperate with the central government in adopting a policy of decentralisation” (Bensouda, 2013: 37). Furthermore, the Local Government Act was enacted by the National Assembly in 2002. The Act states that there shall be a Council for each Local Government Area which shall have such powers and function as are vested in it by the Act. According to the Local Government Act, 2002, each council will be a corporate body named City or Municipal Council as may be appropriate preceded by the name Local Government Area for which the council is established. Local governments are provided legislative and legal instruments that state clear directions for effective service delivery and are constitutionally mandated as enshrined in the Local Government Act to provide basic infrastructural services as are deemed necessary for the residents of the municipality. The Act also tasks these councils to exercise political and executive powers and functions to embark on community development initiatives to enhance the lives of the residents. Decentralisation within the Gambian context has been prioritised and integrated by the Government of The Gambia development-oriented strategy, the National Policy for Decentralisation and Local Development (2015-2024, p. 5) and National Development Plan (2018-2021). Despite these commitments, the real challenge is to effectively transfer managerial and financial powers from centralised ministries to autonomous local agencies. The Gambia Government in its drives to implement a robust decentralisation policy organised a series of workshops that enabled senior policymakers to focus on the enormous challenge involved in implementing local reforms and to chart a way forward. The objectives of the government on formulating decentralisation policy are to decentralise basic services closer to the citizens at the grassroots level through participation and inclusions.

In public administration, decentralisation is a generic term that is used in different contexts. However, literature mentions the three types of decentralisation (Mudalige, 2019; Devas & Grant, 2003). De-concentration or administrative decentralisation is where responsibilities are assigned to personnel of the central government; devolution or political decentralisation is when responsibilities are assigned to elected bodies or entities with some degree of autonomy e.g., local or municipal councils such as Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC) and Brikama Area Council in The Gambia. Other provincial councils such as Mansakonko Area Council and Kerewan Area Council are part of government decentralisation programme to devolve functions and powers of central government. Delegation as another type of decentralisation carries out specific functions on behalf of the central government with a high degree of autonomy but accountable for their actions.

Decentralisation in The Gambia has been a key policy advocated for, the main motivation being to improve service delivery, equitable political, economic, and social development throughout the country as a cornerstone of the fight against poverty by increasing people's participation in the planning and management of the development process. However, there is now an increasing note of scepticism about the results of decentralisation as a result of inadequate provisions of quality service to the citizens and inefficiency in addressing the development needs of the local communities which were intended to be addressed through the decentralisation process, inadequate citizen participation in political activities at local levels, devolution of political powers and resources as well as inefficiency in service delivery, particularly at local levels because of the evident weaknesses of local democratic processes, indicating failures by central government to address key issues for which decentralisation was advocated (Rugo, 2013; Shah & Thompson, 2004). To this effect, the paper attempts to assess the roles and strategies of decentralisation and how decentralisation improves service delivery to the public, and investigates the challenges facing decentralisation in service delivery to the citizens in The Gambia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

Local governance aims at bringing decision-makers and decision making processes close to the people and their needs which could be achieved through decentralisation. Rendinelli et al (1989) defines decentralisation as the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to field units of government agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, area-wide regional or functional authorities, or nongovernmental private or voluntary organisations. The Gambia National Policy for Decentralisation and Local Development (2015-2024, p. 5) describes decentralisation as the "transfer of responsibilities, authority, functions, as well as power and appropriate resources, to provincial, district and sub-district levels". The same policy further states that "deconcentration is the transfer of functions and resources to lower level units of the same administrative system while authority over decision-making and use of resources remains with the centre (i.e. from the headquarters of an institution or administrative system to the lower levels). In the case of government administration, this would entail the transfer of some functions performed at the headquarters of the ministry to regional, district and/or sub-district offices while power and authority are retained by the centre, p. 5".

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Institutional Public Policy Approach

The "institutional approach (or institutionalism) to understanding policy development" is particularly essential in the disciplines of political science, economics, and sociology (Risi, Vigneau, Bohn & Wickert, 2022; Peters, 2000). Studies adopting institutional theory which entails the "tradition of organisational (sociological) institutionalism" (Risi, Vigneau, Bohn & Wickert, 2022; Greenwood, Oliver, Lawrence, & Meyer, 2017; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983;; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2001) to local governance has increasingly become one of the most common theoretical lenses for exploring decentralisation, local governance and service delivery. Traditionally, the institutional public policy approach concentrated on describing the formal and legal government institutions as their formal organisation, procedural rules and functions and/ or activities. Institutionalism is significant because it highlights that structures remain while individuals come and go. Institutions alter the behaviour of individuals who work within these organisations than individuals change the institutions. Given this, "policy decisions are more stable than they might otherwise be, and reform is more difficult than anticipated" (Hofer, 2022:73). Neo-institutionalism was developed in the past decade in which

approach, institutions continue to be organisations that make and implement laws. In history, scholars in policy studies focused on the institutions of any governmental system to categorise and define what existed. This is probably comparable to the “relative strength of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches within and across countries”. In recent years, “a branch of policy studies has developed so-called new institutionalism or neo-institutionalism, which examines how institutions’ rules for decision-making shape the outcomes of the policy process” (Hoefer, 2022:73; Smith & Larimer, 2017).

2.3 Empirical Review

The World Bank (2020: II) established that “the mediating role of local governance and local taxing rights, the findings point to a negative effect of local corruption, yet a positive effect of local authorities’ discretion over tax and revenues. However, the positive marginal effect of local taxing powers tends to reduce in environments with poor quality of local governance, high incidence of bribe payment and low level of trust in local government officials.” Similarly, in the study of Oduola, Sawaneh, Ogunbela, and Babarinde (2019: 21) on “Revenue Generation in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State: A Correlate of Tax Mobilisation and Utilisation” found that “tax mobilisation of the council is not optimally explored as perceived money-spinning sources of tax revenue to local council because other components such as tenement rate, and shops and kiosks rate were not often mobilised”. The findings of the authors further revealed that “expenditure priority of the local council threatens taxpayers’ commitment to paying taxes”. In addition, Abdur, Akram, Sher, Yahya, Dilshad, and Numera (2017) discussed the implication of fiscal decentralisation on public service provision in Pakistan. Their study was based on annual data from 1972 to 2009 (time service data) and the Auto Regression Distribution Lag model for analysis, which has been used to estimate the long-run coefficient. According to their findings, long-run fiscal transfers significantly influence the infant mortality rate. Moreover, vertical balance and fiscal transfer in the short-run have significantly impacted positively on public service (health) provision. Added to that, Oligbi (2020: 95) found that “fiscal decentralisation has been a recurring issue as it has been embarked upon for over two decades by both developing and transitional economies. Fiscal decentralization is the process of reassigning expenditure functions and revenue sources to sub- national governments with a view to decentralizing fiscal policy making and implementation across various governance levels. One of the strongest arguments in favour of decentralization is based on the premise that it allows a closer match between the preferences of the population and the bundle of public goods and services”

Faguet (2006), found that decentralisation made some public investment in education and other services more responsive to local needs. In Indonesia, Shah (1998) observes a marked improvement in education outcomes such as an overall enhancement of female literacy rates, years of schooling, and output rates for primary and secondary education after the implementation of a decentralisation policy. Similarly in Colombia, Faguet (2006) observed that decentralisation improved the public school environment. Similarly, Khalegian (2003) discovered that countries where local governments manage a higher share of public expenditures tended to have lower mortality rates. Thus, Khalegian argued that expenditure in decentralisation was positively related to improved health outcome in low-income countries. Added to that, Faguet (2004) explained that local public health expenditure increased after decentralisation, but over time local government decreased the share of revenue allocated to public health in the Republic of Korea.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

3.1.1 Institutional Public Policy Approach

The study is premised on Institutional Public Policy Approach. Traditionally, the institutional public policy approach concentrated on describing the more formal and legal government institutions as their formal organisations, procedural rules, functions and/ or activities. Policy is a purposive course of action followed by an action or set of actions in dealing with a problem or nature of concern, and public policies are those policies developed by government bodies and officials. The institutional public policy making approach is particularly relevant to this study given the fact that for decentralisation to be effective in any country, especially The Gambia, there must be sound implementable decentralisation policies, programmes and structures with good local governance system put in place.

3.2 Research Design and Sampling

The study employed cross-sectional descriptive survey research design which involved eliciting data from respondents. Data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative instruments like open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires. The study employed descriptive statistical instruments to analyse data.

The study population consisted of 2,099 individuals who were represented by both beneficiaries and administrative staff of the sampled local government councils in The Gambia which were divided using proportionate-to-size sampling technique. The population of the study comprised the senior management of the Ministry of Local Government and Lands responsible for decentralisation programmes in the country through its Directorate of Local Governance. The selected five (5) local government councils include: Kanifing Municipal Council, Brikama Area Council; the Ministry of Lands and Local Government; Kerewan Area Council; and Mansakonko Area Council. The population and sample size for each local government council are shown in Table 1. In addition, senior officers of each of the five institutions and their beneficiaries were interviewed on service provision and consumption using convenient sampling. Beneficiaries for each organisation were purposively selected for the study to gauge their opinions and views on whether decentralisation and local government administration improve public service delivery or not.

Table 1: Population and Sample Size

Sampled Institutions	Regions	Population	Sample Size
Ministry of Lands and Regional Government.	BJL	51	8
Brikama Area Council	WCR	429	66
Kanifing Municipal Council	KMC	1298	201
Kerewan Area Council	NBR	182	28
Mansakonko Area Council	LRR	139	22
TOTAL		2,099	325

Source: Field Survey (2022)

Random sampling technique was adopted to determine the sample size for the study. The study covered five randomly selected institutions which included Kanifing Municipal Council, Brikama Area Council, Kerewan Area Council, Mansakonko Area Council, and the Ministry of Local Government and Lands as the coordinating ministry responsible for formulating decentralisation programmes in the country. The respondents comprised senior officers from grades 8 to 12 of these institutions concerned with decentralisation and public service delivery and their beneficiaries to gauge their opinions on the effects of decentralisation on delivering services to the public. Due to its suitability for small populations, Cochran's (1963) modified random sampling formula was used to calculate the sample size for the population which gave us 325 respondents. This represents 15% of the study population.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Assessment of the Roles and Strategies of Decentralisation and Local Government Administration in The Gambia

The results of the study revealed that 294 (98%) of the respondents have agreed that decentralisation and local governance are indeed an effective strategy that improved and delivered social services to their doorstep, while only 3 (1%) disagreed with this assertion, and 3 (1%) are undecided on this matter. Regarding the second research statement, the results indicate that 291 (97%) have affirmed the fact that decentralisation played a pivotal role in bringing service delivery closer to them (beneficiaries), with 3 (1%) who disagreed, and 6 (2%) have undecided opinions on the subject matter. The results therefore show that the majority of respondents agree that decentralisation has been instrumental in making service delivery more accessible to them.

The findings on research statement three reveal that 279 (93%) of respondents agreed that decentralisation plays a key role in facilitating local community participation in economic activities in their local council areas, whereas 2 (0.66%) disagreed that decentralisation facilitated local community participation in economic activities in their local areas, and 19 (6.33%) were undecided on the statement. The analysis therefore shows that majority of respondents were really in agreement with the assertion.

The analysis of the results in Table 2 indicates that 245 (81.67%) respondents have agreed that decentralisation indeed promoted transparency and accountability in public service delivery at local councils, whereas 24 (8%) disagreed that decentralisation promoted transparency and accountability in public service delivery at local councils, and about 10.33% of the respondents have undecided opinions. Based on this analysis, the majority of the respondents confirmed the statement that decentralisation has promoted transparency and accountability in service delivery at local council level.

The findings of the study also reveal that 268 (89.33%) of the respondents agreed that decentralisation strengthened coordination and management of community resources at local level to improve service delivery while 13 (4.34%) disagreed that decentralisation strengthened the coordination and management of resources at local levels to improve service delivery, and 19 (6.33%) respondents have no opinion on the statement. Therefore, the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement that decentralisation contributed to the smooth coordination and management of community resources for the local councils to provide basic services.

As indicated in Table 2, the results about the sixth statement reveal that about 276 (92%) of the respondents agreed that decentralisation and local governance ensures the devolution of political powers and redistribution of administrative responsibilities from central government to subnational government levels to improve service delivery to grassroots people. About 9 (3%) of respondents disagreed with the statement, and 15 (5%) of the respondents have not decided on the statement. Therefore, it is obvious that the majority of the respondents have affirmed that decentralisation is capable of ensuring devolution of powers and redistribution of administrative responsibilities from central to local government authorities.

Research statement seven is concerned with the relationship between decentralisation and capacity building for local government personnel. To this effect, the results reveal that decentralisation and local governance facilitate capacity development of local government officials to improve service delivery as an overwhelming 261 (87%) of the respondents agreed that decentralisation indeed developed the capacities of local council officials to improve their service delivery, whereas only 11 respondents (3.67%) disagreed the statement above, leaving 28 respondents (9.33%) undecided. Clearly, the majority of the selected respondents affirm the statement to be true.

Furthermore, the results of the study reveal the fact that decentralisation helped improve service delivery to grass root people as the data confirms that 265 respondents (88.34%) agreed that decentralisation really helps to improve service delivery to grass root people. Only 15 respondents

(5%) disagreed that decentralisation helps improve service delivery to grass root people leaving 20 respondents (6.67%) undecided. Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn on basis of the majority that the above statement is true.

On the issue of subnational political participation and improvement of service delivery, the ninth research statement, the findings of the study reveal that decentralisation strengthened political participation at subnational level to improve service delivery. This is corroborated by 234 respondents (78%) who agreed that decentralisation strengthened political participation at sub-national level to enhance service delivery, whereas 23 respondents (7.67%) disagreed with the statement, with 43 (14.33%) who are undecided on the subject matter. The results therefore indicate clearly that most of the selected respondents agreed with the statement under review.

Focusing on the issue of decentralisation and good governance, the study reveals that almost 264 respondents (88%) agreed that decentralisation promoted good governance and delivery of basic services at local levels as opposed to 12 respondents (4%) who disagreed with the statement leaving 24 respondents (8%) who were undecided on the matter. Again, an overwhelming majority confirm the research statement. Table 2 below presents the data that has been described above.

Table 2: Assessment of the Roles and Strategies of Decentralisation and Local Governance in The Gambia

Assertions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	f and (%)	f and (%)	f and (%)	f and (%)	f and (%)
Decentralisation is an effective strategy in delivering basic services to local residents.	227 (75.67)	67 (22.33)	3 (1.0)	2 (0.67)	1 (0.33)
Decentralisation and local governance bring service delivery closer to the council beneficiaries in their local areas.	206 (68.67)	85 (28.33)	6 (2.00)	2 (0.67)	1 (0.33)
Decentralisation and local governance facilitate local community participation in economic activity in their local areas.	170 (56.67)	109 (36.33)	19 (6.33)	1 (0.33)	1 (0.33)
Decentralisation and local governance promote transparency and accountability in service delivery at local councils	141 (47.00)	104 (34.67)	31 (10.33)	16 (5.33)	8 (2.67)
Decentralisation and local governance strengthen coordination of resources at local level to improve service delivery	162 (54.00)	106 (35.33)	19 (6.33)	8 (2.67)	5 (1.67)
Decentralisation and local governance ensure devolution of powers from central government to local levels	185 (61.67)	91 (30.33)	15 (5.00)	6 (2.00)	3 (1.00)

Decentralisation and local governance	139	122	28		3
develop the capacity of local	(46.33)	(40.67)	(9.33)	8	(1.00)
government officials to improve				(2.67)	
service delivery.					
Decentralisation and local	170	95	20		3
governance help improve service	(56.67)	(31.67)	(6.67)	2	(1.00)
delivery to grass roots people				(4.00)	
Decentralisation and local governance	123	111	43		8
strengthen participation at local level	(41.00)	(37.00)	(14.33)	15	(2.67)
to enhance service delivery.				(5.00)	
Decentralisation improves good	144	120	24	8	4
governance and provision of basic	(48.00)	(40.00)	(8.00)	(2.67)	(1.33)
services at local levels					
Mean Score	166.7	101	20.8	6.8	3.7
	(55.56)	(33.66)	(6.93)	(2.06)	(1.23)

Source: Field Survey (2022)

The Challenges of Decentralisation and Local Government Administration in The Gambia

Exposing the institutional and organisational problems, the results of the study presented in Table 3 below revealed that on statement one, 270 respondents (90%) agreed that local government councils faced institutional and organisational challenges in delivering basic services at local councils in The Gambia; about eight (8) respondents (2.67%) disagreed with the statement; and 22 respondents (7.33%) chose to be undecided on the subject matter. Therefore, the analysis shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents are in full agreement with the statement confirming it to be truthful.

On the financial challenges, the results reveal that 258 respondents (86%) agreed that insufficient government subvention to local councils hindered their ability to render quality services; 17 respondents (5.67%) disagreed that insufficient government funding has been a hindrance to local councils' ability to render quality services; and 25 respondents (8.33%) remain undecided on the statement. With an overwhelmingly 86%, the results show clearly that the majority of the respondents were in agreement that insufficient government subvention affected local councils' ability to provide sustainable social services to their beneficiaries. This indicates that there is a need for central government to increase their funding to local councils since many of them have a small revenue base.

On political interference as another challenge for local councils, the results on statement three reveal that 266 respondents (88.66%) agreed that political interference in the operations of local councils hindered their ability for service delivery to their beneficiaries; about 12 respondents (4%) disagreed while 22 respondents (7.33%) were undecided on the issue. Therefore, majority of the respondents, about (88.66%), were in agreement that political interference indeed affected the selected local councils' ability to provide efficient service delivery.

Furthermore the study on statement three found that 242 respondents (80.67%) agreed that lack of a strong revenue base for local councils impeded their ability to implement sustainable projects for their beneficiaries; 30 respondents (10%) disagreed with this while 28 respondents (9.33%) were undecided on the issue. The analysis shows that a clear majority of 80.67% agree that the small revenue

bases of the councils affect their ability to provide sustainable projects in their jurisdictions. Thus, the statement can be taken as accurate.

The results of the study on statement five reveal that 87.33% of the respondents agreed that inadequate revenue collection strategies and mechanisms impeded the local councils ability to deliver quality decentralised services, 15 (5%) disagreed while 7.67% (23) were undecided. Conclusively, the results indicate a majority confirming the statement to be truthful.

The results of the study on statement six reveal that 262 respondents (87.33%) agreed that corruption and misappropriation of council funds by some unscrupulous revenue collectors badly affected their service provisions, while 9 (3%) disagreed that corruption and misappropriations of funds badly affected their service provisions, and 29 (9.67%) were undecided the subject matter. However, evidence has shown that top officials of these councils have embezzled millions of funds through conniving with some unscrupulous collectors as one staff member who wished to remain anonymous confirmed during an interview. Surprisingly, no serious actions such prosecution have been taken against those culpable. Furthermore, the results of the study found that about 264 respondents (88%) agreed that problems of an inadequate and or poorly trained human resource base impeded local government operations, and 4.67% of the respondents disagreed that local government councils faced problem of adequate and trained human resource base to impedes their operations, while 22 respondents (7.33%) were undecided on the subject matter. Therefore, a large majority of 88% confirm the statement that local councils faced formidable a problem of an ill-trained human capital base to execute their mandate in accordance with 2002 Local Government Act.

The study also found that 250 respondents (83.33%) agreed that insufficient central government support in funding councils' infrastructural development derailed their ability to embark on pressing projects, and 15 respondents (5%) disagreed that insufficient central government supports in funding councils' infrastructural development never derailed their ability to embark on needed projects at all, while 35 respondents (11.67%) remain undecided on this. Therefore, the majority of respondents have a strong conviction that the statement is true. It is imperative for central government funds to help local council operational expenditures since they have small revenue bases.

Results in Table 3 show that on statement nine, 234 respondents (78%) agreed with the statement that there is a lack of strong political support from the executive arm of government to give political support for the local councils to expand their operations. The results also show that 15 respondents (5%) disagreed with the statement while 51 respondents (17%) were undecided on the subject matter. Therefore, 78% of the respondents affirm the statement to be accurate.

The results of the study on statement tenth found that 241 respondents (80.33%) agreed that insufficient salary and poor financial incentives for local council staff created attrition and capacity building gaps, while 14 respondents (4.67%) disagreed with this, leaving 45 respondents (15%) undecided on this statement which means the majority of the responded confirm the statement to be accurate.

The results displayed on Table 3 regarding statement eleven found that 262 respondents (87.34%) agreed that corruption and mismanagement of the councils' funds impeded councils' service delivery; only 16 respondents (5.33%) disagreed with this statement; and 22 (7.33%) were undecided on the subject matter. Consequently, majority of the respondents from both administrative staff and beneficiaries were in agreement with statement.

The results of the study also reveal that about 258 respondents (86%) agreed that poor investment initiatives by the local councils for expansion derailed their corporate strategic objectives; only 8 (2.66%) disagreed with this; and 34 respondents (11.33%) were undecided on the statement.

Regarding statement thirteen, the results displayed on Table 3 indicate that 252 respondents (84.28%) agreed that non-payment of taxes and rates by residents of the local government councils have impeded their service delivery, only 15 (5.02%) disagreed that non-payment of taxes and rates have impeded their ability to ensure service delivery, while 32 respondents (10.70%) were undecided

on the subject matter. Therefore an overwhelming majority of selected respondents have agreed with the research statement. It is therefore imperative that residents of the four selected local government councils regularly pay their taxes and rates, and councils should also plough back these tax revenues to provide effective and efficient services for the good of their beneficiaries.

The result of the study on statement fourteenth reveal that 238 respondents (79.6%) agreed that lack of political autonomy really impeded operational efficiency of the local government councils and created delays in their project implementation; 22, (7.36%) of the respondents, disagreed that lack of political autonomy has any connection with the operational efficiency of local government councils or to delays in their project implementation; 39 respondents (13.04%) were undecided on the statement. Therefore, it is imperative that central government grants political autonomy and independence to local councils so that they have freedom as to what policy directions they should take and decide on their own priorities.

Finally, the results on statement fifteen reveal that 159 respondents (53.36%) agreed that the problem of inadequate capital equipment to undertake regular rubbish disposals/collections remained a major challenge in improving service delivery; however, 104 respondents (34.9%) disagreed with this, while 20 respondents (6.71%) respondents were undecided on the subject matter. Therefore, an overwhelming majority of the respondents confirm the statement to be true. It is therefore important for the central government to provide enough annual subventions to procure more capital machineries and equipment to provide regular rubbish/waste disposal equipment for their environment to be kept clean for their residents.

Table 3: Challenges of Decentralisation and Local Government Administration in Service Delivery to the Public

Assertions	Strongly Agree f and (%)	Agree f and (%)	Undecided f and (%)	Disagree f and (%)	Strongly Disagree f and (%)
Local councils have organisational challenges in delivering services at local councils.	174 (58.00)	96 (32.00)	22 (7.33)	3 (1.00)	5 (1.67)
Insufficient government subventions to councils hinder their ability to render services.	179 (59.67)	79 (26.33)	25 (8.33)	14 (4.67)	3 (1.00)
Political interference in local government councils hinders their service delivery.	78 (59.33)	88 (29.33)	22 (7.33)	11 (3.67)	1 (0.33)
Inadequacy of a strong revenue base for local councils hinders their implementation activities.	143 (47.67)	99 (33.00)	28 (9.33)	19 (6.33)	11 (3.67)
Inadequate revenue collection strategies impede their ability to deliver services.	153 (51.00)	109 (36.33)	23 (7.67)	11 (3.67)	4 (1.33)
Corruption and mismanagement by council revenue collectors affected service delivery.	193 (64.33)	69 (23.00)	29 (9.67)	7 (2.33)	2 (0.67)

Inadequate and poorly trained human resource base impedes local government operations.	144 (48.00)	120 (40.00)	22 (7.33)	11 (3.67)	3 (1.00)
Insufficient government support for the councils derails their ability to embark on projects.	145 (48.33)	105 (35.00)	35 (11.67)	12 (4.00)	3 (1.00)
Lack of strong political will of the government to support local councils to implement projects	130 (43.33)	104 (34.67)	51 (17.00)	12 (4.00)	3 (1.00)
Insufficient remuneration and financial incentives for staff creates attrition and capacity building problems.	129 (43.00)	112 (37.33)	45 (15.00)	9 (3.00)	5 (1.67)
Corruption and mismanagement of the councils' funds impedes councils' service delivery initiatives.	152 (50.67)	110 (36.67)	22 (7.33)	13 (4.33)	3 (1.00)
Non-payment of taxes and rates by residents of the local councils impedes their service delivery.	145 (48.49)	107 (35.79)	32 (10.70)	8 (2.68)	7 (2.34)
Mean Score	147.08 (51.82)	99.83 (33.29)	29.67 (9.89)	10.83 (3.61)	4.17 (1.39)

Source: Field Survey (2022)

Discussion of Findings

This section of the study highlights the main findings from the views gathered during the administration of the questionnaires and the interviews conducted based on the objectives of the research.

The findings of the study revealed that decentralisation of local government administration is actually an effective strategy that delivered social services to the council beneficiaries in their communities. The results further revealed that decentralisation played a key role in making decentralised service delivery closer to the people. This is line with a study conducted by Faguet (2006) who concluded that decentralisation contributed immensely towards improving public school performance.

In addition, the findings of the study on objective one also revealed that decentralisation and local government administration are strategies that could promote transparency and accountability between the local councils and council beneficiaries. This is corroborated by Faguet (2011) who found that decentralisation helped improve the consistency of public service with local preference and access to social services and since this enables beneficiaries to measure the degree of satisfaction between service delivery and their service outcomes, it would lead to more service satisfaction.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that decentralisation and local government administration facilitated local community participation in economic activities in their local areas. The study also found that decentralisation as a strategy promoted transparency and accountability in public service delivery in local council operations. Also, It was discovered that decentralisation played a role in strengthening the coordination and management of resources at local level to improve service delivery. The findings of the study showed that decentralisation really played decisive role in ensuring devolution of powers and redistribution of responsibilities from central government to local government to improve services. Findings from the study discovered that decentralisation played a role towards facilitating the development of the capacity of local government officials to improve service delivery.

On the challenges that confront decentralisation efforts in The Gambia, the findings of the study indicated that local councils face institutional and organisational challenges which greatly affect their efforts to implement decentralisation programmes and create phenomenal bottlenecks in providing and improving service delivery to their beneficiaries. Furthermore, the findings of the study discovered that inadequate and insufficient government annual subventions have greatly affected local councils' abilities to provide quality and improved service delivery to their beneficiaries. The findings revealed that political interference from central government in the internal operations of the local government councils affected their roles in implementing decentralised service delivery even though the councils are closer to the local people than central government. Also, the results of the findings found that lack of a strong revenue base and capacity to collect more tax revenues affected the local councils' ability to implement more decentralised projects and programmes to uplift the living standards of council residents. Finally, the results of the study discovered that corruption and mismanagement of local council funds were rampant. It was reported that some top officials of these councils connived with revenue collectors to corrupted and squander millions of dalasi. The findings indicated that this is worsened by the indifference of councils' management who have taken no action against those alleged to have committed such heinous financial crimes for recovery of these funds by the court of law.

To supplement the quantitative data, interviews were conducted with the officials from the local government councils and beneficiaries of local government councils' services. In an interview with the Director of Planning at the Kanifing Municipal Council, he agreed that decentralisation is indeed an effective strategy in delivering social services to the beneficiaries and residents of the council and brings services such as waste collection and other infrastructural services closer to the people of the municipality. The Director lamented that their biggest challenges include insufficient funding from central government, lack of trained personnel, poor remuneration, non- payment of taxes and rates by residents, and political interference which impede their operations. He stated that *"the most pressing challenges of the council is subjecting the councils' annual budget scrutiny and consideration at the prerogative of the Ministry. This creates unnecessary delay in the councils' project implementation."* Another beneficiary from the same municipality said KMC has *'good policies and strategies but implementing these policies become the challenge because of an inadequate, incompetent and poorly trained human resource base coupled with issues of corruption and mismanagement of funds.'* Most of the interviews with the beneficiaries of these local councils revealed unanimity in their views that decentralisation is indeed a good strategy that could assume the role of bringing service delivery closer to the residents/service users. The respondents also affirmed that decentralisation ensures devolution of powers, redistribution of responsibilities from central government to local government councils, and generally agreed that this ensures fair and balanced development to every part of the country. They also affirm that this has increased political participation of grassroots populations.

Some of the interviewees stated that the role of decentralisation is to formulate laws and policies at sub-national level. However, one of the beneficiaries sounded a note of alarm that *"this is always done in isolation without involving grassroots people in policy formulation and implementation making such policies fail as a result of lack of consultations."* As corroborated by the scholarly opinions discussed in the literature review above, effective and efficient community driven service delivery should necessarily ensure that the local community is in the forefront in identifying their own needs and priorities through establishing democratic structures such as village and ward development committees that will conduct critical community needs assessments with the participation of stakeholders before submitting such to the local councils for consideration and implementation. Some interviewees also stated that good strategies that can enhance decentralisation and improve service delivery can include sensitisation, and training of council personnel on their responsibilities. One of the interviewees confirmed that *"this is the only strategy to give back to the people their inherent democratic power."* They also emphasised that decentralisation can be used through the establishment of functional

decentralised structures that have effective procedures and laws. According to one respondent, the roles and strategies can be assessed through *“a dialogue with relevant stakeholders to ensure conduct of impact assessment of their programmes.”*

In another interview, the Director of Planning and Development for Brikama Area Council stressed that for decentralisation to be realistic and sustainable, the local councils should be granted autonomy and independence to make decisions and determine their priorities and ensure effective communication between the beneficiaries and the local councils. The Director stated that *“in The Gambia local councils are paralysed by lack of political autonomy and absolute independence, and this adversely affects the smooth operation of the councils.”* This can create problems of transparency and accountability among stakeholders. The Director also posited that late payment of their subvention by the central government *“derails service delivery to the communities in their jurisdiction.”* During an interview with one resident of the Kanifing Municipality, the respondent alluded to the fact that political interference, corruption, inadequate revenue collection mechanisms, small revenue base and lack of financial control measures affect the realisation of effective service delivery to the beneficiaries of many of the local government councils in The Gambia. One respondent in the council stated that insufficient government financial support, political interference and inadequate revenue collection mechanisms also affected the full realisation of decentralisation policies and laws.

The last local council was Mansakonko Area Council of Lower River Region where an interview was conducted with the Chairperson who said that decentralisation advocates for the utilisation of grassroots democratic structures in the implementation and provision of social services to their beneficiaries. He stated that *“decentralisation is used through fiscal, administrative and political devolution of powers to extend and improve service delivery. It also helps members of the community to take ownership of their development by initiating, implementing and monitoring their own development initiatives.”*

In an interview, one beneficiary in Mansakonko Area Council, highlighted that the challenges confronting the local councils include institutional and organisational challenges such as inadequate capacity, insufficient training, poor remunerations, low staff morale, political interference by the ruling party to manipulate and influence council policies and operations, corruption and mismanagement of council funds, and insufficient central government subventions are all factors impeding the smooth operation of the councils. He stated that *“corruption by Council officials coupled with a lack of punitive actions against culprits, and lack of transparency and accountability creates bottlenecks against efficient operations which remain big challenges.”* This is corroborated by two interviewees who wish to be anonymous that a considerable amount of evidence *“has shown that substantial amounts of collected revenues were lost and unaccounted for in the hands of some revenue collectors.”* Another respondent emphasised that *‘despite the poor revenue collection strategies, no punitive actions have been taken against those found to be culpable.’*

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study revealed that decentralisation of local government administration has remarkably improved service delivery through the implementation of the local councils, strategic visions, plan of actions, strategic environmental policy and waste management, and collection strategies which were implemented by most councils in 2017 following the rebirth of the new political dispensation ushered in by the Barrow administration. The study found that decentralisation improved service delivery, as corroborated by various studies, due to the implementation of the 2 National Policy for Decentralisation and Local Development which aimed at making decentralisation more robust, participatory and inclusive.

The findings of the study revealed that decentralisation and local government administration played a key role and adopted some strategies which impacted on the lives of beneficiaries of the local

councils because decentralisation made them access social services to improve their livelihoods. The results further indicated that decentralisation brought service delivery closer to the residents due to their proximity to the councils. It is therefore imperative for the central government to pursue decentralisation programmes rigorously in order for local populations to benefit from decentralised services. Finally, findings of the study regarding the challenges conclude that decentralisation and local government administration faced formidable constraints which impede councils' efficient and effective implementation. These challenges include inadequacy of manpower and training of council staff, lack of effective communication and sensitisation among stakeholders on effective roles and strategies of decentralisation, and interference by central government in the operation and administration of the internal affairs of local councils, all of which created problems of inefficiency and bottlenecks in the smooth administration of local councils.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were suggested to the Government of The Gambia and stakeholders for consideration in policy formulation and implementation regarding decentralisation.

The study recommended two measures: First, the Government of The Gambia should develop and implement a comprehensive decentralisation and communication policy and strategy for the smooth implementation of decentralisation programmes in the country to make citizens aware of decentralisation processes and take ownership, because most of the respondents were hitherto unaware of any decentralisation processes and have no knowledge or idea of what decentralisation is all about. Second, there is need for the Government of The Gambia to enact a Bill for the establishment of an autonomous national decentralisation secretariat or coordinating board for proper implementation, monitoring and evaluation of decentralisation laws and programmes and to establish local development planning authority to spearhead development needs of local communities.

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