

# Political Decentralization and Service Delivery: Evidence from Agago District, Uganda

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## Abstract

*Does political decentralization improve the provision of service delivery? Many developing countries have taken to political decentralization as an instrument of development that plays a central role in increasing citizens' involvement in policy development and decision making as well as holding their leaders to account. However, the basis upon which it can be relied upon to improve service delivery remains a big puzzle to many practitioners. This study uses the factors of decision making, participation and accountability to uncover how political decentralization can promote service delivery. Based on intensive interviews with local stakeholders in ten sampled local governments in Agago District in Northern Uganda as well as survey, the study uncovered a complex interplay of conditions that impact service delivery in a political decentralization dispensation. The results reveal that political decentralization can be used as an instrument to promote the provision of service delivery. Furthermore, decentralization is shown to have had significant effect on service delivery in the ten local governments examined in the study. However, the study needs generalization on a larger scale.*

**Key words: Accountability, Agago District, Decentralization, Decision making, Participation, Political decentralization, Uganda**

## Introduction

The idea of decentralizing services to the lower level of government has been commonplace of recent especially in developing countries. This has seen the transfer of power and authority from the highest level of government to the lowest level. It has been argued that political decentralization can promote and improve service delivery by enhancing citizens' participation in their own governance, active involvement in the decision-making process and also serve as an instrument for empowering them to hold their leaders to account. Essentially, the presumed argument in favor of this transfer of power and authority is that local governments will be better placed to deliver services to the people.

As noted by Onyach-Olaa (2007), however, this presumption of transfer of power and authority is frequently questioned, and numerous case studies exist of service delivery being stymied by poor performance (see, for example, Francis & James, 2003; Mulema & Wetterberg, 2013). The reasons for poor service delivery are mixed and contradictory. While some believe that the greatest cause of the problem is the lack of resources, others have maintained that the elected leaders themselves make it difficult to provide efficient, effective and satisfactory services. Nonetheless, in Uganda, decentralization was expected to improve efficiency in the delivery of local services, increase citizens' participation in local governance, and create greater ownership of interventions and responsiveness to local needs.

This article has two objectives. The first is to provide empirical evidence on the incidence of poor service delivery in Uganda. It aims to document and analyze the factors causing this, showing that these have retrogressive impact on service delivery. The second objective is to determine the impact of political decentralization on service delivery, using Agago District in Northern Uganda as a case study. This is one of the districts that have suffered too much the brunt of the war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Uganda Government army- the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF). The article sought to ascertain the effectiveness of political decentralization in promoting service delivery. It tested the hypothesis: *There is a significant effect of political decentralization on service delivery*. The article argues that political decentralization has significant influence on service delivery and that it can promote effective, efficient and satisfactory service delivery. The potentials of decentralized service are best realized if there is strong political decentralization grounding. A better approach to this seems to be by focusing on involving the people in decision-making, encouraging them to participate actively in their governance, and establishing a sustainable mode of accountability.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 gives a short review of the concept of decentralization and its relationship to service delivery in development literature, focusing in particular on the model of local government view. Section 3 turns us to an analysis of the theoretical framework that informed the study. Section 4 reviews current literature on decentralization including, especially, on service delivery and political decentralization. Section 5 presents the methodology used in the study through unique data sets collected from the study area. Section 6 presents and discusses the study findings. Section 7 concludes and also identifies some of the outstanding issues for further investigation.

## Background

Nearly everywhere in developing countries, the flame of decentralization is spreading with almost no end in sight. According to Faguet (2012), the strongest theoretical argument in favor of decentralization is that it will improve the accountability and responsiveness of government by altering its structure so as to increase citizen voice and change the deep incentives that public officials face. It is a desirable fact that the provision of quality service in a timely manner to the citizens of a country is an important ingredient of a well-functioning government. If it reaches the lower-most people in the country, then the government can be well credited for performing its functions. In the realization of this desire, there has been growing interest in developing countries to decentralize service provision.

In this article, decentralization is simply the devolution of power and authority to sub-national government with the objective of providing a structural arrangement and a level playing field for stakeholders and players to promote peace, democracy and development. This is done through the transfer of administrative, fiscal and political power to the lower level of a territorially defined area. Kauzya (2005) argues that decentralization promotes people's participation in decision-making processes and developmental activities. Muriisa (2008) attests that decentralization makes possible speedier and more responsive public service attuned to local or individual needs. Meanwhile, political decentralization here is understood as the transfer of power and resources to a democratically elected authority at the sub-national level. It aims to give citizens or their elected representatives more power in public decision-

making through greater participation with better informed and more relevance to diverse interests in society than those made by national political authorities. Mulema and Wetterberg (2013) postulate three outcomes that can be expected from this process. First, it would allow for increased efficiency in the delivery of local services. Second, it would increase citizens' participation in their own governance. And third, it leads to greater ownership of interventions and responsiveness to local needs.

Before decentralization took shape in Uganda with the enactment of the Local Government Act, Cap. 243 of 1997, the country practiced a centralized system of governance with some semblance of local governance. This system continued in operation soon after independence with the consequence that there has been creeping recentralization in favor of the central government, which exerted strong control over decentralized units. In most cases, the local governments were very weak. Consequently, Ugandans were not able to take the full advantage of the potentials of local governments. The present decentralization policy in the country was seen as a tool to achieve national consensus among different groups, given the past tribal animosities and political stability. Amongst its several objectives, Uganda's decentralization policy is to improve service delivery by empowering the nationals to participate in the process of development to improve their livelihood. The devolution of power is intended to improve service delivery by shifting the responsibility for policy implementation to the local beneficiaries themselves. In the process, the local governments have two key functions to perform. First, they provide public goods such as health care, roads, water supply and agricultural extension services. Second, they select individual beneficiaries for the state and other social service delivery schemes. It is these functions that this article draws upon to investigate the effects of political decentralization on service delivery.

With a clear-cut responsibility for the delivery of almost all services within their areas of jurisdiction, local governments in Uganda have boosted the image of the country as a star pupil in the decentralization of government responsibilities and an example for the region (Titeca, 2006). The policy has been credited as involving the most ambitious reforms undertaken since independence in 1962. Various scholars have praised the reform as the most exceptional in developing countries in terms of the scope and scale of the transfer of power and responsibility to the local level (Steiner, 2006). Even though decentralization in Uganda has been applauded as a model that can be emulated; recent studies have also shown that turning the lofty goals of decentralization into reality in Uganda has proven a great challenge (Awortwi, 2011). This has been compounded by a number of issues which range from poor preparation of elected and appointed officials to deliver on the expected benefit of decentralization; reluctance by central government to give up control, failing to transfer sufficient resources and power to local governments; insufficient attention paid to the complex process which must be tailored to local contexts and adjusted over time in preference of perception of decentralization as a standard and straightforward procedure; and unclear details of the reforms which often causes confusion over the roles, duties, and expectations of local officials.

Despite a decade and a half of tireless effort to implement decentralization policy to deliver services by integrating the people into the mainstream of the implementation process (through decision-making, participation and accountability), the conditions of the people and service delivery are still deteriorating. This has led to a number of questions which have

prompted people to interrogate the influence of political decentralization on service delivery. In Agago District, poor service delivery has manifested itself in the form of political nepotism; patronage; shoddy construction works; inaccessible road network, especially during rainy season; lack of medicines and drugs in health facilities; high school failure rates, to mention but a few. Finding creative solutions to eradicate poor service delivery is one of the greatest challenges facing local governments in Agago District. Without urgent prioritization of people's involvement in decision-making, active participation in their own governance, and timely provision of accountability to them, it will be difficult to achieve effective, efficient and satisfactory service delivery in the study area.

Hence there was need to assess the influence of political decentralization on service delivery in Agago District. To achieve this purpose, the following specific objectives acted as guide in this study: i) to assess the roles the people play in decision-making; ii) to establish the level of people's participation in their own governance; and iii), to examine whether the appointed and elected leaders of local governments accounted to the people. The study also tested these hypotheses: (a) that there is a significant effect of political decision making on service delivery, (b) that there is a significant effect of political participation on service delivery, and (c) that there is a significant effect of political accountability on service delivery.

## **Theoretical framework**

Scholars seem to agree that political decentralization lies at the heart of local governance system as it provides the local government with the ability to effectively represent the preferences of the local population (Faguet, 2013). In this article, the ideas in the decentralization theory of Oates and the citizen-centered theory of Sana and Saha (2005) are explored; and, in addition, there are several models to analyze decentralization. Assiduously, this article is guided by the model of local government advocated by Faguet (2005). This scholar argues that we can understand decentralization by recognizing that a local government consists of organized interest groups. He submits that these interest groups benefit from the total scaling back of the central government in their affairs. This empowers the people to have greater influence over political decisions in their areas, actively participate in governance and demand for accountability from the leaders.

While these pose daunting tasks, Faguet (2011) decries the lack of studies on the effect of decentralization on the quality of governance that affects service delivery. He asserts that the reasons for this are not hard to fathom because the data required to empirically examine the effects of decentralization on things like health investment or school enrolment is more commonly available than governance-type issues like accountability and participation in public decision-making. In a similar vein, scholars like Despotis (2005) and Pradhan (2007) question the use of per capita income as an indicator since pure economic indicators cannot capture the wellbeing of the people. This conviction is re-echoed by Pradhan and Sanyal (2011) who establish that public service delivery is the single biggest challenge worldwide, yet it is the key determinant of the quality of life that is not measured in per capita income.

Borrowing from the local government model of Faguet, there are three factors that are considered to drive political decentralization, namely: decision-making, participation, and

accountability. In the long history of the nation-state, involving those governed in the decision-making process has been one of the most intractable problems of governance. It is widely agreed that effective, efficient and satisfactory service delivery is impossible without involving the people in decision-making. In the process, if the people are free to actively participate, then they will be inherently more well-informed and more effective. They will also be more empowered to engage in more effective form of advocacy and thereby make governments more responsive and accountable. This relationship is expressed in Figure 1.

*Source: Faguet's idea of local government and author's review of literature*

<b>Political decentralization</b>	<b>Improvement of service delivery</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making</li> <li>• Participation</li> <li>• Accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectiveness</li> <li>• Efficiency</li> <li>• Satisfactory</li> </ul>

*Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing improvement of service delivery and political decentralization*

The danger of political decentralization is that if the appointed and elected officials do not involve people in decision-making, abuse their right to participate, and do not account to them, they can develop defensive mechanisms and ignore the will of the people. They become unnecessarily antagonistic to the demands and needs of the people. It would seem the most probable reconciliation in this dilemma is to have a combination of decision-making, participation and accountability fully enforced in a local government. Even more promising is the notion that a fuller execution of this combination will dissuade local government officials from being derailed from the objectives of decentralization. In this case, the study presumed that in order for government to effectively, efficiently and satisfactorily deliver services, the people must be involved in decision-making, actively participate in governance and the leaders must account to them. The framework suggests that effective, efficient and satisfactory service delivery depends on the level of harmonization of expectations between the local government officials and the people in terms of decision-making, participation and accountability. The underlying assumption is that implementation of political decentralization is more likely to have profound impact on service delivery when the people are involved in decision making, participate actively in their own governance and the leaders account to them on a regular basis.

## **Literature review**

If it is the government's motive to maintain effective networks of quality service delivery, then it is natural to expect the services to reach the real beneficiaries by bringing these services closer to them. Sometimes the decision to decentralize is to assert state authority; but still it may favor the common person because, at least, the government will be obliged to fulfill its mandate by involving them in decision-making. It necessarily follows then that a government that embraces decentralized services demonstrates that it is committed to fulfilling its mandates by exposing itself to the increased demands of the citizens.

According to Saito (2008), decentralizing services make allocation of public resources truly meet the aspirations and needs of the community. Berendsen (2008) attests that political decentralization serves as a tool and mean of obtaining access to the allocation of resources. He further believes that allocation of resources made by the local government is more consistent with community preference than allocation from the centre. Also, a survey of local agencies in Bolivia by Kaufmann, Mehrez and Gurgur (2002) found that local agencies were more successful in being accessible to the citizens, especially for the poorer brackets of population segments. All these studies tend to show that a local government is not only closer to the people but knows their aspirations and needs well enough and is thus better suited to handle the issue of service delivery at the local front.

In any political decentralization dispensation, the people become the centerpiece of every government workings if any developmental goal is to be achieved. This invites a cordial relationship between the common persons and local government officials. According to Yang (2005), this should be fostered through proper decision-making, active participation of the governed and holding the officials to account. The reason, essentially, is that these factors enhance service delivery provision as desired and demanded by the common person. In the absence of these factors, local government officials may be inclined to exclude the common person in service delivery provision as well as easily practice pork-barrel politics as is the case in Uganda today. Yet these factors provide the basis upon which core governmental activities ought to be carried out to promote the wellbeing and improve the living standards of the people.

The critical role of the government in the provision of service delivery cannot be doubted. Scholars like Dwivedi & Mishra (2005) and Moore (2006) demonstrate that the organization of public service provision is the core function of government. ul Haqu (2012) opines that the two-fold essentialities (purposes) that local government serves are (a) supplying goods and services under administrative purpose, (b) the representation and the involvement of the masses in locating particular public needs, and, objectivity to understand how these needs can be met. The realization of these purposes seems to meet setbacks since there are several incidences of poor service delivery as is the case in Agago District.

## **Methodology**

The study used three research designs. The first was cross sectional design, to gather information from a sample of a population at a time. The second was correlation design since the study variables were hypothesized to have cause-effect relationship. The third was case study design, so as to have an in-depth understanding of the study variables. The unit of analysis for the study was local government officials, NGO personnel and the local community in Agago District.

To get the sampled respondents, three sampling techniques were used. First, judgmental technique was used to select 108 elected and appointed officials in the six sub-counties, three town councils and the district headquarters because it allowed choosing only the respondents who had the exposure that best fitted the purpose. This saved time and cut down costs of the study. The selected respondents held various positions in their local governments. Secondly,

stratified technique was used to select 10 respondents from the NGOs because it helped to identify sub-groups in the population and their proportions. Third, random technique was used to select members of the local community because it gave an equal and independent chance to the respondents to be included in the sample. It was ideal for selecting a representative sample from the community.

Ten out of the seventeen local governments in Agago District were covered by the study. In each local government, the study sought to ascertain (i) the extent to which political decentralization is able to promote service delivery provision, (ii) the constraints on political decentralization in promoting service delivery, and (iii) the strategies that would enhance political decentralization in promoting service delivery. The local governments under study were Paimol, Lira Palwo, Lapono, Lamiyo, Patongo, Parabongo, Kalongo Town Council, Patongo Town council, Agago Town Council and the district headquarters. Data were collected from 30 local community members through structured interviews. This method enabled gaining of a deeper insights and understanding of the subject matter. This was supplemented by in-depth survey questions responded to by 104 respondents as study variables were hypothesized to have cause-effect relationship.

After collection, data were organized, errors corrected and omissions edited to have coherent and systematic data for analysis. First, the qualitative data were integrated to identify likely explanatory themes emerging from the independent variables by comparing incidents applicable to the variables and understanding similar incidents across respondents. Second, the quantitative data were pre-coded, entered and analyzed by the use of SPSS computer package Version 12. This helped to identify the pattern of responses by the respondents by identifying those who agreed and those who did not agree with the question asked. The respondents were asked to record their entire perception of service delivery in their local governments. They were asked to tick the appropriate bracket that showed precisely their attitudes thus: 1- strongly agree; 2- agree; 3- neutral; 4- disagree; and 5- strongly disagree. However, in the final analysis, these were reduced into agree (representing strongly agree and agree, disagree (representing strongly disagree and disagree), and neutral. Each factor had five sets of questions from which the respondents were to make their choices. On decision-making factor, the questions were on: making priorities known, enjoying services, consulted, informed, and involved. On the participation factor, the questions were on: setting priorities, monitoring, evaluation, participation and active politics. On the accountability factor, the questions were on: rights and obligations, demand accountability, discipline leaders, procurement law, and access reports.

The association between political decentralization and service delivery was established through regression analysis that explored the cause-effect relationships between the two. A coefficient *t*-test analysis was also carried out to test the hypotheses. In simple terms, the study blended deep qualitative knowledge with rigorous quantitative research methods to approach the elusive goal of explanation that has both generality and deep understanding.

## Findings and discussion

Service delivery could be affected by the implementation of political decentralization just like other forms of decentralization, namely, administrative or financial. In this study, factors like decision-making, participation, and accountability were used to determine whether political decentralization has an effect on service delivery. These factors were used as the indicator variables. They were used as instruments for determining the efficiency, effectiveness and satisfaction of service delivery in a political decentralization dispensation. The idea was, first, that these variables might affect the provision of service delivery. The citizens might feel best served if there was efficient, effective, and satisfactory service delivery that they enjoyed. Second, the significant coefficients on the dummies for these factors with service delivery indicate that they have a direct effect on service delivery provision. The results of the finding are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Attitudes of Respondents on Political Decentralization

Factors	Scale (percentage) of responses					
	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Decision-making	32.8	31.52	20.8	20.22	50.4	48.46
Participation	39.6	38.6	19.0	18.26	45.4	43.08
Accountability	41.6	40.0	18.6	17.86	43.8	38.51

Source: Primary data

From Table 1 above, 48.46 per cent of the respondents agreed that the elected and appointed officials engaged the community during decision-making processes for proper service delivery compared to 31.52 per cent who disagreed. There were 20.22 per cent of the respondents who did not indicate their position. The percentage of those who agreed and disagreed has a difference of 16.94 per cent which is very small. Although the community seems engaged by local government officials in decision-making, the level of engagement is low. This was corroborated by the interview results. For instance, an opinion leader interviewed stated: "I am always disappointed by our politicians who assemble us and only dictate what is to be done without taking much inputs from us." Nearly all those interviewed saw lack of a set educational standard as the hallmark of poor decision-making by the politicians. The election of even the illiterate to be councilors has been a continuing challenge for local government performance as there is no required standard of education for one to be elected a councilor. Devas and Grant (2003) testify that although many elected leaders have deep local knowledge and popular support, they are inexperienced with regard to government processes, and also lack basic education and administrative skills. Since they seem to neglect the people in decision-making process, this behavior is contrary to the Local Government Act 1997 {Part IV of 3<sup>rd</sup> Schedule, Reg. 22(1)} that provides for the seeking of consent of electorates when making decisions. This also seems to suggest that they often do not involve development agencies in decision making, yet these can provide more technical and advisory perspectives.



According to Brancati (2006), exclusive decision-making in a local government often leads to mis-governance. For instance, since the introduction of multiparty politics in 2005, the need to compromise across party lines has complicated local decision-making. More so, the central government has gradually taken back appointments of key officials, and administration of important functions, in response to perceived low capacity of local officials. Even donors have acted as complicit in undermining local capacity by failing to provide appropriate support as decentralization reforms lost momentum. Consequently, local government officials work around the formal system with informal practices based on their local realities by the use of informal networks and alliances. This shows lack of commitment by the leaders and institutionalized weak decentralization policies that offers little empowerment to the people. Eckardt (2008) avers that an improved service delivery requires informed and well-functioning decision-making processes that allocate resources to priority areas that meet the demands of the broader community. This calls for the need to know the interest and strategies of local stakeholders in order to appreciate the value of decision-making and identification of factors that could lead to people's empowerment. An empowered people are a critical factor for the development of an area since they are able to design and implement programmes for their own good and development. Helling, Serrano and Warren (2005) recommend developing the people's skills, for example, self-confidence and social network. This change will lead to an improvement in a community's level of political efficacy, social capital and social cohesiveness.

Table 1 further reveals that 43.08 per cent of the respondents agreed that they actively participated in the affairs of their local governments compared to 38.6 per cent who disagreed. The difference of 4.48 per cent between those who agreed and those who disagreed is too minute though there were 18.26 per cent who did not indicate their position. The implication of this finding is that the level of community participation in the affairs of their local government was very low. During interviews, more than half of those who participated confirmed that they could not actively participate in the affairs of their governments because of the indifference of the appointed and elected leaders to involve them. One of them remarked that local governments' failure to finance earmarked projects discouraged the communities to participate in the affairs of their local governments. Again, another person cited a scenario where only a "few people with connections benefit from governments projects". Here, the implication is that the people can neither exercise influence nor have control over the decisions that affect them. This may lead to widespread dissatisfaction about the lack of responsiveness of local governments to them and their lack of 'voice' in service delivery. Given that the participation is unfair and undemocratic, the people are often manipulated from the top, with powerful individuals imposing decisions on them. Yet participation is supposed to provide a necessary counterweight to the limitations of representative democracy at the local level. Unfortunately, local government officials are often unfamiliar with and lack the skills to make use of new instruments of citizens' participation. If the people are not allowed to participate in their government, then local history, skills/capacity and tradition can influence local government's response to changes in rules and procedures in a negative way. It may also lead to overstretching of the leader's political skills given the limited resources and there may be resistance to local government programmes by the people. But active participation by the citizens leads to increase in transparency and exposure' of the weaknesses in accountability within the local government. To fully participate, the citizen needs to be well-informed, unlike

in Uganda where Muriisa (2008) noted failure by many Ugandans to enjoy the freedom to access services as well as freedom to decide. This undermines their rational political trust. Hickey and Mohan (2005) aver that in any governance system, there ought to be an interest-based calculation whereby citizens evaluate whether the government and the political leaders act in accordance with their developmental agenda. It is important to appreciate the fact that people's participation in designing and implementing public policies can improve the quality of government action. It is also the basis for local ownership of development strategies.

Further still, from Table 1, it is revealed that 38.51 per cent of the respondents agreed that local government officials provided accountability to them compared to 40 per cent who did not agree. There were 17.86 per cent of the respondents who did not indicate their position. This indicates very low observance of the tenet of accountability as those who disagreed are more than those who agreed by 1.49 per cent. This finding is further supported by the interview results. A retired civil servant testified about the selfish conduct of government officials. A lady retorted: *"Our leaders cannot at any one time convene a meeting to report back to us."* This is contrary to the objective of political decentralization which is to match authority and accountability by clearly demarcating who is responsible for what. According to Lewis and Petterson (2009), accountability is the act of holding public officials and service providers answerable for processes and outcomes, and imposing penalties if specified outputs and outcomes are not delivered. Collier (2007) contends that accountability is about restraints on government power and so depends upon the institutions conceded by government under pressure from citizens. Unlike other public goods, accountability cannot be provided by the government alone. This is because penalty-enforcement cannot be supplied by the government alone. Faguet (2013) postulates the effect of decentralization is to dramatically tighten the loop of accountability between those who produce public goods and services and those who consume them. After all, performance outcomes are determined by the extent to which people can hold their governments accountable through political institutions. Bardhan and Mookerjee (2006) have decried the influence of 'big' interest groups who often deploy their wealth and social influence to undermine local government's accountability requirement. Much as accountability cannot be conceptualized or analyzed separately from the accountability of higher institutions of representation and governance, at a local level accountability is very crucial as well. Short of this, the situation will only assume motives for royalty to the regime with no accountability.

From the premises above, wherever political decentralization exists, citizens are more likely to benefit from service delivery provision mandates. This key assumption is explored using regression analysis. Five variables were introduced on each of the predictor variables. When these variables are introduced, most of them have the expected sign, and many significant. However, when they are run on SPSS Version 12, the coefficients on service delivery are not shown though the significant effects of these variables are demonstrated as in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Political decentralization and service delivery provision in a Local Government

Factors	R	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
Decision making	.589(a)	.347	.340	.44012	.347	54.090	102	102	.000
Participation	.542(a)	.294	.287	.45762	.294	42.383	1	102	.000
Accountability	.509(a)	.259	.252	.46857	.259	35.712	1	102	.000

*a Predictors: (Constant), Political decentralization; b Dependent variable: Service delivery. Source: SPSS Version 12*

The results in Table 2 show that (a) coefficient of determination  $R^2$  of .347 was obtained with a standard error of .44012 for decision making. This implies that the variation in service delivery which is explained by decision making is 34.7 per cent. However, the adjusted  $R^2$  of .340 is low (far from tending to 1) which does not reflect the goodness fit (acceptability and relationship) of the model (decision making) and the population (respondents or service delivery). (b) Participation has a coefficient of determination  $R^2$  of .294 with a standard error estimate of .45762. It implies that the variation in the dependent variable that is statistically explained by the independent variable is 29.4 per cent. The adjusted  $R^2$  of .287 is low (far from tending to 1) which does not reflect the goodness fit (acceptability and relationship) of the model (participation) and the population (respondents or service delivery). (c) A coefficient of determination  $R^2$  of .259 was obtained with a standard error estimate of .46857. This statistic implies that the variation in service delivery that is statistically explained by accountability is 25.9 per cent. Similarly, the adjusted  $R^2$  of .252 is very low which does not reflect the goodness fit (acceptability and relationship) of the model (accountability) and the population (respondents or service delivery).

From this regression analysis, the study shows that political decentralization introduces new dimensions to the discussions of the promotion of service delivery. In theory, it brings government closer to the people and should therefore accord them with effective, efficient and satisfactory service delivery. In practice, there are many factors inhibiting this ambition. These have to do with the degree of genuineness of decision-making, the extent to which local government arrangements facilitate participation of the people, and the seriousness of the local government officials to account to the people. Do these have effect on service delivery?

In determining the effect of political decentralization on service delivery, the alternate hypotheses were turned into null hypotheses to establish the relationship between the variables. The results of the finding are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Co efficient t-test analysis of political decentralization and service delivery

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.604	.169		9.496	.000
	Decision –making	.373	.051	.589	7.355	.000
1	(Constant)	1.697	.176		9.639	.000
	Participation	.365	.056	.542	6.510	.000
1	(Constant)	1.796	.175		10.259	.000
	Accountability	.336	.056	.509	5.976	.000

**a Dependent Variable: Service delivery**

Source: SPSS Version 12

In Table 3, the results of the coefficients of the variables indicate a calculated *t* value of 7.335 for decision-making, 6.510 for participation, and 5.976 of accountability. Each of these calculated *t* value is bigger than the degree of freedom at 2.000 in the probability table. The meaning is that there is a significant effect of these variables on service delivery. This is further explained by the standard coefficients beta in the table which is also the sample value *R* in the regression analysis of .589 for decision making, .542 for participation, and .509 for accountability. Each of these values is more than 0.05 which tends towards the absolute value of +1 (strongly positive). This means that as the value of these variables increases, so does service delivery. Hence, political decentralization affects service delivery.

## Conclusion

This article argues that political decentralization can improve the provision of service delivery, but its improper implementation may reinforce poor service delivery particularly if decision-making, participation and accountability are not well respected. This possibility is taken into account by examining the current poor state of service delivery obtained from a survey of local governments in Agago District in Northern Uganda. The article makes two main contributions. First, the existence of political decentralization is demonstrated empirically in the context of local governments in Uganda. Second, the article provides evidence of important yet heretofore overlooked functional mechanisms that could prevent or limit effectiveness, efficiency and satisfactory service delivery. Simply, the provision of service delivery is strongly affected by political decentralization.

Principally, local governments have been very instrumental in the provision of service delivery especially in this era of decentralization. This has been more possible since political decentralization has eroded the dominance of traditional and centralized-based patterns of governance. Presumably, this should have led to the involvement of the masses in all programmes that could present massive collective action and perhaps the promise of private benefits as the only effective means of enjoying these benefits. This has not been the case in Agago District because the people hardly benefit from local government developmental programmes. However, not all is lost since involving them in decision-making, encouraging

them to actively participate in local government affairs, and providing accountability to them on a regular basis can provide a leeway to maximizing service delivery provision. The fuller success of political decentralization is likely to depend on contemporary principles of decision-making, participation, and accountability. Nevertheless, more investigation is needed to establish whether the citizens are aware of their rights and responsibility in this context and on a larger scale.

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