

PROGRAMME-BASED APPROACH

Lessons from the Sector-Wide Approach in the delivery of services in Uganda

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The government of Uganda under the NDP III has changed the planning and implementation framework for government programmes from the Sector Wide Approach (SWAps) to a Program Based Approach (PBA). However, there is a risk that the system will only change in name – especially if we do not learn from the challenges that plagued the SWAps.

Under the SWAp, the responsibility for planning and budgeting at the central government level was delegated to Sector Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). To execute this responsibility effectively, MDAs were required to formulate their policies, strategies and programmes consolidated into Sector Development Plans that were aligned to the National Development Plan and Uganda Vision 2040. Sectors were also required to monitor Sector outcome measures and to standardise the practice of holding Annual Performance Reviews (APR) as consultative meetings with stakeholders.

Effective FY 2021/22, the planning process has been reformed and the Programme Based Approach has been adapted to the delivery of common results. The NDP III defines a program as a group of related interventions/projects that are intended to achieve a common objective within a specified timeframe. The program approach has been adopted for three main reasons: (i) To focus implementation on delivery of common results; (ii) To strengthen alignment and eliminate the ‘silo’ approach to service delivery and enhance synergies across sectors and other actors; (iii) To provide a framework for the already existing programme-based budgeting. The Sector, Ministry, Agency and Local Government plans are required to be aligned to the NDPIII. Implementation of these

plans is required to be linked to the Programme Based Budgeting System (PBBS).² Therefore, the Government of Uganda (GoU) through the NDP III is now convinced that there is a need for a more integrated, coordinated approach to development. At the same time, it appears that many MDAs and Local Governments are not as yet fully familiar with the programme approach as advocated by NDPIII.

While there is tangible evidence of progress with SWAps (such as leadership and ownership, institutional and management capacity, the flow of resources, and monitoring and evaluation), that progress has often been slow and has sometimes resulted in unintended consequences for the balance of power within and between government institutions as well as between government institutions and the development partners. Even though SWAps have provided a vital forum for discussing and resolving some key policy differences, disagreements continue to exist among MDAs especially on who controls which votes, and who owns certain interventions.

Further, SWGs, established under the Sector Wide Approach (SWAp), Government only pronounced itself on the viability of SWGs through policy documents, such as Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), National Development Plan (NDP), Budget Call Circulars and MoFPED policy guidelines without any law to compel stakeholders to act on sector demands. These SWGs were always riddled with financial constraints in running their activities. In some cases, they partially depend on the Development Partners a dependence syndrome that undermines ownership of the interventions. A study conducted by the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) on the Functionality of the SWGs revealed that MDAs attendance of sector working group meetings where

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² GOU (2020). Third National Development Plan NDP III (FY 2020/21-2024/25. National Planning Authority, July 2020. Available at: http://www.npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NDPIII-Finale_Compressed.pdf

they were not taking lead was irregular which caused delays in decision making because of unnecessary back and forth consultations.³ The study also revealed that in some Sectors, there are no tools to track and monitor the participation of stakeholders, investment of development partners in the sectors, achievements and follow-up on interventions with exception of the health sector. In some sectors particularly, Education, Works and Transport, the private sector has not represented on the SWGs yet their Sector Development Plans envisaged their participation.

Although there are opportunities for civil society to contribute to the policy processes undertaken by SWGs, their impact in some Sectors is yet to be realised. It is not enough to attend and contribute to the meeting without bringing in position papers, research-based evidence on policy and statements of facts and direction during review meetings. Such good practices are seen in the Agriculture Sector by the Non-State Actors Working Group.

In light of the above, it would be prudent for the government to:

- Ensure that the objectives, commitments and roles of the cooperating MDAs are agreed in such a way that they in practice allow for ownership and mutual accountability among the parties involved. They should also be specific enough to be able to assess performance against these commitments. Regular (preferably independent) reviews of the fulfilment of commitments are important for assessing progress.
- Ensure that the lead Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in PBA identify entry points for dialogue, learning and integration of issues from all programme partners which can contribute to the development of the overall programme.
- Actively promote broad ownership of the programme through encouraging the involvement

of relevant stakeholders – such as development partners, relevant civil society actors, and different levels and departments within the organisation – in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of results.

- Ensure that engagements between lead agencies and other partners are context-specific and relatedly directly to how and what they will contribute to the program.
- Strengthening performance management, monitoring and evaluation are critical. Joint mechanisms for oversight and mutual accountability such as joint annual reviews to monitor and assessment the progress of development investments is very critical.
- Bring in more CSOs and the private sector on board that can actively and effectively participate in decision making during SWG meetings and other undertakings.
- The stakeholders especially MDAs, LGS, CSOs and the private sector should be trained on how the PBA will work and how all these actors will fit in.
- Ensure that the technical working groups mainstream cross-cutting issues such as environment and climate change, HIV/AIDS, monitoring and evaluation, gender, and good governance.

In conclusion, policy shifts require careful study of the achievements, challenges and lessons from the implementation of previous policy positions to inform new policies and avoid similar mistakes. It is anticipated that MDAs will be able to do the same so that experiences from the Sector Wide Approach aid the implementation of the Program-Based Approach.

³ Mushemeza. E. D., and Kisaame. E. K., Functionality of Sector Working Groups in Uganda, Kampala: ACODE Policy Research Paper Series No.99, 2020. Available at: <https://www.acode-u.org/uploadedFiles/PRS99.pdf>

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