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LUSAKA

SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

**Evaluation of successes and challenges in service delivery through decentralization.  
A Comparative study of Katete and Chipata Local Authorities.**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to The School of Technology and Social Sciences in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the award of a Bachelor of Science Degree in Politics and  
International Relations.**

**By**

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**Author's Declaration**

I, Matildah Isaac Phiri, hereby declare that this dissertation titled "*Evaluation of Successes and Challenges in Service Delivery through Decentralization: A Comparative Study of Katete and Chipata Local Authorities*" is my original work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

To the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another author except where appropriate acknowledgment has been made within the text.

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Bachelor of Science in Politics and International Relations (BsPIR) at the University of Lusaka.

All sources of information consulted have been fully and accurately referenced.

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## **Abstract**

This study evaluated the successes and challenges of service delivery under Zambia's decentralization policy through a comparative analysis of Katete and Chipata Local Authorities. The research was guided by four objectives: assessing the extent and quality of service delivery, examining institutional and fiscal factors shaping performance, identifying major challenges affecting decentralized service provision, and proposing strategic interventions to strengthen local governance effectiveness. A mixed-methods design was employed, drawing on quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative insights from open-ended responses. The findings reveal marked disparities between the Two (02) Districts. Chipata demonstrated stronger institutional capacity, clearer administrative structures, better staffing levels, more reliable infrastructure development and higher community participation. Katete, in contrast, faced deeper fiscal constraints, staffing shortages, limited community engagement and weaker monitoring mechanisms. Recurrent challenges across both districts included delayed fiscal transfers, political interference, bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate human resource capacity and insufficient transparency. Despite these constraints, respondents emphasized that enhanced fiscal autonomy, continuous staff development, participatory governance and improved administrative coordination are essential for strengthening decentralized service delivery. The results affirm decentralization theory, which posits that local authorities deliver effectively when equipped with adequate resources, autonomy and accountability systems. The study concludes that meaningful improvements in Zambia's decentralization programme require strategic reforms that align fiscal empowerment, administrative efficiency and citizen engagement. Recommendations focus on reinforcing institutional capacity, deepening accountability mechanisms and expanding local participation. The study proposed further research to explore district-level political dynamics, digital governance innovations and long-term impacts of fiscal decentralization on rural service delivery.

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Above all, I acknowledge God's grace, wisdom and strength, which continually guided me to persevere, reflect and complete this academic milestone with integrity and confidence.

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my family, whose unconditional love, encouragement and resilience have shaped the person and scholar I am becoming. Their belief in my academic and professional path has been my greatest source of inspiration. I also dedicate this dissertation to every young woman determined to assert her intellectual voice, rise above limitations and pursue excellence with clarity, courage and purpose.

May this work serve as a reminder that disciplined effort, conviction and faith can transform challenges into defining achievements.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the introductory framework for the study, outlining the background, problem statement, research objectives, questions, significance and scope. The study evaluates the successes and challenges in service delivery under Zambia's decentralization policy by comparing two local authorities Katete and Chipata. The comparative design seeks to identify contextual similarities and divergences in policy implementation outcomes. The study is informed by Zambia's ongoing decentralization reforms and their intended impact on service delivery at the local level.

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Decentralization, broadly defined as the transfer of authority and responsibility from central to sub-national levels of government, has emerged globally as a governance reform mechanism aimed at enhancing service delivery, promoting accountability, and fostering citizen participation. In Africa, decentralization has been widely embraced as a tool for democratic deepening and local development. Empirical studies suggest that decentralization can improve efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of public services, particularly in rural and underserved areas (Smoke, 2003:9).

In Zambia, decentralization is formalized through the 2013 Revised National Decentralization Policy (R-NDP), which seeks to devolve functions, authority, and resources to local authorities to empower them to deliver public services efficiently, responsively, and accountably. The R-NDP articulates a vision of “a Zambia where local governance and decentralization are the basis of effective and efficient service delivery, poverty reduction, and sustainable development” (GRZ, 2013:4). The policy emphasizes devolution, citizen participation, transparency, and equity in service provision.

Despite the promise of decentralization, empirical evidence demonstrates mixed results across Zambia's local authorities. For example, Chikulo (2010) found that while some district councils achieved improvements in citizen engagement and basic service delivery, many continued to struggle with institutional capacity deficits and

inadequate financial resources. Munthali and Nyirenda (2020) noted that the implementation of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) often suffers from political interference and weak oversight, limiting its impact on service delivery. Similarly, Mufune (2021) highlights that human resource constraints, administrative inefficiencies, and limited technical expertise continue to undermine local authorities' ability to provide consistent and quality services. These studies collectively demonstrate that decentralization outcomes in Zambia are highly variable and contingent on local institutional and governance capacities.

Katete and Chipata, both located in Zambia's Eastern Province, offer a compelling comparative case. Katete, being more rural and less economically developed, contrasts with Chipata, an urbanized provincial capital with better infrastructure and institutional capacity. This contrast provides an opportunity to empirically assess how contextual factors influence the successes and challenges of decentralized service delivery. Wunsch and Olowu (2000:35) emphasize that decentralization outcomes are not uniform but vary depending on the capacity, political will, and social capital of local authorities an observation consistent with empirical findings in Zambia.

The importance of evaluating service delivery under decentralization is particularly evident in the context of CDF projects and other community-based initiatives. Conyers (2007:23) argues that "in the absence of effective local governance structures, decentralization risks becoming a hollow reform, producing limited impact on citizens' welfare." Empirical observations from Zambian districts support this claim, showing that local authorities with stronger institutional structures and active citizen participation deliver more effective services than those lacking such capacities.

By focusing on Katete and Chipata, this study responds to the evident knowledge gap in empirical, evidence-based research on decentralization in Zambia. While national policy frameworks outline the goals and mechanisms for devolved governance, their actualization on the ground remains underexplored. This research therefore provides a comparative, empirically grounded analysis of how decentralization translates into practical service delivery outcomes, identifying both success factors and systemic challenges that can inform policy and institutional reforms.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Despite decentralization being a cornerstone of Zambia's governance and development strategy, significant disparities persist in the effectiveness of service delivery across local authorities. The 2013 Revised National Decentralization Policy (R-NDP) seeks to devolve functions, responsibilities, and resources to local governments to improve efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness (GRZ, 2013:5). However, evidence indicates a persistent gap between the policy's objectives and practical outcomes at the district level.

Katete and Chipata Local Authorities, both operating under the same national framework, exhibit contrasting service delivery outcomes. Chipata, as a provincial capital, benefits from stronger institutional capacity, more consistent fiscal transfers, and greater technical expertise. Katete, on the other hand, faces challenges including infrastructural deficits, administrative inefficiencies, and limited community participation. This divergence highlights a critical problem: why do some local authorities perform better than others under the same decentralization policy?

Previous studies in Zambia have explored decentralization and service delivery in varying contexts. Chikulo (2010) examined local government capacities and citizen participation, highlighting the gap between policy intent and actual implementation at district levels. Munthali and Nyirenda (2020) focused on fiscal transfers and the management of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), noting that political interference and limited oversight often undermine service delivery effectiveness. Mufune (2021) analyzed administrative and technical constraints in local authorities, emphasizing that weak institutional capacity significantly affects performance outcomes. While these studies provide important insights, they generally focus on single districts or national-level assessments and lack a comparative analysis to explain variations in service delivery performance between local authorities operating under the same decentralization framework.

This knowledge gap underscores the need for a comparative evaluation. By examining Katete and Chipata, this study seeks to identify the factors contributing to both successes and challenges in service delivery under decentralization. The findings are expected to inform evidence-based policy reforms, strengthen local governance, and promote more equitable access to public services in Zambia.

## **Main Objective of the Study**

Evaluation of successes and challenges in service delivery through decentralization, a Comparative study of Katete and Chipata Local Authorities.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

1. To assess public service delivery in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities under the decentralization framework.
2. To examine the factors contributing to successes in service delivery in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities.
3. To identify challenges hindering effective service delivery in Katete and Chipata under the decentralized system.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What is the state of public service delivery in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities under the decentralization framework?
2. What factors contribute to successes in service delivery in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities?
3. What challenges hinder effective service delivery in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities under the decentralization system?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study holds critical importance in the context of Zambia's ongoing efforts to strengthen democratic governance, enhance local accountability and improve service delivery through decentralization. Despite policy commitments to devolution, there remains a knowledge gap regarding how decentralization manifests in practice across different districts. This research provides timely, comparative insights that can inform national, provincial and local policy discourse.

According to Smoke (2003:12), "Decentralization does not automatically lead to improved service delivery; its success depends on the interplay of institutional capacities, political commitment and community engagement." In this regard, the comparative analysis between Katete and Chipata Local Authorities offers a unique

opportunity to identify best practices, highlight context-specific challenges and recommend reforms that are grounded in empirical evidence.

Furthermore, this study contributes to academic discourse by enriching the body of knowledge on decentralization and local governance in Sub-Saharan Africa. It bridges the gap between theoretical expectations and practical realities by applying a comparative lens to two distinct districts under the same policy regime.

At the policy level, findings from this study are expected to inform the Cabinet Office, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and other stakeholders involved in the implementation and review of Zambia's decentralization policy. The study will also benefit civil society organizations, development partners and local leaders seeking to advocate for inclusive, efficient, and accountable local service delivery.

Lastly, by engaging with local actors and end-users of public services, the research amplifies citizen voices and highlights how decentralized governance affects daily livelihoods at the grassroots level thereby reinforcing the democratic imperative of participatory development.

### **1.6 Scope Of the Study**

This study focuses on a comparative evaluation of the successes and challenges in service delivery under the decentralization framework in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities, located in Zambia's Eastern Province. Specifically, the research examines the implementation outcomes of the decentralization policy in relation to the provision of key public services, including healthcare, education, water and sanitation, and local infrastructure development. The study incorporates perspectives from multiple stakeholders, including local government officials, Ward Development Committee members, community leaders, and ordinary residents, allowing for a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder analysis.

The temporal scope of the research covers the period 2015 to 2025, which aligns with the operational period of the Revised National Decentralization Policy (2013). This timeframe enables an analysis of trends, progress, and emerging challenges in service delivery over a meaningful and sustained implementation period.

The geographical scope is limited to Katete and Chipata districts to allow for an in-depth, comparative assessment. These two local authorities were purposively

selected due to their differences in administrative capacity, population density, and historical investment in decentralized functions, providing a strong basis for comparative analysis.

As noted by Yin (2014:5), “A clearly defined scope is essential to enable focused case study research and to avoid drifting into unrelated issues.” Accordingly, the parameters set in this study are designed to ensure methodological clarity, analytical depth, and research manageability, while maintaining the relevance and integrity of the findings.

## **1.7 Definition of Key Concepts**

### **Decentralization:**

Decentralization refers to the transfer of authority, responsibilities, and resources from central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector (Rondinelli, 1981:137). In Zambia, this involves the delegation of service delivery functions and decision-making powers to local authorities such as district councils.

### **Service Delivery:**

Service delivery refers to the provision of public goods and services such as water, sanitation, health care, education and infrastructure by government institutions to citizens in an efficient, equitable and sustainable manner (World Bank, 2004:26). In this study, it is used to assess the effectiveness and challenges of local authorities in delivering these services under decentralized governance.

### **Local Authorities:**

Local authorities are statutory institutions of governance at the sub-national level, responsible for managing local affairs and delivering services to communities within their jurisdiction. In Zambia, these are municipal or district councils established under the Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019 (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2019).

### **Successes:**

Successes in this study refer to positive outcomes, achievements and improvements in service delivery, such as increased access to services, enhanced participation, improved infrastructure and efficient use of local resources (OECD, 2008).

**Challenges:**

Challenges refer to the obstacles, limitations and barriers that hinder the effective implementation of decentralization, including inadequate funding, lack of capacity, political interference and poor coordination (Smoke, 2003:11).

**Comparative Study:**

A comparative study involves a systematic analysis and evaluation of similarities and differences between two or more cases, in this instance, Katete and Chipata Districts to draw insights, patterns and context-specific conclusions (Hantrais, 2009:72).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Overview**

This chapter reviews existing literature on decentralization and its impact on public service delivery, focusing on assessing public service delivery, examining factors contributing to successes, and identifying challenges affecting decentralized service delivery. Decentralization has been widely promoted as a governance reform strategy aimed at improving efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness in public service delivery by transferring authority and responsibilities from central governments to local authorities (World Bank, 2001). The assumption is that local governments are better positioned to understand local needs and deliver services more effectively. However, the outcomes of decentralization have varied across countries and regions depending on institutional capacity, fiscal autonomy, governance systems, and political commitment (Smoke, 2015). This literature review examines global, African, and Zambian experiences to provide a comprehensive understanding of decentralization and service delivery, while identifying gaps that justify the comparative study of Katete and Chipata Local Authorities.

#### **2.2 Empirical Review**

##### **2.2.1 Public Service Delivery under Decentralization**

Decentralization has been widely associated with improvements in public service delivery at the global level. According to the World Bank (2001), decentralization enhances service delivery by enabling local governments to make decisions that reflect local priorities. Rondinelli (1981) argues that decentralization improves efficiency by reducing bureaucratic delays and bringing decision-making closer to the people. In Latin America, decentralization reforms in Bolivia and Colombia led to improved service delivery in education, healthcare, and infrastructure due to increased local government autonomy and accountability (Faguet, 2014). Similarly, OECD (2018) reports that European countries such as Sweden and Germany have achieved high-quality service delivery due to strong institutional frameworks, fiscal autonomy, and clear administrative structures. These experiences demonstrate that

decentralization can enhance service delivery when supported by strong governance systems.

In Africa, decentralization has produced mixed results. In Uganda, decentralization improved citizen participation and enhanced service delivery in sectors such as education and healthcare, as local governments were able to respond more effectively to community needs (Francis and James, 2003). South Africa has also experienced improvements in service delivery due to fiscal decentralization and strong institutional structures that support local government autonomy (Smoke, 2015). However, in countries such as Nigeria, decentralization has not significantly improved service delivery due to corruption, weak administrative capacity, and financial dependence on central government (Agba et al., 2013). Similarly, Kenya's decentralization reforms improved infrastructure and healthcare services, but political interference and corruption have limited the effectiveness of local governments (Bosire and Gikonyo, 2012). These findings suggest that decentralization alone does not guarantee improved service delivery, as its success depends on institutional capacity, governance quality, and financial resources.

In Zambia, decentralization has been implemented through the National Decentralization Policy, which aims to improve service delivery and promote local governance (Government of Zambia, 2013). Studies by Chikulo (2010) indicate that decentralization has improved citizen participation and local accountability. However, service delivery improvements have been constrained by financial limitations and lack of administrative capacity. Munthali and Nyirenda (2020) note that decentralization has contributed to infrastructure development through the Constituency Development Fund, but its overall impact on service delivery has been limited due to weak implementation mechanisms. Similarly, Mufune (2021) found that many local authorities lack skilled personnel and financial resources necessary for effective service delivery. These challenges are particularly evident in rural districts, where decentralization has not fully achieved its intended objectives.

### **2.2.2 Factors Contributing to Successes in Service Delivery under Decentralization**

Several factors contribute to successful service delivery under decentralization globally. Institutional capacity is one of the most important factors, as local

governments require skilled personnel, administrative systems, and management capacity to deliver services effectively (Smoke, 2015). Fiscal autonomy is also critical, as local governments need adequate financial resources to implement development programs and provide essential services (Oates, 1972). Countries with strong fiscal decentralization systems, such as Germany and Sweden, have achieved high service delivery performance due to adequate financial support and institutional strength (OECD, 2018). Additionally, community participation plays an important role in improving service delivery by enhancing accountability and ensuring that services reflect local needs (Arnstein, 1969). Faguet (2014) found that community participation improved service delivery outcomes in Latin America by promoting transparency and accountability.

In Africa, institutional capacity and fiscal decentralization are key factors influencing successful service delivery. In Uganda, decentralization improved service delivery due to strong institutional structures and active community participation (Francis and James, 2003). Similarly, South Africa's decentralization reforms improved service delivery due to effective fiscal decentralization and administrative capacity (Smoke, 2015). However, weak institutional capacity remains a major challenge in many African countries. According to the African Development Bank (2019), inadequate financial resources, weak governance systems, and lack of administrative capacity limit service delivery effectiveness in many African local governments.

In Zambia, institutional capacity and financial resources play a crucial role in determining service delivery outcomes. Chikulo (2010) found that local authorities with strong administrative capacity are more effective in delivering services. The Constituency Development Fund has contributed to infrastructure development and improved service delivery in some districts, although its effectiveness depends on proper management and accountability (Munthali and Nyirenda, 2020). Community participation has also improved service delivery in some districts by enhancing accountability and transparency (Zimba and Zulu, 2019). However, political interference and financial constraints continue to limit the effectiveness of decentralization in improving service delivery.

### **2.2.3 Challenges Hindering Effective Service Delivery under Decentralization**

Despite its potential benefits, decentralization faces several challenges globally. Lack of institutional capacity is a major constraint, as local governments often lack the administrative skills and resources required to deliver services effectively (Rondinelli, 1981). Fiscal constraints also limit service delivery, as local governments require adequate financial resources to perform their functions (Oates, 1972). Political interference further undermines decentralization by affecting decision-making processes and resource allocation (Sharma, 2005).

In Africa, decentralization faces similar challenges. Smoke (2003) argues that weak institutional capacity, financial constraints, and political interference limit service delivery effectiveness in many African countries. Corruption is also a major challenge, as it reduces accountability and affects the efficient use of public resources (Agba et al., 2013). Additionally, lack of skilled personnel and administrative capacity limits the ability of local governments to deliver services effectively (African Development Bank, 2019).

In Zambia, decentralization faces several challenges that affect service delivery. Financial constraints limit the ability of local governments to provide essential services (Chikulo, 2010). Political interference also affects service delivery by influencing resource allocation and decision-making processes (Mufune, 2021). Furthermore, lack of skilled personnel and administrative capacity limits service delivery effectiveness (Munthali and Nyirenda, 2020). These challenges highlight the need for institutional strengthening and improved governance systems to enhance service delivery under decentralization.

### **2.3 Critique of Literature**

The reviewed literature reveals a breadth of studies that examine decentralization and its impact on service delivery globally, across Africa and within Zambia. However, despite the richness of the existing body of knowledge, several critical gaps and limitations are evident, warranting the present study.

Firstly, much of the global and African literature tends to generalize the outcomes of decentralization, often without sufficient contextual nuance. Scholars such as Smoke (2003:12) and Francis & James (2003:327) offer valuable insights into the structural challenges of decentralization in Africa, yet their analyses often focus on national-level

experiences or capital cities, leaving peripheral or rural settings underexplored. This leaves a gap in understanding how decentralization functions in smaller, less-resourced local authorities, such as Katete and Chipata Districts in Zambia.

Secondly, most empirical studies reviewed emphasize either the theoretical benefits or the systemic challenges of decentralization but few adopt a balanced, comparative approach that systematically evaluates both successes and failures in local service delivery. For instance, Agba et al. (2013:144) provide a detailed account of service delivery shortcomings in Nigerian local governments but do not explore cases where decentralization may have succeeded under similar constraints. This lack of comparative evaluation restricts policy learning and evidence-based reform.

Thirdly, within the Zambian context, while notable contributions have been made by Chikulo (2010:21), Munthali & Nyirenda (2020:66), and Mufune (2021:85), most of these studies focus broadly on decentralization policy, financial allocations, or governance mechanisms. Few engage with service delivery outcomes across multiple local authorities using a comparative lens. The result is an uneven body of literature that lacks specificity on how differing institutional capacities, leadership practices and resource utilization patterns influence service delivery at the district level.

Furthermore, participatory governance and community involvement, though emphasized in decentralization policies, are often treated in literature as ideal goals rather than empirically measured variables. This creates a gap in understanding the extent to which community participation correlates with improved service outcomes on the ground.

Lastly, the reviewed studies generally lack integration with robust theoretical frameworks to explain the dynamics of decentralization, governance performance and service delivery. While some reference governance theories, many do not systematically apply them to interpret findings or guide their methodologies.

Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering a comparative, theoretically grounded and empirically detailed evaluation of the successes and challenges in service delivery under decentralization, focusing on Katete and Chipata two rural but administratively significant districts in Zambia.

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

The study is grounded in Decentralization Theory, complemented by the Principal-Agent Theory and Public Choice Theory to provide a multidimensional understanding of how decentralization affects service delivery at the local level.

### **2.6.1 Decentralization Theory**

Decentralization Theory posits that transferring authority, responsibilities, and resources from central to local governments improves governance efficiency, enhances service delivery, and fosters citizen participation (Rondinelli, 1981). It assumes that local governments, being closer to their communities, are better positioned to understand and respond to local needs. The theory identifies political, administrative, and fiscal forms of decentralization, each influencing the capacity and accountability of local authorities. Political decentralization allows elected local bodies to participate in governance; administrative decentralization redistributes management responsibilities to improve efficiency; and fiscal decentralization provides local governments with financial resources to execute development programs. However, the theory also acknowledges that without adequate institutional support, technical capacity, and fiscal resources, decentralization may produce fragmented governance or exacerbate inequalities (Cheema and Rondinelli, 2007). This perspective is particularly relevant for this study, as it provides the basis for assessing public service delivery in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities and understanding why outcomes may differ across districts under the same national framework.

### **2.6.2 Principal-Agent Theory**

This theory explains the relationship between central governments (principals) and local authorities (agents) in decentralized systems (Jensen and Meckling, 1976). It is based on the assumption that while principals delegate authority and responsibilities to agents, agents may act in their own self-interest, which may not always align with the goals of the principal. This misalignment can create risks such as inefficiency, moral hazard, rent-seeking, and mismanagement of resources. The theory further assumes that information asymmetry often exists, meaning the principal cannot fully monitor the actions of the agent, which can result in suboptimal outcomes unless appropriate oversight and incentive structures are in place.

Effective decentralization therefore requires clear delegation of authority, well-defined mandates, robust monitoring systems, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that local governments implement policies as intended. In the Zambian context, local authorities like Katete and Chipata are responsible for planning, implementing, and delivering services such as water, education, health, and infrastructure development. However, the central government retains substantial control over fiscal allocations, disbursement timing, and oversight procedures. This creates a complex dynamic where local councils are accountable for service delivery outcomes but are constrained by limited financial autonomy and administrative support.

As a result, the performance of local authorities can vary widely, even under the same decentralization policies. Differences in institutional capacity, leadership effectiveness, adherence to regulations, and community engagement influence how resources are used and services delivered. Principal-Agent Theory thus provides a valuable lens for analyzing both the successes and challenges in service delivery observed in Katete and Chipata, highlighting how the interaction between central oversight and local autonomy shapes the efficiency, responsiveness, and accountability of decentralized governance.

### **2.6.3 Public Choice Theory**

Public Choice Theory further complements the analysis of decentralization by emphasizing the role of citizen engagement, local competition, and individual incentives in improving service delivery (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962). The theory assumes that all actors in the public sector including elected officials, bureaucrats, and community leaders are guided by self-interest, similar to participants in markets. In the context of decentralized governance, this means that local officials will respond more effectively to citizen demands when there are incentives to do so, such as the desire to maintain legitimacy, re-election prospects, or social approval. Decentralization, therefore, creates an environment where local governments compete to provide better services, aligning the self-interest of officials with the welfare of the community.

Additionally, the theory assumes that citizens act as active participants rather than passive recipients of public services. Through mechanisms such as voting, participation in community meetings, feedback on service delivery, and oversight of local projects, citizens can influence how resources are allocated and ensure that

services meet local needs. The presence of local competition among districts can also encourage innovation, efficiency, and responsiveness, as councils seek to demonstrate effective governance relative to neighboring jurisdictions.

In the Zambian context, and specifically in Katete and Chipata, Public Choice Theory helps explain variations in service delivery performance. Local authorities operate within the same national policy framework but face different levels of citizen engagement, leadership responsiveness, and administrative capacity. Districts where communities are more active in monitoring development projects and participating in decision-making tend to see better outcomes in service delivery, as officials are incentivized to act efficiently and transparently. This theoretical lens is therefore particularly valuable for evaluating how community involvement, accountability mechanisms, and local competition contribute to both successes and challenges in service delivery, providing insights into why decentralization can produce divergent outcomes even within similar administrative and policy contexts.

#### **2.6.4 Justification for Theoretical Framework**

By combining these three theories, the study gains a comprehensive analytical framework. Decentralization Theory explains the structural dimensions and expected outcomes of local governance reforms; Principal-Agent Theory highlights issues of accountability, delegation, and alignment of incentives; and Public Choice Theory emphasizes the importance of citizen engagement and competition in shaping service delivery. Together, these theories enable a nuanced understanding of why decentralization may yield different outcomes across districts, despite being guided by the same policy framework, providing a strong foundation for analyzing successes and challenges in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities.

#### **2.7 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study illustrated the relationships between the independent, mediating and dependent variables in evaluating service delivery under decentralization in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities.

- **Independent Variables:** Institutional factors, fiscal capacity, administrative competence and leadership practices of local authorities. These are the key determinants that influence how decentralization is operationalized.

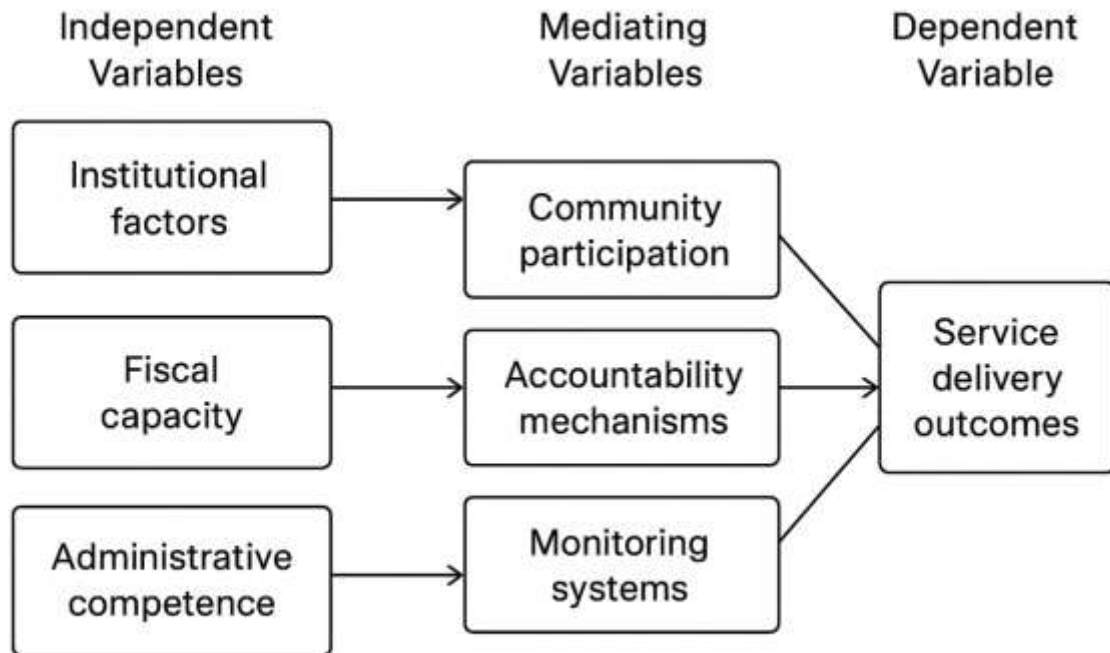
- **Mediating Variables:** Community participation, accountability mechanisms and monitoring systems. These factors mediate the relationship between local authority capacity and service delivery outcomes by enhancing responsiveness, transparency and citizen engagement.
- **Dependent Variable:** Service delivery outcomes, measured by the extent, quality, and efficiency of core public services such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation, and local infrastructure development.

### **2.7.1 Illustration of Relationships:**

Institutional capacity, fiscal resources and administrative efficiency (independent variables) influence service delivery outcomes (dependent variable). This relationship was mediated by mechanisms such as community participation, accountability structures and monitoring systems (mediating variables) which enhanced the effectiveness, equity and sustainability of service provision.

This framework provided a structured lens to analyze how variations in local authority capabilities, combined with citizen engagement and governance mechanisms, shaped the successes and challenges of decentralized service delivery. It guided the study's empirical assessment by linking theoretical constructs to measurable service outcomes.

### 2.7.2 Visual Diagram Of This Conceptual Framework



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodological framework employed in the study titled “Evaluation of Successes and Challenges in Service Delivery through Decentralization: A Comparative Study of Katete and Chipata Local Authorities.” It details and justifies the research paradigm, research approach, research design, study area, target population, sampling procedures and techniques, sample size determination and allocation, data collection methods and instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis strategies, validity and reliability measures, and ethical considerations. The chapter demonstrates methodological rigor and ensures alignment between the research objectives and the data collected, enhancing the reliability, validity, and credibility of the findings.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

The study adopted a pragmatic research paradigm, which prioritizes the research problem and allows the use of multiple methods to produce practical, contextually relevant findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Decentralization and service delivery are multidimensional phenomena, involving quantitative outcomes such as service accessibility, coverage, and citizen satisfaction, alongside qualitative aspects such as institutional capacity, leadership responsiveness, and community participation. Pragmatism was appropriate because it supports integration of qualitative and quantitative methods, encourages triangulation to enhance validity, and emphasizes practical understanding of the research problem rather than adherence to a single methodological approach.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The quantitative component measured citizen satisfaction, access to services, and perceptions of service effectiveness, allowing statistical comparisons between Katete and Chipata. The qualitative component explored contextual and institutional dimensions, including administrative and fiscal challenges,

leadership accountability, and community engagement through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Integrating these methods allowed the study to capture not only what differences exist in service delivery but also why these differences occur, providing a richer and more actionable analysis.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The study employed a comparative case study design, which investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2014). The comparative element enabled a cross-district analysis under the same decentralization framework, highlighting how differences in institutional capacity, socio-economic context, and governance affect service delivery outcomes. This design facilitated detailed analysis of governance processes, identification of district-specific successes and challenges, and rigorous explanation of observed differences.

### **3.4 Study Area**

The research was conducted in Katete and Chipata Districts, Eastern Province, Zambia. Chipata, as the provincial capital, benefits from relatively advanced infrastructure, administrative systems, and technical capacity. Katete, by contrast, is predominantly rural, with lower fiscal capacity, limited technical expertise, and less developed infrastructure. These districts were purposively selected because they operate under the same national decentralization policy yet differ in socio-economic and institutional characteristics, allowing for a meaningful comparative evaluation of service delivery (Mukwena, 2004; Conyers, 2007).

### **3.5 Target Population**

The study targeted stakeholders directly involved in, or affected by, decentralized service delivery. These included local authority employees, Ward Development Committee (WDC) members, traditional and community leaders, and local residents who are beneficiaries of public services. Inclusion of these groups ensured a multi-level perspective encompassing policy implementers, oversight actors, and service recipients, thereby capturing both governance and user experiences of decentralization (Smoke, 2003).

### 3.6 Sample Size Determination and Allocation

The total sample size for this study was 180 respondents, divided equally between Katete and Chipata (90 respondents per district). The sample size was calculated using a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of  $\pm 7\%$ , which is consistent with standard social science research practice for achieving statistically reliable results (Cochran, 1977; Israel, 1992). This confidence level ensured that the study results reflect the population within acceptable statistical error, while remaining feasible given logistical and resource constraints.

The sample was allocated across stakeholder groups to capture diverse perspectives as follows: 30 local authority employees (15 per district), 40 WDC and community leaders (20 per district), and 110 local residents (55 per district). This distribution ensured proportional representation, emphasized the experiences of service beneficiaries, and maintained balance between institutional and community viewpoints.

**Table 3.1: Sample Size Allocation Across Stakeholder Groups and Districts**

Stakeholder Group	Katete	Chipata	Total
Local Authority Employees	15	15	30
WDC/Community Leaders	20	20	40
Local Residents	55	55	110
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>180</b>

**Justification:** The sample size and allocation were designed to balance quantitative representativeness with qualitative depth. Local residents, being primary service recipients, constituted the largest proportion to reflect population experiences. Employees and community leaders were sampled to provide governance and oversight perspectives, offering insights into institutional and participatory dimensions of service delivery.

### **3.7 Sampling Procedures and Techniques**

A multi-stage sampling approach was employed to ensure representativeness, reliability, and methodological rigor. This method allowed for the structured selection of participants across different stakeholder groups, ensuring that both institutional and community perspectives were adequately captured. Multi-stage sampling was particularly suitable because the study involved multiple categories of participants—local authority employees, community leaders, and residents—across two districts with differing socio-economic and administrative contexts.

#### **Selection of Districts:**

Katete and Chipata were purposively selected to provide contrasting socio-economic and institutional environments while operating under the same decentralization framework. Katete is predominantly rural with lower fiscal capacity and less developed infrastructure, whereas Chipata, as a provincial capital, enjoys relatively advanced administrative systems and service delivery infrastructure.

**Justification:** Purposive selection was necessary to facilitate a meaningful comparative analysis. The contrasting contexts of the two districts enabled the study to examine how differences in institutional capacity, leadership, and resource availability affect the successes and challenges of decentralized service delivery. Random selection could have included districts with insufficient variation, limiting analytical depth and the explanatory power of the study (Wunsch and Olowu, 2000; Smoke, 2003).

#### **Selection of Local Authority Employees:**

Local authority employees, including councillors, planners, and finance officers, were purposively sampled, with inclusion criteria requiring a minimum of two years' service and direct involvement in decentralization implementation.

**Justification:** These employees possess specialized institutional knowledge essential for understanding administrative, fiscal, and governance processes. Purposive sampling ensured that participants could provide reliable and informed insights. Randomly selecting employees without regard to their experience or role could have resulted in participants lacking the necessary knowledge, compromising the validity of

data on operational challenges and service delivery outcome (Conyers, 2007; Mukwena, 2004).

### **Selection of WDC and Community Leaders:**

Ward Development Committee members and other community leaders were purposively selected based on their active engagement in participatory governance and oversight of community projects, including Constituency Development Fund initiatives.

**Justification:** These leaders are key actors in local accountability and citizen engagement processes. Purposive sampling ensured that the study captured governance perspectives from stakeholders directly involved in monitoring and influencing service delivery. Their insights allowed the research to assess the effectiveness of decentralization beyond administrative operations, focusing on community participation, transparency, and oversight mechanisms (Conyers, 2007; Smoke, 2003).

### **Selection of Local Residents:**

Local residents were selected using a combination of stratified random sampling and systematic sampling. Five wards per district were randomly selected to ensure geographic representation. Within each ward, every fifth household was systematically sampled, and one eligible adult resident per household was randomly chosen. Inclusion criteria required participants to be 18 years or older, residents for at least three years, and beneficiaries of local public services. Temporary residents and individuals under 18 were excluded.

**Justification:** Stratification ensured that residents from different wards were proportionally represented, capturing geographic and socio-economic diversity. Systematic sampling minimized selection bias and increased objectivity in household selection. Random selection of one adult per household allowed for equal probability of inclusion, enhancing the reliability and generalizability of findings. This approach ensured that the largest stakeholder group service beneficiaries was adequately represented, reflecting their perspectives on the effectiveness of decentralized service delivery. population (Cochran, 1977; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

### **3.8 Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of service delivery under decentralization. Structured questionnaires were administered to 110 local residents and 30 local authority employees, collecting quantitative data on citizens' satisfaction with services, accessibility to core public services, and perceived effectiveness of local government performance. Questionnaires were appropriate for these groups because they allowed standardized measurement across a large sample, facilitated comparisons between Katete and Chipata, and provided statistically analyzable data.

Semi-structured interview guides were used to collect qualitative data from 20 senior local authority officials and 20 community leaders, making a total of 40 in-depth interviews. These instruments enabled participants to discuss institutional capacity, administrative and fiscal challenges, governance practices, and community engagement in detail. The semi-structured format allowed probing for clarity, exploration of emerging issues, and contextual insights not possible through questionnaires. Combining questionnaires and interviews strengthened triangulation, enhanced validity, and provided a multi-dimensional understanding of how decentralization functions in practice.

### **3.9 Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection was conducted over six weeks. Permissions were obtained from the respective councils and community leaders before commencing research activities. The process began with the administration of structured questionnaires to 110 local residents and 30 council employees, ensuring participants fully understood the questions. After quantitative data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 senior local authority officials and 20 community leaders, scheduled at times convenient for participants. Interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis. This sequential explanatory approach allowed preliminary quantitative findings to inform qualitative interviews, enhancing the interpretation and contextual depth of the results.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) summarized satisfaction, service access, and perceived effectiveness, while inferential statistics (Chi-square tests of independence) examined associations between categorical variables and compared outcomes between Katete and Chipata. Inferential statistics were suitable because the data were categorical, and the study focused on relationships between variables rather than predictive modeling.

Qualitative data from 40 semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Recorded interviews were transcribed, coded, categorized into themes, and linked to the study's objectives. This process helped identify institutional and governance factors influencing service delivery outcomes, explaining differences observed between the two districts (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Yin, 2014).

### **3.11 Validity and Reliability**

Validity was enhanced through pre-testing instruments in non-sample wards to improve clarity and refine questions. Content validity was ensured by aligning questionnaire and interview items with the research objectives. Reliability was achieved through consistent administration of questionnaires, standardization of interview procedures, and systematic selection of respondents. Member-checking in interviews allowed participants to verify their responses, increasing trustworthiness. Triangulation between quantitative and qualitative data further strengthened the robustness and credibility of the findings (Saunders et al., 2009).

### **3.12 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained, participants were assured of confidentiality, and data were securely stored. Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw at any stage. The study adhered to the Belmont Report principles, including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

#### 4.0 Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study titled “Evaluation of Successes and Challenges in Service Delivery through Decentralization: A Comparative Study of Katete and Chipata Local Authorities.” The results are organised according to the four research objectives to ensure alignment between the methodology and analysis.

The findings are based on a total sample of 180 respondents, comprising 90 respondents from Katete and 90 from Chipata out of the total population of 222 595 for Katete and 327, 059 for Chipata District. Of these, 140 respondents completed structured questionnaires, while 40 respondents participated in semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data are presented using frequencies and percentages to allow comparison between the two districts, while qualitative insights from the interviews are integrated to explain and support the statistical patterns observed.

#### 4.1 Response Rate

The study achieved a strong overall response rate across both data collection methods. Out of the 140 questionnaires distributed to respondents comprising 110 local residents and 30 local authority employees all were completed and returned, representing a 100% questionnaire response rate. Additionally, all 40 scheduled semi-structured interviews with 20 senior local authority officials and 20 community leaders were successfully conducted, resulting in a 100% interview participation rate. The complete engagement from participants ensures that the study findings are representative of both service beneficiaries and key institutional stakeholders in Katete and Chipata, enhancing the credibility, reliability, and robustness of the study’s results.

#### 4.2 Demographic Information of Respondents

The study collected demographic data from a total of 180 respondents, equally divided between Katete (90) and Chipata (90). Respondents represented a range of roles within local authorities and community structures and had varying levels of experience interacting with local service delivery.

#### 4.2.1 District Representation

District	Frequency	Percentage
Katete	90	50%
Chipata	90	50%
Total	180	100%

The sample was evenly distributed across the two districts, with 50% of respondents from Katete and 50% from Chipata. This balanced representation ensures that findings capture perspectives from both rural and urban contexts under the decentralization framework.

#### 4.2.2 Position/Role of Respondents

Position/Role	Katete (n=90)	Chipata (n=90)	Total (n=180)
Senior Management	10	12	22
Middle Management	8	10	18
Technical Officer	12	15	27
Support Staff	15	13	28
Ward Development Committee Member	20	20	40
Community Representative	20	18	38
Other	5	2	7
Total	90	90	180

The respondents represented a diverse mix of roles within local authorities and community structures. Most respondents were Ward Development Committee (WDC) members and community representatives, reflecting the study's emphasis on

understanding service delivery from both governance and beneficiary perspectives. Senior and middle management, technical officers, and support staff were also included to provide insights into administrative processes and operational challenges.

#### 4.2.3 Years of Experience Interfacing with Local Authority Service Delivery

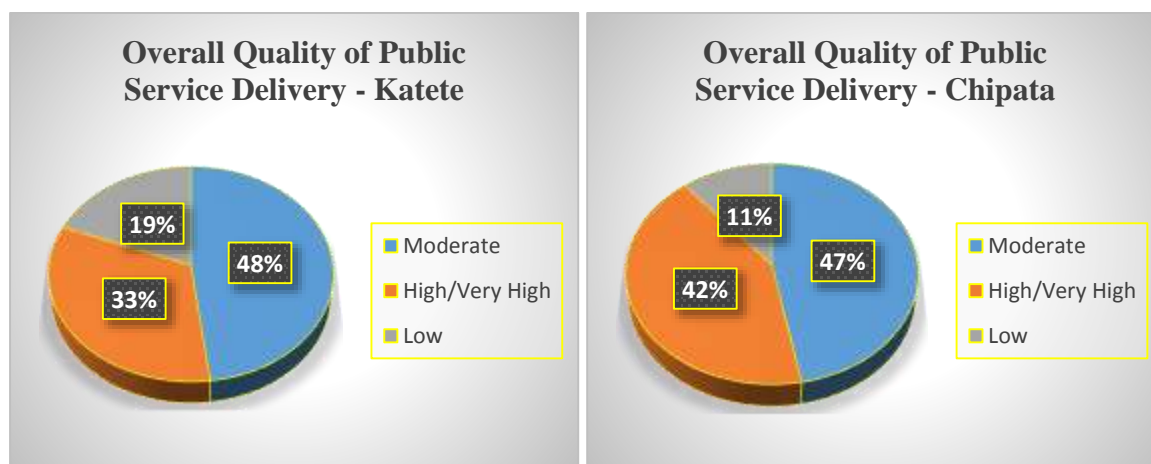
Years of Experience	Katete (n=90)	Chipata (n=90)	Total (n=180)
Less than 1 Year	8	6	14
1–3 Years	25	20	45
4–7 Years	30	32	62
Over 7 Years	27	32	59
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>180</b>

The majority of respondents had significant experience working with or interfacing with local authorities. In total, 62 respondents had 4–7 years of experience, while 59 respondents had over 7 years. This high level of experience across both districts indicates that respondents were well-positioned to provide informed and reliable perspectives on the effectiveness of decentralized service delivery. Only a small proportion (14 respondents) had less than one year of experience, ensuring that the data reflects knowledgeable insights.

#### 4.3 Assessing the Extent and Quality of Public Service Delivery in Katete and Chipata

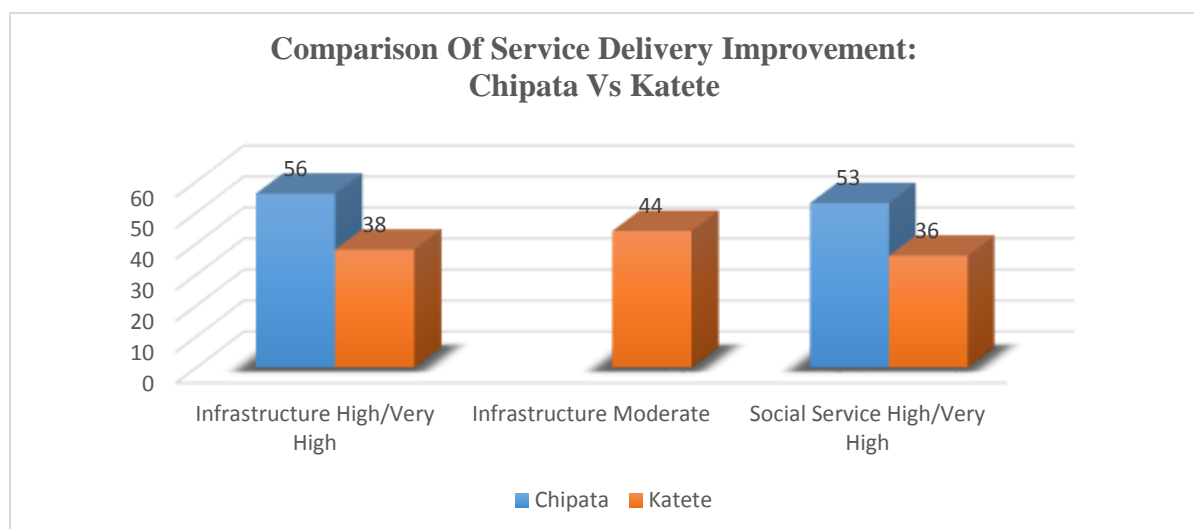
The first objective sought to determine the current state and quality of public service delivery in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities within the decentralization framework.

**Figure 1.0: Comparative Institutional Capacity, Resource Availability and Administrative Efficiency in Katete and Chipata.**



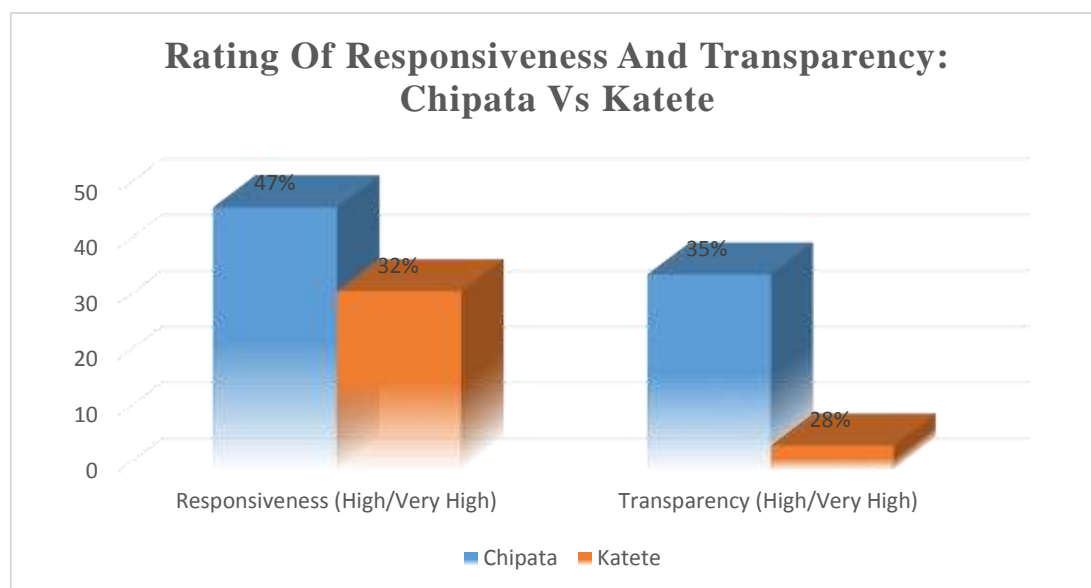
The findings show noticeable variation between the two districts in terms of overall service delivery performance. In Chipata, out of the 90 respondents, 38 respondents (42%) rated service delivery as High or Very High, 42 respondents (47%) rated it as Moderate, and 10 respondents (11%) rated it as Low. In contrast, in Katete, only 30 respondents (33%) rated service delivery as High or Very High, while a larger proportion, 43 respondents (48%), rated it as Moderate, and 17 respondents (19%) rated it as Low. These results suggest that although both districts demonstrate moderate progress under decentralization, Chipata is perceived to perform better overall. This pattern is reinforced by qualitative responses, as one resident from Chipata stated, “Service delivery has improved, especially in roads and markets. Things are more organized now,” whereas a respondent from Katete observed, “Services are there, but they are slow and sometimes not completed on time,” highlighting concerns about efficiency and implementation delays in Katete.

**Figure 1.1: Shows the Comparison of Service Delivery Improvement between Chipata and Katete**



These findings reinforce the argument by Smoke (2015) that decentralized service outcomes often vary due to historical administrative capacity, leadership styles and fiscal space available to local authorities. In terms of responsiveness to community needs, Chipata performed marginally better, with 42 out of 90 respondents (47%) describing the responsiveness of the local authority as high or very high, compared to 29 out of 90 respondents (32%) in Katete. Timeliness in addressing service requests followed a similar pattern, with respondents in Chipata reporting quicker responses than those in Katete. A participant from Chipata noted, “When we report issues like water problems or road damage, the council responds faster than before,” while a respondent from Katete stated, “Sometimes we submit complaints, but it takes a long time before action is taken.” Transparency and equity were rated lower overall in both districts, with only 25 respondents (28%) in Katete and 32 respondents (35%) in Chipata indicating that service processes were transparent. Concerns were raised in the interviews, as one Katete respondent explained, “We are not always informed how funds are allocated or which projects are prioritized,” and a Chipata participant added, “Budget information is not fully shared with the community.” These combined quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that although decentralization has enhanced responsiveness to some extent, significant gaps remain in transparency and accountability mechanisms in both districts.

**Figure 1.2: Shows the rating of Responsiveness and Transparency between Chipata and Katete.**

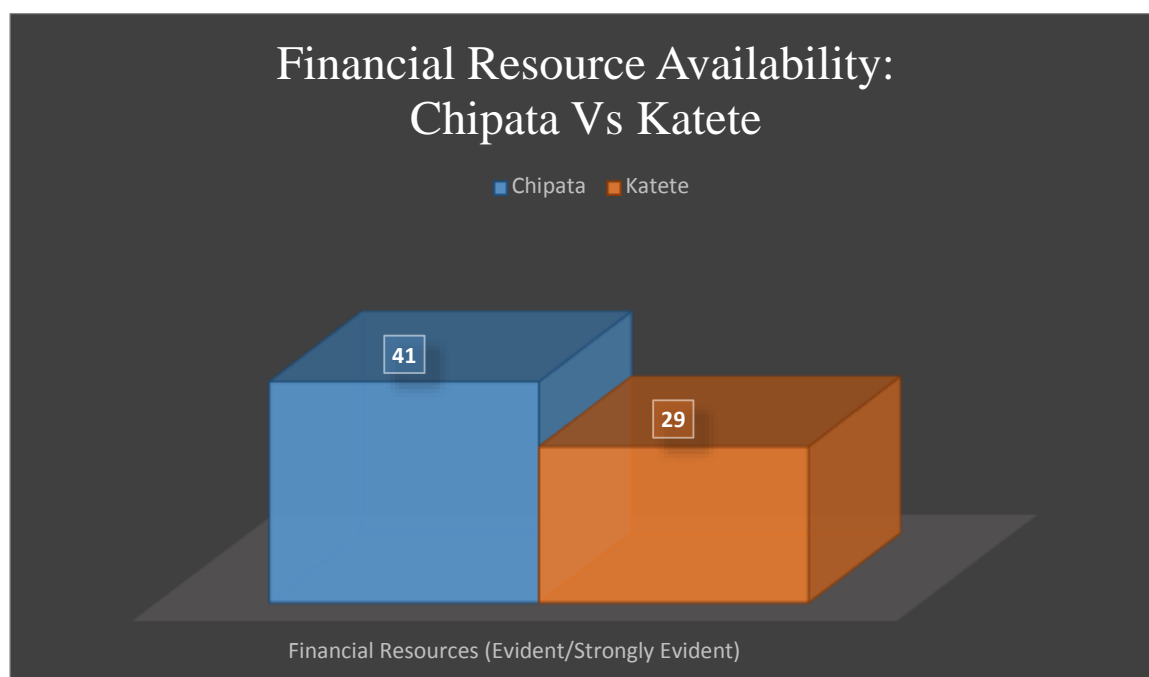


These results suggest that although decentralization has enhanced proximity of services to the communities, gaps remain in accountability systems and participatory mechanisms. As noted by the World Bank (2020), “decentralization improves service delivery only when local governments demonstrate sufficient transparency, responsiveness and commitment to equity,” a condition that remains partially fulfilled in both study sites.

#### **4.4 Examining Factors Contributing to Successful Service Delivery**

The second objective examined the internal and external factors underpinning effective service delivery in Katete and Chipata, including financial availability, administrative structures, staff competence, community participation and interdepartmental coordination.

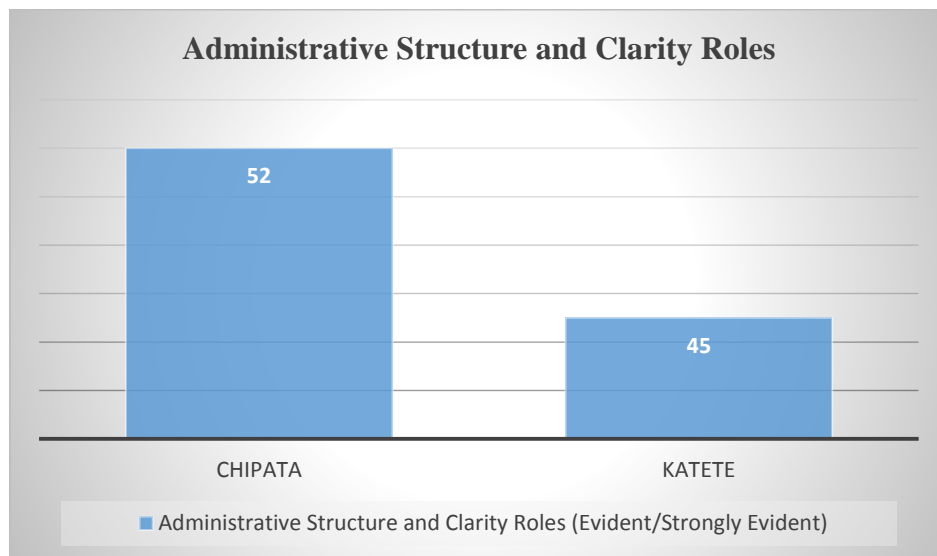
**Figure 1.3: Shows the Financial Availability between Chipata and Katete.**



The findings indicate that institutional alignment and managerial capacity are central to performance under decentralization. Financial resource availability was perceived as moderately evident in both districts, although Chipata recorded a slightly higher proportion of positive responses, with 37 out of 90 respondents (41%) indicating that financial support was evident or strongly evident, compared to 26 out of 90 respondents (29%) in Katete, where 43 respondents (48%) described financial adequacy as only moderately evident. An interviewee from Chipata explained, “Because of our broader revenue base, we are able to fund certain projects internally without waiting entirely for central government transfers,” while a respondent from Katete stated, “Most of our projects depend on delayed grants, and sometimes we have to postpone implementation due to insufficient funds.” Administrative structures and clarity of roles were viewed more positively, with 47 respondents (52%) in Chipata and 41 respondents (45%) in Katete indicating that administrative clarity was evident or strongly evident. A Ward Development Committee member in Chipata noted, “Departments now understand their responsibilities better, which reduces confusion when implementing projects,” whereas a Katete official observed, “There is better coordination than before, although staffing levels still limit efficiency.” These combined quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that while administrative alignment has

improved in both districts, fiscal capacity and staffing constraints continue to shape the effectiveness of service delivery under decentralization.

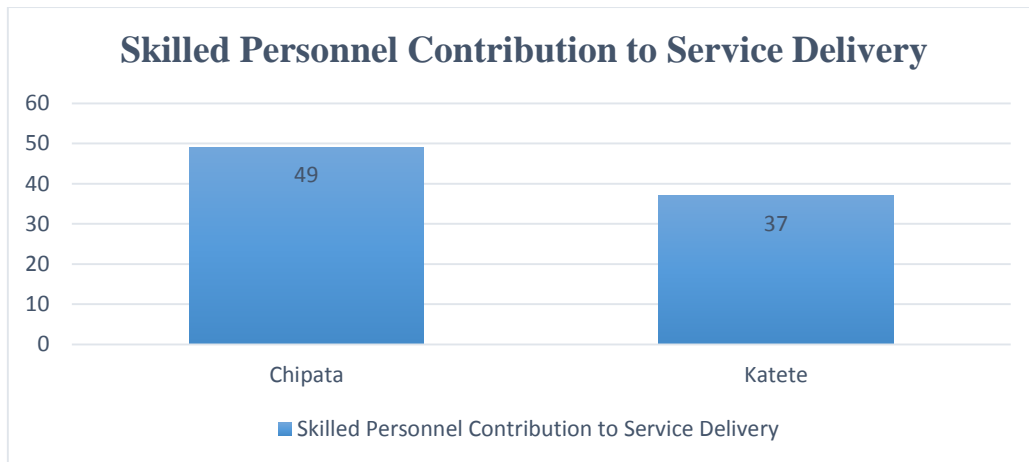
**Figure 1.4: Shows the Administrative Structure and Clarity Roles between Chipata and Katete.**



**These represents respondents who indicated administrative clarity was evident or strongly evident.**

On the other hand, skilled personnel were identified as a significant contributor to successful service delivery, receiving positive ratings from 44 out of 90 respondents (49%) in Chipata compared to 33 out of 90 respondents (37%) in Katete. The comparatively lower rating in Katete reflects reported shortages of technical and specialized staff, a concern repeatedly emphasized in the qualitative responses. A council official in Katete explained, “We do not have enough qualified technical staff, especially in planning and engineering, which slows down project implementation,” while another participant noted, “Sometimes one officer handles multiple roles due to staffing gaps.” In contrast, a respondent from Chipata observed, “We have relatively better staffing levels, and this helps in supervising projects effectively.” These combined findings suggest that human resource capacity plays a critical role in shaping service delivery outcomes, with staffing disparities contributing to performance differences between the two districts.

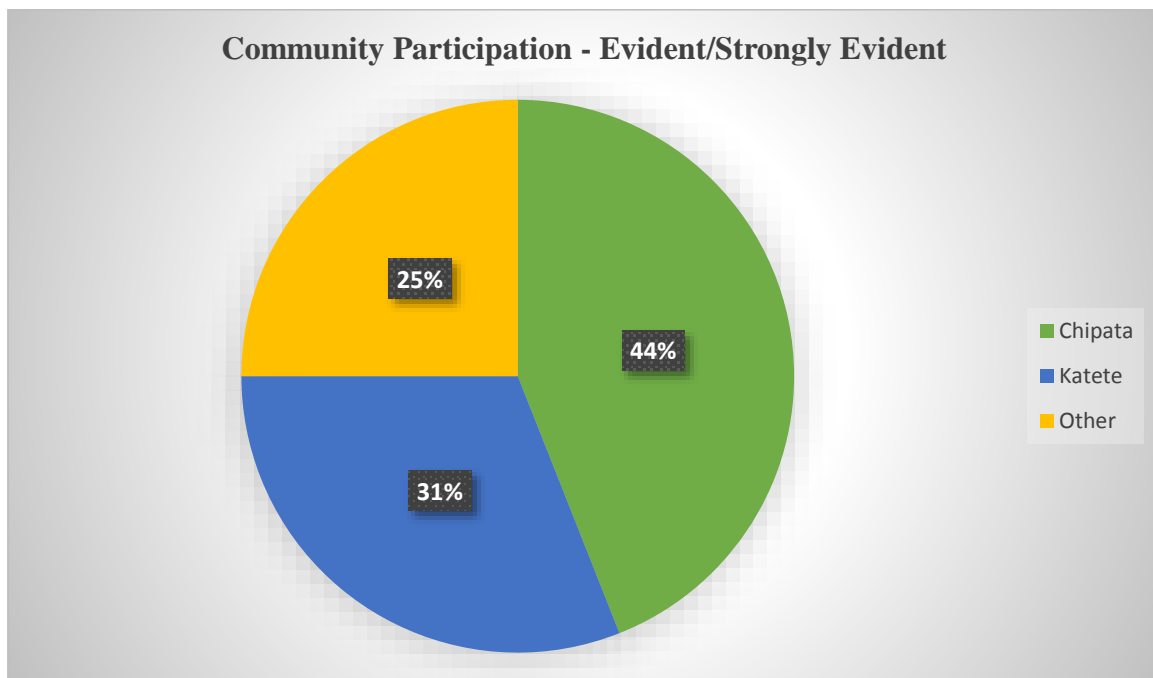
**Figure 1.5: Shows the Skilled Personnel Contribution to Service Delivery between Chipata and Katete.**



***These show the percentage of respondents who rated skilled personnel as contributing significantly to successful service delivery.***

Community participation was generally perceived as moderately evident, with 40 out of 90 respondents (44%) in Chipata indicating that citizen involvement in local governance was evident or strongly evident, compared to 28 out of 90 respondents (31%) in Katete. Qualitative responses highlighted differences in engagement levels between the districts. A community leader in Chipata explained, “People actively attend ward meetings and provide input on project priorities, which helps the council plan better,” whereas a resident in Katete noted, “Participation is limited; many community members do not attend meetings, and decisions are often made without our input.” These observations indicate that while decentralization frameworks exist in both districts, the extent and effectiveness of community participation vary, influencing transparency, accountability, and overall service delivery outcomes.

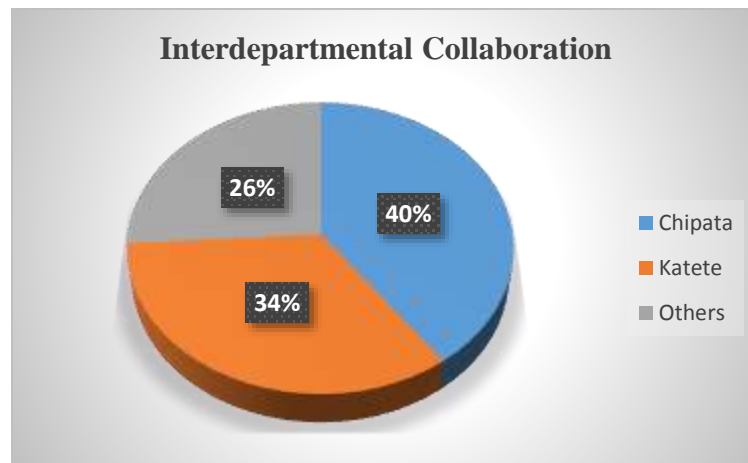
**Figure 1.6: Shows the Community Participation between Chipata and Katete.**



***These represents respondents who indicated Community Participation was evident or strongly evident.***

Interdepartmental collaboration received mixed ratings, with 36 out of 90 respondents (40%) in Chipata and 31 out of 90 respondents (34%) in Katete indicating that collaboration between departments was evident or strongly evident. Qualitative feedback provided further context, revealing differences in coordination practices. A senior official in Chipata noted, “Departments regularly meet to plan and review projects, which reduces duplication and improves efficiency,” whereas a local authority employee in Katete remarked, “Collaboration happens occasionally, but often departments work in silos, which slows down project implementation.” These insights suggest that while some level of coordination exists in both districts, stronger interdepartmental collaboration in Chipata likely contributes to more effective service delivery outcomes.

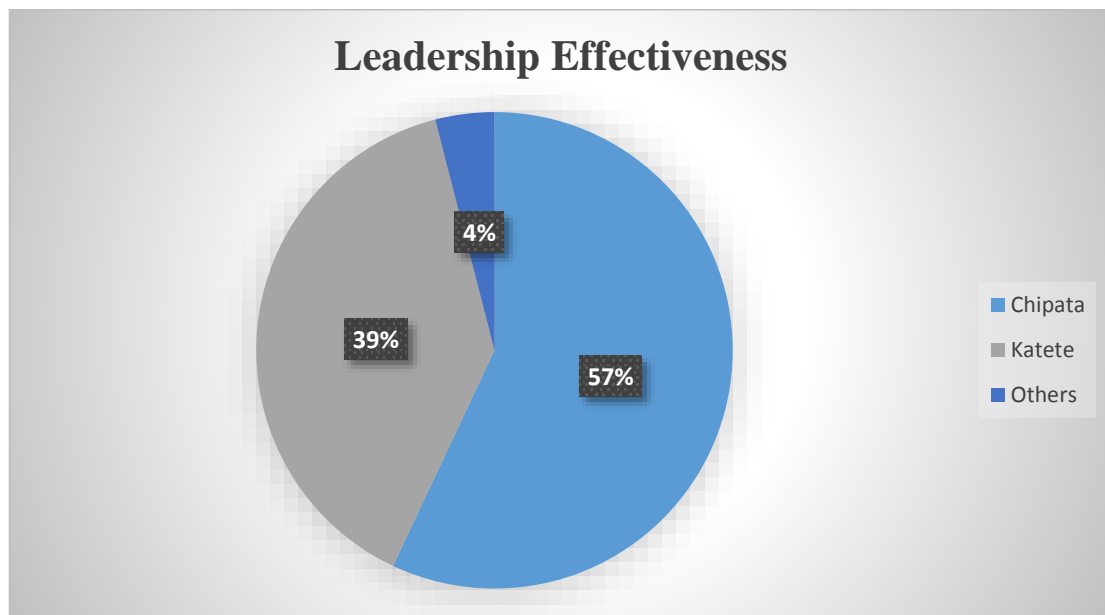
**Figure 1.7: Shows the Interdepartmental Collaboration between Chipata and Katete.**



***These represents respondents who indicated Interdepartmental Collaboration was evident or strongly evident.***

Leadership emerged as a defining success factor, with 51 out of 90 respondents in Chipata (57%) indicating that leadership practices significantly promote effective service delivery, compared to 35 out of 90 respondents in Katete (39%). Qualitative responses reinforced this finding, highlighting the role of proactive and accountable leadership. One Chipata councillor explained, “Our leadership prioritizes timely project implementation and ensures resources are properly allocated,” while a Katete employee observed, “Leadership support exists, but decisions are often delayed or influenced by external pressures, which hampers service delivery.”

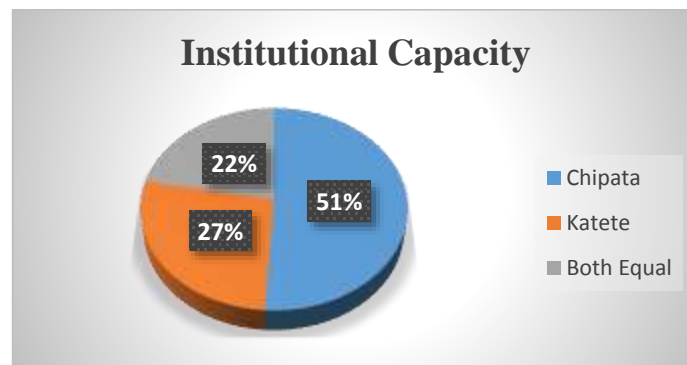
**Figure 1.8: Shows the Leadership Effectiveness between Chipata and Katete.**



***These represents respondents who indicated Leadership Effectiveness was evident or strongly evident.***

When assessing institutional capacity, the majority of respondents perceived Chipata as stronger than Katete. Specifically, 46 out of 90 respondents (51%) identified Chipata as having superior institutional capacity, compared to 24 respondents in Katete (27%), while 20 respondents (22%) considered the capacity of both districts to be equal. Qualitative insights reinforced these perceptions: a Chipata council official remarked, "Our departments are better organized, and coordination between units is smoother, which helps us deliver services more efficiently," whereas a Katete resident observed, "In Katete, there are often delays because offices are not well coordinated, and staff are not always available when needed." These responses highlight that institutional strength, including organizational structure and internal coordination, is a key differentiator influencing the effectiveness of decentralized service delivery across the two districts.

**Figure 1.9: Shows the Institutional Capacity between Chipata and Katete.**



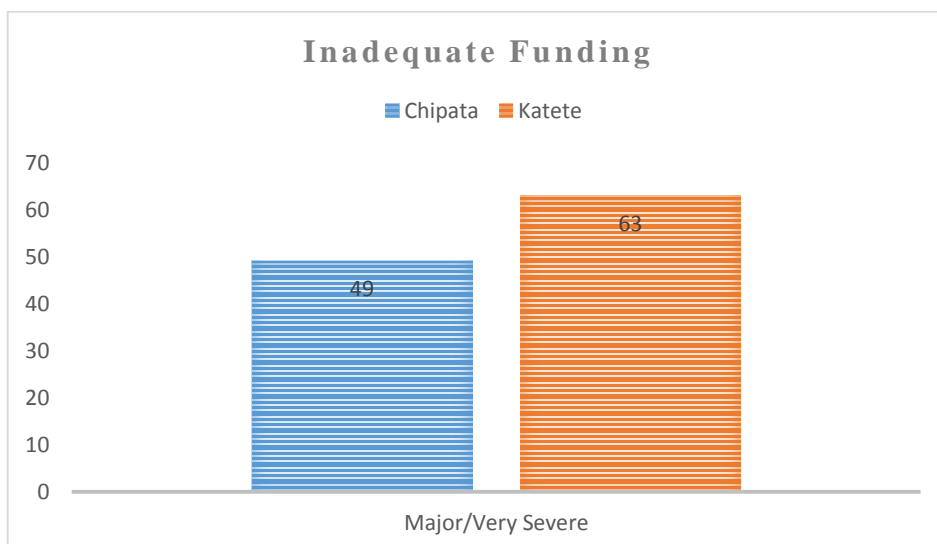
**These represents respondents who indicated Institutional Capacity was stronger.**

The variations highlight the importance of administrative maturity, staff competence and financial flexibility in shaping service delivery outcomes.

#### **4.5 Major Challenges Hindering Effective Decentralized Service Delivery**

The third objective examined the challenges hindering effective service delivery under decentralization, with respondents highlighting various structural, administrative, and fiscal constraints.

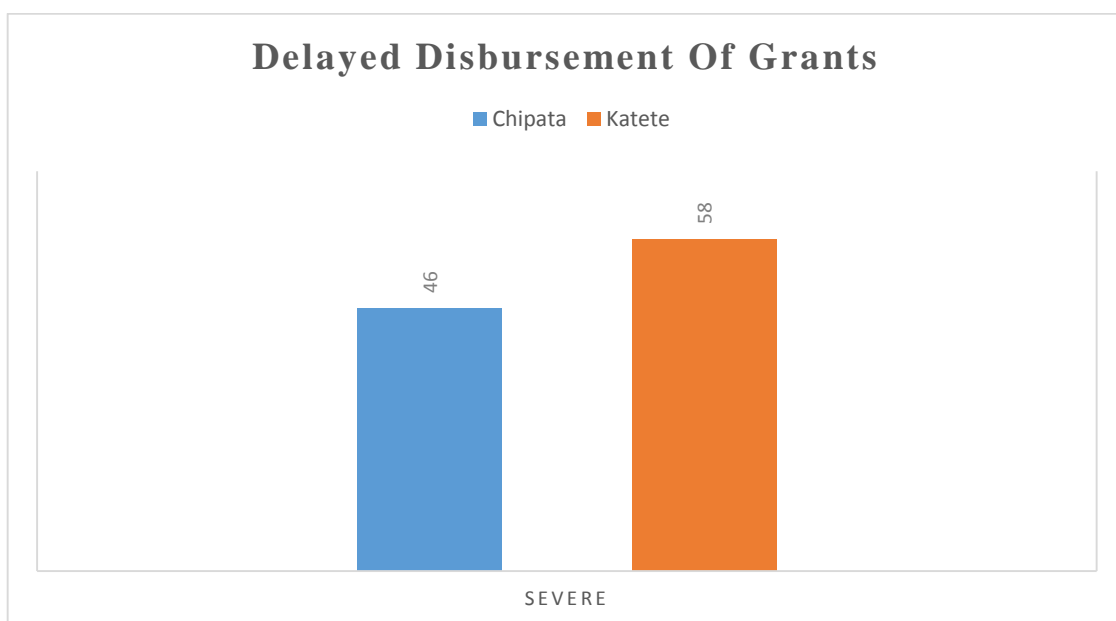
**Figure 2.0: Shows the Inadequate Funding between Chipata and Katete.**



**These represents respondents who indicated Inadequate Funding was a Major or Very Severe.**

The findings further indicated that Inadequate funding emerged as the most pressing issue, with 57 out of 90 respondents in Katete (63%) and 44 out of 90 respondents in Chipata (49%) rating it as a major or very severe challenge. Delays in grant disbursement were also cited as a significant impediment, with 52 respondents in Katete (58%) and 41 respondents in Chipata (46%) reporting severe delays that negatively affect service provision. Qualitative responses provided further context: a Katete council employee explained, “Funds often arrive late, which means planned projects stall or get scaled down,” while a Chipata community leader noted, “Even when allocations are approved, delays in transfers make it difficult to maintain consistent service delivery.” These insights demonstrate that financial constraints and slow fiscal transfers continue to undermine the efficiency and responsiveness of local authorities in both districts.

**Figure 2.1: Shows the Delayed Disbursement Of Grants between Chipata and Katete.**

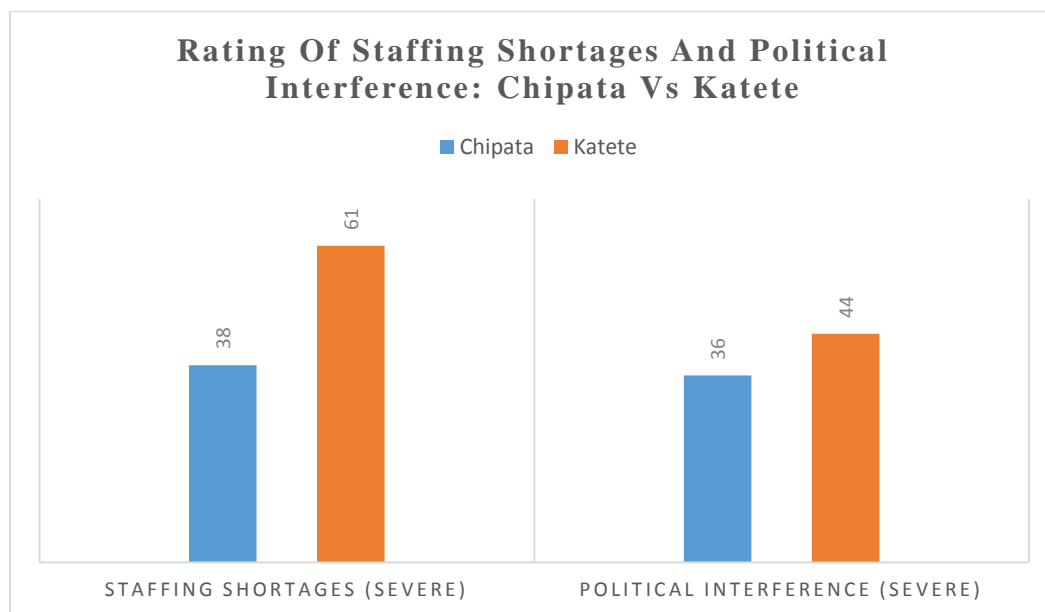


**These represents respondents who indicated Delayed Disbursement was Severe.**

The study findings reveal that challenges affecting service delivery under decentralization are more pronounced in Katete than in Chipata. Delays in fiscal transfers were widely reported, corroborating the Local Government Association of Zambia (2022), which notes that such delays “create operational bottlenecks that undermine local government performance.” Staffing shortages and inadequate

technical skills emerged as particularly acute in Katete, with 55 out of 90 respondents (61%) rating them as major or very severe challenges, compared to 34 out of 90 respondents (38%) in Chipata. Political interference was also highlighted as a significant impediment, with 40 respondents in Katete (44%) and 32 respondents in Chipata (36%) perceiving it as severe. Qualitative data further contextualized these issues: one Katete council employee noted, “Political influence frequently affects the allocation of resources and delays the deployment of skilled staff, making it hard to complete projects on time,” while a community leader added, “Sometimes, even when we submit requests for funding or staff, political priorities override technical needs, which frustrates service delivery.” These narratives suggest that, despite decentralization reforms, structural and political barriers continue to constrain operational efficiency and undermine the neutrality of local governance, particularly in districts with weaker institutional capacity.

**Figure 2.2: Shows the rating of Staffing Shortages and Political Interference between Chipata and Katete.**

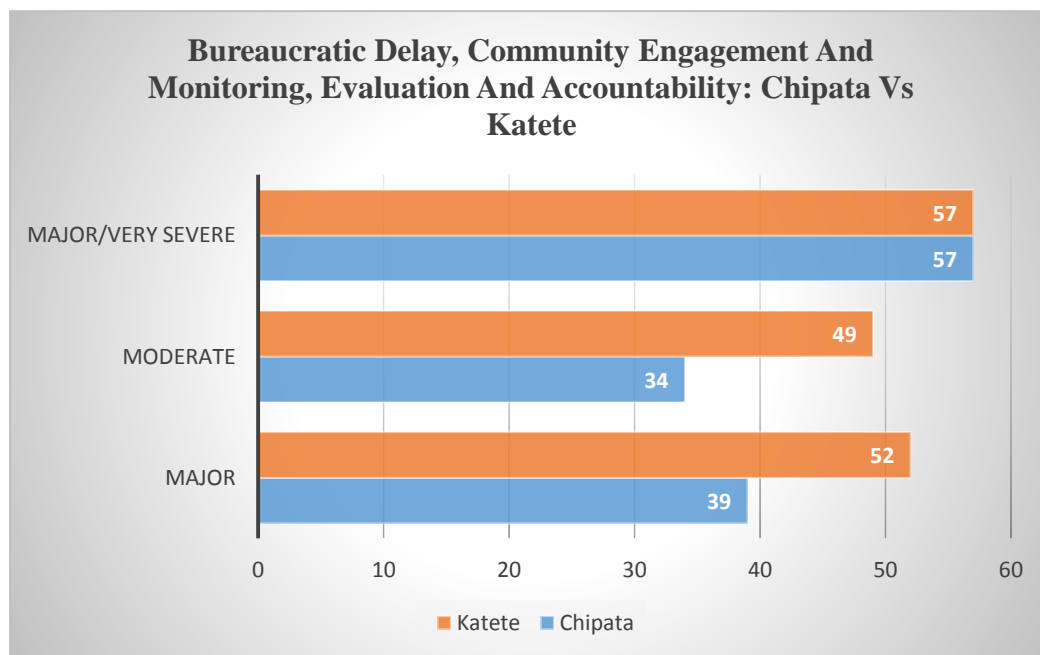


**These represents respondents who indicated Staffing Shortage and Political Interference was Severe.**

Bureaucratic delays, staffing shortages, and political interference were highlighted as major challenges affecting service delivery in both districts. In Katete, 47 out of 90 respondents (52%) reported administrative delays as a major obstacle, while 35 out of 90 respondents in Chipata (39%) expressed the same concern. Weak community

engagement was also a notable barrier, with 44 respondents in Katete (49%) and 31 respondents in Chipata (34%) describing participation as moderate to poor. Monitoring, evaluation, and accountability systems were perceived as inadequate, with 51 out of 90 respondents across both districts (57%) rating these mechanisms as major or very severe challenges. Qualitative insights emphasized the impact of political influence, with one Katete council employee stating, “Political actors often dictate which projects get prioritized, and this affects staffing and resource allocation,” while a Chipata community leader observed, “Decisions are sometimes made to satisfy political interests rather than community needs, which slows down effective service delivery.” These findings indicate that administrative inefficiencies, limited citizen involvement, and political interference continue to undermine institutional neutrality and constrain the implementation of decentralized mandates, echoing broader literature that warns of the distorting effects of politics on local governance.

**Figure 2.3: Shows the rating of Bureaucratic Delay, Community Engagement and Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability between Chipata and Katete.**



**These represents respondents who indicated Bureaucratic Delays was Major, Community Engagement was Moderate and Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability was Major/Very Severe.**

The study found that political and administrative challenges significantly affected service delivery in both districts. In Katete, 52 respondents (58%) rated bureaucratic delays as a major challenge, while in Chipata, 35 respondents (39%) indicated the same. Weak community engagement was reported by 44 respondents in Katete (49%) and 31 respondents in Chipata (34%) as a moderate to major barrier. Monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms were viewed as insufficient, with 51 respondents across both districts (57%) rating them as major or very severe challenges. Qualitative insights highlighted these issues further, with one Katete resident noting, “Political influence affects how resources are allocated, and projects are prioritized, which slows down services.” A Chipata community leader added, “Pressure from political actors sometimes delays staff deployment and service execution.” Overall, when asked to compare the severity of constraints, 41 respondents in Katete (46%) reported experiencing higher or much higher levels of challenges compared to Chipata, illustrating that differences in administrative capacity and local conditions continue to influence decentralized service delivery outcomes.

#### **4.6 Discussion of Findings**

The study revealed that decentralization has contributed positively to service delivery in both Katete and Chipata, though the extent and quality of services varied across districts. In line with the first objective, the findings indicate that while both districts have made progress in providing public services, Chipata generally demonstrates higher efficiency, responsiveness, and satisfaction levels than Katete. This suggests that institutional capacity, leadership quality, and resource availability play significant roles in shaping decentralized service outcomes, consistent with the observations of Smoke (2015), who notes that differences in historical administrative capacity and fiscal space often explain variations in local service delivery.

Regarding factors contributing to successful service delivery, the study found that financial resources, administrative structures, skilled personnel, leadership, community participation, and interdepartmental coordination were all critical. Stronger governance and managerial capacity in Chipata facilitated more effective implementation of decentralization reforms, whereas limitations in technical expertise and resource management in Katete constrained service delivery performance. These findings support Grindle’s (2007) argument that local leadership and

institutional alignment are central to the efficacy of decentralized systems. Furthermore, the results align with Bahl and Bird (2018), highlighting that fiscal capacity and discretion over resource allocation are essential for local governments to deliver services effectively.

In assessing challenges, the study demonstrated that structural, administrative, and political constraints continue to hinder optimal service delivery. Common barriers such as inadequate funding, delayed grant disbursements, staffing shortages, and political interference were observed, with varying intensity across the two districts. These findings echo broader decentralization literature, which emphasizes that decentralization reforms can underperform where local institutions lack monitoring, accountability, and sufficient human and financial capacity (Andrews, 2013; World Bank, 2020). The study further shows that community participation and oversight remain important for ensuring equitable and responsive service provision, reinforcing arguments that citizen engagement strengthens transparency and legitimacy in local governance.

Finally, the study's overall findings indicate that the successes and challenges of decentralized service delivery are shaped by the interplay of institutional capacity, leadership, fiscal resources, human capital, and citizen engagement. While decentralization offers opportunities for improved service delivery, its effectiveness is contingent upon the local context, including governance structures, administrative competence, and political dynamics. These insights align with the objectives of the study, highlighting both the achievements and persistent gaps in service delivery under Zambia's decentralization framework.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an integrated discussion of the study's key findings in relation to the research objectives, relevant literature and the broader theoretical and policy frameworks guiding decentralization in Zambia. The analysis draws together the results from Chapter Four and interprets them within established perspectives in decentralization theory, public administration and empirical evidence from comparable contexts.

The chapter further distils the major insights, outlines the principal conclusions, offers targeted recommendations and identifies areas requiring further inquiry. The discussion also underscores the practical implications of the findings for policymakers and local authorities, demonstrating how the evidence generated can inform ongoing efforts to strengthen Zambia's decentralization programme and improve service delivery outcomes at district level.

#### 5.2 Summary of the Study

The study set out to evaluate the successes and challenges of decentralized service delivery in Katete and Chipata Local Authorities. In addressing the first objective, which examined the extent and quality of service delivery, the findings revealed that the two districts demonstrate significantly different performance levels. Chipata showed comparatively stronger outcomes in infrastructure development, citizen responsiveness and overall administrative coordination, while Katete exhibited slower progress and more frequent operational constraints. These differences reinforce Smoke's (2015) observation that decentralization produces uneven results because local authorities vary in institutional histories and resource environments.

The second objective focused on the institutional, fiscal and administrative factors that contribute to service delivery performance. The results showed that Chipata benefited from clearer administrative structures, better financial capacity, stronger leadership and a more competent workforce. Katete, on the other hand, reported limitations in technical staffing, weaker institutional alignment and less consistent community

participation, which collectively reduced its ability to implement decentralized functions effectively.

The third objective sought to identify the challenges affecting decentralized service delivery. Across the two districts, inadequate funding, delayed fiscal transfers, staffing shortages, political interference, bureaucratic delays and weak monitoring and evaluation systems emerged as persistent obstacles. These constraints were more severe in Katete, illustrating the continued strain placed on rural and resource-constrained authorities. The findings correspond with broader scholarly arguments, including Faguet (2014), who stresses that decentralization succeeds only when local governments have the necessary autonomy, resources and accountability frameworks.

The fourth objective aimed at proposing strategic recommendations for strengthening decentralized service delivery. Respondents emphasized the need for increased fiscal autonomy, targeted capacity-building, enhanced citizen engagement, improved departmental coordination and stronger transparency mechanisms. These proposed interventions reflect both local realities and established decentralization principles.

Taken together, the summary of findings provides a coherent foundation upon which the subsequent conclusions and recommendations are developed, ensuring that the chapter transitions logically toward policy and practice-focused insights.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The findings demonstrate that decentralization in Zambia has produced notable yet uneven improvements in local service delivery. Chipata District recorded relatively stronger administrative capacity, enhanced resource management and more consistent service delivery outcomes, whereas Katete District continued to face institutional, financial and human resource constraints that weakened the effectiveness of decentralization. These results directly addressed the study's objectives by revealing the successes achieved, the persistent challenges encountered, and the variations in performance between the two local authorities. The study further established that decentralization on its own does not guarantee improved service delivery unless local governments are equipped with adequate authority, financial resources and administrative capability. Andrews (2013) affirms that reforms often falter when institutions operate without the necessary monitoring systems to

reinforce accountability and performance discipline, a concern that remains evident across both districts.

### **5.3.1 Institutional Performance**

The findings clearly demonstrate that institutional capacity significantly influenced the extent to which decentralization enhanced service delivery, directly addressing the study's objective on assessing institutional performance within the two districts. Chipata's well-defined administrative structures, effective leadership practices and adequately staffed departments strengthened its ability to plan, coordinate and deliver services efficiently. These institutional strengths enabled the district to translate decentralization reforms into tangible improvements in infrastructure and community responsiveness. Katete, on the other hand, exhibited evident institutional deficiencies that limited its progress toward achieving the same objective. Staffing shortages, weak coordination mechanisms and insufficient managerial support constrained its operations and reduced its capacity to implement decentralization reforms effectively. The contrasting outcomes between the two districts affirm that institutional performance remains a critical determinant of whether decentralization can successfully improve service delivery at the local level.

### **5.3.2 Fiscal and Resource Constraints**

Fiscal inadequacy emerged as the single most persistent challenge. The results confirm that without adequate and predictable financial flows, local authorities remain unable to plan or respond effectively to community needs. This finding strengthens the argument of Bahl and Bird (2018) that fiscal decentralization succeeds only when local governments possess both adequate resources and decision-making discretion.

### **5.3.3 Community Engagement and Accountability**

Community participation varied across the two districts and was notably stronger in Chipata than in Katete. The limited engagement in Katete weakened accountability because citizens had fewer opportunities to provide feedback, monitor projects or question decisions affecting public services. Weak feedback systems and restricted platforms for community oversight reduced transparency and diminished local ownership of development initiatives. Chipata's more active community structures, including regular consultation meetings and functional oversight committees, supported greater responsiveness from local authorities. This aligns with the World

Bank's (2020) view that decentralization enhances service delivery when communities can effectively scrutinize local decisions, demand transparency and influence the allocation of resources.

### **5.3.4 Administrative and Political Dynamics**

Administrative and political conditions continued to influence the quality of service delivery in both districts. Excessive bureaucracy and slow decision-making limited operational efficiency, while political involvement in technical processes affected the consistency of resource allocation and staff appointments. The findings show a clear distinction between legitimate political oversight which is essential for setting policy direction and ensuring accountability and undue political interference, which distorts administrative objectivity and weakens institutional performance. Political actors are expected to provide strategic leadership, yet the study revealed instances where interference extended into operational matters, thereby constraining professional autonomy. Effective decentralization therefore depends on maintaining this balance, where political leaders offer oversight without compromising administrative neutrality and the technical integrity required for improved service delivery.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

The study identifies a number of strategic reforms necessary for strengthening decentralized service delivery. The recommendations presented below are grounded in empirical evidence from the findings and supported by contemporary decentralization literature.

### **5.4.1 Strengthening Fiscal Autonomy and Resource Allocation**

Give districts more control over their revenue and ensure predictable transfers from central government. Pair financial independence with strong accountability measures such as audits, transparent reporting, participatory budgeting, and internal controls to prevent misuse.

### **5.4.2 Enhancing Human Resource Capacity**

Invest in staff training, mentorship, and performance evaluations to build skills in areas like engineering, procurement, budgeting, and administration. A competent and motivated workforce will improve service delivery and responsiveness.

### **5.4.3 Strengthening Community Engagement and Transparency**

Institutionalize regular community meetings, public consultations, and active ward committees. Use digital platforms like mobile feedback apps, online notice boards, and social media to expand participation and ensure residents can monitor projects and provide input.

### **5.4.4 Improving Administrative Efficiency and Reducing Bureaucratic Delays**

Streamline workflows and reduce delays by digitalizing services such as licensing, permits, procurement tracking, and project monitoring. Integrate technology with performance monitoring to ensure timely feedback, better planning, and more transparent service delivery.

## **5.5 Suggestions for Future Research**

### **Further Research:**

1. Explore the causal relationship between fiscal autonomy and service delivery outcomes across a larger sample of districts to identify national trends.
2. Conduct comparative studies involving rural, peri-urban, and urban local authorities to understand how contextual factors affect decentralization outcomes.
3. Undertake additional qualitative research on political-administrative interactions to examine how political dynamics influence local decision-making and service delivery.
4. Carry out longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of decentralization on institutional capacity and service outcomes.

### **Key Insights from the Study:**

1. Zambia's decentralization policy has led to meaningful improvements in service delivery.
2. Disparities between districts indicate persistent institutional and fiscal constraints that need urgent attention.
3. Strengthening fiscal autonomy, administrative competence, participatory governance, and accountability mechanisms is essential for equitable and effective service delivery.

4. Decentralization is most effective when local authorities have sufficient resources, autonomy, and managerial capacity to implement reforms.
5. Sustained commitment from government, development partners, and communities is vital for decentralization to be a transformative tool for local governance and service delivery.

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## **Appendix One (01): Research Questionnaire**

**Title:** Evaluation of Successes and Challenges in Service Delivery through Decentralization: A Comparative Study of Katete and Chipata Local Authorities

**Purpose:**

This questionnaire seeks to collect views from employees, community leaders and residents of Katete and Chipata on the successes, challenges and strategic improvement areas of decentralized service delivery. The data will be used solely for academic purposes and confidentiality will be strictly maintained.

**SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

*(Please tick or fill in where appropriate)*

**1. Which district do you represent?**

Katete  Chipata  Both (Provincial/NGO/Ministry Level)

**2. Your position/role within the local authority or community:**

Senior Management  Middle Management  Technical Officer  Support Staff  Ward Development Committee Member  Community Representative

Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Years of experience working with, or interfacing with, local authority service delivery:**

Less than 1 Year  1-3 years  4-7 years  Over 7 years

**SECTION B: ASSESSMENT OF SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE**

**Response scale:**

1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = Moderate, 4 = High, 5 = Very High

**4. Rate the overall quality of public service delivery in your district.**

1 = Very Low,  2 = Low,  3 = Moderate,  4 = High,  5 = Very High

**5. Extent of improvement in infrastructure services (roads, markets, bus stations).**

1 = Very Low,  2 = Low,  3 = Moderate,  4 = High,  5 = Very High

**6. Effectiveness of social services (health, education, sanitation).**

1 = Very Low,  2 = Low,  3 = Moderate,  4 = High,  5 = Very High

**7. Responsiveness of local authorities to community needs.**

1 = Very Low,  2 = Low,  3 = Moderate,  4 = High,  5 = Very High

**8. Timeliness of addressing service requests or complaints.**

1 = Very Low,  2 = Low,  3 = Moderate,  4 = High,  5 = Very High

**9. Transparency in service delivery processes.**

1 = Very Low,  2 = Low,  3 = Moderate,  4 = High,  5 = Very High

**10. Equity in distribution of services.**

1 = Very Low,  2 = Low,  3 = Moderate,  4 = High,  5 = Very High

**11. Comparative performance relative to the other district:**

Much lower,  Lower Similar,  Higher,  Much higher

**SECTION C: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESSES IN SERVICE DELIVERY**

**Response scale:**

1 = Not Evident, 2 = Slightly Evident, 3 = Moderately Evident, 4 = Evident, 5 = Strongly Evident)

**12. Availability of financial resources supporting service delivery.**

1 = Not Evident,  2 = Slightly Evident,  3 = Moderately Evident,  4 = Evident,

5 = Strongly Evident

**13. Clarity of administrative structures and defined roles.**

- 1 = Not Evident,  2 = Slightly Evident,  3 = Moderately Evident,  4 = Evident,  
 5 = Strongly Evident

**14. Contribution of skilled personnel to service delivery.**

- 1 = Not Evident,  2 = Slightly Evident,  3 = Moderately Evident,  4 = Evident,  
 5 = Strongly Evident

**15. Community participation influence on service outcomes.**

- 1 = Not Evident,  2 = Slightly Evident,  3 = Moderately Evident,  4 = Evident,  
 5 = Strongly Evident

**16. Interdepartmental collaboration enhancing efficiency.**

- 1 = Not Evident,  2 = Slightly Evident,  3 = Moderately Evident,  4 = Evident,  
 5 = Strongly Evident

**17. Leadership and managerial practices promoting success.**

- 1 = Not Evident,  2 = Slightly Evident,  3 = Moderately Evident,  4 = Evident,  
 5 = Strongly Evident

**18. Empowerment through decentralization in decision-making.**

- 1 = Not Evident,  2 = Slightly Evident,  3 = Moderately Evident,  4 = Evident,  
 5 = Strongly Evident

**19. Comparative district with stronger institutional capacity:**

- Katete,  Chipata,  Both equally

## **SECTION D: CHALLENGES AFFECTING SERVICE DELIVERY**

### **Response scale:**

1 = Not a Challenge, 2 = Minor Challenge, 3 = Moderate Challenge, 4 = Major Challenge, 5 = Very Severe Challenge

### **20. Extent to which inadequate funding hinders service delivery.**

1 = Not a Challenge,  2 = Minor Challenge,  3 = Moderate Challenge,  4 = Major Challenge,  5 = Very Severe Challenge

### **21. Significance of delays in grant disbursement.**

1 = Not a Challenge,  2 = Minor Challenge,  3 = Moderate Challenge,  4 = Major Challenge,  5 = Very Severe Challenge

### **22. Severity of staffing shortages or insufficient technical skills.**

1 = Not a Challenge,  2 = Minor Challenge,  3 = Moderate Challenge,  4 = Major Challenge,  5 = Very Severe Challenge

### **23. Degree of political interference as an obstacle.**

1 = Not a Challenge,  2 = Minor Challenge,  3 = Moderate Challenge,  4 = Major Challenge,  5 = Very Severe Challenge

### **24. Bureaucratic delays affecting service delivery processes.**

1 = Not a Challenge,  2 = Minor Challenge,  3 = Moderate Challenge,  4 = Major Challenge,  5 = Very Severe Challenge

### **25. Weak community engagement hindering service delivery.**

1 = Not a Challenge, 2 = Minor Challenge, 3 = Moderate Challenge, 4 = Major Challenge, 5 = Very Severe Challenge

### **26. Challenges with monitoring, evaluation, and accountability.**

1 = Not a Challenge,  2 = Minor Challenge,  3 = Moderate Challenge,  4 = Major Challenge,  5 = Very Severe Challenge

**27. Comparative challenge severity:**

Much lower,  Lower,  Similar,  Higher,  Much higher

**SECTION E: POLICY AND OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

**Response scale:**

1 = Not Important, 2 = Slightly Important, 3 = Moderately Important, 4 = Important, 5 = Very Important

**28. Importance of increased funding autonomy.**

1 = Not Important,  2 = Slightly Important,  3 = Moderately Important,  4 = Important,  5 = Very Important

**29. Importance of capacity-building for staff.**

1 = Not Important,  2 = Slightly Important,  3 = Moderately Important,  4 = Important,  5 = Very Important

**30. Importance of enhancing community involvement.**

1 = Not Important,  2 = Slightly Important,  3 = Moderately Important,  4 = Important,  5 = Very Important

**31. Importance of improved departmental coordination.**

1 = Not Important,  2 = Slightly Important,  3 = Moderately Important,  4 = Important,  5 = Very Important

**32. Importance of stronger transparency and communication.**

1 = Not Important,  2 = Slightly Important,  3 = Moderately Important,  4 = Important,  5 = Very Important

**33. Importance of reducing bureaucratic delays.**

1 = Not Important,  2 = Slightly Important,  3 = Moderately Important,  4 = Important,  5 = Very Important

**34. Importance of improved monitoring and evaluation systems.**

1 = Not Important,  2 = Slightly Important,  3 = Moderately Important,  4 = Important,  5 = Very Important

**SECTION F: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

35. Additional insights or recommendations:

.....  
.....  
.....

**Thank You for Taking the Time To Participate In This Study.**

This questionnaire is part of an academic research project being conducted to evaluate the successes and challenges in service delivery under Zambia’s decentralization framework, with specific reference to Katete and Chipata Local Authorities.

**Appendix Two (02): Budget**

<b>S/No</b>	<b>ITEMS</b>	<b>COSTS (ZMW)</b>
1.	Survey Materials	K2,000.00
2.	Data Collection (Transport)	K3,000.00
3.	Data Analysis Software	K1,500.00
4.	Miscellaneous	K1,000.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>K7,500.00</b>