Data gaps cast doubts on local governments' readiness for the parish development model

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Local governments in Uganda have for long struggled to generate real-time, reliable and quality data for their development planning. This is majorly attributed to the lack of capacities of local government staff in terms of data collection and analysis, lack of a harmonised information management system and reliance on manual systems for data management.[i] The challenge of data management puts in doubt the readiness of local governments, as both data generators and users, for the implementation of the recently launched Parish Development Model (PDM).

Background

The government of Uganda adopted the Parish Development Model (PDM) as a strategy to move 39 per cent of the households still stuck in subsistence into the money economy. The PDM was conceptualised as the whole-of-government approach to enable development at the parish level being the lowest administrative and operational hub for delivering services that will foster local economic development.[ii] Within the framework of PDM, different government interventions are to be harmonised and Ministry, Department and Agency (MDA) will focus on delivering services with measurable results closer to the people at the parish level.[iii] The success of PDM will require organized, integrated, well-coordinated and results-based efforts and this involves creating data systems that constantly feed the whole Government with real-time information concerning various interventions at the Parish level. The data generated and interpreted will improve the understanding of the different and unique characteristics of households across the country and hence provide the basis for the delivery of targeted interventions. Although the financial year 2022/2023 marks the first year of full-scale implementation of the PDM, the process of data collection for use during the implementation of the new poverty alleviation program is yet to be concluded.[iv] Local Governments lack validated statistics such as the number of administrative units that would otherwise be critical for the implementation of PDM.[v] Suffice it to note is that Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), the agency responsible for coordinating, monitoring and supervising the National Statistical System has raised a red flag as to the readiness for implementation of the PDM.[vi]

Statistics and Development Planning

Statistics mirror society and help to reflect on the reality of society. It gives a benchmark of the society at any one time.[vii] An essential component of any development planning is data, without which, a country's efforts to plan for future

growth can be severely impeded and the welfare of its citizens flawed.[viii] Statistics serve the dual function of informing and enabling (catalysing) development. Not only are statistics needed to monitor progress towards achievement of development goals and objectives but also to achieve them. To track the progress of development goals, the government must have quality and reliable data which provides essential information about the effectiveness of policies and programs. This helps the government in improving its policies and ensures transparency and accountability.[ix] Statistical information is necessary for making critical evidence-based national decisions and is important for informing development processes such as policy formulation, analysis and advocacy as well as in planning, decision-making, monitoring, evaluation and reporting on development progress.[x] Globally, the provision of reliable and high-quality data and information is gaining traction for economies and societies.[xi] In the 21st century overall, statistics are an important part of the enabling environment for development. Tackling development problems requires new ideas, partnerships, strategies and actions supported by reliable statistics at national and sub-national levels.[xii]

Data Generation and Information Management in Local Governments

Within the framework of decentralisation policy, the development planning function was devolved to local governments[xiii] and district councils are recognised as the planning authority of a district.[xiv] For local governments to be able to undertake their planning functions and constantly track the implementation of development plans, quality statistics are of essence.[xv] The National Development Plan III, National Planning Regulation, 2018 and the PDM Implementation Guidelines recognise the need for quality data in the planning process and places the primary responsibility of producing statistical data and storing other information relevant to the operations of the District on local governments. There are concerns raised about the quality, timeliness, access to data and data gaps in local governments in Uganda. The role of statistics in planning process notwithstanding, most local governments still lack the capacity to produce, analyse and use the range and quality of statistics required to support an effective planning process. As a result, policy making in local government suffers, citizens are under-served, development targets are not met, and impacts are not traced leading to a vicious cycle of underdevelopment.

Data Gaps in Local Governments and impact on PDM

There is a huge variance in the data demand and

actual data generated in local governments as a result of the low production of data. UBOS, has asked the government to halt the planned release of funds citing lack of reliable information on target beneficiaries. UBOS contends that the data that has been collected by the local leaders is invalid and reiterated that the country is not prepared for PDM roll-out.[xvi] Data and statistics related to the prevailing physical, social and economic characteristics of a district such as health, agriculture, population, local economic potentials, rain patterns, government investments and social and demographic characteristics that would be necessary for the successful implementation of the different pillars of the PDM are, unfortunately, not available for most local governments. Websites of various local governments do not have information on various sectors of the district while in some districts, the information is not updated to reflect the current situation. A review of Nakapiripirit, Moroto, Gulu, Nwoya and Lyantonde district websites for instance, revealed that their websites were last updated in; 2016, 2018, 2019, and 2021 respectively. Meanwhile, websites of districts such as Bududa bear the information of other districts. Analysis of Sector Strategic Plans for Statistics of districts such as Gulu, Sironko, Amuria, Masindi and Kabale revealed that while a lot of raw data is generated and stored, they are not validated and analysed. In Amuria district, for instance, education and community-based Education Management Information System (EMIS) and Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) statistical forms dating back to 2013 were still in the store and unprocessed.[xvii]

Table 1: Key data missing in local governments and how it will affect the implementation of PDM

Pillar	Data needed but not produced	Impact on PDM
Production, Storage, Processing and Marketing	• Crop yields and acreage • Statistics on Water yields • Livestock statistics • Industrial statistics	This will limit the process of area-based commodity clustering of farmers and value chain actors
Infrastructure and Economic Services	• Economic Statistics • Statistics on local enterprises • Infrastructure statistics	This will affect the process of providing tailored technical assistance to local enterprises such as linking business development services, extension services, guaranteed markets, and subsidized credit
Financial Inclusion	• Poverty statistics, • Widows • Household statistics	This will limit the process of developing and implementing Action Plans for the inclusion of disadvantaged interest groups

Pillar	Data needed but not produced	Impact on PDM
Social Services	• Statistics on quality indicators for different social services	The lack of data on service delivery indicators will affect the government's understanding of the development disparities and efforts to deliver targeted services to parts of the country that are lagging behind in development
Mindset change and cross-cutting issues	• Social statistics • Demographic statistics	This will affect mobilisation and sensitising Households for socio-economic development for self-help projects
Governance and Administration	• Number of administrative units • Statistics of the PDCs	The lack of data on the Parishes will limit and disrupt the coordination efforts under PDM. Several Parishes in Bududa, Dokolo, and Namutumba Districts have missed funds under PDM in this financial year on account of missing statistics about them

Source: Author's analysis of different local government websites

Quality of data produced

Local governments generate administrative data for their use and sharing with other MDAs, especially line ministries. As primary data producers, local governments largely influence the quality of data used by other MDAs.[xviii] However, the quality of data generated by local governments is questionable, unreliable and inconsistent.[xix] This is mainly because the data is invalidated, and structures for the generation of primary data are most times not supervised.[xx] For instance, checks for completeness and validations of EMIS statistical forms for primary school and OVCMIS are left to schools, caregivers and ACDOs leading to a compromise in the quality of data produced.

Key factors limiting statistical and information management in Local Governments

There are a number of factors that have been identified to limit the appropriate statistical and information management. These include:

a) Lack of capacity of Local Government Staff: There is inadequate and or low capacity of departmental staff for generation, management and analysis of data. Local Governments rely on parish chiefs for administrative data collection but do not have the critical staff responsible for processing and analysing the data. There is, for instance, no substantive statistician and or Information and Community Technology (ICT) in many LGs to specifically deal with data analysis.

b) Lack of ICT equipment and poor internet connectivity in most Local Governments: Data collection and management require the use of equipment such as computers, scanners, etc. However, there is a problem of lack of this equipment in some local governments. This is further compounded by the lack of internet connectivity at local government levels to support data generation, process, analysis and dissemination. Most districts lack internet to facilitate information management, only 58 of the 135 District headquarters are connected to the National Backbone Infrastructure.[xxi] Besides, there is also an unreliable power supply to support ICT equipment for handling statistical matters in some local governments.

c) The multiplicity of Management Information Systems: The success of a data collection and management plan depends on the credibility of a management information system. However, in the Local Government system today, there are many Management Information Systems such as; Education Management Information System (EMIS); Health Management Information System (HMIS); Integrated Finance Management Information System (IFMIS); Programme Budgeting System (PBS); Output Budget Tool (OBT); Integrated Personel and Payroll System (IPPS); Local Government Information and Communication System (LoGICS); Orphans and other Vulnerable Children Management Information System (OVCMIS); Local Government Revenue Management Information System (LGRMIS); and the Public Policy Executive Oversight Forum (APEX) among others, being promoted by various stakeholders which duplicate, rather than supplement each other. Further, these systems operate in silos and do not share information. The Local Government Information and Communication Systems, launched about five years ago to act as a harmonised management information system has not been fully functional in many local governments. Furthermore, there is still very limited understanding of the recently launched Public Policy Executive Oversight Forum (APEX) whose aim is to monitor the progress of government programmes.[xxii] The APEX Platform provides a robust monitoring mechanism for the success of government programmes such as the PDM.[xxiii] The limited understanding of the APEX platform among local government actors is another indicator of readiness challenges in local governments for PDM implementation.

Table 2: Various Information Management System in Local Governments

System	User Department	Purpose
APEX	Cross - cutting	Monitoring progress of government projects
EMIS	Education	Collecting, capturing and processing data for the education and sports sector
HMIS	Health	Data collection for planning, management, and decision-making in health facilities and organizations
IFMIS	Finance/ Planning	Automated public financial management system for budget preparation, execution, accounting and reporting
IPPS	Human Resource	For data collection and capture system for various human resource functions
LGRMIS	Finance	Capturing information on Local revenue collection
LoGICS	Harmonised	For capturing statistical information on service delivery in local governments
OBT	Finance	To assist in planning, budgeting and reporting of performance
OVCMIS	Community Service	For capturing statistical information on the needs and characteristics of Orphans and other Vulnerable Children and their households
PBS	Finance	Online system for capturing budget information

Source: Ministry of Local Government Strategic Plan for Statistics (2015/16-2019/20)

Conclusion

Quality data informs policy, planning and decision-making processes and provides the basis for monitoring and evaluating programmes. Local Governments have a role to produce quality data for themselves and use of MDAs. In light of the role that local governments play in the implementation of both the PDM and National Development Plan III, the ability of local governments to produce quality and real-time data is critical in ensuring the success of all these programs. For this to happen, local governments should be supported to overcome the limitations to their abilities to generate quality statistics.

Policy Recommendation

a) Recruit Key Staff in charge of Information Management- Ministry of Local Government and Public Service should revise the local government human resource structure to allow for the recruitment of staff specifically for data management such as statisticians and ICT officers.

b) Build Capacities of Parish Chiefs for data collection-Ministry of Information and Communication Technology which is charged with the responsibility of providing technical support under pillar six of the PDM should take deliberate efforts in building the capacities of local government staff including Parish Chiefs, on the other hand, UBOS should provide guidance on data standards to ensure quality data.

c) Harmonise Information Management Systems for Local Government-Ministry of Local Government with support from the Ministry of ICT should invest in revamping and strengthening the Local Government Information and Communication System (LoGICS) as a harmonised management information system for Local Governments

d) Invest in the extension of the National Backbone Infrastructure-While NITA-U has made a substantive investment in extending the internet connection in local governments, a number of District headquarters still remain without internet connection. NITA-U and the Ministry of ICT should therefore make deliberate efforts in connecting more district headquarters to the National Backbone Infrastructure

e) Disseminate the APEX Platform Operations Guidelines and Procedures Manual-Ministry of Local Government in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister should disseminate the APEX Operations Guidelines and Procedures Manual to local government leaders to create a uniform understanding of the APEX Platform and a standard practice for monitoring progress of the PDM.

Endnotes

i   Sironko District Local Government. (March 2017). Strategic Plan for Statistics 2017/18-2019/20.

ii   Government of Uganda. (2021). PDM Community Mobilisation and Mindset Change Manual. Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. October 2021.

iii See https://parliamentwatch.ug/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Ministerial-Stamen-on-the-Parish-Develop-Model.pdf

iv   See https://nilepost.co.ug/2022/06/14/ubos-kicks-off-collection-of-data-for-use-during-parish-development-model-program

v   On 11th July, the PS/ST wrote to PS MoLG noting that informations submitted by Local Governments on numbers of Administrative Units were inconsistent, and unverified.

vi   See https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/ubos-asks-govt-to-halt-release-of-pdm-money-3893756

vii Shahjahan, K. (2013). Statistics in planning and development. Pakistan Journal of Statistics.

viii Hoegen, M. (2015). Statistics and the quality of life. Measuring progress, a world beyond GDP.

ix   UBOS. (2020). Plan for National Statistical Development (FY 2020/21-FY 2024/25).

x   See Hoegen, M. (2015).

xi   UNECE. (2018). Recommendations for Promoting, Measuring and Communicating, the Value of Official Statistics .

xii OECD. (2015). The role of statisticsin world development.

xiii Mushemeza, E. D. (2019). Decentralisation in Uganda. Trends, Achievements, Challenges and Proposals for Consolidation. Kampala: ACODE.

xiv See Section 35 of the Local Governments Act, 1995 Cap. 243 as amended

xv   Ministry of Local Government. (2015). Strategic Plan for Statistics (2015/16-2019/20).

xvi See https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/ubos-asks-govt-to-halt-release-of-pdm-money-3893756

xvii Amuria District Local Government. (2017). Strategic Plan for Statistic 2017/18-2019/20.

xviii UBOS. (2020). Third Plan for National Statistical Development (FY2020/21- FY2024/25).

xix Ministry of Local Government. (2021). Implementation Guidelines for Parish Development Model. Kampala.

xx   Kabale District Local Government. (2021). Strategic Plan for Statistics 2020/21-2024/25.

xxi National Information Technology Authority. (2021). NITA-U Statistical Abstract 2021.

xxii GoU. (2020). APEX Platform Operations Guidelines and Procedures Manual September 2020.

xxiii See https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/oped/commentary/use-apex-platform-to-monitor-pdm-3878272