

LOCAL GOVERNANCE BRIEFER

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Citizen Engagement Is A Pre-Condition For The Success Of The Parish Development Model In Uganda

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The Third National Development Plan (NDP III) was approved by the Parliament of the Republic of Uganda on 30th January 2020. The goal of NDP III is focused on increasing household incomes and improving the quality of life of Ugandans under the theme: “Sustainable Industrialisation for Inclusive Growth, Employment and Wealth Creation.” Operationalisation of the Parish Development Model is one of the strategies for realising the targets for deepening decentralization and citizen participation in local development in the NDP III. Thus, Cabinet approved the implementation of the Parish Development Model (PDM) as a strategy for organizing and delivering public and private sector interventions for wealth creation and employment generation at the parish level as the lowest economic planning unit, with effect from 1st July 2021³. According to (World Bank, 1993) and (UNESCO, 2000), the participation of stakeholders has been recognized as an essential component of anti-poverty policies and programmes. Community (citizen) participation has been identified as an important element in the success of poverty alleviation efforts (Baker, 1997) similarly the United Nations Development Programme has highlighted the importance of citizen participation in programmes designed to reduce poverty (UNDP, 2000).

However, it’s important to note that citizen engagement is critical in the conceptualisation and implementation of such initiatives because it improves the quality of policy being developed, making it more practical and relevant, and

helping to ensure that services are delivered more effectively and efficiently. Citizen engagement plays a key role in challenges faced by public officials in middle and low-income countries in improving the effectiveness of service delivery in terms of assessing the relevance and effectiveness of services. Strengthening accountability, transparency since lack of accountability and corruption in the public sector is perhaps the single most important factor for failures in service delivery (UNDP, 2016).

Government efforts to eradicate poverty should ensure citizen involvement to sustain peace regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity, or age (Malango, Matembe, & Kaheru, 2021). There should be a form of constant interaction between citizens and their governments in terms of the planning, development, and implementation of government policy and the delivery of public services. This results in more effective service delivery, responsive and accountable governments (IDS, 2018). (Lodewijckx, 2010) notes that in citizen engagement, the government ought to provide citizens with all the necessary information to enable them to make informed decisions. Furthermore, the world bank alludes to the fact that involving citizens in the decision-making process and development activities of local governments results into more efficient and effective delivery of services by the public sector (World Bank, 1996).

What’s the challenge?

The Constitution of Uganda⁴, the Local Government Act (1997), the NDP III, and the Vision

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² The Third National Development Plan (NDP III) 2020/2021 -2024/2025

³ Ministerial Statement on the Parish Development Model

⁴ See articles 38 and 41 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda

2040⁵ among other legal and policy provisions provide opportunities for citizen engagement and participation in the design and implementation of government programmes. However, (Francis, 2003) notes that though the decentralisation policy in Uganda provides for local participation in decision-making through different processes and structures and these structures and processes do not constitute a genuinely participatory system of local governance.

Similarly, (Rutakumwa, 2006) notes that though Uganda has good policies in terms of eradicating poverty and improving livelihoods of its population, the implementation of these policies has not filtered through to the grassroots structures because of factors such as corruption at the lower local government level, limited funding, lack of skilled manpower to implement the policies, lack of a regulatory oversight and a pervasive culture of learned helplessness among most people in local community enclaves.

However, officials from LG argue that citizens lack the capability needed to provide valuable input, including more people into LG decision-making causes delays in coming up with decisions as well as the process of reaching consensus more complex and increased costs. In addition, citizens have limited knowledge on how LGs work, or how final decisions are made. They also often lack the minimum acceptable skills required to communicate ideas properly, negotiate with different stakeholders, persuade dissidents, and engage in evidence-based lobbying and advocacy.

In addition, citizen representativeness and inclusiveness in LG decision-making were found to be rather low because of the perceived domination in the participation process of elites, leaving out ordinary people, and the practice of surrogate participation, although there were signs of improvement, especially in socially mobilized communities or those with high-level social networks. Lack of LG responsiveness, political and socio-economic structures, that leave out some citizens were among the major constraints for inclusive participation.

It is also important to note that limited citizens' involvement has been cited in the failure of previous poverty eradication initiatives of the Government. Commenting on the prospect of the Parish Development Model (PDM), the Director of Budget in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) noted that previous programmes were disjointed. He stated that Parish Model is to ensure that the challenge

of having programmes that are disjointed, duplicative, and less efficient are addressed (Kamurungi, 2021)⁶.

Similarly, citizens in Uganda have attributed failures of interventions such as Operation Wealth Creation and NAADS to the lack of their involvement. During community engagement meetings conducted by ACODE, citizens have severally noted that they were not consulted. It was also observed that citizens were not engaged in some government programmes. Further, there was a lack of a communication strategy on how the information will flow from the central government to the grassroots. There were concerns of understaffing in relevant departments at the LG level and limited resources were cited.

Furthermore, previous poverty eradication programs have been said to be good on paper but having no tangible actions at the grassroots level. Initiatives such as Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP) have benefited fewer women well-connected in the value chain. Similarly, it has been noted that the Livelihood Programme (YLP) has benefited urban-educated youth. Other challenges cited included sabotage by district officials and politicking and lack of transparency in the design of group formation (Guloba, Ssewanyana, & Birabwa, 2017).

Other factors that have affected agricultural initiatives include limited knowledge about irrigation, value addition, water harvesting; limited awareness of best technologies that can be used in the sector and rigidity in the adoption of new technologies; climate change; poverty; limited funds from government and limited access to finance; poor availability of radio, TV and other ICTs for campaigns to spread information in some areas; poor infrastructure in terms of roads, electricity (Ronner, Grace, & Braber, 2019).

In their study, (Molokwane & Lukamba, 2018) note that the involvement of citizens leads to increased efficiency and services, improved decision making, and promotes good governance. Ensuring that citizens participate effectively in policymaking should be central to open government reforms because it can result in a good relationship between policymakers and citizens. Participation of citizens through consultation improves the quality of policy by, ensuring its practical and relevant hence delivering more effectively and efficiently service delivery.

Success stories of citizen involvement in policy formation in Botswana, Brazil among others illustrate that when citizens make adequate

5 Uganda Vision 2040

6 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/how-parish-devt-model-will-work--3435664>

efforts in the contribution to the formulation of the country's public policy, it contributes to the successful implementation of such policies (Molokwane & Lukamba, 2018). In The Gambia, local people were involved in project design and evaluation in the National Strategy for Poverty Alleviation (Stoesz, Guzzetta, & Lusk, 1999) notes that citizen participation in efforts to reduce poverty has yielded positive results in some countries of southern and central Africa. Furthermore, In Uganda ACODE's Citizen Engagement Action Plans being implemented in 35 local governments have also registered success in improving service delivery. Furthermore, In Uganda ACODE's Citizen Engagement Action Plans being implemented in 35 local governments have also registered success in improving service delivery.

Recommendations

Citizen engagement in the Parish development model can be achieved in the following ways:

- *There is a need to leverage the existing Communications Strategies.* The government should leverage on the existing structure such as the Government Citizens Interaction Centre that is mandated to enhance interaction between government and citizens. Enhancement of use of client service charters by local governments and relevant MDAs to ensure transparency in government programs such as the PDM and provide a framework for feedback and consultations with service users to review and improve the quality of service delivered which ensures user satisfaction. Ministry of ICT, UCC, and NITA should work with relevant implementing stakeholders to intensify the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) such as SMS, television, and radio. Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials developed by MoLG should also be translated into local languages to ensure that all citizens understand PDM and none is left behind. To motivate citizens that participate in such processes, they should be informed of progress and how their input has affected the decisions or policies being made.
- *There is a need to empower Citizens.* Giving some authority and power in the decision-making process to citizens closest to the issues. Government can also leverage on already existing structures such as Barazas funded by The Office of the Prime Minister that work closely with the Resident District Commissioners, District and lower Council leadership to ensure satisfaction with service delivery. The Uganda Human Rights Commission has a mandate for civic education

and human rights awareness to work with relevant MDAs such as MoLG, MoFPED, and LGs to ensure citizen engagement in the PDM. Furthermore, revitalising the parish development committee to ensure planning at the parish level.

- *Ensuring sufficient staffing and resources is very important.* The Ministry of Local Government, Local Governments, and the Ministry of Public Service should ensure proper staffing at both the LG and lower LG levels for example, communication offices at the LG should be fully staffed and functional. Parish chiefs who are in charge of the parish development committees for the 10,595 parishes in 146 districts of Uganda according to the electoral commission website are recruited. Furthermore, ensuring that all non-functional newly created sub-counties, town councils, parishes, and administrative units are functional so that all citizens can benefit.
- *MDAs should establish clear success metrics.* The Office of the Prime Minister should ensure clear goals, objectives, and measurement indicators are identified to track citizen engagement initiatives in the monitoring and evaluation framework for the parish development model.

Conclusion

The implementation of the Parish Development Model can be a conduit to deepen decentralization and citizen participation in local economic development. To realize the cardinal goals of PDM requires invigoration of the local community's role in resource mobilization, demanding accountability from local leaders, participating in the planning, and choosing leaders. However, for that to happen, the implementers of the model will have to among other strategies prioritize citizen engagement. Citizen participation will encourage increased citizen ownership of government interventions that are designed to uplift them from their plight. An informed citizenry will be instrumental in enhancing citizen participation in monitoring the implementation of projects in their local areas as well as help in the fight against corruption, and thereby ensuring that the resources that are remitted by the center will reach the beneficiaries to serve the intended objectives.

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