

POLICY SHIFT TO PROGRAMME-BASED APPROACH

Implications for the local governments and service delivery in Uganda

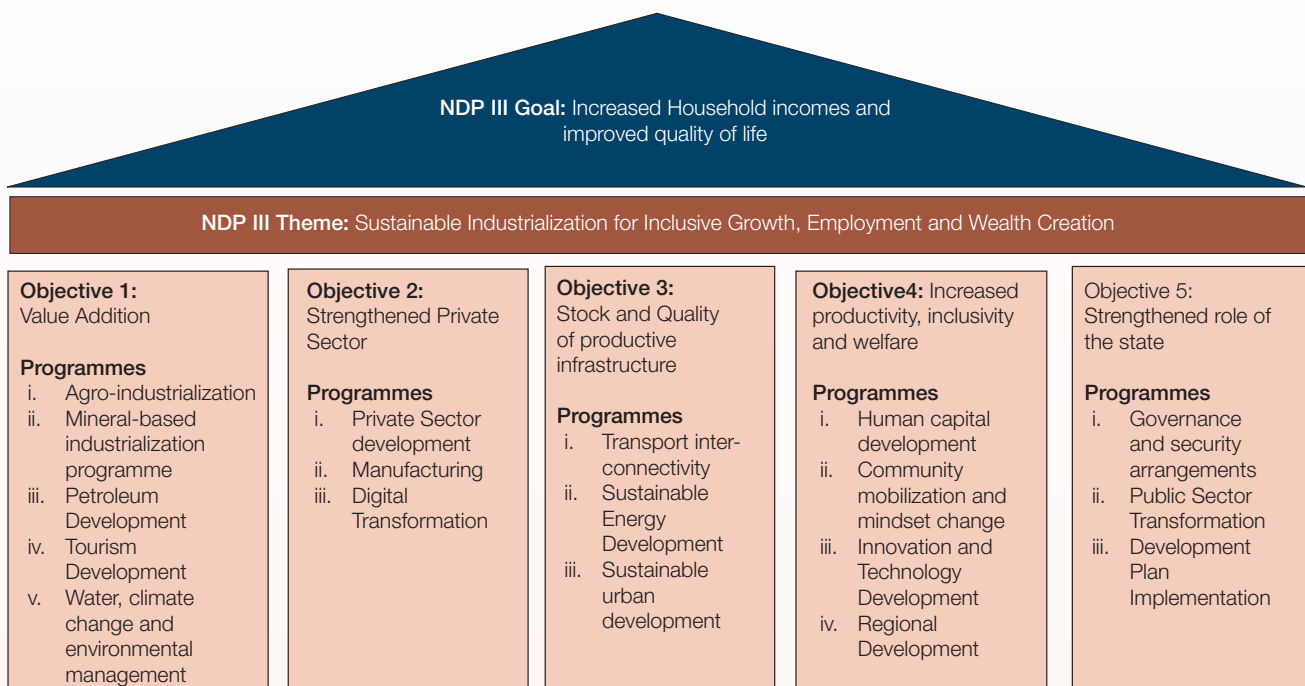
By Drake Rukundo*

Article 35 (1) of the Local Government Act CAP 243 establishes a district council as a planning authority of a district. Under the same article sub-section (3), a district council shall prepare a comprehensive and integrated development plan that incorporates plans of lower-level local governments for submission to the National Planning Authority (NPA). The primary function of the NPA according to Article 7 (1) of the National Planning Authority Act, 2002, is to produce comprehensive and integrated development plans for the country elaborated in terms of the perspectives of the national vision, long-term and medium-term plans. Under Article 8 (4) and (5) of the NPA Act 2002, a district planning committee shall initiate

and prepare district development plans in a manner prescribed by the Authority. In addition, under (5) of the same article, a Ministry or sector shall prepare a plan and submit it to the NPA whose duty shall be to harmonize all the plans from various ministries or sectors to formulate the national plan. However, this is not entirely, what is happening in practice.

According to the NPA Act, normatively, LG development plans ought to have informed the NDPs harmonization-in an interplay of a top-bottom that meets a bottom-up process. Accordingly, NPA has been supporting LGs (Districts, municipal councils) to formulate 5-year Local Government Development Plans (LGDPs) for FY 2020/21-FY 2024/25 using the revised guidelines to achieve alignment to NDP III.

Figure 1: Illustration of NDP III Goal, Theme Objectives and Programmes



Source: Author's Demonstrational Chart of NDP III Goal, theme, objectives and programmes

The current third National Development Plan (NDP III), has adopted a programme-based approach to planning, budgeting, implementation and performance reporting. According to the NDP III, the programme approach supports better performance and greater accountability by applying a clear logic to planning, budgeting and implementation with a focus on intended results at all levels. The NDP III has five (5) objectives, twenty (20) strategies and eighteen (18) programmes. As illustrated by fig.1 these programmes have Programme Implementation Action Plans (PIAPs) that NPA has developed to ensure a strengthened alignment and smooth implementation of the NDP III.

What are the Implications for Service delivery?

NPA has had limited resources (especially of time and for capacity building) to transit from the old system to programme based budgeting and planning. This is a process that ought to have undergone a steady and two-year protracted planning process at all levels. Doing with a quick turn-around has pushed not just LGs but sectors into a panic change over. Votes will still be made on the national budget appropriation as before, but efficiency gains from this reform need to be studied on a sector-by-sector basis under each programme. There is a, however, better clarity on the contributory role each programme will make if its objectives under it were met. This clarity could ease monitoring and assessment of the extent of performance better than before.

For instance, the contribution of and to the private sector (under objective 2), value addition (under objective 1) and explicit contribution of the state (under objective 5). Which sector should head which programme is a headache entrenched in the hoary public sector mindset of a desire to lead 'or be in control resources' or 'to be seen to be on top' as opposed to contribution. Since LGs follow the sector lead- this may also play out at the LG level – creating a need for provision of clarity of what a programme is once it comes to a typical municipality, city or district. A Local Government with 11 departments, how will they serve 18 programmes in an elaborate guided manner?

According to the Second Budget Call Circular whose responsive deadline is February 15th, LGs were supposed to have shifted from the old format to Programme based approach. According to the Terms of Reference issued for quality assurance of LGDPs in April 2021, the NPA has supported Local Governments to align to the NDP. To date this process is ongoing and 112 out of 176 LGs have completed this process. The remaining 64 LGs are either newly-created districts or cities-which are yet to finalize their plans. LGs also face capacity constraints among other challenges in generating these plans. Some don't, as yet, have filled positions of a Planner mandated to conduct this role

in a local government. All this is happening almost one year after the launch of NDP III.

Recommendations for National Planning Authority

The NPA has been bold to set up this programme based planning dispensation in a see it through in a very short time. Now it needs resources (manpower, logistics and financial resources) to support all MDAs and LGs to understand, align and implement their plans along with this reform. The question for all Uganda is to correctly identify to what objective and what programme(s) we all contribute to. It is envisioned that this reform may continue under NDP IV. If that were both the assumption then it is now time to study this reform and plan early so that the planning cycle is expended to make it right this time for the NDP IV. In this regard, the NPA should:

- Support the ongoing process to implement the Parish Model as described in both the NRM Manifesto and the technical on-going works with the Ministry of Local Government, Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance as a modular for NDP III performance appraisal, M&E and service delivery outcome-learning;
- Not wait until far into the NDP III implementation to begin planning for NPD IV. Planning should revolve and be continuous. As the NDP III is implemented, it would be particularly prudent that NDP III baseline mid-term review and end-line evaluation are timely done so that results (especially at mid-term) inform NDP IV a year before its preparation.
- Short reporting templates are provided (out of the current NDP III results framework) to sector MDAs and LGs to report on how activities, outputs and outcomes are delivering on the objectives under each programme to ease appraisal, compliance and assessment.
- Under the Apex Platform or another appropriate-a modular is found to study key sampled areas of this reform to understand the extent to which this reform has performed in enhancing local service delivery, and results used for prospective plans.

Recommendations for LGs

It is at the Local Government level where people's engagement with the public institution is vital and has the most potential to ensure services reach the people regardless of any reform. It is important that:

- Local Governments review their approach towards planning and programming with their eyes on impact. Whereas producing output is the target, under the programme approach, impacting the citizenry is the ultimate implication.

- Local Governments (and all MDAs) look beyond their mandates and functions and envision their contribution to the overall national development objectives by working coherently cohesively and not in silos.
- Local Governments through support associations like ULGA and agencies like ACODE should pursue support options to link with sectors so that LG plans are synthesized thoroughly at the sector level for sectors to submit to NPA sector plans in time with LGDPs' input.

Closing Note

The success of any programme depends on how well it is perceived, embraced, resourced and managed. Let all Uganda perceive this reform and embrace this reform with a new mindset. Going forward, health, education and nutrition as well as clean water are now one umbrella of human capital development geared at improving the quality of life of one citizen. Once such a mentality is shaped, the shift to a programme-based approach shall then be a success.

Endnotes

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