

# Examining Decentralization and Its Implementation Challenges: A Case for Moyamba District Sierra Leone

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**Abstract:** Decentralization in Sierra Leone has been affected by several challenges. However, limited studies have specifically focused on identifying these challenges in detail. This study was therefore undertaken to identify the main obstacles affecting decentralization implementation. The objectives of the study were to examine the obstacles to decentralization policy implementation, assess the role of decentralization in rural development, and determine the impact of decentralization on rural development.

Data were collected from 410 respondents using stratified random sampling techniques, while a semi-structured questionnaire was administered to obtain quantitative and qualitative responses. A key informant guide was also used to collect information from selected key informants. The data were analyzed using the “R” a widely used statistical tool for data analysis.

The results revealed that inadequate funding, political interference, weak accountability mechanisms, incomplete devolution of functions and resources, and poor coordination between central government and local councils are the major obstacles affecting decentralization implementation in Sierra Leone. The findings further showed that lack of skilled personnel and late disbursement of funds continue to undermine effective decentralization implementation.

To address these challenges, the study recommends that the government establish a transparent and legally protected intergovernmental framework that guarantees adequate fiscal transfers, strengthens accountability and oversight systems, and promotes regular collaboration with clearly defined roles among all levels of governance. These measures would enhance the effectiveness of local councils in delivering public services.

**Keywords:** Decentralization, Local government, Devolution, Development, Policy.

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## Introduction

Over the past three decades, several developing countries have increasingly embraced decentralization as a governance and development strategy. The decline of highly centralized planning and development models contributed to the emergence of this form of governance. Its central objective has been to enhance citizen participation and productivity by increasing people’s involvement in development processes, while reducing the administrative burden associated with devolved functions.

In many developing countries, debates on the structure, roles and functions of government have focused on the effectiveness of central authority in promoting economic and social progress, as well as the potential advantages and limitations of transferring authority to sub-national administrative units, local governments and other state actors (Cheema et al., 2007). Across much of Africa, demands for decentralization were also driven by economically and politically marginalized ethnic minorities. The decentralization movement on the continent was further strengthened by growing dissatisfaction with the inability of central government institutions to provide effective services to local communities (G. Shabbir et al., 2007).

Decentralization has therefore been widely regarded as a pathway to more effective and efficient service delivery because it promotes greater citizen participation and responsiveness. Fanthorpe et al. (2011) observe that decentralization is often viewed as a means of improving the capacity of central government officials to obtain more accurate information on local and regional conditions, plan local programmes more responsibly, and respond more quickly to unexpected challenges that inevitably arise. However, despite the arguments in favour of decentralization, outcomes across many African countries have been mixed. Although widely praised, decentralization has not always met expectations. Cheema and Rondenelli (1983) argue that no country has conclusively demonstrated that decentralization is more cost-effective than centralization, or that it fully resolves the challenges it was initially designed to address.

In Sierra Leone, decentralization was introduced into the governance structure in 1946 through the establishment of the first local councils as part of efforts to modernize British colonial administration (Sierra Leone Decentralization Policy, 2022). This development created the basis for democratic local governance and

the administration of public affairs by local residents (Sierra Leone Decentralization Policy, 2021). Local councils continued to perform local government functions until 1972, when they were suspended and replaced by management committees following allegations of widespread corruption and poor administration. From the 1970s onward, local development in Sierra Leone was constrained by authoritarian governance and a highly centralized administrative system. Unequal distribution of resources from the center contributed to uneven development across the country.

Decentralization was reintroduced in Sierra Leone for several reasons. For some actors, it was necessary to sustain the democratic transition, as decentralization and democracy are closely linked. For others, it was influenced by donor pressure to adopt decentralization as a condition for good governance. It was also consistent with the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which identified over-centralization as one of the causes of the civil war. In the post-conflict period, democratic decentralization was considered essential because it expanded opportunities for local political participation while transferring authority to elected local officials. The Local Government Act of 2004, as amended in 2021, provided the legal foundation for the management and administration of local councils after the civil war. Two years after the 2004 Act, the Decentralization Policy was enacted in 2006. The Sierra Leone Decentralization Policy of 2021 restored the local council structure to its pre-1972 configuration, consisting of five town councils, twelve district councils and the Freetown City Council.

The decentralization process in Sierra Leone is mainly supported by the Local Government Act of 2004, as amended in 2022, and the Decentralization Policy of 2006, as revised in 2021, since there is no explicit constitutional provision establishing local governance. Through decentralization, authority and resources are transferred to local councils to carry out devolved functions. The process was intended to reduce social inequalities, promote democratic good governance, and create socio-economic spaces that enhance inclusion, participation and development (SLGP, 2021).

However, despite the initial expectations that decentralization would promote good governance, improve service delivery, enhance citizen participation and increase responsiveness to local needs and aspirations, many people now question the extent to which these objectives have been achieved. Fanthorpe et al. (2011) caution that decentralization may be reversed if its weaknesses are allowed to grow unchecked. Others argue that current government policy reflects a delayed response to the reality that the 'genie' has already been let out of the bottle. As some scholars have suggested, decentralization appears to be shifting toward a semi-centralized governance system, which could negatively affect local development and undermine the overall purpose of the reform.

The literature reviewed and Sierra Leone's own decentralization experience show that the process has faced significant challenges. For example, examination of local council development plans and observation of implementation processes indicate that many planned activities were only partially implemented or not implemented at all. This situation is also reflected in the work of G. Shabbir and Cheema in *Decentralizing Governance: Emerging Concepts and Practices* (2007), which notes that major implementation challenges have occurred in nearly every country where governments have attempted decentralization. To further examine these claims, the researcher attended several

Local Council ordinary meetings. The study found that local councils were unable to implement about one-third of their development plans, which significantly weakened local service delivery. This observation is consistent with Cheema's (2007) finding that decentralized administrations in developing countries have often failed to adequately address local problems, and that decentralized planning has not sufficiently reflected community needs and aspirations.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that Sierra Leone's decentralization initiative continues to face important challenges. This study therefore provides policy recommendations for addressing these challenges and strengthening decentralization reforms. Such recommendations are intended to support government and policy makers in reviewing and designing practical decentralization policies. Since the challenges affecting decentralization must be clearly understood before they can be effectively addressed, the researcher sought to identify the obstacles affecting decentralization implementation within this context. Specifically, the study examined the nature of these obstacles and the factors that make decentralization implementation difficult.

Accordingly, the study was undertaken to understand the context of decentralization and the challenges that hinder the process. This was guided by the following research questions: What obstacles does Sierra Leone face in implementing decentralization policies? What is the role of decentralization in rural development? What changes have occurred as a result of decentralization interventions?

## Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the study topic and provides the theoretical and empirical foundation for the research. It examines key concepts, theories and previous studies that have contributed to understanding decentralization. By analyzing existing scholarly work, the chapter identifies current knowledge, highlights areas of agreement and debate, and reveals gaps that justify the need for the present study.

One major obstacle to decentralization implementation has been the partial and sometimes inconsistent legal framework governing the process. Although the Local Government Act of 2004, as amended in 2022, established the basic architecture for decentralization, Sesay and Hughes (2017) identify several inconsistencies between this law and sector-specific legislation, which have created implementation confusion. Various studies on decentralization in Sierra Leone have shown that conflicting regulations have hindered effective implementation. The Local Government Act of 2004, as amended in 2022, provides the foundation for the implementation of decentralization in Sierra Leone. However, other laws also assign authority and functions to traditional leaders under the chiefdom administration. For instance, the Mines and Minerals Act of 2022 contains provisions that appear to conflict with the devolution of natural resource management functions provided for in the Local Government Act of 2022. Several studies have shown that such legal inconsistencies pose serious challenges to decentralization implementation.

Kamara (2020) documents how these legal discrepancies have affected decentralization implementation in Moyamba District, noting that district officials frequently cite conflicting legal mandates as barriers to exercising authority in key development sectors. His research highlights specific examples in environmental management and land-use planning, where

overlapping legal mandates between the district council and national agencies have created implementation difficulties.

Another major obstacle, closely related to the legal framework, is the continued ambiguity in the division of responsibilities among levels of governance. For example, the Local Government Act of 2004, as amended in 2022, authorizes local councils to generate own-source revenue from available local sources. At the same time, the Chiefdom Administration Act of 1974 and other enactments give local authorities some revenue-generating powers from similar sources. This has created an uneasy relationship between local government officials and traditional authorities. Decentralization was expected to create a platform for collaboration between local government and traditional authorities under the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development (SLDP, 2018). The central government envisaged that the functions and duties of councilors and chiefs would be complementary, as reflected in the placement of councils and chieftaincy matters under one ministry. In practice, however, it is the inverse. The Local Government Act and the decentralization policy did not clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the different actors in the decentralization process. This has affected local council revenue generation and, consequently, local development and growth.

A World Bank study (2016) analyzes the devolution schedules outlined in Sierra Leone’s decentralization policy documents and finds that many devolved functions lack clear operational descriptions or resource allocation guidelines. This lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities has enabled central government ministries to retain de facto control over functions that are formally devolved. Williams and Tucker (2022) provide a detailed case study from Moyamba District, documenting how responsibility for rural road maintenance has been contested between the Sierra Leone Roads Authority and the district council. Their research shows that this confusion has created maintenance gaps in critical infrastructure, with each institution claiming that the other is responsible for specific road segments. Although some studies have examined decentralization in Sierra Leone, there remains limited research specifically identifying the challenges that inhibit the successful implementation of decentralization.

### Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This involved collecting data from respondents involved in the implementation of decentralization, as well as beneficiaries of decentralized service delivery. The combination of both methods helped to balance the limitations of either approach when used alone. This approach was preferred because it enabled the researcher to gain a fuller understanding of the issues by exploring and analyzing data from different qualitative and quantitative sources. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select respondents from the target population. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the population consisted of distinct stakeholder groups, namely government officials, civil society organization representatives, and Household heads. This approach ensured that each group was adequately represented in the study and minimized sampling bias.

The first step involved identifying the target population, which consisted of 709 individuals drawn from three key categories: government officials (71), civil society organizations (220), and community beneficiaries, including household heads (417). The sampling frames for these groups were obtained from

official and community records. Lists of government officials were obtained from the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, the Decentralization Secretariat, and council records. Lists of Civil Society Organizations were obtained from records of the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO). Lists of Household heads, especially beneficiaries of decentralized services, were obtained from chiefdom taxpayers registers maintained by local authorities and community leaders. These sources ensured that the sampling frame covered the population relevant to the study. After establishing the sampling frame, a sample size of 410 was determined using the Yamane sample size determination formula, adjusted for a finite population.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n= desired sample size

N= total population

e= marginal error (0.05 for 5% marginal error)

The sample size was considered sufficient to provide reliable and representative data for the study. The next step involved dividing the population into three strata based on stakeholder categories. The sample size was then allocated proportionately to each stratum according to its population size. Accordingly, 60 respondents were selected from government officials, 140 respondents from civil society organization staff, and 200 respondents from community beneficiaries, (household heads). Within each stratum, respondents were selected using simple random sampling. Each individual in the sampling frame was assigned a unique identification number, and random selection was conducted using a random number technique to ensure that every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected. This method enhanced the objectivity and representativeness of the study.

In addition, 10 respondents were selected from a total population of 10 for key informant interviews, bringing the total study sample to 410 respondents.

**Table 1: Showing sample frame and sample size**

Category of respondent	Sample frame	Sample size
Government officials	71	60
Civil Society staff	215	140
Community Beneficiaries (HH)	417	200
Chiefs, CA, experts	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>708</b>	<b>410</b>

A total of 400 semi-structured questionnaires were administered to 60 government officials, 140 Civil Society staff (CSOs) and 200 community beneficiaries. 10 Key Informant Interviews were conducted for experts in the field of decentralization. The final sample therefore consisted of 410 respondents drawn proportionately from the four stakeholders’ groups, ensuring balanced representation of government institutions, CSOs, Household heads (beneficiaries), and experts in the field of decentralization.

Data was collected over a period of one month starting with the Key Informant Interview followed by the administration of a questionnaire. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the conduct of the research. Participants were well informed about the

purpose of the research and permission to obtain information was duly granted by respondents.

All statistical analysis was carried out in R, a free and widely used environment for statistical computing. The work was written as a single, reproducible script organized by research objective, so that every table and chart can be regenerated directly from the cleaned dataset. The script first checks for and installs any missing packages, then loads the cleaned data file before running the analysis in four blocks, one for each objective, followed by the reliability checks. The analysis combined several methods, each chosen to match the type of question being asked. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and 95% confidence intervals were used first to summarize the responses. To compare categorical answers between Household heads (beneficiaries) and officials, chi-square tests of independence were applied, and Cramer’s V was reported alongside them to show the strength of any difference. Spearman rank correlation was used to study how the ordinal items related to one another, both among the five obstacles and among the eight impact dimensions.

Binary logistic regression was the main modelling tool. It was used to find out which factors predicted four binary (yes/no) outcomes: whether implementation was seen as ineffective, whether respondents believed governance had improved, whether they had witnessed local council projects, and whether they felt access to services had improved. Results from these models are reported as adjusted odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals. The odds ratios were obtained by exponentiating the logistic-regression coefficients, while the confidence intervals were derived using the profile-likelihood method, and model fit is summarized with the McFadden pseudo-R<sup>2</sup>. An odds ratio above 1 indicates a higher chance of the outcome, whereas a value below 1 indicates a lower chance. As a supplementary check, an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was run on the continuous overall impact index. Finally, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to test the internal consistency of the three multi-item scales.

Throughout the study, the significance level was set at  $\alpha = .05$ . In the tables, statistical significance is flagged as  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$ , and  $**p < .001$ , while “ns” marks results that are not significant.

## Results and Discussions

### Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The gender composition of the respondents shows moderate male dominance, with 54.8% male and 45.2% female respondents. This is a relatively balanced distribution, with only a 9.6 percentage-point gap, and it gives the study a useful basis for understanding both male and female perspectives on decentralization, rural development and service delivery.

The educational profile of the 400 respondents provides important context for interpreting perceptions of decentralization and rural development in Moyamba District. The distribution shows a relatively highly educated sample overall, with a majority having attained tertiary education (53%), followed by secondary education (28.7%), while smaller proportions reported no formal education (10.5%) and primary education (7.8%). This pattern has significant implications for how respondents understand, evaluate, and articulate issues related to local governance, service delivery, and development outcomes. The dominance of respondents with tertiary education (53%) suggests that more than half of the sample possesses advanced formal education, likely including post-secondary diplomas, undergraduate degrees, or professional

qualifications. This level of education typically enhances respondents’ ability to critically assess governance structures, policy implementation, and institutional performance. The slight male majority may reflect rural governance realities in which men are more visible in public meetings, formal leadership spaces and community decision-making structures. Majority of the respondent (43.8%) are formally employed, 30.6% are journalists, clergy, consultants, and retired, (9.7%) are students, (8.3% are farmers, and (8.3%) are engaged in petty trading.

### Perception and Understanding of Decentralization

The first objective looked at how well respondents understand the decentralization policy, how important they think it is, and whether they believe it has improved local governance. A chi-square test compares this belief across the three respondent groups, and a logistic regression then identifies what predicts a positive view.

#### Familiarity with the decentralization policy

**Table 2.** Showing Familiarity with the decentralization policy.

Familiarity	n	%
Not familiar	4	1.00
Somewhat familiar	125	31.40
Very familiar	269	67.60

Awareness of the policy was high in Table 4 above. Two-thirds of respondents (67.6%) described themselves as very familiar with decentralization, almost a third (31.4%) as somewhat familiar, and only 1% as not familiar. The policy is therefore well known across the district. The findings is in line with the World Bank report (2021), it identifies decentralization as a widely adopted, common public sector reform across nations, involving the transfer of authority to local entities. The study states that over the past 25 years, significant decentralization reforms have been implemented worldwide establishing it as a recognized governance framework.

#### Showing importance of decentralization for rural development

**Table 3.** Showing Perceived importance of decentralization for rural development.

Importance	n	%
Not important	1	0.30
Important	118	29.60
Very important	280	70.20

Respondents also held the policy in high regard as shown in Table 5 above. Seven in ten (70.2%) saw it as very important for rural development, and almost all of the rest (29.6%) saw it as important. Very few respondents dismissed it. Respondents clearly value decentralization, even where they remain uncertain about its results. The findings resonate with the findings of Jackson (2012), he notes that in post-conflict Sierra Leone, decentralization was a deliberate strategy to bring development closer to the people and correct decades of marginalization and that responsible decentralization can be a powerful driver of development.

**Believe that decentralization improves local governance**

**Table 4.** Showing Belief that decentralization improved local governance, by respondent type, with chi-square test.

Respondent type	No	Not Sure	Yes		
Community Member	76	30	87		
Government Officials/CSOs Staff	88	71	39		
Test	chi2	df	p	Cramér's V	Decision
Pearson chi-square	35.75	2	<.001	0.302	Significant

Note.  $\alpha = .05$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Views on whether decentralization had actually improved governance differed sharply between the two groups (Table 6). Among community members, more said yes (87) than no (76). Among officials and CSO staff, the pattern was reversed: far more said no (88) or were unsure (71) than yes (39). The chi-square test confirms that this difference is statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 35.75$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with a moderate effect size (Cramér's  $V = 0.302$ ). Notably, the officials responsible for implementing the policy appear more critical of its outcomes than community members.

The findings is in line with the study of Cheema & Rondineli (1983), they stated that the results of decentralization implementation across many countries has been mixed and that there is no conclusive evidence that decentralization improves local governance. Yuxin Wang et el (2024) also indicates that decentralization improves local governance only when accompany by sufficient resources, with citizens' directly equating service quality with governance effectiveness.

**Believe decentralization improve local governance**

**Table 5.** Logistic regression: predictors of believing decentralization improved local governance.

Predictor	OR	95% CI low	95% CI high	p	sig
Familiarity (higher)	0.621	0.350	1.10	.103	ns
Perceived importance (higher)	1.97	1.04	3.71	.037	*
Education level (higher)	1.46	1.10	1.93	.009	**
Gov/CSO (vs community)	0.221	0.128	0.379	<.001	***

Note.  $n = 389$ ; McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = 0.095$ .  $\alpha = .05$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; ns = not significant ( $p \geq .05$ ).

The logistic regression in Table 7 shows what lies behind a positive belief. Respondent type mattered most: officials and CSO staff were far less likely than community members to believe governance had improved (OR = 0.221,  $p < .001$ ), corresponding to roughly 78% lower odds. Two other factors raised the chance of a positive view seeing the policy as important (OR = 1.97,  $p = .037$ ) and having more education (OR = 1.46,  $p = .009$ ). Familiarity alone showed no significant effect. The model explained a modest share of the variation (pseudo- $R^2 = 0.095$ ), which is common for attitudinal data of this kind.

**Obstacles to the Implementation of Decentralization**

**Challenges to the implementation of decentralization**

**Table 6.** Showing Reported challenges to decentralization implementation (multiple responses).

Challenge	n endorsing	% endorsing
Inadequate funding	194	97.50
Political interference	182	91.50

Challenge	n endorsing	% endorsing
Weak accountability	181	91.00
Poor coordination	178	89.40
Lack of skilled personnel	131	65.80

As Table 3 shows, almost every official pointed to inadequate funding as a problem (97.5%). Political interference (91.5%) and weak accountability (91%) came next, closely followed by poor coordination (89.4%). A lack of skilled personnel was the least common complaint, but even this was raised by about two-thirds of respondents (65.8%). Overall, funding and governance-related problems are near-universal concerns, whereas a shortage of skilled staff is a real but somewhat smaller difficulty. The findings resonate with the study findings of Bah & Bangura (2024), the study found that while decentralization is crucial for local service delivery, persistent issues like inadequate funding, a lack of financial autonomy, and untimely transfers of funds from central government critically impede operations.

on the scale of 1-5, 1 been not significant and 5 been most significant and their findings are presented in the table 9.

**Severity of obstacles to effective decentralization**

Respondents were also asked how serious each obstacle is, rather than just whether it exists. Their responses were measured

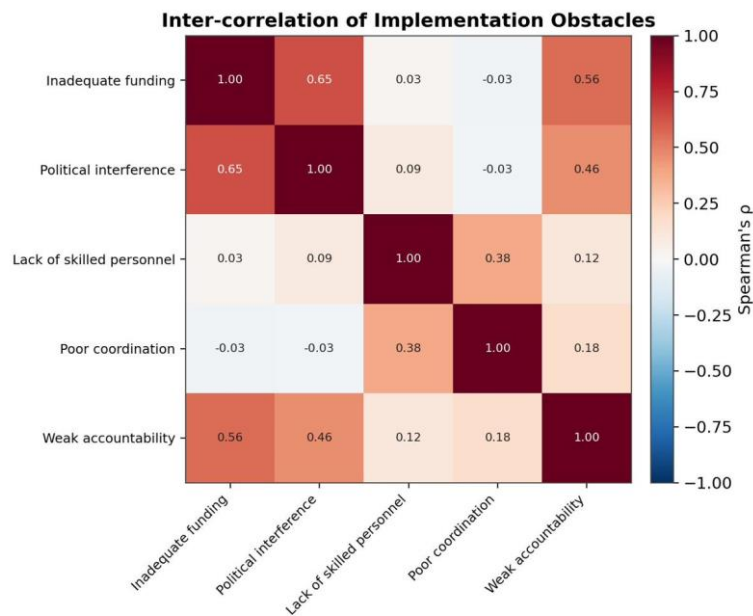
**Table 7.** Showing Rated severity of obstacles to effective decentralization (1 = not significant ... 5 = most significant).

Rank	Obstacle	Mean	SD	n	95% CI half
1	Inadequate funding	4.72	0.80	199	0.11
2	Weak accountability	4.69	0.73	198	0.10
3	Political interference	4.63	0.82	199	0.11
4	Poor coordination	3.35	0.70	199	0.10
5	Lack of skilled personnel	2.82	0.82	198	0.11

The same three problems rose to the top: inadequate funding (M = 4.72), weak accountability (M = 4.69), and political interference (M = 4.63). All three sit near the very top of the scale, showing strong agreement that they are severe. Poor coordination (M = 3.35) and lack of skilled personnel (M = 2.82) were seen as only moderate by comparison. The narrow confidence intervals (about ±0.10) tell us that respondents largely agreed with one another.

To see how the obstacles relate to one another, Spearman correlations were examined (Figure 3). Funding and political interference are most strongly related ( $\rho = 0.65$ ), and both are linked to weak accountability (0.56 and 0.46). Lack of skilled personnel and poor coordination form a separate, weaker pair (0.38) and have almost no link to the funding-and-politics group. This suggests two distinct groups of problems: one tied to resources and governance, and another tied to staffing and coordination. This split also helps explain the modest reliability of the obstacle scale reported later.

**Figure 1:** Spearman inter-correlation among the five implementation obstacles



**Table 8.** Logistic regression: obstacle severity predicting perceived ineffective implementation.

Predictor	OR	95% CI low	95% CI high	p	sig
Funding severity	1.31	0.714	2.41	.382	ns
Political interference severity	1.86	1.00	3.44	.049	*

Predictor	OR	95% CI low	95% CI high	p	sig
Skilled-personnel severity	0.812	0.526	1.26	.350	ns
Coordination severity	1.02	0.605	1.73	.935	ns
Accountability severity	2.87	1.30	6.31	.009	**

Note.  $n = 196$ ;  $McFadden\ pseudo-R^2 = 0.145$ . OR = adjusted odds ratio.  $\alpha = .05$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; ns = not significant ( $p \geq .05$ ).

A logistic regression then tested which of these severities best predicts the belief that implementation has been ineffective (Table 3). Two stood out. Weak accountability had the strongest effect: respondents who rated accountability problems as more severe were almost three times more likely to view implementation as ineffective (OR = 2.87,  $p = .009$ ). Political interference also mattered (OR = 1.86,  $p = .049$ ). Funding, skilled personnel, and coordination were not significant once the other factors were taken into account. Thus, although funding is the most frequently cited and most severe obstacle, it is weak accountability and political interference that most strongly shape whether respondents judge implementation to be ineffective.

**Key findings**

1. The study found that awareness and understanding of decentralization among respondents were generally high. A substantial majority of respondents indicated that they were familiar with the decentralization policy, while over two-thirds considered decentralization to be very important for rural development. These findings suggest that the concept of decentralized governance has gained considerable recognition among citizens and stakeholders within Moyamba District.
2. The study further revealed significant differences between community members and government officials regarding the perceived effectiveness of decentralization in improving local governance. While many household heads believed that decentralization had improved governance, government officials and civil society actors were more critical of its achievements. This divergence suggests that citizens tend to assess decentralization based on visible development interventions, whereas officials evaluate performance based on implementation realities and institutional constraints.

3. Regression analysis further demonstrated that respondents who regarded decentralization as important and those with higher levels of education were more likely to hold positive perceptions regarding governance improvements. However, familiarity with the policy alone did not significantly influence perceptions of governance outcomes.
4. The findings revealed that decentralization implementation in Moyamba District continues to face several significant challenges. Inadequate funding emerged as the most frequently cited obstacle, with almost all government officials and civil society respondents identifying it as a major constraint. This finding highlights the continued dependence of local councils on central government transfers and the limited fiscal autonomy available to local authorities.
5. Political interference and weak accountability mechanisms were also identified as critical obstacles. Although funding was the most commonly cited challenge, statistical analysis showed that weak accountability and political interference were the strongest predictors of perceived implementation failure. This finding suggests that governance-related challenges may have a greater influence on decentralization outcomes than purely financial constraints.
6. The study also identified poor coordination among institutions and shortages of skilled personnel as challenges affecting implementation. However, these factors were found to be less influential compared to accountability deficits and political interference. The findings therefore indicate that the effectiveness of decentralization depends not only on financial resources but also on the quality of governance systems and institutional integrity.

**Summary of major findings**

Table 9: showing summary of major findings

No	Research Objectives	Key findings
1	Perception and Understanding of decentralization	High awareness and strong support for decentralization. However, there are significant differences between citizens and officials regarding governance outcome.
2	Obstacles to decentralization implementation	Inadequate funding, weak accountability, political interference, and coordination challenges continue to undermine decentralization implementation.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, decentralization is widely understood and strongly supported by stakeholders in Moyamba District. The

majority of respondents recognize its importance as a governance and development strategy. However, perceptions regarding its effectiveness differ significantly between community members and government officials, reflecting contrasting experiences with

implementation. Second, decentralization implementation continues to face serious challenges. Although inadequate funding remains a major concern, the study concludes that weak accountability mechanisms and political interference constitute the most significant threats to successful implementation. These governance-related challenges undermine transparency, reduce institutional effectiveness, and weaken public confidence in local government systems. The study further concludes that decentralization has contributed positively to rural development by promoting citizen participation, improving local planning processes, and enhancing service delivery. The presence of visible local council projects has strengthened public perceptions regarding the value of decentralized governance. While decentralization has generated measurable improvements in service delivery and social inclusion, its broader economic impact remains limited. The findings suggest that decentralization has been more successful in improving access to services than in reducing poverty or creating economic opportunities.

Overall, the study concludes that decentralization remains an important governance reform in Sierra Leone. However, achieving its full developmental potential will require stronger accountability systems, reduced political interference, enhanced fiscal autonomy, and increased investment in rural development priorities.

### Recommendations

The study concludes with the following recommendations:

1. The Government of Sierra Leone should accelerate the implementation of fiscal decentralization by ensuring timely, adequate, and predictable financial transfers to local councils.
2. Existing decentralization policies and legislation should be reviewed to clarify institutional mandates and eliminate overlapping responsibilities among local councils, central government institutions, and traditional authorities.
3. Local councils should receive continuous capacity-building support in planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, procurement, and project management.
4. The Local Government Service Commission should strengthen recruitment and retention strategies to address technical capacity gaps within local councils.
5. Stronger accountability and transparency mechanisms should be introduced to improve public trust and ensure effective utilization of public resources.
6. Government should establish safeguards against political interference in local development planning and resource allocation processes.

7. Regular public accountability forums should be institutionalized to improve citizen oversight of local governance.

### Recommendation for further research

Based on the findings of this study, the following areas are recommended for future research:

1. Comparative studies on decentralization implementation across districts in Sierra Leone.
2. The relationship between fiscal decentralization and local economic development.
3. The effectiveness of accountability mechanisms within decentralized governance systems.

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