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Uganda's Experience in the Use of Service Delivery Surveys

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1. Introduction

Uganda is situated in Africa along the Equator. Longitude location is between 29° and 36°. The country population is about 18 million people. Uganda was one of the most promising developing countries in Africa south of the Sahara, particularly with regard to infrastructural development and service delivery.

At independence in 1962, Uganda inherited a system of government characterised by sub-centres of power in the form of kingdoms and other local governments. The quasi federal constitution that was adopted as the supreme law of the land accommodated these sub-centres of power while at the same time recognising the co-ordinating and supportive role of the centre. During this period, a strong civil society flourished and the rule of law was strengthened by an independent judiciary.

Following the political crisis that became popularly referred to as the Uganda crisis of 1966, the 1962 Constitution was suspended and subsequently replaced with the 1967 Republican Constitution. The new constitutional order abolished the Kingdoms, the quasi-federal system and the robust Sub-political systems of governance. In their place was introduced a highly centralised power base that exercised control over the local government institutions through the devolution of central government staff to manage the Districts. The devolved staff were not directly accountable to the local populace but to the authorities at the centre. It was therefore not surprising that, as long as the power base at the centre was satisfied with the performance of their officer at the district level, no amount of dissatisfaction with service delivery by the locals could be remedied. It is partly on account of the centralisation of service delivery that the local capacity to manage and provide the services mandated to them by the centre was eroded. This resulted in the eventual disenchantment with and degeneration of quality and efficiency in service delivery, loss of accountability and popular participation in development activities (Kaswarar, 1989, Museveni, 1993).

Following a protracted armed struggle against dictatorship and the misuse of centralised power in the hands of a few, the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) led by Yoweri Kagame Museveni captured power in 1986. The NRM/A developed a political programme aimed at democratising Uganda, decentralising power to the sub-centres and carrying out other fundamental changes on the socio-economic front (Y. Museveni, 1992). On 2nd October, 1992, President Museveni launched the Decentralisation Programme. In 1993, the National Resistance Council (which was the national legislature at the time) enacted the Local Governments (Resistance Councils) Statute 1993, which gave statutory effect to the decentralisation programme.

The 1995 Constitution further endorsed the concept of decentralisation as a principle of democratic governance. Article 176(2) states that:-

- i. Decentralisation shall be a principle Applying to all levels of local government and in particular,

from higher to lower level government units to ensure peoples' participation and democratic control in decision making;

- ii. The system shall be such as to ensure the full realisation of democratic governance at all local government levels;
- iii. The local governments shall oversee the performance of persons employed by the government to provide services in their areas and to monitor the provision of government services or the implementation of projects in their areas. (Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, Article 176 (2) (b), (c) and (g)).

The implementation of these constitutional provisions has been facilitated by the enactment of the Local Governments Act 1997 and the Local Governments (Amendment) Act, 1997. It is abundantly clear that the decentralisation reforms ushered in by the NPM Government, particularly so the power to oversee the performance of service providers and to monitor the provision of services including the implementation of government projects, is a true litmus test of genuine democracy and the empowerment of the local people. This paper is an attempt to examine the impact of the decentralised agencies/ services in terms of service delivery. It will also highlight some of the views of the service providers in the context of decentralisation.

1. 2. Definition of Terms

1. 2. 1 Customer-evaluation

Customer-evaluation may be referred to as a process by which the beneficiaries/users of a service or product are facilitated to make an input on how they reckon the service or product should be delivered or made. In order for the process of customer-evaluation to be effective therefore, there is need to develop a check list of expectations which in turn should be used to judge the delivery of services or the performance of a product. It is precisely against this background that the Government of Uganda commissioned a Baseline Service Delivery Survey in November, 1995 as part of the ongoing Institutional Capacity Building Project which aims at strengthening personnel capacities and to improve management processes within central and local Government. I shall refer to the findings of this survey elsewhere in my paper. However, let it suffice to say that the Survey was extremely useful in providing insights on the customer perceptions and expectations with regard to service delivery.

1. 2. 2 Decentralised Agencies/Services

Decentralisation is a generic word which has been defined as the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, resource mobilisation and allocation, decision making, and administrative authority from the centre to regional branch offices, local governments and/or non-governmental organisations. Rondenelli (1984) distinguishes four distinct levels of decentralisation, namely;

Deconcentration	a transfer of power to local administrative offices of central government.
Devolution	a transfer of power to sub-national political entities.
Delegation	a transfer of power to statutory or corporate bodies.
Privatisation	a transfer of power and responsibility to private entities.

Whichever the form decentralisation takes, a major characteristic of this process is the transfer of power, whether marginally or in totality, to a subcentre of power and authority. The focus of this paper is therefore on the performance of these subcentres in the provision of services. But let it suffice to say that in Uganda deconcentration as a form of decentralisation is now getting into the history books.

The essence of decentralisation in Uganda is captured in the underlying objectives of the programme namely:

- i. To transfer real power to the districts and thus reduce the load on remote and under-resourced central government officials;

- ii. To bring political and administrative control over services to the point where they are actually delivered, and thus reduce competition for power at the centre and improve accountability and effectiveness;
- iii. To free managers from central constraints and thus, allow them to develop organisational structures tailored to local circumstances;
- iv. To improve financial accountability by establishing a clear link between payment of taxes and the provision of services they finance;
- v. To restructure government machinery in order to make the administration of the country more effective; and
- vi. To create a democracy that would bring about more efficiency and productivity in the state machinery through involvement of the people at all levels. (Decentralisation Secretariat, 1993).

The attainment of these objectives largely depends upon central government's political commitment to them. It may be observed that this seems to be the case especially so since, in principle, the decentralisation policy has been constitutionalised. Indeed, under the Constitutional provisions for the National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, part II (iii) states that "the State shall be guided by the principle of decentralisation and devolution of governmental functions and powers to the people at appropriate levels where they can best manage and direct their own affairs."

The policy has been translated into practice under the context of democratic decentralisation which includes participation and transparency, accountability and good governance. This is exemplified by the fact that Local Governments in Uganda now:-

1. have had their functions devolved to them;
 2. have a governmental character: they appoint staff and no staff from Central Government are now in the Local Government, unless they are seconded at the request of the Local Governments; they approve and manage their own budgets without reference to the Centre; they make bye-laws, initiate and execute socio-economic development programmes;
 3. have some coercive powers.
 4. Have councils which are directly elected by the people. There are nominated representatives in local government councils.
2. Customer- Evaluation of the Performance of Decentralised Agencies/Services.

The most significant contribution with regard to the evaluation of the decentralised agencies/services in Uganda, is the Baseline Service Delivery Survey, 1996. It is important to point out at the outset that the Survey was basically intended as a pilot exercise to set a framework for future Service Delivery Surveys. Amongst other things, it aimed at not only at building evaluative capacities of personnel in both central and local government, but also to provide some initial data on coverage, impact and perceptions of three key government services and on some potential performance indicators for those services. The services selected for coverage under the baseline survey were: The Customs Department of the Uganda Revenue Authority, the decentralised Health services and Agriculture Extension Services.

Whereas the Customs Department was selected to be assessed in a survey of businesses, the latter services were chosen due to the fact that they were those that were provided to rural communities. It is not my intention to enumerate the methodology used in the survey but let it suffice say that the users and potential users of the services were asked their use of and views about the delivery of those services.

2. 1. Health Services

Uganda has health services provided through a network at different levels. The hospital service ranges from the teaching hospital at Mulago to the hospitals in the country. Although delegated to the districts, hospital management remains directly under the Ministry of Health, to whom the Medical Superintendents are accountable. All other health facilities, such as the Health Centres, Dispensaries, Sub-dispensaries (aid posts) and mobile clinics (including outreach centres are under the management of the District Medical Officer who is part of the District Management Team.

2. 1.1 User Charges

The idea of cost sharing for health services in Uganda was first mooted in 1988. Although the policy has not been officially implemented, user charges are wide spread either as a fixed fee attendance, or a fee per item of service, or a charge for drugs and materials. The rationale for user charges is to raise funds to sustain and to improve the services offered. However, a recent, mainly qualitative, study by Health Planning Unit of the Ministry of Health (March, 1.995) found that, in many parts of Uganda, the quality of health services did not improve by the presence of user charges and the revenues from the charges was not sufficient to purchase items to improve service quality or improve the performance of staff (Service Delivery Survey, 1996:15) . A portion of service users resented having to pay for services, feeling that they had already paid their taxes. Some remembered the "good old days" when health care was provided free of charge.

The same study found that many people chose to use non -governmental health services on account of cost and quality of service. Other options range from self-medication, through visits to traditional healers, to the use of private practitioners or clinics or use of religious facilities.

When asked to rate the government health service in their area, 38% thought that it was good, 22% average and 22% bad. The main problems identified with regard to the unsatisfactory service delivery were lack of drugs and poor accessibility to facilities.

2. 2 Agricultural Extension Programmes

A major project in the agricultural sector is the Agricultural Extension Project. Sponsored by IDA (World Bank) in conjunction, with the Government of Uganda, the project aims at addressing the issues of disease control, yield improvement and capacity building to deliver and support effective extension services. In project Districts, a unified extension approach was adopted together with a Training and Visit methodology to reach the maximum number of farmers.

In a recent follow-up Survey to the one carried out in 1992, 70% of the farmers as compared to 50% in the 1992 survey were aware of the extension worker and the proportion of these who had discussed with him/her production- related matters were 75%. More had attended demonstrations and field clays, and about half of those who had discussed production-related matters with the extension worker had attended a training course organised by him/her mostly in local farm buildings, stores or school. Reported crop and milk yields were higher than those reported in 1992.

With regard to the extension staff themselves, it was found that they needed more support in order to reach more farming families. Nonetheless, they felt that, in the overall, the extension system was better than before 1992, and nearly all felt that the farmers had benefited from the new system.

The quota from the Service Delivery Survey, 1996 complement the previous studies of the impact of the Agricultural Extension Project. Although some fears have been expressed over future service delivery in the agricultural sector following the transfer of this function to districts, these fears have been thwarted by the recognition that decentralisation in fact, leads to better supervision of service delivery particularly so if funding accompanies function.

2. 2. 1 The Supply of Farming Chemicals an Drugs.

Until 1993, the supply of farming chemicals and drugs was through the outlets of the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries. Today, the supply has been privatised and farmers purchase them from commercial outlets. There is evidence to suggest that supplies are irregular under the privatisation arrangement. At times the supplies are adulterated with inactive constituents, the prices are high and there is lack of advise about the use of the materials at the point of sale. However, the magnitude of these problems is not yet known, although it would be quite relevant for the evaluation of the privatisation policy for this sector.

2. 3 The view of service providers at the District Level.

District administrations were generally positive about the effects of decentralisation and about the support they receive from central government with a number of suggestions to improve this support, especially through offering training to increase skills to cope with the increased responsibilities.

2. 4. Customs Services of the Uganda Revenue Authority.

The Uganda Revenue Authority is the main revenue collecting Agency for Government. Formed as a statutory body in 1990, the Authority is a conglomeration of divested functions hitherto performed by the Ministry of Finance, one of which is the Customs service.

It was thought that the Customs activities of the Uganda Revenue Authority should be assessed since they are an area that affected businesses quite considerably and could often lead to dissatisfaction. At any rate, the Authority represents a typical decentralised Agency delegated to handle a specific mandate on behalf of Government. A set of indicators were used by the Service Delivery Survey (1996) to determine the clients evaluation of the performance of the customs Department of the Uganda Revenue Authority. These are as follows:

2. 4. 1 Delays in the Importing Process.

Respondents were asked their views on the causes of delay in the importation process and their views were as follows:

Paperwork/bureaucracy	61%
Problems with the "Longroom"	33%
Incompetence	22%
Corruption	15%
Delay in Valuation	11%
congestion at Customs Centre	11%
Too few Custom Staff	7%
Problems with Clearing Agent	4%

Of the 23 people who gave a rating to the Customs import services, their views were as follows:

Very Good	Nil
Good	6 (26%)
Adequate	10 (44%)
Bad	4 (17%)
Very Bad	3 (13%)

Only three respondents mentioned that Uganda laws hindered their imports. Other issues relating to the delay in the import process were cited as truck inspections which delay the movement of their convoys, having to pay taxes in cash rather than cheque, and environmental protection laws that forbid them from importing of freon.

It is not quite possible to compare the performance of what obtained during the pre-divestiture phase of this function to the Authority but, in the overall, clients indicated that there was a marked improvement in service provision after the divestiture.

2. 4. 2 Export Services

There was no sufficient data to justify an analysis of the client evaluation of the Export services.

3. The Client-Evaluation of Other Government Services.

Other government services for which ratings were given include:

Figure 1. Business Ratings of other Government Services.

Other Services	Ratings of Services				
	Very Bad	Bad	Adequate	good	very good
URA	1				1
Electricity			2	1	1

Water			1	2	1
Telephone, fax, ect.	1	1			
Import/Export licences	1	3	1	1	
Police				1	
Post Office			2		
Kampala City Council			2		

Source: Service Delivery Survey (1996:45)

4. Conclusion.

It has been demonstrated that decentralisation as a principle of good governance could either be hijacked by predatory forces or too fledged to render it effective in the monitoring of the allocation of resources and/or service provision. Either way, the Programme may be viewed as an exercise in futility. On a positive note however, the fears expressed in regard to the empowerment of the people through decentralisation have been shown, in the case of Uganda, to be unfounded. Indeed, the recognition that decentralisation has generally led to improvements in service delivery is a vindication to the concept as a principle of good governance.

Although the Service Delivery Survey highlighted the fact that a relatively high proportion of the population was unable to give suggestions for improvements in service delivery, it was becoming more apparent that households /businesses were willing to give information about their use of services and their views on those services than before. It is quite understandable that the proportion of non-responses was high given that the people were, in the past, more used to accepting whatever they were given in the way of service delivery. The increased awareness of their needs and preferences is an attestation to the impact of decentralisation as a tool for the empowerment of the people.

The reported level of satisfaction with Government health services is quite good in most districts even though people perceive problems with them. The frequent use of alternative health services is however, an indicator of dissatisfaction with the current health provision. User Charges, although not officially sanctioned, are universal. It is indeed, encouraging to note that the majority of households are prepared to pay for improved health services.

The coverage of the Agricultural Extension Services is relatively low and only about one to ten households has benefited from it. There is clearly a perception of needing and wanting an agricultural advisory service, and more than a half of the households interviewed were willing to pay for an improved service. This indicates a large "market" for the service which, in any case, should the policy review of the present methods of providing the spark service.

The practice of buying farming drugs and chemicals from commercial. Outlets was shown to be less than satisfactory. They are not always available, they are perceived to be adulterated and expensive and advise about use and safety precautions was lacking. In it's regulatory role, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries could tighten the control over the sale of farming drugs And chemicals, perhaps by making it compulsory to offer advise at the point of sale.

The awareness amongst the rural communities about other government services, other than agriculture and health, is quite low. There is also some indication that service providers do not seem to share the same perception on the impact of service provision under the decentralisation programme. A community feedback mechanism, such as regular service delivery surveys, could help District Administrations to review services and to lock for areas for improvement.

Most Districts are reasonably satisfied with the support services they receive from the central government, although some expressed a feeling of having been abandoned to manage problems on their own. They clearly appreciate the local control and accountability afforded by decentralisation; and it quite obvious that their role in setting performance indicators for service delivery under the Results-Oriented Management style is very significant.

The Customer-evaluation of the performance of the Customs Department of the Uganda revenue authority reveals that service delivery has improved although there are some areas of management that require remedial action.

All this analysis of Public perception of the way decentralised services and agencies are performed was made possible by the use of Service Delivery Surveys (SDS) . The Service Delivery Surveys are,

therefore, an important tool to use to gather vital information relating, for instance, to problems or successes in respect of service delivery. Such information can be used to make improvement in the delivery of service to the public. The way forward is, therefore, for both national and local governments to intensify training in the design, management and use of SDS so that their applications become widespread.

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return to [table of contents](#)