

Challenges in decentralization and service delivery, Wakiso district

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the challenges involved in service delivery under decentralization in Wakiso District, Uganda. The study was guided by a case study design and employed the qualitative data collection approach. A total of 50 people were targeted for the study from whom 44 respondents were selected using Krejcie and Morgan table. Semi structured questionnaire using interviews were used to collect data from 44 Sub County leaders in Wakiso district. Raw data collected was summarized, organized and analysed using simple content value analysis through triangulation. Results revealed the challenges that exist in service delivery are inadequate human resources, insufficient financial resources, greed, questionable land ownership and lack of political will, stakeholder involvement and bureaucratic bottleneck. The paper provides insights on undocumented challenges within decentralization and hindered service among the beneficiaries.

Keywords

Decision making, governance, political-will, service delivery

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Introduction

Massuanganhe (2005) asserts that decentralization is a process through which authority and responsibility for some functions are transferred from the central government to local governments, communities and the private sector. This implies that transfer of power, responsibilities, capacities and resources from national to all sub-national levels of government with the aim of strengthening the ability of the latter to both foster people's participation and delivery of quality services (Zarrouk, 2018 & Smith, n.d). It has been argued that decentralisation of powers to local government is unlikely to be a panacea for the shortcomings of a weak central government (Smith, n.d). Therefore, decentralization plays a special role in democratization because local populations participate in the management of decisions making. This can be a fulcrum for rural development. Thus, effective involvement of people in all facets of the society is a permanent state in which performance is achieved (Cistulli, as cited in Massuanganhe, 2005, p.7). It can be noted that, decentralization needs to be complemented by demand driven participation, conceivably championed by civil society, to ensure genuine democratization and empowerment in natural resource management. On

that note, decentralization transfers power from the central government to local governments, providing effective opportunities for democratic change at the local level which improves national democracy as well. Participation in decentralization is very important in implementing government policies (Suratman, 2013). Decentralization has been confronted by a number of challenges which hinder service delivery. Bardhan & Mookherjee (as cited in Bofa et al., 2016, p.2) report that mismanagement and lack of accountability are common in local governments, developing and transition economies. Faguet et al. (2015) stress that, the central bureaucracy's reluctance to give up power has continued to affect the decentralization process. Such problems have limited local councils in deciding their own issues rather than the bureaucracy-captured decision-making resulting in duplication of efforts and overlapping services in the same areas.

Literature review

The funds allocated to Local Governments in comparison to the functions devolved to them are inadequate (Bogere, 2013). Some sectors, especially those that are indivisible and, or are highly sensitive and technical such as defence and security as well as specific functions such as procurement of drugs and supplies for which economies of scale accrue from centralization ought to remain under the central government. This would impose a restraint on central government expenditure which in many cases turns out to be a challenge of wasteful and is susceptible to embezzlement. Therefore, Obwona et al. (as cited in Ekpo, 2007, p.19) concludes that "financial and institutional constraints have adversely affected the ability of the sub-national governments to adequately deliver services of sufficient quality", as thus a challenge.

Citizens have an important role to play in ensuring accountability, but there is general apathy and the population seems disempowered to hold leaders accountable (Bogere, 2013). They do not realize the leverage they hold over policy makers, politicians and service providers. Corruption, bribery and hand-outs from politicians seem to be normal and acceptable, instead of demanding for better services from public servants. This attitude puts huge and unrealistic expectations on the politicians making it difficult to have regular interface with their constituents. Further, weak political supervision arising from insufficient capacity of Local Governments to effectively facilitate elected leaders is a menace to service delivery for local governments.

Underfunding sub-national Local Governments constrains the discretion of Local Governments over budget resources (Bogere, 2013). He further asserted that, apart from the mismatch between service delivery responsibilities and resource allocation (<20%), Local Governments are heavily dependent on central government transfers for revenue (>95%). This does not support the objective of putting people in charge of their own affairs. Hence, limiting people's discretion over budget resources because over 85 percent of the grants are conditional.

Muriisa (2009) pointed out that, lack of capacity and personnel at sub-national government level to exercise responsibility for service delivery impinges on efficiency. Thus, the delivery of quality service is anchored on an essential element of institutional capacity. It is noted that, the positions in the Local Governments are rarely filled and some functions are never performed. Since the central government imposed a freeze on recruitment of civil servants at district level, the situation has worsened, particularly in hard-to-reach districts (Bogere, 2013). He further, asserts that, lack of training opportunities to develop professional and

technical expertise, and lack of career progression of staff recruited at district level, low and often delayed payments, shortage of equipment and materials have worsened the situation in the performance of the local governance (...p.9). Additionally, an important problem in local government administration in Uganda is in recruiting, motivating and retaining staff; others include lack of resources resulting in programme failure and reduced independence and complexity in central-local relations (Ekpo, 2007, p.19).

Accountability is increasingly becoming prominent in development discourse (Bardhan & Mookherjee, as cited in Bofa et al., n.d, and p.2). Decentralization and liberalization in Uganda led to the introduction of diverse and numerous actors with unclear roles and responsibilities. There is lack of adequate supervision due to inadequate facilitation, lack of coordination between central and local government, overlapping and unclear mandates for monitoring Local Governments and lack of essential statistical databases for planning, monitoring and evaluation at the local levels. Ekpo (2007) explains that, in Nigeria for example, under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, the Federal Government releases money to State Primary School Boards but cannot hire, fire, replace or evaluate teachers.

As a result, the demand for accountability by the citizenry is still very low (Bofa et al., 2016, p.2). The level of citizens' participation in planning and budget monitoring activities remains low, and there is a generally negative attitude over civic matters (Bogere, 2013; Muriisa, 2009). This is attributed to; wide spread lack of knowledge among the citizens of their roles and responsibilities, unavailability of relevant information especially at district level, loss of trust and confidence in government by citizens and absence of effective mechanisms for holding leaders accountable. This implies that, degree of autonomy from the central government by local governments can be circumscribed in their ability to track and account for local government funds and make wise decisions on how to spend the proceeds.

Lack of political commitment/ will, this is evident in the unwillingness to pay staff and offering technical support to the local governments by the central government. Despite pronouncements to the contrary, central governments often do not want to devolve power to the local level. National political leaders and civil servants may resist decentralization for any number of reasons, from the narrow, parochial interest of retaining power to the broader concern of maintaining national oversight in the interest of uniformity. This notion is prompted by recentralization of a number of functions that had been devolved to sub national governments, including recruitment of staff and remuneration, procurement as is the case with procurement of drugs. Bogere (2013) clarifies that, this situation is contrary to the thrust of the decentralization policy in Uganda that sought to free the center of certain functions while at the same time empowering citizens to take charge of affairs. It is widely accepted that the center of the problems of service delivery under decentralization in Uganda is the political economy of decentralization where the political considerations tend to override the objectives of decentralization. On that, the meagre funds mainly cover salaries of workers leaving little for provision of materials and actual service provision.

Insufficient funds to facilitate local government officials mean that many of the local government officials including councillors have remained voluntary, without compensation. Such people are difficult to hold accountable to the local communities (Golola, 2003). Muriisa (2009) clarifies that lack of funding at the local level paralyzed the personnel sector. In the first instance, decentralization led to staff retrenchment through civil service reform. Therefore, this is a big challenge to the implementation process and service

delivery because much of the available financial resources end up enriching individuals employed in the public sector, particularly local governments. Additionally, the funds allocated to Local Governments in comparison to the functions devolved to Local Governments are inadequate (Bogere, 2013).

It is paramount to note that, local economic development is reliant on efficient, reliable service provision, such as of roads, electricity and water. In addition to lack of administrative capacity, lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities and inappropriate focus and investments often constrain the delivery of services that are necessary for local economic development (Scott, as cited in M'Cormack, 2011, p.2; Devas, 2005). Therefore, lack of capacity at sub-national levels of government in exercising responsibility for public services is critical. In Uganda and Tanzania, the lower tiers of government lacked the ability to manage public finances and maintain proper accounting procedures. Consequently, lower levels of government received less money from the central government than before decentralization (Ahmad et al., as cited in Ekpo, 2007, p.12).

The bureaucratic and lengthy procurement procedures and other administrative processes which result in failure of districts to utilize the funds over the required time are a major impediment to service delivery (Bogere, 2013). This mean that, the bureaucratic processes sometimes lead to late release of funds and result in unspent balances returned to the treasury. The other administrative handicap is the reporting and accounting which is not accompanied by adequate capacity building. It is further noted that, as the process of decentralization continues, it will not take that long for reality to sink in that many local governments have limited financial and human resources and inadequate governance capacity to fulfil the mandate thrust upon them. In some cases, many local and municipal governments lack the necessary institutional capacity to manage their rapidly growing populations.

Bogere (2013; Devas, 2005) asserts that, conflicts stifle development because they consume time, money and energy meant for service delivery. He adds that conflicts cause stress at the work place, reduce productivity, initiative and innovation and the common conflicts at district level are technical verses political leadership. Muriisa (2009) further informs that implementation of the decentralization programme is marred by the conflicts between the politicians and the civil servants. Largely, conflicts emerge from the demand for accountability by the civil servants from the politicians.

Like in all other spheres of public life in Uganda, corruption is also rampant at the district level (Bogere, 2013). This implies that corruption takes many forms, including influence peddling by those in positions of authority, undue influence by politicians, abuse of office, bribery, fraud, embezzlement, misappropriation and misallocation of limited resources (Devas & Delay, 2006) It can be noted that, there is increased corruption by the officials who try to compensate themselves by misappropriating funds and by extortion from the citizens. Decentralization has been hindered by corruption of the lower levels of government partly due to weak accountability and transparency issues (Ekpo, 2007). Therefore, the levels of corruption under decentralization, particularly the collusion by politicians and technocrats at the districts in awarding contracts and tenders in what is commonly referred to as "scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" arrangements, is alarming (Devas & Delay, 2006) There is also evidence that corruption has led to the poor performance of service delivery of the local government level in many developing economies. In a recent citizen survey covering six local government authorities in Tanzania, including 42 villages and wards, corruption was

seen to be prevalent in all councils. On average, 60 percent of the respondents saw corruption as a serious problem (Fjeldstad et al., as cited in Ekpo, 2007, p.19).

In terms of accountability, the lack of financial autonomy and insufficient funds to facilitate local government officials means that many of the local government officials including councillors have remained voluntary, without compensation. Such people are difficult to hold accountable to the local communities (Golola 2003; Devas, 2005). There is increased corruption by these officials who try to compensate themselves by misappropriating funds and by extortion from the citizens. In the decentralised framework, I precisely affirm that there is decentralisation of corruption. This is a big challenge to service delivery because much of the available financial resources end up enriching individuals employed in the public sector, particularly local governments.

Additionally, insufficient funds to facilitate local government officials mean that many of the local government officials including councillors have remained voluntary, without compensation. Such people are difficult to hold accountable to the local communities (Golola, 2003). Muriisa (2009) clarifies that lack of funding at the local level paralyzed the personnel sector. In the first instance, decentralization led to staff retrenchment through civil service reform. This is a big challenge to in the implementation process and service delivery because much of the available financial resources end up enriching individuals employed in the public sector, particularly local governments. Additionally, the funds allocated to Local Governments in comparison to the functions devolved to Local Governments are inadequate (Bogere, 2013).

Regrettably, the issue of staff motivation at sub-national level and at the service provision units still dominates the debate; majority of the staff at local government level are poorly paid, and the payment comes late (Bogere, 2013). He further, asserts that, absence of the tools of work makes the jobs 'empty shells' with no satisfaction derived. In addition, absence of career growth and development opportunities for staff at district level limits prospects to promote for many staff to ceilings imposed by staffing structure.

Methodology

Flankli (2012) defines methodology as the systematic, theoretic analysis of the procedures applied to the area of study. It comprises the theoretical analysis of the body of methods and principles associated with a branch of knowledge. On the other hand, a research design serves as a master plan (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Cooper & Schindlers, 2003) for the researcher to define research questions, identify the appropriate variables of the study, determine the methods to be used to collect data as well as deciding how accurately to analyse and present the finding (McQueen & Knussen, 2002). Therefore, this study adopted a case study design and in addition to that, it used qualitative approach as the main approach, with support from quantitative approach. The study targeted a population of 50 people from whom, a sample of 44 respondents were determined using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determinant table. Based on this, the researcher administered a total of 44 questionnaires to the participants. Unfortunately, out of the 44 questionnaires, only 37 questionnaires were correctly filled and answered by the local government leaders. The researcher used purposive sampling technique to select the local government leaders regarding to their respective locations and leadership positions. Therefore, the study collected data from both primary and secondary data through interview guides, questionnaires and documentation methods respectively.

It can be noted that, both validity and reliability were measured in the study using content validity index (CVI) to determine the validity of the instrument by the formula below: $CVI = \frac{\text{Terms cleared by relevant experts}}{\text{Total number of items}}$. According to the formula, if the $CVI \geq 0.70$, the instrument is considered valid, otherwise it is not (Amin, 2005). In this case, the $CVI = 0.71$. Amin (2005) asserts that, if the Cronbach's alpha values are $\alpha \geq 0.70$, the instrument is reliable, otherwise it is not.

In the findings of this study, all the Cronbach's alpha values were $\alpha \geq 0.70$. Quantitative data from the questionnaires as obtained from the field were edited, coded, compiled and sorted to have the required quality, accuracy and perfectness. Data was analysed through the use of SPSS to generate frequencies and percentage distribution of the responses on the challenges faced by decentralization and service delivery in Wakiso district.

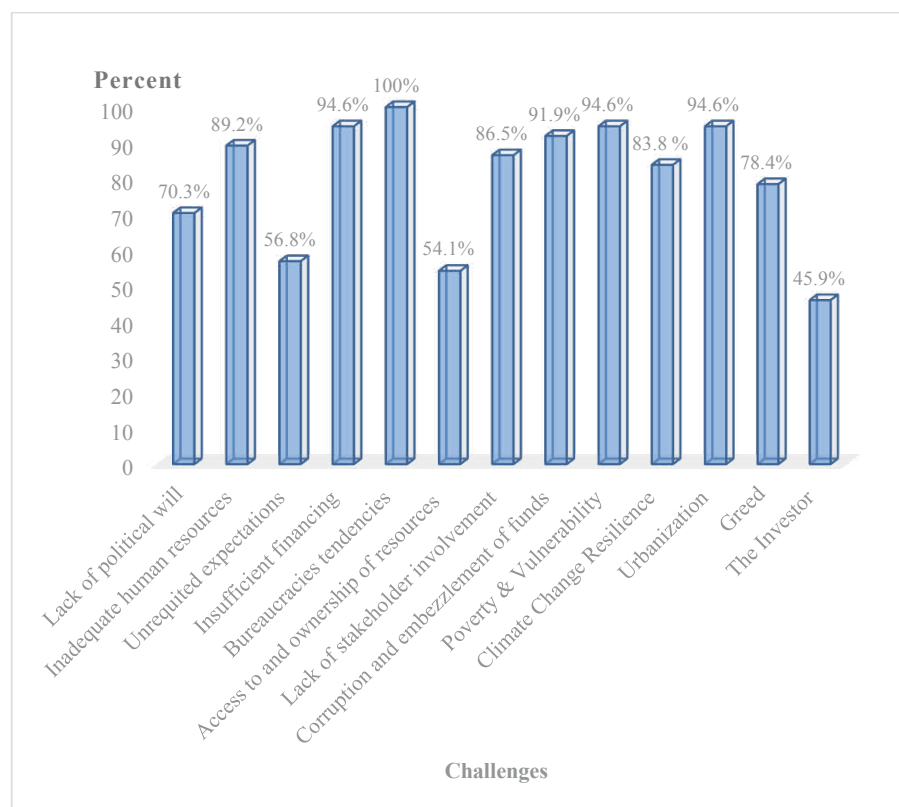
Results

The focus of the study was to assess the challenges faced by decentralization in service delivery in Wakiso district and a total of 44 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents but only 37 questionnaires were valid for study analysis which gave a response rate of 84.1%. Therefore, the findings for the study are discussed below:

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This presents the results on the challenges as collected from the respondent in the study areas as indicated in Figure 1 below:

Fig. 1: Challenges involved within decentralization in service delivery in Wakiso



Source: Primary Data, 2019

Results in Figure 1 above indicates that, majority of the respondents (100%) reported bureaucratic tendencies as a major challenge for the decentralization process in Wakiso district local governance. This was followed by insufficient financing, poverty, vulnerability and urbanization as the other challenges facing the decentralization process and these accounted for 94.6% respectively. These challenges are not only affecting Wakiso but even other local governments in Uganda including other local governments in the African continent as well as many developing countries across the globe. The respondents also reported other challenges to be affecting the decentralization implementation process and they included; corruption and embezzlement of funds (91.9%), inadequate human resources (89.2%), lack of stakeholders' involvement (86.5%) and climate change resilience (83.3%). Additionally, greed (78.4%) and lack of political will (70.3%) had an impact on the decentralization implementation process in Wakiso district respectively. Further, respondents revealed unrequited expectation (56.8%), access to and ownership of resources (54.1%) and the investor (45.9%) as challenges to the decentralization implementation process, though at a lesser extent respectively.

Discussions

Challenges facing by decentralization service delivery in Wakiso Local Government

Results indicated that bureaucratic tendencies pose a major challenge to decentralization and contribution to service delivery. The bureaucratic and lengthy procurement procedures and other administrative processes which result in failure of districts to utilize the funds over the required time are a major impediment to service delivery (Bogere, 2013). Further, Faguet et al. (2015) stress that; the central bureaucracy's reluctance to give up power has continued to affect the decentralization and service delivery. This denotes that in areas where the long process are exhibited, the delivery of services is halted and led to poor performance of the local governance. This also affirmed by Ekpo (2007) who explains that in Nigeria, under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, the Federal Government releases money to State Primary School Boards but cannot hire, fire, replace or evaluate teachers. For the case of Wakiso, the procedures gone through for any service are very long and sometimes the beneficiaries give-up. This has been evident in the lands department, social services, among others.

Furthermore, findings of the study indicated insufficient funding as a challenge to decentralization in Wakiso district. It was revealed that the district is underfunded by the central governance. The findings concur with Bogere (2013) who asserts that, funds allocated to Local Governments in comparison to the functions devolved to Local Governments are inadequate. Despite the district being underfunded, it is one of the district which collects the largest sums of revenue in the country which it sends to the government treasury. Insufficient funds to facilitate local government officials means that many of the local government officials including councillors have remained voluntary, without compensation. Such people are difficult to hold accountable to the local communities (Golola, 2003). Unfortunately, the government remits limited amount to the local governance, and reported that for this year, the employees have not been paid for over three months. The question is, if the workers are not paid on time, how do you expect them to perform their duties and improve service delivery? Bogere (2013) adds that, staff motivation at sub-national level and at the service provision units still dominates the debate; majority of the staff at local government level are poorly paid, and the payment comes late.

Regrettably, poverty and vulnerability have been paramount into failed centralization and service delivery in the district. This implies that, the district has high population of poor people who are vulnerable to a number of disasters. The district surrounded by Kampala City which has extended its problems to the area for example high crimes rate, murder, theft and land grabbing which have worsened the district's performance. Based on the above statements, World Bank (as cited in Ekpo, 2007, p.12) asserts that, the tangential problems to decentralization confront sub-national governments lead to over borrowing to lessen the poverty levels of the citizens. He affirms that, in Argentina, the citizens could not sustain themselves with social services and other basic needs of life by the end of 2001 due to deterioration of service quality. This led to increased poverty rates by 40%, medical demands exceeded supply in almost all the public hospitals and there were many school closings during that year. This does not only manifest itself in Argentina, but it is also paramount in the Wakiso and other districts with the country. This indicates that, the local governments have to incur too much costs to address the poverty levels and as well as improving the social amenities for better livelihoods, though they are constrained by financing.

Based on the study findings, corruption and embezzlement of funds were reported to have bottlenecks effects on the decentralization process and its role in service delivery. Respondents noted that, there is high rates of corruption and embezzlement of funds at the district. This have been evidences that, those who receive the money for service delivery in district, they end up using the money for their own gains. Like in all other spheres of public life in Uganda, corruption is also rampant at the district level (Bogere, 2013). This implies that, decentralization cannot enhance service delivery in the area to ensure growth. Lack of capacity at sub-national levels of government in exercising responsibility for public services. Adds to the dilemma. Ahmad et al. (as cited in Ekpo, 2007, p.12) claims that, in Uganda and Tanzania, the lower tiers of government lacked the ability to manage public finances and maintain proper accounting procedures. Consequently, lower levels of government received less money than before decentralization. Additionally, corruption has been noted in the district service commission. To receive service from such agencies at the district, requires one to bribe his/her way through.

The results also indicated that inadequate human resources as another challenge faced by the decentralization and service delivery in the area. Muriisa (2009) pointed out that, lack of capacity and personnel at sub-national government level to exercise responsibility for service delivery is critical for success. The district does not have the required number of experts per the various positions. The employment/ opportunities are based on the technical knowhow, which does not depend on merit of the applicants. Implying that, since the freeze on recruitment of civil service at district level was imposed by the central government, the situation has worsened, particularly in hard-to-reach districts (Bogere, 2013). However, this is not only in Wakiso but a disease across the country within various governance agencies. Based on the technical knowhow, you find an environmental professional heads the physical planning unit, a situation that can hardly be considered normal. Therefore, the district had limited human resources which cannot support the activities undertaken. In addition to lack of administrative capacity, lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities and inappropriate focus and investments often constrain the delivery of services that are necessary for local economic development (Scott, as cited in M'Cormack, 2011, p.2). Ekpo (2007, p.19) stipulates that, local government administration in Uganda Wakiso inclusive, are faced with problems in recruiting, motivating and retaining staff; others include lack of resources resulting in programme failure and reduced independence and complexity in central-local relations.

The findings show that, lack of stakeholders' involvement in the decision making process which are key for service delivery as meant by the decentralization is vital. This implies that, effective involvement of people in all facets of the society is a permanent state in which performance is achieved (Cistulli, as cited in Massuanganhe, 2005, p.7; Suratman, 2013). In most cases, the decisions are taken based on up-bottom approach of which the citizens lack sense of ownership. This implies stakeholders involvement helps in the transfer of power, responsibilities, capacities and resources from national to all sub-national levels of government with the aim of strengthening the ability of the latter to both foster people's participation and delivery of quality services (Zarrouk, 2018 & Smith, n.d). Evidences show that, in the areas where decision-making and policies are made together with the stakeholders, a sense of ownership and efficient service delivery is enhanced. The level of citizens' participation in planning and budget monitoring activities remains low, and there is a generally negative attitude over civic matters (Bogere, 2013; Muriisa, 2009). In addition, take an example, where women are given a right to access owner resources, inclusion of all gender in decision making and leadership are significant means for efficient service delivery.

Additionally, another challenge to decentralization is climate change resilience. This has been as a result of deforestation, wetland destruction and uncontrolled agriculture in the district. It is noted that, the destruction of forests and wetlands have resulted into climate change phenomena such drought, floods and diseases outbreaks. When such calamities occur, the district incurs more costs to avert them. This means that revenues from the forests, wetlands and any other nature resources have been lowered due to their deterioration.

Moreover, greed of those in the leadership position at the district level who want to take everything as theirs put the decentralization process in further distress. It was revealed that, the officers compromise the poor and destroy what would have enhanced service delivery. And for God's sake, the elected representatives, never mind, because ordinary citizens are rarely in a position to check the details of the use of resources (Devas & Delay, 2006). This means that, the poor in areas with many resources are denied the use while investors have full access to the same. This was common on Lake Victoria shores, where the Chinese invaded the lake and started mining sand and denied other the opportunity to do so. Therefore, level of corruption under decentralization, particularly the collusion by politicians and technocrats at the districts in awarding contracts and tenders in what is commonly referred to as "scratch my back, I will scratch yours" arrangements, is alarming. Bardhan & Mookherjee (as cited in Bofa et al., n.d, p.2) reports that mismanagement and lack of accountability are common in local governments and theses are common in developing and transition economies.

Interestingly, increased lack of political will by the central government towards the support of local governments does not help. Bogere (2013) clarifies that, this situation is contrary to the thrust of the decentralization policy in Uganda that sought to free the center of certain functions while at the same time empowering citizens to take charge of their affairs. The interests of the government are far away from supporting local governments, though many have been created another new districts have been created but with no services. Responses indicated that, there is increased number of newly created districts but these are not supported, of which most of them have no technical staff, technologies, infrastructures, and limited capital technologies to support their activities. It was noted that some officers operate their activities in poor housing even below the shades of the trees. This implies, the central government has to construct housing,

roads and extend power to search areas in poor conditions to improve their service delivery in those locations. Furthermore, the respondents reported that the unrequited expectations by the local governments had hindered service delivery in the region. This relates to the unexpected works/ uncoordinated services to be undertaken by those in the decentralization process. For example, money sent to the local governments and failure to use it result in those monies to be refunded to the government treasury. Therefore, there is a need to have clear plans and logical frameworks to guide the scheduled activities in the operation areas of the district. This is also confirmed by Ekpo (2007) who denotes that misaligned responsibilities either due to incomplete process or for political reasons have affected the decentralization process and service delivery to the citizens. Additionally, the uncompleted services/ expectations are as a result of uncoordinated activities, inadequate financing and limited human resources among others.

It was also reported access to and ownership of resources as a challenge to decentralization in Wakiso district. Some of the respondents revealed that the increased land grabbing and unknown land ownership of land resources had worsened the situation for decentralization. Despite most land resources like forests, wetlands and the lake are State owned resources on behalf of the citizens as per the Uganda Constitution, 1995 as amended, they have been falsely owned by unknown people. Those who own them, have not contributed any levies to the district finance treasury but they only misuse them for their own benefits. Bogere (2013) clarifies that, this situation is contrary to the thrust of the decentralization policy in Uganda that sought to free the center of certain functions while at the same time empowering citizens to take charge of affairs. The investor was also reported as a challenge to decentralization. The study revealed that Wakiso is faced with a challenge of the 'so-called investors' in almost every corner of the district. Unfortunately, these investors do not follow the guidelines and regulations of the district neither do they follow the government guidelines on investments. One of the respondents asserted that, what we think to be investors, they are just employees of the big officials in the government 'Invisible Hand'. This implies that, the powers of decentralization have not been evidenced in the in the district, but benefit only those who are part of the investor.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Decentralization has become in theory one way of ensuring good governance and effective service delivery in most developing countries in recent times. However, reality shows that for decentralization to succeed it needs the confidence and commitment of central governments through putting in place the right policy and appropriate institutional framework. This implies that decentralization is a key to promote central government's role through various approaches to the implementation process.

Therefore, government should avail human and financial resources to local governments, promote good governance, ensures political will and reduce technical inadequacies in the decentralization process and service delivery.

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