

## Climate Change Integration in Local Government Planning: Lessons from Kyenjojo District

By Anthony Mugeere, PhD<sup>1</sup>

Richard Businge, the enigmatic former Kyenjojo District Local Government Planner has a thing or two for suits. Quite often, he could unexpectedly don suits that mesmerised some of his colleagues at the office. As the 48-year-old ‘Mr. Planner’--as he was often fondly referred to by his peers--always entered his office on the western wing of the administration block, he always left quite an impression on some of his workmates with his sense of style. “The man truly loves his suits. You can hardly miss him when he arrives at the office,” remarked a casual labourer, as he mowed the lawn a few metres away from the district council hall.

In August 2018, Businge was among the first district planners who were invited for a capacity building workshop on integrating climate change in local government planning. Undertaken by the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) and Care International in Uganda, the training was aimed to sensitise the planners on the importance of integrating climate change at the district level. Whereas the District Development Plans (DDPs) are a legal requirement for all higher and lower local governments countrywide, they are essentially the basic tools for the implementation of decentralization development programmes and service by government and non-government actors in local governments. Often developed in a comprehensive and integrated cycle with input from a host of stakeholders, DDPs are not only aimed to achieve sustainable socio-economic development in conformity with national and local priorities but also serve as the pointers to the strategic directions of the districts for the planning period. Overall, the DDPs are made to address the major social service and infrastructure developments at the district,

county, sub-county, parish and village levels. These include; Universal Primary Education (UPE), health, production and marketing, water and sanitation, road maintenance, environmental protection and the participation of youth, women and Persons With Disabilities (PWDs).

In Uganda, it is now evident that all districts fully recognise the fact that climate change poses significant challenges, shocks and risks for a wide range of human and natural systems. In some districts--especially in the northern, northwestern and eastern regions of the country, rainfall amounts are dwindling. The weather conditions are becoming hotter and drier every other year; an indicator that the earth’s surface is--as it is happening elsewhere in the world--truly warming. Lakes and rivers are drying up too creating a water crisis for domestic use in some parts of the country. Landslides and plunging water supplies are not just a threat to food security but also the other sources of livelihoods.

According to the 2014 Local Government Planning Guidelines (LPGs), all districts must integrate climate change in their 5-year development plans. Through their Environmental and Natural Resources Departments (ENRDs), the district planners are required to adopt a planning framework that provides for vertical integration of environmental development issues at all levels of government. Starting at parish levels, the development of environmental action plans is expected to move onto the sub-county levels before the outputs are used to feed into the DDPs. One of the key denominators of this process is that the DDPs must consider Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) as a pre-requisite for the development of all vital infrastructure in the districts. Gender mainstreaming is also meant to be considered during the planning

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process as are the distribution and planting of trees for afforestation, wetland conservation and medical and solid waste disposal plans. Other components include the reduction in illegal logging and the enforcement of the law on environmental conservation.

The LGPGs are also quite emphatic on integrating climate change initiatives into the District Environmental Action Plans (DEAPs). Specifically, they emphasise mainstreaming climate change in the planning and construction of all key infrastructure projects such as schools, health facilities, roads and urban centres. Overall, climate change mainstreaming in local government such a common catchphrase in this much-heralded five-year cycle process that it could easily find its way into any anthem sung before any such planning meeting.

*“Unfortunately, most districts lack either the capacity or political will to integrate climate change in their DDPs,”* remarked one Planner from eastern Uganda. *“The main problem is that most of us don’t understand what exactly is meant by integrating or mainstreaming climate change in the district plan.”*

Less than three years after the ACODE-Care capacity building workshop, Kyenjojo ranks among the districts whose Development Plans (2020-2025) is ‘climate change compliant.’ Such is the level of integration of climate change in the Plan that it is embedded in the design and implementation of all projects in the Education and Sports, Primary Health Care and Production Departments. The integration is also evident in the Works and Infrastructure, Water and Sanitation and Functional Adult Literacy projects.

In the education department, for instance, the district planned for the planting of tree woodlots in schools, continued integration of environment lessons in the school syllabus, continued school talking compounds, continued environment competitions to be carried in schools and involvement in environment day celebrations. Also, a total of 300 facilities have been planned to support the nutrition activities in 100 schools through drip irrigation. In building construction projects especially in schools, the DDP makes planting of trees a key component of the contract.

Under the Primary Health Care component, all capital projects under health department will be subjected to environmental impact assessment while a raft of

measures has been embedded in the DDP to dispose of all the medical waste (plastic bottles IV fluids, cannulas bin liners, gloves) in one gazetted area. With a projected expenditure of UGX 1, 270, 856, 000 under the water sector, the district plans to plant trees around all the water sources constructed in the next five years and the revitalisation of water user committees to monitor natural resource use in the water catchment areas. In addition, the district plans to construct latrines with hand washing facilities while water tanks have been planned to be constructed in public places, to reduce the impact of runoffs.

For the Production Department, the district has planned for the integration of drought-resistant crops, as a climate change adaptation mechanism which will be supplied to youth and farmers’ groups for planting. The district has also planned for the implementation of small scale irrigation schemes under the Ministry of Agriculture aimed at supporting water-stressed sub-counties in Nyabuharwa, Katooke, Katooke Town Council, Kihuura and Nyankwanzi Sub counties.

*“The underlying issue to this plan is that the budget allocation to climate change mainstreaming in the DDP and implementation has gradually increased over the years which has increased knowledge on integration of climate change in the DDP by all Heads of Department at the district,”* said Businge, in his presentation at the ACODE-Care organised inter-district multi-stakeholder dialogue held at Kyenjojo district in September 2020. *“There is also improved coordination in the planning process among stakeholders such as the Environment Police, Resident District Commissioner (RDC) and political leaders at all levels.”*

Other key climate change interventions embedded in the DDP include planning and budgeting for environmental impact assessment for all capital projects through the creation of a District Discretionary Equalisation Grant (DDEG) and the regular control of soil erosion using water bowsers during the dry season.

Businge has since left his Kyenjojo planning job for greener pastures in central government. At Kyenjojo district headquarters, however, his legacy transcends the ‘man of the suits’ tag to be one of the pioneers of integrating climate change in local government planning.