

The Role of Decentralization in Rural development; Evidence from Moyamba District, Sierra Leone

Gabriel Timothy Ndanema^{1*}, Dr Morrison Kenie Lahai² & Emmanuel Conteh³

¹M.Phil Candidate, Institute of Geography and Development Studies, School of Environmental Sciences, Njala University

²School of Environmental Sciences, Njala University

³Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences Milton Margai Technical University

Corresponding Author: Gabriel Timothy Ndanema

M.Phil Candidate, Institute of Geography and Development Studies, School of Environmental Sciences, Njala University

Article History

Received: 15 / 05 / 2026

Accepted: 30 / 06 / 2026

Published: 16 / 07 / 2026

Abstract: Decentralization has become a significant governance reform strategy in post conflict Sierra Leone. However, results from the implementation has been mixed. This study was therefore undertaken to determine the role of decentralization in rural development. The objectives of the study were to identify the role of decentralization in rural development, determine the challenges associated with the implementation process, and to determine what changes have been observed in rural development as a result of decentralization implementation.

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 of the study revealed that while decentralization has made some gains in promoting gender equality and service delivery, economic opportunity, poverty reduction and rural water supply remain below average undermining the effectiveness of decentralization implementation in Sierra Leone.

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, Coordination, Fiscal, Autonomy, Service delivery.

How to Cite in APA format: Ndanema, G. T., Lahai, M. K. & Conteh, E. (2026). The Role of Decentralization in Rural development; Evidence from Moyamba District, Sierra Leone. *IRASS Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(7), 35-43.

Introduction

Decentralization has become an important governance strategy adopted by many developing countries to improve public service delivery, strengthen local democracy, and promote sustainable rural development. The concept involves the transfer of political, administrative, and fiscal responsibilities from the central government to local government institutions, thereby bringing governance closer to the people. In many African countries, decentralization has been viewed as an effective mechanism for increasing citizens participation in decision-making, improving accountability, and ensuring that development intervention respond to local needs and priorities (Edwards & Yilmaz, 2015).

In Sierra Leone, decentralization gained renewed importance following the end of the civil war in 2002. The government recognized that excessive centralization had contributed to poor governance, unequal distribution of public services, and the marginalization of rural communities. Consequently, the enactment of the Local Government Act, 2004 re-established elected local councils after more than three decades, with the objective of improving governance, promoting community participation, and accelerating local development. Since then, local councils have assumed responsibility for several devolved

functions, including primary healthcare, basic education, agriculture, water supply, sanitation, and infrastructure (Ministry of Finance, 2024).

Rural development remain a national priority because a significant proportion of Sierra Leonean’s population resides in rural communities where poverty, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to healthcare and education, and low agricultural productivity continue to hinder socio-economic progress. Decentralization is expected to address these challenges by empowering local councils to identify community needs, allocate resources efficiently, and encourage local participation in development planning. Through community involvement, development projects are expected to become more responsive, transparent, and sustainable (Conteh & Pan, 2024).

Despite these expectations, the implementation of decentralization in Sierra Leone has produced mixed results. Studies have shown that decentralization has contributed to increased political participation, strengthened democratic governance and improve access to essential public services. Local councils have provided platforms for community engagement and have enhanced citizens’ ability to hold public officials accountable

for development outcomes. Furthermore, the transfer of selected functions to local government has improved coordination between communities and public institutions in several districts (Edwards & Yilmaz, 2015). However, several challenges continue to limit the effectiveness in promoting rural development. Local councils frequently face inadequate financial resources, weak institutional capacity, limited technical expertise, and heavy dependence on central government transfers. In addition, overlaps in authority between local councils and traditional authorities, delays in fiscal transfers, and insufficient locally generated revenues have constrained the implementation of development projects, particularly in rural areas (Conteh & Pan, 2024). These challenges reduce the ability of local government to deliver quality public services and respond effectively to the development needs of the communities.

Recognizing these challenges, the Government of Sierra Leone has continued to strengthen the decentralization framework through policy reforms. The Medium-Term National development Plan (2024-2030) emphasizes decentralization, local governance and rural development as essential components of inclusive national development.

Although notable progress has been achieved, evidence suggests that decentralization has not yet fully realized its intended impact on rural development. Persistent disparities in infrastructure, healthcare, education, agricultural support services, and local economic opportunities indicates that improvements in institutional capacity, fiscal decentralization, and community participation are required. It is therefore important to examine the extent to which decentralization has contributed to rural development in Sierra Leone and identify the factors that enhance or hinders its effectiveness. This study seeks to answer the following research questions; what is the role of decentralization in rural development? 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

Decentralization has emerged as a significant governance reform strategy across developing countries, with particular relevance for rural development in post-conflict societies like Sierra Leone. Following the end of the civil war in 2002, Sierra Leone embarked on an ambitious decentralization agenda through the Local Government Act of 2004, which reestablished local councils after decades of centralized governance (Conteh, 2017). This literature review examines the specific roles that decentralization has played in rural development within Moyamba District, one of Sierra Leone's predominantly rural areas facing significant development challenges.

Drawing on research published between 2015 and 2025, this review analyzes how decentralized governance structures and processes have influenced rural development outcomes in Moyamba. The review is organized thematically, examining decentralization's role in service delivery enhancement, resource mobilization and allocation, participatory development planning, agricultural transformation, and infrastructure development. By synthesizing existing evidence, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how decentralization has shaped rural development trajectories in Moyamba District over the past decade.

Decentralization has been widely advocated as the mechanism to enhance governance, increase local participation, and improve service delivery in developing countries. In Sierra Leone, the decentralization has been enshrined in legal and policy frameworks such as the Local Government Act 2022, aiming to transfer political, administration, and fiscal autonomy from central government to local councils. While considerable scholarship has focused on the theoretical promise of decentralization, empirical studies, especially those situated in rural districts like Moyamba reveal a complex interplay of structural, political, socio-cultural factors that limits the implementation effectiveness.

One major stand of literature highlights institutional and structural limitations. Scholars such as Sesay and Kargbo,(2019) argue that local councils in Sierra Leone suffer from inadequate administrative capacity, fragmented bureaucratic system, and unclear delineation of responsibilities between central and local actors. These structural weakness are exacerbated by limited financial autonomy as local government remain heavily dependent on conditional grants from central ministry, undermining their ability to prioritize locally relevant interventions. In Moyamba, research by Kamara (2020) illustrates that while councils are formally empowered to manage infrastructure, education, and health services, the actual exercise of these powers is constrained by insufficient human resources and bureaucratic bottlenecks, reflecting broader trends documented at the national level.

Another body of evidence emphasizes political dynamics and governance challenges. The decentralization process in Sierra Leone has been politicized, allegiance to national parties influencing local decision-making and leading to clientelistic allocation of resources (Bangura, 2017). This politicization of ten manifest in delays in the execution of approved development plans and selective distribution of service delivery programs. In Moyamba where historical pattern political contestation intersect with ethnic affiliations, local stakeholders report that discretionary control by councilors and central oversight limits transparency and accountability, consistent with patterns observed in similar post-conflict settings in Sub-Saharan Africa (Olsson, 2015).

Socio-cultural and community-level factors has also been identified as key mediators of decentralization effectiveness. Studies underscore the gaps between formal decentralization policies and local perceptions of authority and participation. In many rural districts, including Moyamba, citizen's engagement is shaped by entrenched hierarchical norms, low literacy levels, and limited understanding of local governance mandates. Consequently, participatory mechanism designed to enhance citizen input, such as town hall meetings or budget consultations, underutilized or symbolic rather than substantive (Kamara 2020; essay, 2019). In addition, traditional authority structures, including paramount chiefs and local elders, retain significant influence over community decisions, sometimes presenting parallel governance pathways that complicate integration with council-led initiatives.

The literature also identifies temporal and logistical constraint as factors that limit the assessment of decentralization outcomes. Many studies perform cross-sectional analyzes at particular time points, capturing only snapshots of policy implementation (Bangura, 2017). Changes in administrative staffing, period revision of central-local fiscal transfers, and socio-political events such as education and health (e.g. the Ebola outbreak) produce dynamic conditions that are not always reflected in empirical studies. This temporal limitation restricts the ability to draw generalizable conclusion regarding the sustainability and

longitudinal effectiveness of decentralization in Moyamba and similar districts.

Despite these highlighted limitations, the review of literature points to emerging and mitigation approaches. Some studies document the gradual adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) to enhance transparency in local budgeting and public service tracking. Others advocate for enhanced capacity-building programs, emphasizing training for council staff, and mechanisms for citizen education to strengthen accountability and civil engagement at the district level (Hongso et al, (2016)

In conclusion, the literature demonstrates that while decentralization in Sierra Leone offers a theoretical pathway for decentralizing governance and increasing local responsiveness, significant structural, political, socio-cultural, and temporal factors constraints its effective implementation in districts like Moyamba. These findings underscore the necessity for nuanced, context-specific analysis that integrates institutional, political, and community level dimension.

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
Total	708	410

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 were 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^2 . 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

Awareness of local council development projects

Table 2. *Awareness of local council development projects.*

Witnessed projects	n	%
Yes	208	52.40
No	189	47.60

Source: Author's field data

Just over half of respondents had witnessed a local-council project (52.4%), while a little under half had not (47.6%) (Table 2). Project activity is therefore visible to about half of respondents, indicating that it is real but not yet widespread. This result suggests that despite the implementation of decentralization and the existence of local councils, many citizens in Moyamba District still perceive limited visibility or impact of council-led development initiatives within their communities. This findings is in line with

Perceived quality of services since decentralization

Table 3. *Perceived quality of services since decentralization*

Quality	n	%
Poor	34	8.70
Fair	237	60.60
Good	120	30.70
Excellent	0	0.00

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.

Gbla et al (2024). The study noted that geographical proximity 'has improved citizens' awareness of local governance institutions and increased the frequency of informal interactions between officials and the public. . However, it highlighted that these improvements in witnessing project presence "are largely surface level; they have not translated into significantly better service delivery or stronger institutional responsiveness" due to continued budgetary controls by higher-level authorities.

Most respondents rated service quality since decentralization as “fair” (60.6%), with about a third calling it “good” (30.7%) and fewer than one in ten calling it “poor” (8.7%) (Table 3). Notably, no respondent selected “excellent.” Overall, perceptions are cautiously positive: respondents acknowledge some improvement but stop short of strong endorsement. The findings

resonates with the findings of (Cheema & Rondeneli. 2007) who stated that there is no conclusive evidence that decentralization improves quality service delivery. (Mensah & Kyei, 2020), also notes that while decentralization results in localized gains and better meeting the immediate needs of citizens, the overall quality and sustainability of the services delivered remain questionable.

Awareness of projects

Table 4. Awareness of projects by respondent type, with chi-square test.

Respondent type				No	Yes
Community Member				87	104
Government Officials/CSOs Staff				96	102
Test	chi2	df	p	Cramér's V	Decision
Pearson chi-square	0.23	1	.632	0.024	Not significant

Note. $\alpha = .05$. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$; ns = not significant ($p \geq .05$).

Unlike their opinions on governance, the two groups reported witnessing projects at almost the same rate 54% of community members and 52% of officials (Table 4). The chi-square test found no meaningful difference between them ($\chi^2 = 0.23$, $df = 1$, $p = .632$; Cramer's V = 0.024). In other words, both groups observe project activity at similar rates, even though they assess its results differently.

Witnessing Local Council Development Project

Table 5. Logistic regression: predictors of witnessing local council development projects.

Predictor	OR	95% CI low	95% CI high	p	sig
Education level (higher)	1.35	0.980	1.87	.066	ns
Familiarity (higher)	0.659	0.324	1.34	.251	ns
Perceived importance (higher)	2.57	1.25	5.27	.010	**
Service-quality rating (higher)	12.56	6.91	22.84	<.001	***
Gov/CSO (vs community)	0.816	0.447	1.49	.507	ns

Note. $n = 382$; McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = 0.271$. $\alpha = .05$. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$; ns = not significant ($p \geq .05$).

The logistic regression in Table 5 above reveals what most strongly predicts having witnessed projects. By far the biggest factor was how respondents rate service quality: those who rate services higher were more than twelve times as likely to report seeing projects (OR = 12.56, $p < .001$). Seeing the policy as important also helped (OR = 2.57, $p = .010$). Education, familiarity, and respondent type were not significant. The model fit was good for survey data (pseudo- $R^2 = 0.271$). The strong association between higher service-quality ratings and witnessing projects suggests that visible projects strongly shape respondents' judgment of service quality. The findings agrees with *Bardhan & Dilip, 2006), the study finds that constituents judge local service

quality based on visible physical projects, which shapes their perceptions. The study highlights that political incentives drive officials to prioritize visible construction over less tangible service improvements.

Impact of Decentralization on Rural Development

The objective measured perceived impact across eight rural development dimensions and five service-delivery areas. It reports the descriptive means, how the impact dimensions relate to one another, and a logistic regression for improved access to local services, with a supplementary OLS model on the overall impact index.

Perceived impact across rural development dimension

Table 6. Mean perceived impact across rural-development dimensions (1 = poor ... 5 = excellent).

Rank	Dimension	Mean	SD	n
1	Gender equality	2.59	0.77	399
2	Access to basic services	2.37	0.73	397
3	Infrastructure development	2.31	0.72	395
4	Environmental management	2.29	0.75	399
5	Citizen participation	2.18	0.86	397

Rank	Dimension	Mean	SD	n
6	Accountability of officials	1.86	1.01	398
7	Economic opportunities	1.83	0.96	398
8	Poverty reduction	1.73	0.93	399

Source: Author's field data 2026

Across all eight dimensions, the average scores fell below the midpoint of the 1–5 scale, indicating that respondents perceive the impact as modest at best (Table 6). Gender equality scored highest ($M = 2.59$), followed by access to basic services (2.37) and infrastructure (2.31). The lowest scores went to poverty reduction (1.73), economic opportunities (1.83), and accountability of

officials (1.86). Overall, respondents credit decentralization more for progress in equality and basic services than for economic growth or poverty reduction. This findings supports the findings of (Richard et al 1998) who find that respondents credit decentralization more for progress in basic services and local equality than centralized systems.

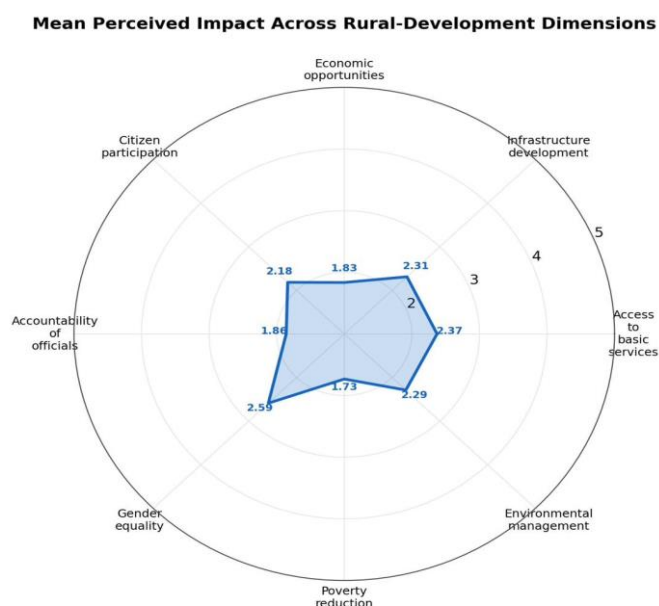


Figure 1: Mean perceived impact across the eight rural-development dimensions.

The Spearman correlations in Figure 2 below show that the eight dimensions are all positively and fairly strongly related (most coefficients fall between 0.4 and 0.7). The closest links were between economic opportunities and poverty reduction ($\rho = 0.74$) and between economic opportunities and accountability (0.71). Because respondents who perceived impact in one area tended to perceive it in others as well, the impact scale shows strong internal consistency, which matches its excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.944$) reported later.

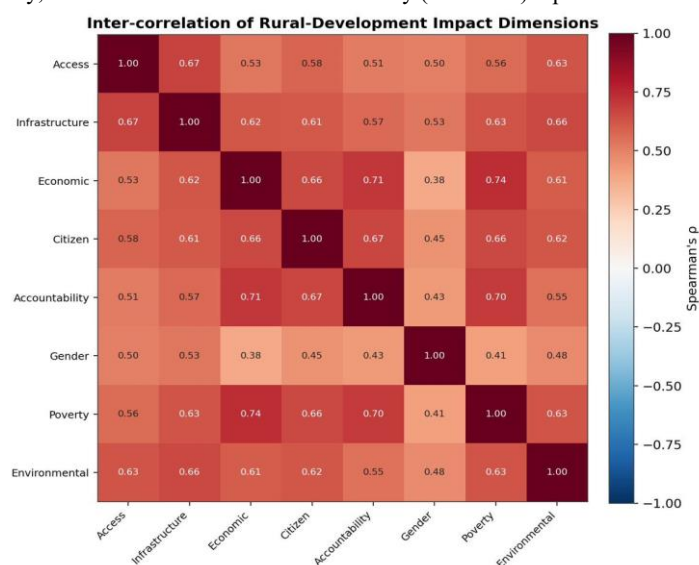


Figure 2: Spearman inter-correlation of impact dimensions.

Perceived effect on rural service delivery

The study findings in Table 7

Table 7. Mean perceived effect on rural service-delivery areas.

Service area	Mean	SD
Education services	2.54	0.72
Health delivery	2.53	0.75
Rural sanitation	2.27	0.75
Sanitation facilities	2.27	0.72
Rural water supply	1.80	1.00

Looking at the five service areas (Table 7), education ($M = 2.54$) and health ($M = 2.53$) were rated highest, followed by rural sanitation and sanitation facilities (both 2.27). Rural water supply stood out as the weakest area by a clear margin ($M = 1.80$, $SD = 1.00$). Water supply is therefore the service most in need of attention under decentralization. The studying findings in table reflects earlier conclusion by (Fanthorpe et al, 2011) which says decentralization has been consistent with substantial improvements in local services, but it is almost impossible to isolate the material impact of the program in the country still undergoing extensive,

donor-supported post-war reconstruction. (Adank et al, 2022) also noted that poor coordination among decentralized agencies is another critical challenge affecting rural water.

Improved access to local services

The Binary logistic regression output for improved access to local services as the outcome variables and familiarity, perceived importance, education, awareness of project and whether respondents is a government worker or just a community member is reported in Table 8.

Table 8. Logistic regression: predictors of improved access to local services.

Predictor	OR	95% CI low	95% CI high	p	sig
Familiarity (higher)	0.932	0.454	1.91	.848	ns
Perceived importance (higher)	1.90	0.958	3.75	.066	ns
Education level (higher)	1.12	0.801	1.56	.514	ns
Witnessed projects (yes)	16.26	8.41	31.43	<.001	***
Gov/CSO (vs community)	1.77	0.918	3.41	.089	ns

Note. $n = 388$; McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = 0.279$. $\alpha = .05$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; ns = not significant ($p \geq .05$).

Source: Author's field data, 2026

The logistic regression in Table 8 found one factor that dominated all others: having witnessed projects. Respondents who had seen local-council projects were about sixteen times more likely to report improved access to services ($OR = 16.26$, $p < .001$). None of the other factors familiarity, importance, education, or respondent type reached significance, although importance and respondent type approached it. The model fit was strong (pseudo- $R^2 = 0.279$). This indicates that concrete, visible projects are the

main factor convincing respondents that access has improved. The finding is strongly related with the findings of the OECD report (2019), the report shows that visible infrastructure projects such as roads and clinics are two primary indicators for citizens' perceiving improvements in service access, these tangible outputs are prioritized by voters, serving as the main signal of government performance over less visible reforms.

Table 9. Supplementary OLS regression: predictors of the overall impact index.

Predictor	B	SE	p	sig
Familiarity (higher)	0.032	0.086	.715	ns
Perceived importance (higher)	0.108	0.090	.231	ns
Education level (higher)	0.032	0.042	.444	ns
Witnessed projects (yes)	0.619	0.068	<.001	***
Gov/CSO (vs community)	-0.236	0.080	.003	**

Note. $R^2 = 0.227$. B = unstandardized coefficient. $\alpha = .05$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; ns = not significant ($p \geq .05$).

The supplementary OLS regression on the overall impact index (Table 9) tells the same story in a different way. Witnessing projects was again the strongest positive predictor ($B = 0.619$, $p < .001$), while being an official or CSO staff member was linked to a lower impact rating ($B = 0.236$, $p = .003$). Familiarity, importance, and education made no significant difference. The model explained about 23% of the variation ($R^2 = 0.227$). Taken together with the logistic results, this confirms two consistent patterns: witnessing tangible projects drives more positive assessments of impact, while officials remain more cautious than community members. This findings is in line with the (World Bank Report, 2005), which indicates that tangible, visible infrastructure projects serves as key benchmarks for citizens' evaluating the quality of local governance and service delivery.

Key Findings

1. The study established that decentralization plays a significant role in promoting rural development in Moyamba District. More than half of the respondents reported having witnessed local council development projects within their communities, indicating that decentralized governance structures are actively involved in local development interventions.
2. The findings showed that decentralization has contributed to improvements in local planning, community participation, and service delivery. Respondents acknowledged that local councils have become more responsive to local needs through the implementation of community-based projects and consultation mechanisms.
3. The study also revealed that visible development projects significantly influence public perceptions of service quality. Respondents who reported witnessing local council projects were considerably more likely to rate

service delivery positively than those who had not observed such interventions. This suggests that tangible development outcomes remain essential in building public confidence in decentralization reforms.

4. The study found that decentralization has generated moderate but positive impacts on rural development within Moyamba District. Among the various development dimensions assessed, gender equality, access to basic services, and infrastructure development received the highest ratings. These findings suggest that decentralization has contributed positively to social inclusion and the expansion of essential public services.
5. However, the study also found that the impact of decentralization on poverty reduction and economic opportunities remains limited. These dimensions received the lowest ratings among respondents, indicating that improvements in governance and service delivery have not yet translated into substantial economic transformation at the local level.
6. The assessment of service delivery outcomes further revealed that education and health services recorded relatively better performance under decentralized governance arrangements. In contrast, rural water supply emerged as the weakest-performing service area, highlighting the need for increased investment and policy attention.
7. The study additionally established that respondents who had witnessed development projects were significantly more likely to report improvements in access to local services. This finding underscores the importance of visible and well-executed development interventions in enhancing the perceived impact of decentralization.

Summary of major findings

Table 10: showing summary of major findings

No	Research Objectives	Key findings
1	Role in Rural Development	Improved participation, local planning, and service delivery through local council projects.
2	Impact on Rural Development	Moderate improvement in service delivery and infrastructure; limited impact on poverty reduction and economic opportunities.

Conclusion

The study concludes that decentralization is an acceptable and widely recognized system of governance in Sierra Leone. However, its implementation has been limited by several challenges including inadequate financial resources, weak accountability, political interference, and weak coordination among others. While these challenges are not insurmountable, the prolong inaction by decentralization authorities to address these challenges continue to undermine its effectiveness. The study concludes that decentralization has not lived up to expectations contrary to earlier hopes that decentralization promotes good governance, improve service delivery, and more responsive to local needs and priorities due to its proximity to local residence.

For the period under review, the study concludes that decentralization has not been able to effectively deliver on its mandate and that results have been mixed. And this conclusion is

in line with Cheema and Rondeneli (2007) which states that there is no conclusive evidence that decentralization promotes good governance and improves service delivery. While decentralization has made some measurable gains in gender equality and rural sanitation, these achievements remain short of wide public approval. Rural water supply, poverty reduction, and economic opportunities are where decentralization has performed weakest and remain below average.

Generally, decentralization remain an acceptable governance system in Sierra Leone. However, achieving effective decentralization that meets public approval requires strong political commitment, institutional strengthening and enforcement of accountability measures.

Recommendations

1. Stronger accountability and transparency mechanisms should be introduced to improve public trust and ensure effective utilization of public resources.

2. Greater investment should be directed toward rural water supply systems, given the poor performance recorded in this sector.
3. Government and development partners should continue investing in feeder roads, agricultural extension services, education, and healthcare infrastructure.
4. Local economic development initiatives should be strengthened to improve employment opportunities and accelerate poverty reduction.
5. Regular public accountability forums should be institutionalized to improve citizen oversight of local governance.
6. Government should establish safeguards against political interference in local development planning and resource allocation processes.

9. Hongslo, E, Hovik, S, Zachrisson, A, & Lundberg, A.K. A (2016). *Decentralization of conservation management in Norway and Sweeden: Different translation of an international trend. Society and Natural Resources*, 29(8), 930-944
10. Bah, M. A., & Bangura, E. B. (2024). *Local governance and service delivery in Sierra Leone: Challenges faced by Bo District Council*.
11. Cheema, G. S., & Rondinelli, D. A. (2007). *Decentralizing governance: Emerging concepts and practices*. Brookings Institution Press.
12. Fanthorpe, R., Laval, A., & Sesay, M. G. (2011). *Decentralization in Sierra Leone: Impact, constraints and prospects*. World Bank.
13. Hughes, O. E. (2017). *Public management and administration* (5th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
14. Jackson, P. (2012). *Decentralization and peace-building in Sierra Leone*.
15. Mookherjee, D., & Bardhan, P. (2006). *Decentralization and development*. MIT Press.
16. Republic of Sierra Leone. (1974). *The Chiefdom Administration Act, 1974*. Government Printer.
17. Republic of Sierra Leone. (2004, amended 2022). *The Local Government Act, 2004 (as amended in 2022)*. Government of Sierra Leone.
18. Republic of Sierra Leone. (2021). *The Sierra Leone decentralization policy*. Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.
19. Sesay, M., & Hughes, J. (2005). *Go beyond first aid: Democracy assistance and the challenges of institution building in post-conflict Sierra Leone*.
20. Wang, Y., Li, J., Ma, W., Li, Y., Xiong, X., & Yu, X. (2024). *Fiscal decentralization and citizens' satisfaction with public services*.
21. World Bank. (2014). *Decentralization, accountability and local services in Sierra Leone*. World Bank.
22. World Bank Report, (2021) “An introduction to Decentralization: Multi-Level Governance and Intergovernmental Relations.

References

1. Conteh, A.B. &Pan, Q (2024). *Effectiveness of Own-Source Revenue generation at 22 Local Councils in Sierra Leone as a driver of local development. Journal of Scientific Records*, 7(1), 334-348
2. Edwards B, & Yilmaz. (2016). *Decentralization as a post-conflict stabilization tool. The case of Sierra Leone. Public Administration and Development*, 36(5), 347-358
3. International Monetary Fund (2024). *Sierra Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (Country Report No. 24/323)* Washington, DC: IMF.
4. Ministry of Finance, (2024). *Fiscal Decentralization in Sierra Leone. Government of Sierra Leone*.
5. Bangura, A. (2017). *Decentralization as a post-conflict stabilization tool. The case of Sierra Leone. Public Administration and Development*, 36(5), 347-358
6. Conteh, F, M, (2017). *Politics, development and the instrumentalization of decentralization in Sierra Leone*.
7. Sesay F, S & Kargbo A.I, (2019) *Decentralization and its limits in Sierra Leone. International Journal of Advanced Studies and Research*.
8. Kamara, S, & Fanthorpe, R (2012). *Decentralization in Sierra Leone: Impact Constraints and Prospects. The British Government department for International Development (DFID)*