

The Role of Decentralization in Local Government Empowerment and Effective Service Delivery: A Case Study in Uganda

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Abstract:

Uganda has made significant efforts in decentralization, and the intent has been to significantly empower people and accelerate growth, improve the quality of service delivery and boost government efforts in steering good governance and improving quality of life. Furthermore, Uganda has been promoting good governance and participatory democracy by increasing openness and accountability in Local Governments. With its effectiveness on decentralization, a wide range of powers, responsibilities, and functions have been delegated to District Local Governments. Moreover, the Lower Local Council facilitates governance processes and contributes to national development efforts. Therefore, this paper stands to unravel Uganda's achievements and progress with its commitment and effectiveness in Decentralization. This paper lays out the different types of Decentralization that Uganda has embraced in maintaining effective Decentralization and the ultimate impact on local government in contributing to national development efforts. And the propensity it has to spark and empower local government when implemented in other African countries.

Keywords: Decentralization, local government, service delivery, empowerment, effectiveness

1. INTRODUCTION

During the well-known economic and democratic election reforms in African countries since 1998, particularly after 1990, another critical reform, albeit less visible and praised, has been the growing Decentralization of governments. One of the most crucial aspects of state reform in Africa after independence has been the recent resurrection of local government. (Ndegwa & Levy, 2003). Furthermore, thirteen nations evaluated in a recent World Bank study had solid or moderate degrees of Decentralization as judged by the composite index of political, administrative, and fiscal devolution indicators. Another thirteen demonstrated at least some degree of Decentralization, with some in the process of progressive reform. (Ndegwa & Levy, 2003)

In Uganda, a decentralization program was implemented more than 20 years ago to empower people, democratize governmental power, and facilitate community modernisation. This was done as it became clear that Uganda's centralized strategy of managing public affairs and development planning, which had been in place since independence, still needed to eliminate poverty effectively—improving people's welfare or delivering good governance (Anon, 2015). Decentralization in Uganda is now firmly entrenched as a system and process of local governance; its benefits to improving service delivery, boosting welfare growth, and improving overall rural delivery

have been recognised nationally and internationally. Therefore, this paper shows Uganda's different decentralization processes and efforts in improving and empowering local government and facilitating service delivery for the national government.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Decentralization?

According to the NEO Program (2019), Decentralization is devolving and distributing power, resources, and responsibilities from the national government to the local government. The national government makes the general policies, and the local government creates specific actions to respond to the developing national policies. In other research, the revolution of Decentralization has achieved impressive degrees of success in government transformation across the globe due to inhibiting factors. These factors include path dependency accentuated by powerful political, military, and bureaucratic elites. The main thrust of this revolution has been to move decision-making closer to the people and to establish fair, accountable, incorruptible, and responsible governance in a country.

What Other Studies Found

The silent revolution has been sweeping the globe since the 1980s. Hugely complex factors, such as the political transition in Eastern Europe, the abolition of colonialism, globalization and the information revolution, the assertion of citizens' fundamental rights by courts, divisive politics and citizens' dissatisfaction with governance, and the people's quest for responsible and accountable governance, have all played a role in gathering the storm.

According to the decentralization theorem advanced by Wallace Oates, a jurisdiction should provide every public service with control over the minimum geographic territory at its local jurisdiction while conforming with the national

authority, which internalizes the benefits and the costs of such provision. As a result, the local government ultimately comprehends the dire concerns of residents. Local decision-making is most responsive to the people for whom the services are intended, which solely amplifies fiscal responsibility and efficiency for local governments to manage their finances and run their local projects effectively.

Decentralization can describe a system of government in which power is granted to local authorities or a process by which governance is moved from a centralised to a decentralized system to promote efficiency, accountability, and transparency. Empowering local government whilst lessening the burden on the national government (Prud'homme, 2003)

Local Governments

Local governments always seem unremitting to those close to them. For a long period before 1997, the reforms appeared to be focused on reducing the power and central role of local authorities. This is in the democratic leadership of their communities and in being the first point of contact between citizens and government (Chandler, 2001). For instance, in Britain, local governments refer to the authorities and dependent agencies established by parliament to provide a range of specialized services and represent the general interests of a species under the direction of a locally elected council.

According to NEO Program (2019), local authorities supply more services than in the case of many ad hoc agencies or quangos. This means they can ordinate many separate functions and determine a strategy that catalogs and harnesses the well-being and development of a community. Since an effective democracy requires that many citizens participate in the political system, the local government ensures a much more incredible opportunity for people to be involved.

Moreover, serve as councilors to make decisions affecting people and communities.

The local government system in Uganda

The Ministry of Local Government oversees local government in Uganda. The local government legislation of 1997 established local government, codified in Article 5 of the constitution (Commonwealth Governance, 2022). The local government comprises one hundred eleven(111) district councils that sit at the top of a five-tiered organization. Other tiers include one county and municipal council, two sub-county and two councils, three parish councils, and four village and ward councils.

Municipal elections are held every five years for these different local authorities. The local government has revenue-raising powers, collects property taxes, licenses and fees, and receives most of its revenues from the national government. Furthermore, in collaboration with the national government, local authorities are responsible for environmental preservation and local transportation. They are solely responsible for economic growth in the district, such as public health, education, and social welfare. Some parts are devolved to lower tiers.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is exploratory qualitative research that uses only secondary data to provide deep insight and practical significance to the research topic. The findings are insights from previous and most recent literature that stringently allude to the research topic. The result will be generated from prominent analyses and discussions from other literature on the subject matter.

4. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVE

This research explores Uganda's decentralization policy's attractive and commendable efforts. Amplify its astute role in empowering local government to support the national government. Moreover, it aims to provide qualitative information that elicits the attention of other African countries on the overall advantage of effectively adopting decentralization and the potential to steer effective devolvement of power, promote local government participation in national development and help reduce the central government's burden.

5. LIMITATIONS

Only secondary data are used in this qualitative research study to provide comprehensive insights into Uganda's decentralization relevance and impact. It details Uganda's success in empowering local governments and encouraging effective service delivery all around the country.

6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the different decentralization systems that are working for Uganda? 2. What are some of Uganda's achievements from effective decentralization? 3. What are some of the impacts of local government empowerment? 4. Why should some African countries learn from Uganda's decentralization policies?

7. RESULTS

The Different Types of Decentralization Systems Working for Uganda

Uganda has adopted different types of decentralization and upholds them effectively and efficiently. These different decentralization types have strengthened and solidified Uganda's service delivery efforts

and empowered local governments to support the central government in driving national development.

Deconcentration

This type of decentralization is where the central government transfers responsibility and functions to the local government levels to be implemented by its representatives at the particular level. In Uganda, the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) is an example of a central government representative, like the regional police. They represent the central government at the local level. This provides maximum security for the local people and maintains rules and order among people in the local regions of Uganda.

Devolution

This type of decentralization is where the central government transfers political, financial, administrative, planning, judiciary, and even legislative powers. These powers are devolved to local governments as defined in the constitution. However, this mandates local governments such as districts and town councils to plan independently. They also manage their finances alone and they conduct elections at their local levels. This type of decentralization gives citizens or their representatives the power to make decisions at that level. They become independent as entities. The district's technical planning committee are responsible for collecting and integrating plans of lower local governments to allow for bottom-up participatory planning, budgeting, administration and decision-making between the central and local government (Green, 2015)

Fiscal Decentralization

Uganda leverages fiscal decentralization to transfer financial powers between the local government and the federal government. This type of decentralization is mainly centered around money disbursement. In this process, the central government transfers funds to the local government to fund their priorities. The local government is mandated to collect local revenue to finance their projects at their level. This decentralization allows each local government in Uganda to structure a sustainability and income generation that empowers them to launch their developmental projects at a local level (Muchangi, 2015). Local governments

have the authority to levy, charge, and collect local taxes and fees, as well as receive many intergovernmental grants, to enable them to carry out their tasks. *Delegation*

Lastly, Uganda has a solid and effective delegation of decisions and functions to local government. This type of decentralization is referred to as delegation. It transfers effective and more efficient decision-making and developmental functions that empower local governments to represent the interests of the local people and serve as agents in driving their development. The central government ministries previously did this to semi-autonomous organizations under the central government's control. For instance, Uganda has former marketing boards and parastatal bodies. These parastatal bodies and corporations are the national water and sewerage corporation of which is under the ministry of water and environment. The Uganda national road authority and the Uganda road fund all fall under the ministry of works and transport. Moreover, the national forest authority dairy cooperation is from the ministry of agriculture, and other cattle rearing sectors among others. Meanwhile, all of those authorities and corporations perform a delegated duty of their ministry. This facilitates the ministry to implement numerous projects and reach many regions with the strong support of those delegated local authorities.

8. UGANDA'S ACHIEVEMENTS FROM EFFECTIVE DECENTRALIZATION

Uganda's decentralization fosters effective service delivery alongside broad economic and political reforms. After a successful stabilization of the macroeconomic environment by the early 1990s, the

country embarked on a poverty alleviation program designed to deliver through a decentralized system of government. Henceforth, the relationship between decentralization and economic development could be mixed and controversial. However, it is prudent to understand that decentralization positively impacts the efficient allocation of resources, democratic governance and enhanced accountability (Matinez, 2003). Below are the key achievements of Uganda's decentralization policy and the outstanding service delivery improvement the country has experienced over the years.

Institutional Strengthening

Uganda has made significant progress in implementing decentralization (MoLG,2006). The structure of political decentralization is well entrenched and fully operational, as evidenced in the several local elections that have been successfully conducted over the past years. A functional administrative system at a local level has been established, with 75% of the public service workforce comprised of local government employees, and substantial progress has been made to implement fiscal decentralization, with about 38% of the national budget being allocated to local government to kick off their development projects. The country was given a three on a scale of four for administrative decentralization, with indicators such as the role of local administrative staff in the formulation of the development agenda and service delivery, the presence of a clear legal framework delineating the roles of the local and central government, and the institutionalization of the principle of subsidiarity, where actual service delivery is delegated.. Uganda also fared well in fiscal decentralization, as measured by the number of fiscal transfers made from the central government to the locals and the proportion of public expenditure handled by the localities. Uganda ranks third out of the 30 countries studied in this category, with a score of 3.5 on a 5-point scale (Ojambo,2012).

Empowerment and participatory Development

In Uganda, decentralization has empowered the citizens, heightened their awareness of the different custodians of responsibility, and delivered coordinated services closer to the people, this promoted creative local resources mobilization and increased the responsiveness of public investment to local public funds (Emourt,2006). Decentralization has promoted the development of communication channels between the population, including the local authorities, regional participation and central government leaders. This has geared up local level-political participation and opened accountability has been profusely enhanced for urban and rural leadership.

The developed political powers have enabled citizens to elect local leaders who have come under increasing demands for performance and visa-vi accountability. Meanwhile, decentralization has immensely contributed to residents' participation in planning and other decision-making processes. This system has empowered local governments' programs to implement local development programs, which has enhanced growth in the local area and have facilitated effective service delivery and national-wide development for the national government.

Improvement of Service Delivery

The accountability relationships between policymakers, service providers and citizens determine service delivery outcomes. The Service Delivery Indicators (SDI) aim to construct benchmarking metrics that capture service delivery's critical dimensions, including providers' knowledge and effort (EPRC, 2022).

In Uganda, the local government is a key driver of primary health care, primary education, water and sanitation, feeder and access roads, agriculture extension, street lights, and market infrastructure in local areas. This aims to steadfastly promote service delivery to reduce the burdens on the central government and, most significantly, provide ownership to the people to be inclusively part of the development process

while spotting accountability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. For instance, access to health centers increased when new health centers were constructed at both parish and sub-county levels by the local government. Uganda has made considerable strides in decreasing poverty, increasing school enrollment, and improving child survival rates (World Bank, 2013). This provided needed access to many residents and facilitated and improved health access within the local areas. The Service Delivery Initiative is a program in collaboration between the World Bank, the African Economic Research Consortium, and other renowned international institutions to create and institutionalize rigorous service delivery measures. These metrics are measured using survey tools that are supported by robust research and incorporate the most recent advancements in measuring provider competence and effort. Tanzania and Senegal piloted the survey instruments. Uganda is the second country to implement a full-fledged service delivery initiative effectively (EPRC, 2022).

9. IMPACTS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPOWERMENT

Local governments have been given the authority to deliver successful service. As a result, Ugandan local governments have been enabled to carry out and improve efficiency and effectiveness, participation, and accountability in Uganda's service sector.

Efficiency and Effectiveness - Poor allocation of funds and other monetary incentives to government sectors has resulted in poor development and development of programmatic and policy implementation. And this could hinder the government from implementing their projects effectively and create a huge burden to reach the local development levels (Lars,2022). Meanwhile, with Uganda's astute decentralization effort, local governments have been empowered through a robot and efficient fund allocation. This supported local governments in significantly contributing to improving local communities' primary education and healthcare services. And the amount of funds efficiently transferred to local governments for implementing local projects is one of the highest in Africa (Comfort Maratho, 2017).

Meaningful Participation

Participation must be transformed into a realistic, effective presentation and empowerment capable of reducing poverty and involving people in the development process (Sage journals, 2010). In Uganda, the decentralization program has boosted local government engagement in the national development process. They are tasked with mobilizing resources by generating revenue from established services and demanding accountability from local leaders. Furthermore, they participate in planning; they create and implement their own development projects at their level with pragmatic leadership. More intriguingly, the people elect their leaders without influence from local elites or the central government, ensuring that effective rural development objectives are prioritized (Kakumba, 2010).

Accountability

According to Kakumba(2010), decentralization is one of the most direct mechanisms of ensuring that leaders are accountable to the citizens on development trends. In Uganda, all local governments are required to publicize fiscal transfers they receive from the central government, and many of them have complied with the requirements. Thus, this keeps every authority to spend funds on the intended project and boasts transparency while promoting development. Moreover, districts have established units of engagement support service which sometimes incorporate NGOs, parish and village members to undertake monitoring and evaluation of service delivery to support downward accountability. As per the upward accountability, the legislative and operational structure allows the central government to

unilaterally define local governments' general policy direction and financial capabilities through the central grant transfers, which account for 90 per cent of local budgets and permit the upward accountability trend (EPRC, 2022).

DISCUSSION

This session discusses various literature that emphasizes Uganda's decentralization program as an essential step in empowering local government and considerably increasing service delivery in promoting local and national development. Since most of the literature reviewed similarly articulates the general subject from different perspectives, the most prominent will be discussed below.

According to Prud'homme (2003), Uganda's decentralization policy is to grant local authorities the mandate to promote efficiency, accountability and participation in service delivery. However, this article stringently unravels the different mandates and the position of the local government's capacity to support the national government in its quest for development. The author alludes to the fact that in every process of decentralization, the local people can understand the efficiency, participation and inclusion of the accountability track within the country. Hence, if Uganda's vision of 2040 is to alleviate poverty, improve education and healthcare services and promote sector development, giving the mandate to local governments in those capacities to drive the vision could be of immense strides for the national government.

Moreover, the (NEO Program, 2019) contends that local governments provide a broader range of services than many ad hoc agencies or quangos, implying that they can coordinate many separate functions and develop a strategy that catalogs and harnesses a community's well-being and development. In light of the fact that 80% of Ugandans live in rural areas (World Population Review, 2022), the viewpoint in this article may make more sense. Because the majority of the population lives in rural areas, and local governments have been a driving force for effective service delivery, it may be critical that Uganda maintains and steadfastly upholds its effective devolution of powers, mandate, and responsibility to local governments. This could be an essential insight to call the attention of other African countries whose rural populations surpass the urban, yet many are very delinquent in decentralization. Uganda must have been on a more glittering path to adopt this robust decentralization policy committedly.

According to Muriisa (2010), decentralization in Uganda began in 1986, when a national resistance movement came to power to foster democracy and increase local participation. This is demonstrated by the Ugandan government, which has local governments in each of the country's 111 districts. They participate in

decision-making, plan and manage their local projects at their levels, and produce funds at their levels. This is encouraging because, since the 1990s, decentralization has been an integral pillar for speeding growth and enhancing service delivery at all levels of the country. Another source claims that Uganda's decentralization policy encourages decentralization at all levels of government to develop good governance democratic involvement in and control over decision-making by the people and (Nakayi, 2013). However, researchers may readily reject the claim of "good governance." This may be disputable to academicians and most especially those who usually politically criticize the Museveni's leadership, and consider it to be a dictator regime and that numerous oppositions have been suppressed in recent years. Therefore, is this claim considered a "good governance" to only have an effective decentralization policy and, importantly, ignore the act of democracy? In this literature, the author could have specifically defined good governance in a perspective that only alludes to his research topic and then made it open-

ended.

CONCLUSION

A recent estimate suggests that at least 80 percent of developing countries are pursuing a decentralization policy. The international development community has taken up this push for local democracy with a wave of recent publications extolling the virtues of local governments in improving local democracy accountability and central government performance (Ndegwa & Levy, 2003). This is imperative to Uganda's impressive strides in sustaining effective decentralization on the continent; with this, Uganda has been able to achieve institutional strengthening and providing an opportunity for local governments to participate actively in the national development efforts while lessening the heavy burden of national development and governing from the central government. Therefore, effective decentralization could be a significant drive in maintaining an equal development progress across a country and if pragmatically and effectively implemented, this could also spur tremendous social and economic development at all levels of a nation.

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