

Service Delivery should be a priority for the newly elected Leaders!

By Drake Rukundo¹

Between January and March 2021 provided yet another opportunity for Ugandans to elect local council Councilors and Chairpersons. Ugandans have also elected mayors, Members of Parliament and the President with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

Let this article remind the newly elected local leaders of the platform they run on. It is very clear in the Local Government Act – (you will be sure not over half of the elected candidates in the local governments have bothered to read the Act in its entirety) under Part IV are functions of all local leaders. Did their election manifesto align to the statutory roles they are supposed to play? The newly elected local government leaders ought to know that promises they made are not only theirs to keep but they should only lobby the Government in power to ensure that they are kept. Like Members of Parliament, they face an ugly possibility of not being able to “deliver on those promises”. Unless local leaders do not lobby that service demands as enshrined in the District, Municipal, Town and City Plans are not met with the required financing, and contractors able to implement against minimum service delivery standards – little will change on the ground.

One of the key structures in the entire Local Governance system is the District Executive Committee which under the Local Government Act (CAP 243) 17 (b) is mandated to oversee the implementation of Government and NGO activities in the district. While citizens will demand services from Government, leaders will be the first to bear the heat on why these services were not delivered or delivered in less-than-satisfactory fashion. It will

be easier for citizens to point out a broken bridge to the Chairman LC5 before their local MP, Minister or President. Proactively, local leaders ought to work in anticipation that while they may belong to a certain political affiliation, it’s the people that will matter before the party. It will be services he the citizens that should matter more than their interests or salaries.

It is also important for all Ugandans to understand the six fundamentals of citizenship as pertains to their civic responsibility even beyond the electoral process:

- i. A citizen should exercise his or her right to vote for an elected representative;
- ii. A citizen should also pay his or her taxes. It is out of this revenue base that services we all seek are delivered.
- iii. A citizen should know his or her elected representatives. It will not be surprising if some people do not know the name of their current LC 1 chairperson or even their newly elected office bearers in their local councils. If you don’t know your leader, then, you can engage them on your service delivery concerns. They too can not represent you effectively.
- iv. A citizen should participate (first of all in all elections and later) in meetings for planning, budgeting and feedback on issues that concern delivery of services (this is the only entry point and the key to the development process)
- v. A citizen should exercise his or her right to hold their elected leaders to account (otherwise called bottom-up accountability).
- vi. A citizen should actively engage by attending barazas, speaking on call-in radio and television

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talk shows, following press releases in newspapers and engaging in routine monitoring in his or her area to see if services are being delivered (otherwise called civil action).

To hold leaders to account, and for effective service delivery, both citizens and elected leaders should equally understand the mandates for their local governments. For instance, it is essential to know the functions of your district executive committee which include among others:

- i. Initiating and formulating policy for approval of the Council;
- ii. Overseeing the implementation of Government policies and monitor activities of NGOs;
- iii. Monitoring the implementation of Council programmes and take remedial actions where necessary;
- iv. Recommending to the council to persons for appointment in district statutory committees;
- v. Receiving and solving problems or disputes forwarded to it from lower local governments;
- vi. Considering and evaluating the performance of the council against the approved work plans and programmes at the end of each financial year;
- vii. Carrying out any other duty as may be authorized by the Council or any law that related to LGs.

All the above functions of the District executive committee together with the associated functions of the individual leaders at the local government level are designed to ensure effective and efficient delivery of services to the people. Therefore, if the District executive committee that is composed of the elected representatives at the district and other similar committees at cities, municipal councils, sub-counties and all other structures at the local government level, do what is expected of them, then, citizens will enjoy good quality services.

While successfully elected, it is also important to point out what will be expected of each elected leader be it Sub County/Town/Municipal Division Councilors or Chairpersons. These form indicators

and benchmarks upon which performance will be measured: attend all council meetings, timely and keep records under a calendar and diary; Superintend over meetings right from village/cell to parishes/wards up to district level and ensure a record of issues of your voters; voice the voters' concerns emphatically during debate and decision making; provide feedback to council and citizens on progress being made to deliver services to them.

Now that Ugandans have finished electing their representatives, it is important to know their roles and rights and appreciate the functions of the district leadership to able hold their leaders to account for these functions. For a citizenry that is very reliant on political leaders to present their demands, this opportunity is one that deserves even more critical attention. While a Member of Parliament will tell voters, that his mandate is to legislate – not to build roads, schools, health centres and fix broken boreholes, a sub-county/Town/Municipal/Division Councilor or chairperson will not. For the latter, it is their responsibility and mandate to ensure decentralized services reach the grassroots. It is time to see beyond the colours on the posters and transcend party and politics to services. Regardless, of the choices and party colours, the citizens need leaders that can eloquently and competently voice your concerns at decision-making tables and ensure delivery of quality services.

Lastly, Citizens should let their vote and voice end of election-day. It is actually, the beginning of their civic action. Regardless of the party affiliation of the leader – citizens should hold them to account! Making their votes count is making their voices heard. You can make your voice transcend the violence, bypass the chaos and the mud-sliding that begets the name 'politics is a dirty game'. Now that the elections are over, what will matter is functional water at your tap, the road to your home or nearest market, school or health facility; the security of your market-stall and a motivated nurse at your health centre. All the elected leaders must know that the delivery of better services to the citizens is the only way to make their vote meaningful!

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