International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

Examining the Capacity of the Local Government to Implement Decentralization Policy: A Case Study of Mwense Town Council

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Abstract
This study examines the capacity of Mwense Town Council to implement decentralization policies, focusing on assessing the council's capabilities, analyzing stakeholder perceptions of effectiveness, and identifying key challenges. Utilizing a descriptive research design, the study targeted key stakeholders, including council staff, local government officials, community leaders, and civil society representatives, with a purposive sample of 50 respondents. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire that captured both quantitative and qualitative insights, analyzed using descriptive statistics via STATA software. Findings indicate that 32% of respondents rated the council's decentralization capacity as high, while 20% rated it as very low. Regarding financial resources, 32% felt the council was adequately funded, but 36% were unsure. Stakeholder participation mechanisms were primarily public hearings and forums, though 40% were uncertain about training on decentralization. Key challenges included insufficient staff training (28%) and resource constraints (26%). The study recommends expanding training programs, improving financial transparency, enhancing community engagement, fostering political collaboration, and strengthening accountability mechanisms to address these challenges and improve decentralization effectiveness. These insights are valuable for policymakers and practitioners in local governance and decentralization efforts.

1. Introduction
1.1 Background
Decentralization is the transfer of authority from central governments to local entities, aimed at enhancing governance and public service delivery while increasing citizen participation (World Bank, 2021) [33]. This approach allows local governments to address community needs more effectively than centralized institutions. Countries like Spain and Italy have successfully implemented decentralization to promote local autonomy and stability (Rodríguez-Pose & Gill, 2017) [26], while Latin American nations, such as Colombia and Brazil, have empowered local governments to improve services despite facing challenges like capacity constraints (Falleti, 2010 [13]; Montero & Samuels, 2004). In Africa, decentralization seeks to enhance service delivery and democratic governance, as seen in Uganda and Kenya, where local governments gained significant powers but encountered issues with fiscal autonomy (Green, 2015 [14]; Mwenda, 2010). Zambia's National Decentralization Policy aims to empower local authorities but faces challenges, including insufficient funding and human resources (Mulenga, 2019) [20]. Mwense Town Council illustrates these difficulties, struggling with limited financial support and coordination with the central government, which hampers effective service delivery (Munyenyembe, 2018) [21].

1.2 Statement of the Problem
Zambia has adopted decentralization to improve governance and service delivery; however, local authorities like Mwense Town Council struggle with implementation. Key challenges include insufficient funding, a lack of qualified staff, and poor stakeholder engagement, leading to inadequate service provision and stunted local development. Recent data reveals that less

than 40% of Zambian local authorities have effectively implemented decentralization policies (Ministry of Local Government, 2022) [19], and citizen satisfaction with local services in rural areas, including Mwense, is low, with only 25% of residents expressing contentment (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2021) [34]. This situation highlights the urgent need to assess Mwense Town Council's capacity to implement decentralization and address its challenges to improve local governance and service delivery.

1.3 Objective
1.3.1 General objective of the study
1. To examine Strategies for Improving Public Sector Employee Motivation and Performance.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives
1. To assess the capacity of Mwense Town Council in implementing decentralization policy.
2. To analyze the perception of stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of decentralization at Mwense Town Council.
3. To identify the challenges faced by Mwense Town Council in executing the decentralization policy.

1.4 Research questions
1. What is the capacity of Mwense Town Council in implementing decentralization policy?
2. What are the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of decentralization at Mwense Town Council?
3. What challenges does Mwense Town Council face in executing the decentralization policy?

1.5 Theoretical Framework
The Institutional Capacity Theory provides a vital framework for assessing Mwense Town Council's ability to implement decentralization policies, emphasizing the importance of administrative, financial, and political capacities (Grindle and Hilderbrand, 1995) [15] Administrative capacity relates to effective resource and process management for policy execution, while financial capacity concerns the availability and management of financial resources, including local revenue generation (Smoke, 2015) [30]. Political capacity involves engaging stakeholders and maintaining autonomy from central government interference, which is essential for effective governance (Sørensen and Torfing, 2016) [31]. Deficiencies in these areas can severely impede decentralization efforts, leading to inadequate service delivery (Peters, 2012) [23]. By applying this theory, the study aims to identify specific weaknesses within Mwense Town Council, such as insufficient staffing or financial mismanagement, and develop targeted recommendations to enhance local governance and responsiveness to community needs (smoke, 2015) [30].

2. Literature Review
This chapter examines the literature on decentralization, focusing on local government capacity, stakeholder perceptions, and implementation challenges.
2.1 Capacity of Local Government in Implementing Decentralization Policy
Decentralization aims to improve governance by transferring powers to local authorities (World Bank, 2021) [33]. Its success hinges on local governments' administrative, fiscal, and technical capacities (Smoke, 2015) [30]. Effective capacity includes human and financial resources necessary for service delivery (Faguet, 2014). However, many local governments in developing countries face significant constraints, such as inadequate staffing and funding, which impede effective decentralization (Rodríguez-Pose and Gill, 2017) [26].

2.2 Stakeholder Perceptions Regarding the Effectiveness of Decentralization
Stakeholder perceptions are crucial for decentralization's success. Effective decentralization is seen as beneficial by local officials and citizens alike (Green, 2015) [14]. However, studies reveal mixed perceptions; while some stakeholders note improvements in service delivery, others cite challenges like resource limitations and political interference (Rondinelli and Cheema, 2020) [27]. In Zambia, local officials recognize increased autonomy, but citizens express dissatisfaction with service quality, particularly in rural areas (Simutanyi, 2020; Zulu & Chileshe, 2021) [28, 36].

2.3 Challenges Faced by Local Governments in Executing Decentralization Policy
Local governments face numerous challenges in implementing decentralization, particularly financial constraints due to reliance on inconsistent central transfers (Chikulo, 2010) [6]. Political resistance often limits local autonomy, as central authorities retain control over key functions (Abdelkader *et al*., 2022) [1]. Institutional weaknesses, including unclear roles and insufficient capacity, further hinder effective governance (Dickovick & Riedl, 2022) [10]. In Zambia, studies highlight inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of skilled personnel as significant barriers to fulfilling local mandates (Banda & Simukonda, 2022) [4].

2.4 Personal Critique of Literature Review
The literature on decentralization reveals significant gaps, particularly regarding rural areas like Mwense. Most studies emphasize urban centers or national analyses, often neglecting the unique challenges faced by rural councils. For example, Zulu (2020) [35] highlights local government struggles but does not distinguish between rural and urban contexts, leaving the specific issues of rural districts underexplored. A key limitation is the generalization of findings across diverse local government settings, ignoring variations in governance structures and resources. Reports from the Ministry of Local Government (2021) identify capacity deficits but fail to analyze how these challenges differ in rural areas. This oversight risks oversimplifying the complexities faced by rural councils, which typically encounter greater resource constraints (Phiri, 2019) [24]. Moreover, while international literature offers valuable insights, it often overlooks the socio-economic dynamics unique to Zambia's rural regions. Reports from the National Decentralization Secretariat (2021) [22] emphasize the importance of stakeholder engagement, yet analyses of differing perceptions and their influence on decision-making are often lacking. As noted by Smoke (2016), local ownership is crucial for effective decentralization, but this aspect is frequently underrepresented.

2.5 Establishment of Research Gaps

The literature reveals a critical gap in understanding decentralization policies in rural districts like Mwense, particularly regarding local government capacity, stakeholder perceptions, and practical challenges. Most studies focus on urban contexts, neglecting the unique issues faced by rural councils. Mulenga (2019) [20] highlights that "most decentralization efforts in Zambia are hampered by insufficient human and financial resources," which is often generalized without considering rural-specific challenges. Chikulo (2016) [7] notes that "urban councils have historically been better positioned to handle decentralized responsibilities," emphasizing the weaker capacities of rural districts. This raises questions about the applicability of urban-focused assumptions to rural areas like Mwense, where resource scarcity is more pronounced. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure complicates the implementation of decentralized functions, a factor that remains underexplored. There is also a lack of research on stakeholder perceptions in rural decentralization. Most studies focus on institutional challenges, overlooking the influence of local stakeholders such as community leaders and civil society. Smoke (2015) [30] asserts that "decentralization reforms often fail to achieve their intended outcomes" due to insufficient consideration of local perceptions. Furthermore, the specific challenges faced by rural councils in executing decentralization policies are not well-documented. While some studies acknowledge fiscal constraints, they often lack empirical evidence or targeted recommendations (Ministry of Local Government and Housing, 2017). Finally, the literature inadequately examines the relationship between national policies and local implementation. Although Zambia's National Decentralization Policy (2013) provides a framework for devolving power, there is limited insight into how these policies are adapted at the rural level. The World Bank (2020) [32] emphasizes the need for strong local institutions, yet the capacity of rural councils remains unclear. This study aims to fill these gaps by focusing on Mwense Town Council, providing empirical data on local government capacity, analyzing stakeholder perceptions, and identifying challenges to effective policy execution (World Bank, 2020) [32].

3. Research Methodology

This chapter details the methodology used to assess Mwense Town Council's capacity for implementing decentralization policy, covering research design, target population, sampling, data collection, analysis, triangulation, limitations, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive research design is employed to comprehensively examine Mwense Town Council's capacity, stakeholder perceptions, and challenges in policy execution. This approach facilitates both quantitative and qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2016).

3.2 Target Population

The target population includes key stakeholders such as council staff, local officials, community leaders, and civil society representatives. This diversity captures a wide range of perspectives on decentralization (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003).

3.3 Sampling Design

A purposive sampling design is utilized, selecting participants directly involved in decentralization. This method ensures that respondents have relevant expertise, enabling in-depth insights (Etikan *et al*., 2016; Palinkas *et al*., 2015).

3.4 Sample Size

The study will include 50 respondents, which is adequate for a representative understanding and manageable for analysis, allowing meaningful statistical evaluation using STATA (Guest *et al*., 2006) [16].

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection will use a structured questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions. This standardizes responses, facilitating easier analysis. The questionnaire will be pre-tested for clarity and relevance (Dillman *et al*., 2014) [11].

3.6 Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using STATA for descriptive statistics, summarizing findings and identifying patterns (StataCorp, 2019).

3.7 Triangulation

Triangulation will enhance validity by comparing data from multiple sources, including various stakeholders and secondary reports, thus mitigating biases (Denzin, 2017) [9].

3.8 Limitations of the Study

Limitations include a small sample size, which may affect generalizability, and potential respondent bias due to socially desirable answering. The structured nature of the questionnaire may also limit response depth (Creswell, 2014).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles such as informed consent and confidentiality will be upheld. Participants will be informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity will be maintained in reporting, and data will be securely stored (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013) [5].

4. Results/ Findings

This chapter involves analyzing and deriving meaning from presented data, going beyond raw numbers to identify patterns, relationships, and implications. It requires understanding the context of data collection and study objectives.

4.1 Presentation of results on background characteristics of the respondents

a) Gender of the respondents

Table 4.1.1.1: Gender of the respondents

	Freq.	Percent
Female	22	44%
Male	28	56%
Total	50	100%

As shown in figure 1.1, the gender distribution of the respondents indicates a relatively balanced representation,

with a slight majority of male participants. Out of the total 50 respondents, 22 (44%) are female, while 28 (56%) are male. This shows a 12% difference between male and female respondents, with males making up a slightly higher proportion of the sample.

b) Age of respondents

Table 4.1.2: Age of respondents

Age group	Freq.	Percent
18-25	10	20%
25-34	9	18%
34-44	11	22%
45-54	9	18%
55+	11	22%
Total	50	100%

As shown in figure 4.1.2, majority of the respondents are evenly spread across the 34–44 and 55+ age groups, each constituting 22% of the total sample. The 18–25age group represents 20%, suggesting that younger individuals also have a voice in the study. The 25–34and 45–54 age groups each account for 18% of respondents, indicating moderate participation from middle-aged individuals.

c) Department/Sector
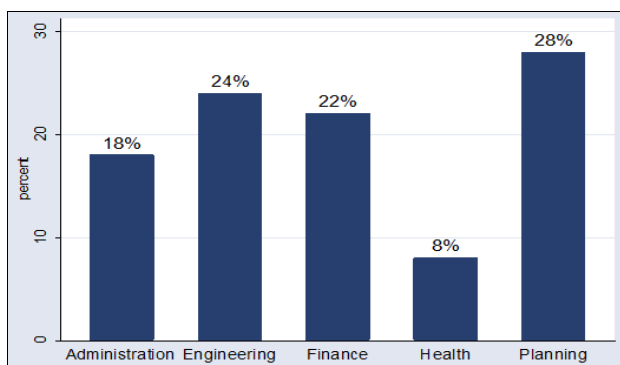
Fig 4.1.3: Department/sector

As shown in figure 4.1.3, the Planning department has the largest share at 28%, reflecting its key role in policy implementation. This is followed by the Engineering sector (24%) and the Finance department (22%), both critical to infrastructure development and resource management. The Administration accounts for 18%, indicating its role in coordination, while the Health sector has the lowest representation at 8%.

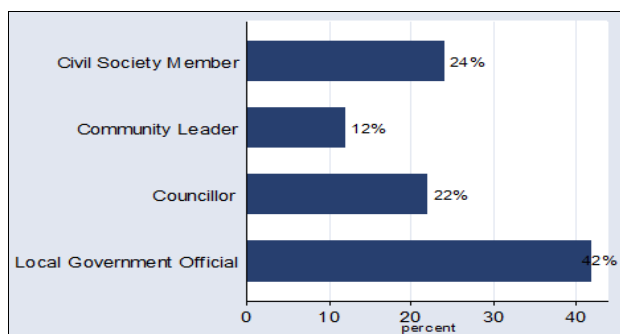d) Position Held in Local Government

Fig 4.1.4: Position held in Local Government

As shown in figure 4.1.4, the positions held by respondents in the local government reflect a diverse range of perspectives. The majority are local government officials, accounting for 42 %, emphasizing their direct involvement in decentralization processes. Civil society members represent 24 %, highlighting the role of external stakeholders in governance. Councillors, who are key in decision-making, account for 22 %, while community leaders make up 12 %, providing grassroots insights.

e) Highest Level of Education

Education	Freq.	Percent
PhD	8	16%
Master's degree	7	14%
Bachelor's degree	19	38%
Vocational technical training	6	12%
Secondary	10	20%
Total	50	100%

As shown in Figure 4.1.5, a significant proportion, 38%, hold a bachelor's degree, indicating a strong foundational education among respondents. Master's degree holders account for 14%, and PhD holders represent 16%, showcasing advanced qualifications within the sample. Secondary education accounts for 20%, while 12% have vocational or technical training, highlighting practical skills among some participants.

f) Years of Experience in Local Government/Public Service

Experience (years)	Freq.	Percent
1-5	17	34%
6-10	12	24%
11-15	11	22%
15 +	10	20%
Total	50	100%

In Figure 4.1.6 respondents' years of experience show a balanced distribution, with a significant portion, 34%, having 1–5 years of experience, reflecting a relatively new but active workforce. Those with 6–10 years' account for 24%, while 22% have 11–15 years of experience, indicating a substantial number of mid-career professionals. Respondents with over 15 years of experience make up 20%, representing seasoned individuals with extensive expertise.

4.2 Presentation of results based on a thematic area developed from objective one: To assess the capacity of Mwense Town Council in implementing decentralization policy.
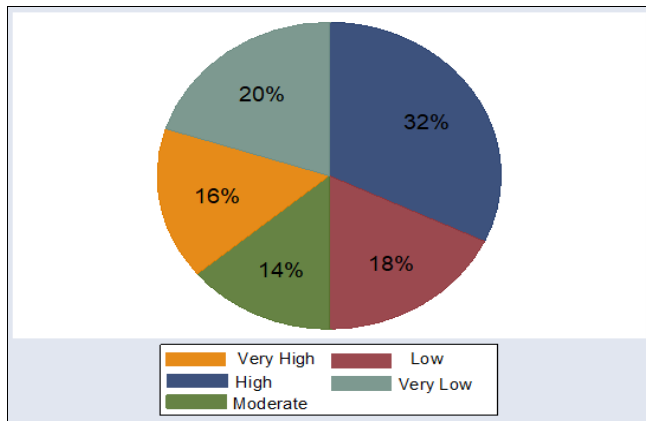a) Capacity of Mwense Town Council to Implement Decentralization

Fig 4.2.1: Capacity of Mwense Town Council to implement decentralization

As depicted in figure 4.2.7, the assessment of Mwense Town Council's capacity to implement decentralization reveals varied perceptions among respondents. A total of 32% rated the council's capacity as high, and 16% as very high, indicating that nearly half of the respondents recognize a commendable level of capability. However, 18% rated the capacity as low, and 20% as very low, highlighting significant concerns among some participants. Meanwhile, 14% rated the capacity as moderate, suggesting room for improvement.

b) Mwense Town Council financial resources to implement decentralization

Table 4.2.2: Mwense Town Council financial resources to implement decentralization

	Freq.	Percent
	16	32%
	16	32%
	18	36%
Total	50	100%

The findings in figure 4.2.8 revealed divided opinions. A total of 32% of the respondents indicated that the council has adequate financial resources, while another 32% stated that the council does not have sufficient funding. Additionally, 36% of the respondents were unsure, reflecting significant uncertainty or lack of information regarding the council's financial capacity. These findings suggest that financial resource availability remains a critical concern, with perceptions pointing to potential funding gaps and the need for enhanced financial transparency and resource mobilization.
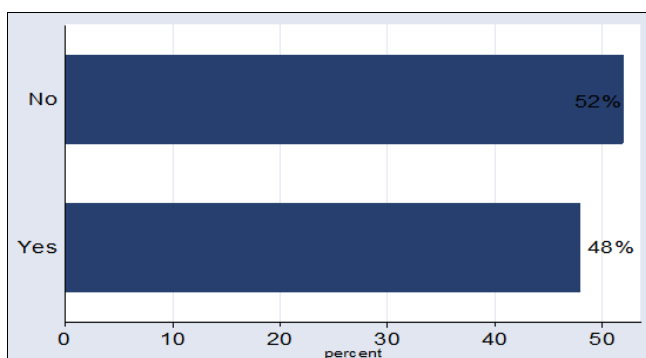
c) Staffing for Decentralization

Fig 4.2.3: Adequate Staffing for Decentralization

According to the data in figure 4.2.9, opinions on the adequacy of staffing levels at Mwense Town Council to support the decentralization process are closely divided. 52% of respondents believe that the current staffing levels are not adequate, suggesting that the council may face challenges in implementing decentralization effectively due to insufficient staff. On the other hand, 48% of respondents consider the staffing levels to be adequate.

d) Staff Establishment for Mwense Town Council

Table 4.2.4: Staff Establishment for Mwense Town Council

As shown on table 4.1.10 as of Quarter 3, 2024, Mwense Town Council had a total of 116 staff members, comprising 79 males (68.1%) and 37 females (31.9%). The gender distribution reveals a significant disparity, with male staff dominating across all divisions. Division 4 has the highest staff count with 43 members (32 males and 11 females), while Divisions 1 and 2 have the lowest, each with 16 staff members. Division 3 has a moderate distribution of 41 staff members. (Mwense Town Council Human Resource, 2024). This uneven staffing across divisions, coupled with a notable gender gap, highlights potential challenges in achieving inclusivity and equitable workload distribution. The gender imbalance and staffing levels are critical factors to consider when assessing the council's capacity to implement decentralization policies effectively, particularly in fostering inclusivity and addressing gender-specific needs.

e) Staff Trained in Decentralization

Table 4.2.5: Staff trained in decentralization

Aspect	Details
Total staff	116
Staff Trained on Decentralization	21
Percentage of Trained Staff	18% (21 out of 116)
Departments Involved	Administration, Works, Finance
Training Focus	- Decentralization goals and implementation strategies - Stakeholder engagement - Monitoring and evaluation skills
Training Duration	Ongoing, with periodic sessions and workshops
Challenges	- Limited number of trained staff - Need for continuous learning and refresher courses
Recommendations	- Expand training to include more staff - Provide regular professional development - Ensure adequate resources to support trained staff

As of September 2024, Mwense Town Council had a total staff of 116 members, with 21 staff members having received training on decentralization policy implementation. This training has been critical in enhancing the council's capacity to manage decentralization processes effectively. The training focused on improving knowledge and skills

related to decentralization goals, policy implementation strategies, and fostering stakeholder participation. Despite the positive impact, the number of trained staff constitutes only about 18% of the workforce, highlighting a need for broader training efforts across the council. To further strengthen decentralization implementation, it is recommended that the council expand training programs to include more staff, ensure continuous professional development, and allocate adequate resources to support these efforts. This will ensure the council can more effectively manage decentralization processes and improve service delivery at the local level.

f) Technological Resources for Decentralization
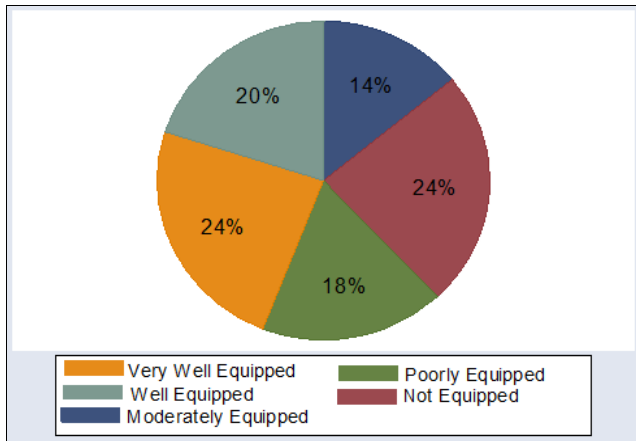
Fig 4.2.6:

Mwense Town Council's technological resources for implementing decentralization are viewed as mixed. While 24% of respondents consider the council to be "Very Well Equipped" and 20% say it is "Well Equipped," there are significant concerns, with 24% indicating that the council is "Not Equipped" and 18% describing it as "Poorly Equipped." Additionally, 14% feel the council is "Moderately Equipped." These responses suggest that while some technological resources are available, there are notable gaps that need to be addressed to effectively support decentralization efforts.

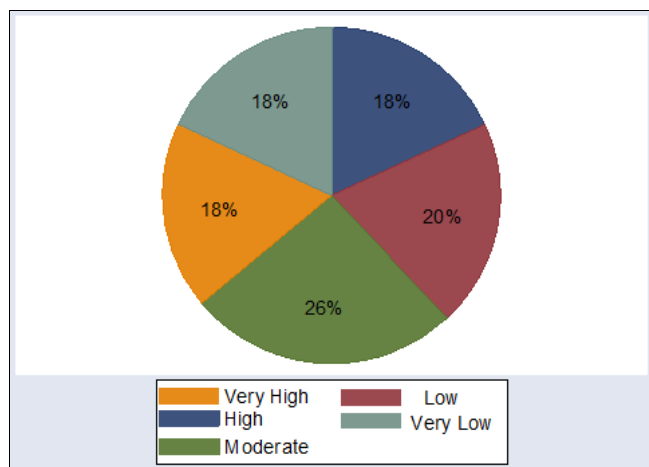g) Access to Skilled Personnel for Decentralization

Fig 4.2.7: Access to skilled personnel for Decentralization

According to figure 4.2.14 on Mwense Town Council's access to skilled personnel for implementing decentralization shows mixed perceptions. While 18% of

respondents feel that the council has "Very High" access to skilled personnel and another 18% consider it to have "High" access, a notable portion of respondents, 26%, rate it as "Moderate". However, 20% perceive access to skilled personnel as "Low", and 18% view it as "Very Low". These findings suggest that while some staff members believe there is sufficient skilled personnel, a significant proportion of respondents feel there are gaps in expertise, which could hinder the effective implementation of decentralization. Further review of staff shows that the engineering department can use more engineers as on 3 are present at the council. The other departments had all the critical staff

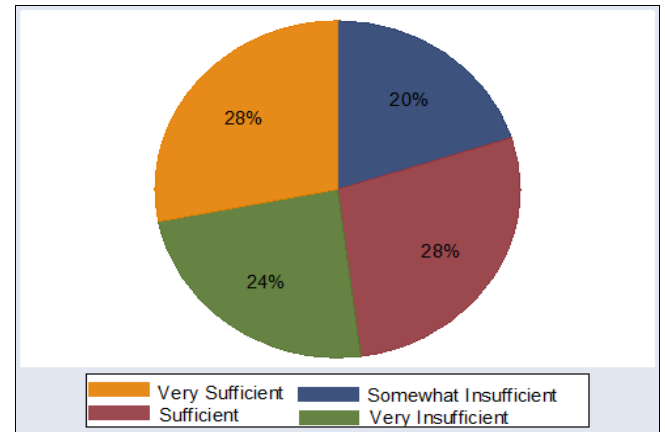h) State of Infrastructural Capabilities

Fig 4.2.8: State of Infrastructural Capabilities

Figure 4.2.8 on Mwense Town Council's infrastructural capabilities for supporting decentralization reveals a mixed assessment. While 28% of respondents consider the infrastructure to be "Very Sufficient" and another 28% deem it "Sufficient", 24% believe it is "Very Insufficient", and 20% see it as "Somewhat Insufficient". These results suggest that a good portion of staff feels the infrastructure is adequate to support decentralization.

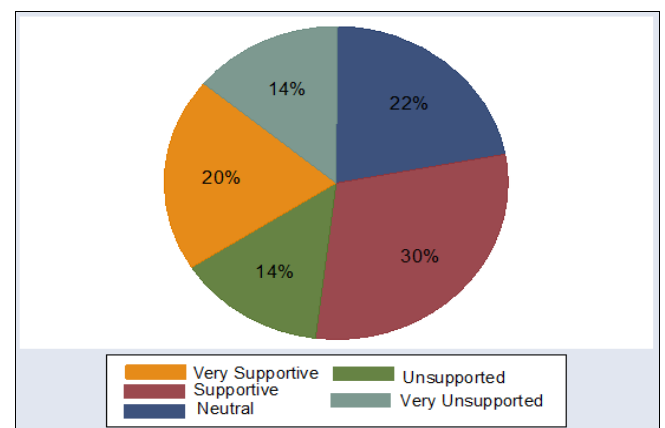i) Leadership Support for Decentralization

Fig 4.2.9: Leadership Support for Decentralization

Figure 4.2.16 leadership at Mwense Town Council shows a generally positive but mixed response regarding its support for decentralization. While 30% of respondents find the leadership "Supportive" and 20% consider it "Very Supportive," 22% remain "Neutral." However, 14% feel the leadership is "Unsupported" and another 14% describe it as "Very Unsupported." These results indicate that while a

significant portion of respondents views the leadership as supportive, there is also notable criticism and uncertainty, suggesting room for improvement in leadership commitment to driving decentralization.

4.3 Presentation of results based on a thematic area developed from objective two: To analyze the perception of stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of decentralization at Mwense Town Council

This section delves into how key stakeholders perceive the success and challenges of decentralization at Mwense Town Council. The analysis draws from interviews and surveys with local government officials, community leaders, and other relevant parties. It assesses whether decentralization has improved service delivery and governance, and identifies areas where stakeholders believe improvements are needed.

a) Training Provided on Decentralization

Table 4.3.1: Training provided on decentralization

	Freq.	Percent
Yes	14	28
No	16	32
Not Sure	20	40
Total	50	100

Table 4.3.1 Training or workshops provided by Mwense Town Council on decentralization to stakeholders shows mixed responses. While 28% of respondents confirmed that training or workshops were provided, a significant portion, 40%, are "Not sure" whether such training occurred. Additionally, 32% indicated that "No" training was provided. These results suggest a lack of clarity or communication regarding the availability of training on decentralization, highlighting the need for better transparency and more widespread capacity-building initiatives.
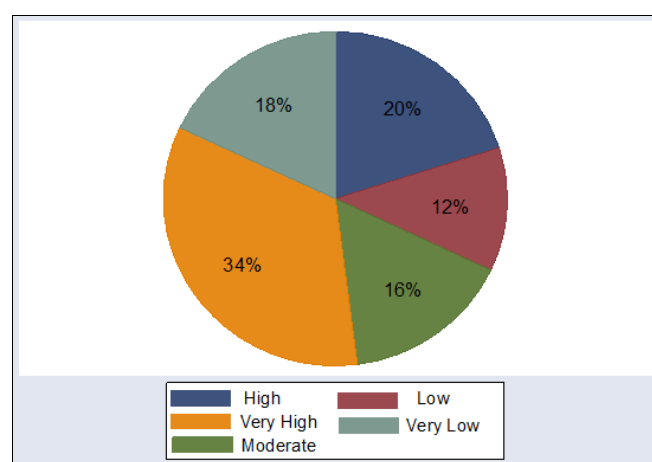
b) Community Understanding of Decentralization Policy

Fig 4.3.2: Community understanding of Decentralization Policy

Figure 4.3.2 on community understanding of the decentralization policy in Mwense shows varying levels of comprehension. While 34% of respondents rate the understanding as "Very High "and 20% as "High", 18% feel the understanding is "Very Low" and 12% rate it as "Low." Additionally, 16% of respondents consider the understanding to be "Moderate." These findings suggest that

a majority of the community has a solid understanding of decentralization, but there remains a significant portion with limited or no understanding, indicating a need for improved awareness and educational efforts.

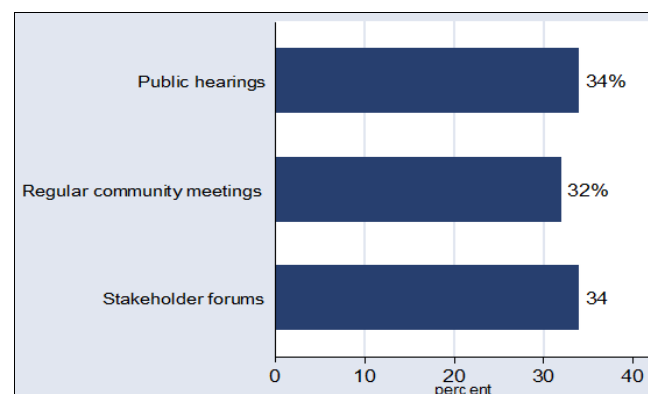c) Mechanisms for Stakeholder Participation

Fig 4.3.3: Mechanisms for Stakeholder Participation

Figure 4.3.3 on mechanisms for stakeholder participation in Mwense Town Council's decentralization decision-making reveals that a variety of engagement methods are in place. 34% of respondents indicated that public hearings and stakeholder forums are used to involve stakeholders, while 32% highlighted the importance of regular community meetings. These findings suggest that Mwense Town Council employs multiple channels to engage stakeholders in decentralization processes, which is crucial for ensuring community involvement and transparency. However, continued efforts to strengthen and diversify these mechanisms may further enhance participation.

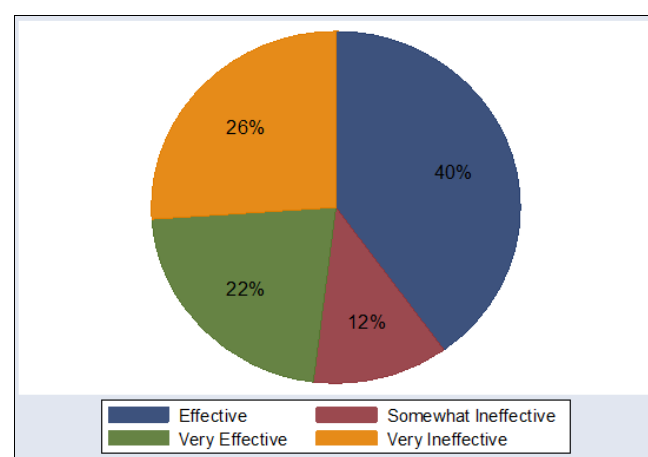d) Effectiveness of Stakeholder Participation Mechanisms

Fig 4.3.4: Effectiveness of Stakeholder Participation Mechanisms

As shown in figure 4.3.4, the effectiveness of the mechanisms used for stakeholder participation in Mwense Town Council's decentralization process is rated as mixed. 40% of respondents consider the mechanisms to be "Effective", and 22% believe they are "Very Effective." However, a notable 26% feel the mechanisms are "Very Ineffective", and 12% rate them as "Somewhat Ineffective." These results indicate that while a majority of respondents view the mechanisms as somewhat effective, there are concerns about their overall impact.

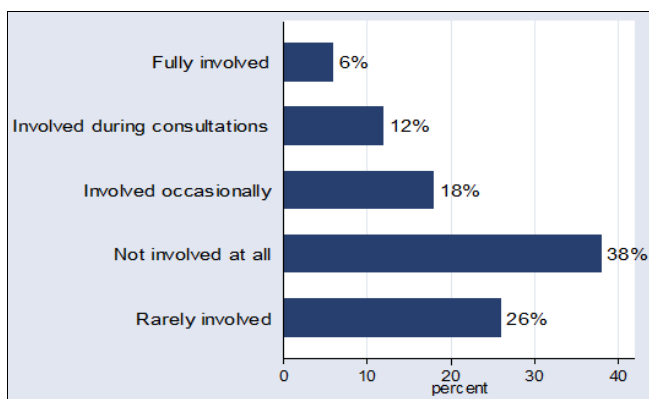e) Local Community Involvement in Decision Making

Fig 4.3.5: Local Community Involvement in Decision Making

Figure 4.3.5 on local community involvement in decision-making at Mwense Town Council shows limited engagement. 38% of respondents feel that the community is "Not involved at all", and 26%believe they are "Rarely involved." Only a small portion, 18%, report occasional involvement, while 12% state that the community is involved only during consultations. A mere 6% consider the community to be "Fully involved." These findings indicate that despite some efforts, local communities have limited participation in decision-making processes, highlighting a need for more inclusive and consistent engagement strategies.

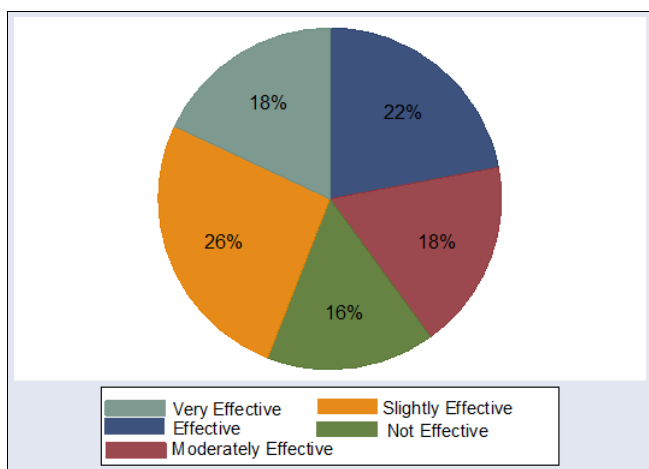f) Effectiveness of Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

Fig 4.3.6: Effectiveness of Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

As shown in figure 4.3.7, the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement strategies in the decentralization process at Mwense Town Council is viewed as mixed. 22% of respondents consider the strategies to be "Effective", and 18% rate them as "Very Effective." However, 26% feel the strategies are only "Slightly Effective", and 16% believe they are "Not Effective." Additionally, 18% consider them to be "Moderately Effective." These results suggest that while some strategies are seen as effective, a significant portion of respondents feel that the current engagement efforts need improvement to better foster stakeholder involvement and collaboration.

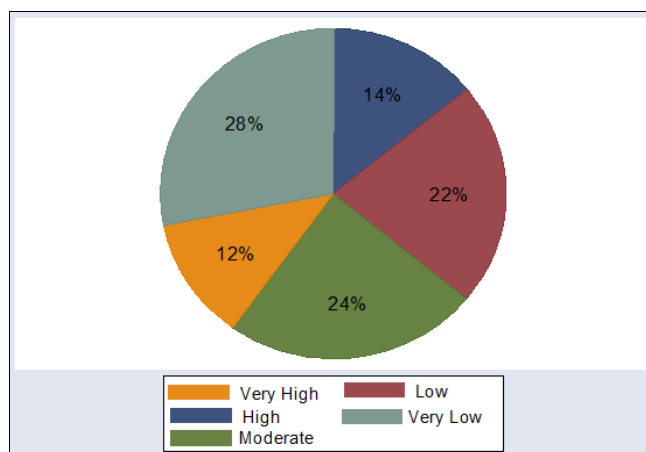g) Transparency and Accountability in Decentralization

Fig 4.3.8: Transparency and Accountability in Decentralization

Under Figure 4.3.21, the perception of transparency and accountability in decentralization-related activities at Mwense Town Council is largely negative. 28% of respondents feel that transparency and accountability are "Very Low", and 22% rate it as "Low." While 24% consider it to be "Moderate", only 14% believe the council exhibits "High" transparency and accountability, with 12% rating it as "Very High." These findings suggest that there are significant concerns regarding the council's transparency and accountability in implementing decentralization policies.

4.4 Presentation of results based on a thematic area developed from objective three: To identify the challenges faced by Mwense Town Council in executing the decentralization policy
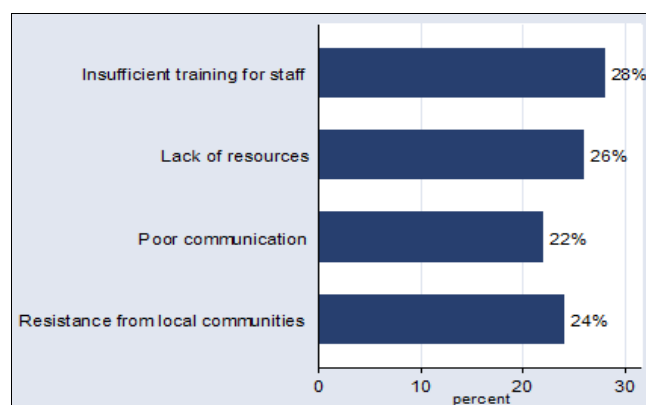a) Challenges in Decentralization

Fig 4.4.1: Challenges in Decentralization

As shown in figure 4.4.1, the biggest challenges in executing the decentralization policy at Mwense Town Council are perceived as insufficient training for staff (28%), followed by lack of resources (26%). Resistance from local communities is also a significant concern, with 24% of respondents citing it as a major challenge. Additionally, poor communication is highlighted by 22% of respondents. These findings suggest that while staff training and resource allocation are key barriers, addressing

communication gaps and community resistance are also crucial for the successful implementation of decentralization.

b) Communication and Coordination Challenges

Table 4.4.2: Communication and Coordination Challenges

Communication and Coordination Challenges	Freq.	Percent
Significant barrier	13	26
Minor barrier	13	26.
To some extent sometimes	16	32
Not a barrier	8	16
Total	50	100

Table 4.4.2,the data on communication and coordination challenges within Mwense Town Council indicates that 26% of respondents view it as a "Significant barrier", while another 26% see it as a "Minor barrier." 32% of respondents feel that these challenges are a barrier "To some extent sometimes," suggesting that communication and coordination issues occur intermittently. However, 16% believe that communication and coordination are "Not a barrier" at all. These findings suggest that while communication and coordination challenges are recognized as issues, they are not perceived as constant barriers, and there may be varying degrees of impact on decentralization efforts.Political Challenges in Decentralization

Table 4.4.3: Political Challenges in Decentralization
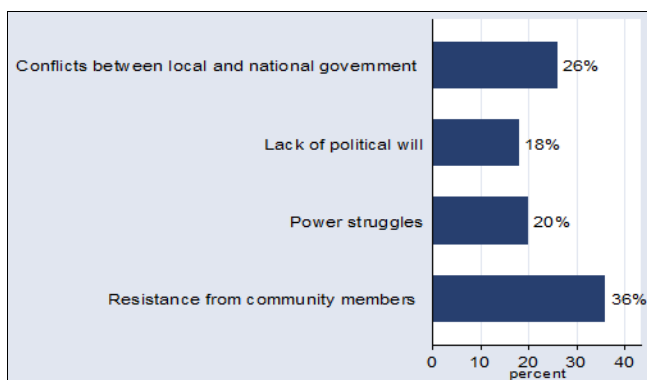
As depicted in Figure 4.4.3, the political challenges affecting the implementation of decentralization at Mwense Town Council are significant. 36% of respondents highlighted "Resistance from community members" as the most prominent challenge, followed by 26% who pointed to "Conflicts between local and national governments". 20% identified "Power struggles" within the local government as a barrier, and 18% cited a "Lack of political will" from local leaders. These findings suggest that political resistance, both from local communities and within government structures, poses substantial obstacles to successful decentralization, indicating the need for stronger political collaboration and community engagement strategies.
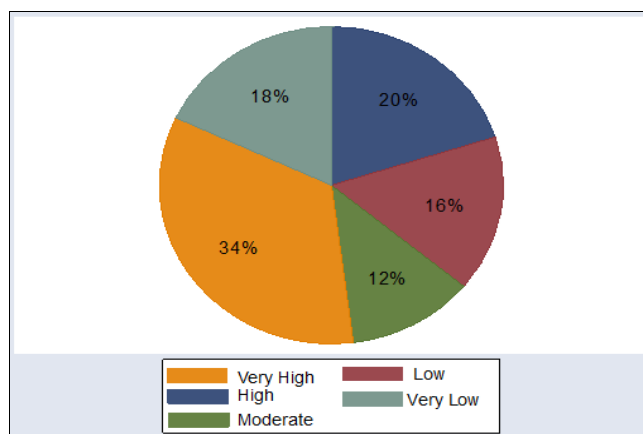
c) Impact of Political Interference

Figure 4.4.4. The impact of political interference on the implementation of decentralization policy at Mwense Town Council is perceived to be significant. 34% of respondents rated the impact as "Very High", and 20% considered it to be "High." 16% viewed the impact as "Low", while 12% saw it as "Moderate." However, 18% felt that political interference had a "Very Low" impact. These results suggest that political interference is seen as a major barrier by a large portion of respondents, particularly in hindering the effective implementation of decentralization policies.
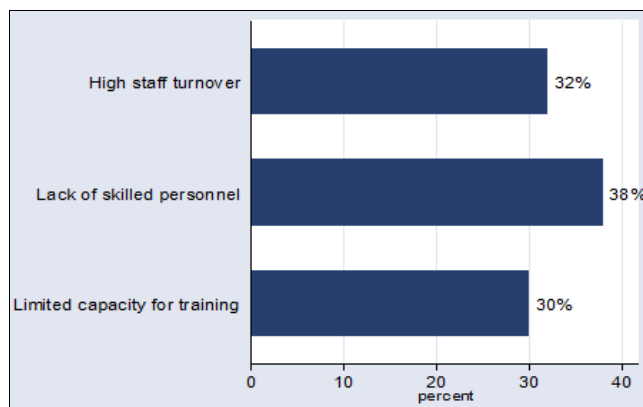
d) Human Resource Gaps

Fig 4.4.5: Human Resource Gaps

Figure 4.4.5 shows, the human resource gaps at Mwense Town Council that hinder effective decentralization policy implementation are primarily lack of skilled personnel (38%), followed by high staff turnover (32%) and limited capacity for training (30%). These gaps suggest that the council faces significant challenges in maintaining a skilled workforce, retaining staff, and providing adequate training opportunities. Addressing these issues is crucial for enhancing the council's ability to implement decentralization policies effectively and ensure long-term success in local governance.
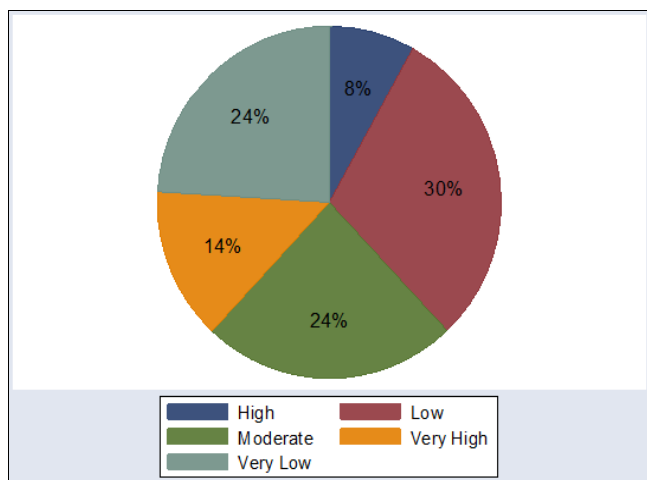
e) Public Awareness about Decentralization

Fig 4.4.6: Public Awareness about Decentralization

Figure 4.4.6, the level of public awareness about the decentralization policy at Mwense Town Council is relatively low. 30% of respondents rated the awareness as "Low", and 24% as "Very Low." A smaller portion, 24%, consider the awareness to be "Moderate", while 14% feel it is "Very High" and 8% rate it as "High." These findings suggest that while there is some awareness, a significant portion of the public has limited understanding of the decentralization policy, highlighting the need for more effective public awareness campaigns to improve knowledge and engagement.

4.5 Discussion of Research Findings
4.5.1 Discussion of research findings based on Background Characteristics of Respondents
Gender Representation: The respondents are 56% male and 44% female, promoting diverse perspectives essential for decision-making (Kumar, 2018) [17].

Age Distribution: Age groups are well-represented, with 34–44 and 55+ at 22%, and 18–25 at 20%. This diversity balances experience and innovation (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980) [8].

Departmental Representation: Planning (28%), Engineering (24%), and Finance (22%) dominate, indicating their critical roles in decentralization, while Health has only 8% representation (Smoke, 2003) [29].

Positions Held: Local government officials (42%) and civil society members (24%) play significant roles, highlighting the importance of various stakeholders (Mansuri and Rao, 2013) [18].

Educational Background: 38% hold bachelor's degrees, with 30% having advanced degrees, enhancing the council's capacity for complex policy implementation (Bahl and Linn, 1992) [3].

Years of Experience: Experience is varied, with 34% having 1–5 years, ensuring a mix of fresh ideas and historical knowledge (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

4.5.2 Discussion of research findings based on objective one. To assess the capacity of Mwense Town Council in implementing decentralization policy
Capacity Perception: Mixed ratings on the council's capacity, with 38% rating it low, indicating operational challenges (Faguet, 2004) [12].

Financial Resource Adequacy: Opinions on financial resources are polarized, with significant uncertainty affecting stakeholder trust (World Bank, 2017).

Staffing and Training: 52% find staffing inadequate; only 18% have training in decentralization, highlighting a critical gap (Ayee, 2000) [2].

Technological Resources: 56% express concerns about technological readiness, indicating a need for improvements (Smoke, 2003) [29].

Access to Skilled Personnel: Limited access to skilled personnel is reported, necessitating enhanced training and retention strategies (Mansuri & Rao, 2013) [18].

Infrastructural Capabilities: 44% have concerns about infrastructure sufficiency, indicating a need for improvements (Faguet, 2004) [12].

Leadership Support: Leadership is viewed as supportive by 50%, but perceptions vary significantly, indicating inconsistent effectiveness (Ayee, 2000) [2].

4.5.3 Discussion of results based on a thematic area developed from objective two: To analyze the perception of stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of decentralization at Mwense Town Council.
Training and Awareness: Only 28% reported receiving training, indicating a need for structured programs to enhance stakeholder engagement (Creswell, 2014).

Participation Mechanisms: Public hearings and forums are acknowledged, but 38% find them ineffective, suggesting a need for improvement (Ribot, 2002) [25].

Community Involvement: Limited community involvement is noted, with 38% feeling excluded, emphasizing the need for greater grassroots engagement (Mansuri and Rao, 2013) [18].

Engagement Strategies: Mixed effectiveness of engagement strategies suggests a need for a more inclusive approach (Faguet, 2004) [12].

Transparency and Accountability: Perceived transparency is low, with 50% rating it inadequately, highlighting the need for better reporting practices (World Bank, 2017).

4.5.4 Presentation of results based on a thematic area developed from objective three: To identify the challenges faced by Mwense Town Council in executing the decentralization policy
Staff Training: Insufficient training is a major barrier, with only 21 trained staff members, necessitating robust training programs (Smoke, 2003) [29].

Resource Constraints: Resource inadequacies are noted by 26%, underscoring the need for improved financial transparency (Faguet, 2004) [12].

Community Resistance: Resistance linked to low awareness of decentralization indicates a need for public engagement initiatives (Mansuri & Rao, 2013) [18].

Political Challenges: Political resistance and conflicts hinder decentralization efforts, impacting effective policy implementation (Ayee, 2000) [2].

Communication Issues: Communication challenges affect 52% of respondents, suggesting a need for clearer frameworks (Ribot, 2002) [25].

5. Conclusion
The study highlights Mwense Town Council's mixed capacity to implement decentralization policies, revealing both strengths and significant challenges. While diverse demographics among respondents provide valuable insights, gaps in financial resources, staffing, training, and technological readiness hinder effective decentralization.

Many respondents express concerns about the council's overall effectiveness (Faguet, 2004) [12]. Additionally, limited community involvement and transparency issues reflect broader systemic challenges in Zambia's local governance (Ayee, 2000) [2].

6. Recommendations
To enhance the council's capacity for decentralization, the following recommendations are proposed:
1. **Training and Capacity Building:** Implement training programs on decentralization and financial management, potentially through partnerships with educational institutions (Smoke, 2003) [29].
2. **Financial Transparency:** Establish clear communication regarding budget allocations and fund usage, enhancing stakeholder trust through regular public reports (World Bank, 2017).
3. **Community Engagement:** Create mechanisms for community involvement in decision-making, such as participatory budgeting, to empower citizens (Mansuri and Rao, 2013) [18].
4. **Leadership Engagement:** Increase council leadership visibility in decentralization efforts, advocating for goals through regular town hall meetings (Ayee, 2000) [2].
5. **Technological Upgrades:** Assess and upgrade technological infrastructure to improve departmental effectiveness and service delivery (Smoke, 2003) [29].
6. **Staffing Review:** Conduct a review of staffing levels to address imbalances and promote gender equity for better representation (Faguet, 2004) [12].

7. Acknowledgment

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