

FROM SECTOR-WIDE TO PROGRAMME-BASED APPROACH

What it means for climate change interventions at local governments

By Anthony Mugeere, PhD¹

Government reserves the right to make any pronouncement that it considers critical for the implementation of its development agenda. And, much as it is early days to pass any form of the verdict over its rationality, the move is one of those over which the proverbial jury is still out. In fact, it might take years or even decades for anyone to pass any form of judgment over its prudence. After all, a rose by any other name would, as William Shakespeare suggested in his famous play, *Romeo and Juliet*, smell as sweet; wouldn't it?

A report on the *Functionality of the Sector Working Groups in Uganda* published by the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) shows that Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs) were introduced in Uganda and other developing countries in the late 1990s beginning with the Education Sector. The motivation for developing SWAs was, according to the report, the need to improve the impact and sustainability of aid. Overall, the initiative was a new paradigm for planning and institutional development aimed to increase the overall effectiveness and efficiency of resources. "It ensured that the sectors were more responsive to national government policies and priorities, facilitating coherence between Sector policies, human and financial resource allocations," notes the report.

In 2020/21 came with reforms on the arrangement of government programs, out went the SWAs Approach and in came the Program-Based Approach (PBA). Talk of new wine in old bottles was rife but this did not deter policymakers from implementing the policy shift. For those of us outside government, there is no justification whatever to suggest that anything about

the sectors needed fixing. The naming—sectors—was by all standards, regular and fancy. Despite a few half-hearted complaints about limited funding, non-prioritisation and failure to coordinate the implementation efforts, there was nothing to suggest that anyone was losing any sleep over the use of the word sector at all.

So why the sudden shift from sector-wide to the programme-based approach in implementing government? "It wasn't a sudden shift as you might think," remarked a senior official from the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Planning. "It was a result of long-term planning aimed to strengthen the alignment of planning and budgeting frameworks in line with the National Development Plan (NDP) III. The spirit was to provide a logical framework for anchoring the Program-Based Budgeting System (PBS) that had been initiated earlier by enhancing synergies across sectors and other actors to reduce a 'silo' approach to implementation," he added.

The simple fact is that the government had for instance—either belatedly or otherwise—realised that a healthy population transcends the health sector to include other sectors such as that of agriculture and water that contribute to the well-being of the population by providing food, nutrition and safe water and sanitation; does it ring a bell now. Or that any talk of human capital development would ideally, remain just empty talk, without embracing issues of increasing access to inclusive safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) with emphasis on increasing coverage of improved toilet facilities and handwashing practices and establishing early warning systems for disaster preparedness, are we together? "So when we talk about the shift from the sector to the programme-based approach, it is all about providing

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a coordinated framework for implementation, monitoring and reporting for improving the delivery of results,” explained another official from the NPA.

On the face of it, planners and other development analysts are convinced that the paradigm shift is likely to improve the implementation process and deliver better results under the NDP III. They point to the reduced hitherto duplication of efforts (financial and human resources) among government agencies. Before the policy shift, for instance, the tourism sector would hire its water engineers to do feasibility studies and construct valley dams in national parks resulting in duplication and wastage of government resources. The same scenario would play in the rest of the sectors.

“With the programme approach, there is planning for the construction of multi-purpose water facilities to cater for humans, animals and crop under the leadership of the Ministry of Water and Environment - which is the Secretariat of the Natural Resources, Environment, Climate Change, Water and Land Management Programme. This bridges the persistent gap between the budget and the development plan” added the NPA official. Overall, the management of the new setup is quite clear. Like night follows day, the erstwhile Sector Working Groups will become the Programme Working Groups led by the Minister of the lead agency. The Permanent Secretaries, Commissioners, Board Members and Non-State Actors will constitute the Programme Management while the Planning Units of the lead agencies will oversee the routine implementation of the programme.

At the local government level, the situation might be a little hazy; especially concerning the implementation of climate change interventions. Whereas sustained efforts by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) such as the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) resulted in the establishment of a fully-fledged Environment, Natural Resources, Climate Change, Land and Water Management programme, there is little evidence of the integration of climate change in its budgeting frameworks. Although the programme objectives focus on assuring the availability of adequate and reliable quality freshwater resources for all uses and reducing human and economic loss from natural hazards and disasters, there are areas of non-compliance at both central and local government levels.

“The new programme still features areas of non-compliance such as the failure to allocate financial resources such as the percentage of automation of standard agroforestry practices monitoring system, issuance of carbon certificates to industries to foster carbon neutrality among industries and the establishment of plantation woodlots to reduce pressure on natural forests driven by demand for cooking energy in form of charcoal and firewood,”

observes the NPA in a recent report.

The report titled, *Climate Change Budget Compliance Assessment Report for FY 2021/2022* whose publication was supported by ACODE and Care International in Uganda also highlights the government’s failure to allocate 1.6 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to climate change responsive interventions as one of the drawbacks in the programme design. Going forward, the report recommends fast-tracking climate change budget tagging and approval of the Climate Change Bill (2020) as one of the mechanisms for lobbying for local climate finance.

By and large, local governments face the daunting of mainstreaming climate change in their programming to promote the resilience of their communities. In addition to promoting agroforestry and other tree planting initiatives at district, county, sub-county and other levels, local governments need to establish watershed management practices if the agro-industrialisation program is to continue providing the backbone to our economy. Although the early warning systems seem to be highly centralized under the Uganda National Meteorological Authority (UNMA), local governments need to play their bit—by relying on the vast network of radio stations to relay timely and accurate weather/climate/early warning information to farmers and other stakeholders within their areas of jurisdiction. The recent stand-off between Ugandan maize traders and their Kenyan clients over the quality of maize exports to our neighbours should also spur local governments to enact and implement by-laws on postharvest handling and storage of agricultural products. Special emphasis should be placed on constructing locally made granaries, silos, dryers and all forms of locally designed storage facilities at sub-county and village levels.

Similarly, the human capital development programme which now encompasses the hitherto education and health sectors calls for the integration of specific climate resilience practices during the construction and management of schools and health centres by the local governments. For a start, district authorities must ensure that infrastructural plans that do not incorporate climate resilience practices such as water harvesting and the disposal of medical, electronic and other forms of waste are never approved. District and sub-county planners must also take the initiative to ensure that they tap into renewable energy resources such as solar, biogas and wind to reduce the carbon emissions to the atmosphere due to the use of firewood and other forms of fuel.

For the integrated transport infrastructure and services programme, most local governments tend to believe that planting trees on the major highways and city/town streets and roads is the magic bullet for environmental conservation. In light of endless infrastructural works and re-works in most urban

areas, in particular, authorities need to scale up by adopting climate-smart road and bridge construction technologies such as paving roads with durable materials, use of flood-resistant soils and rocks to pave roads and bridges and emphasis on the use of durable construction materials that can resist floods and storms.

The private sector development programme also presents local governments with the opportunity to reach out to the local investors in their localities to explore ways of financing climate resilience practices that reduce the use of firewood and charcoal which put enormous strain on natural resource use. Such mechanisms could include co-financing the construction of biogas plants, water harvesting tanks and solar systems. The local government-private partnership is also critical in the management, excavation and use of sand and rocks whose demand for the construction of buildings and roads is on the upward trend in all parts of the country. A similar initiative can also be undertaken under the innovation, technology development and transfer programme through the promotion of climate-smart innovations such as bio-digesters at household and small-scale industrial levels.

Although it is evident that the implementation of most local government activities is often beset by limited funding, misplaced priorities and inadequate staffing, the new programme alignment should be seen as an opportunity for enhancing resilience by the politicians and technical staff at these levels. Like it happened with the integration of HIV/AIDS and gender interventions within the sectors in the years gone by, the mainstreaming of climate resilience interventions in all programmes at local government levels is not only necessary but also a clear call to action for all stakeholders.

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