

# Decentralisation and service delivery

## Human resource issues in Wakiso and Nakaseke districts of Uganda

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### ABSTRACT

*This article investigates human resource issues in the decentralised districts of Nakaseke and Wakiso in Uganda and the manner in which they pose a challenge to service delivery in local government. The article argues that human resource issues have implications for the empowerment of citizens and for service delivery in local communities in Uganda. While the decentralisation policy has been integral to the democratic government system that has taken root in Uganda since the 1990s, the link between decentralisation and empowering communities through service delivery is not automatic. The decentralisation policy has encountered a number of challenges relating to the legal and institutional framework, the political, financial and administrative issues. Some of the bottlenecks in service delivery are related to human resource issues because they determine the efficiency and the quality of services offered by local government structures.*

*The article encompasses both primary and secondary data in analysing the relationship between decentralisation (specifically human resource aspects) and service delivery in Wakiso and Nakaseke. Data was collected through interviews,*

*questionnaires and focus group discussions, as well as through a literature survey of relevant documents such as reports, minutes, legislation, journals, newspapers and textbooks.*

*The findings reveal that districts are constrained by human resource challenges that entail inadequate staff, lack of competence among elected leaders, ambiguous legislation to guide district officials in their work and inappropriate training policies. The article recommends mitigation measures to address the human resource challenges in order to enhance efficiency in service delivery.*

## INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the role of human resources in determining the quality and quantity of service delivery under the decentralisation policy in Wakiso and Nakaseke districts in Uganda. It argues that the human resource capacity of the two districts affect service delivery in the communities. The article traces the history of the decentralisation policy in Uganda, its legal and institutional framework and how these relate to service delivery.

## CONSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

Uganda comprises 112 districts, with the districts of Wakiso and Nakaseke located in the central region of the country. Wakiso is a peri-urban district while Nakaseke is a rural area. The first step in the country's decentralisation process was the enactment of the 1987 *Resistance Council/Committees Statute 9*, which legalised Resistance Committees and gave them powers in their areas of jurisdiction at the local level (Asiimwe 1989 quoted by Bashasha, Mangheri & Nkonya (2001:2). The Government of Uganda then implemented decentralisation with the enactment of the *Resistance Council Statute, 1993* (Lubanga 1996: 53-54). The decentralisation policy was later enshrined in Uganda's Constitution in 1995 and it was operationalised by the *Local Government Act, 1997*, which established local councils at the district, municipal, and sub-county/division/town council levels. The Act devolved far reaching powers and responsibilities in such areas as finance, legislation, policies, planning and human resource matters to these councils.

The devolution of powers, functions and responsibilities to local government was intended to transfer real power to the districts, thereby reducing the workload of the remote and under-resourced central government officials; to bring political and administrative control over services to the point that they can actually be delivered, thereby improving accountability and effectiveness; and promoting people's ownership of programmes and projects executed in their districts. The policy also aimed to free local government managers from central government constraints and, in the long run, to allow them to develop organisational structures tailored to local circumstances. Furthermore, it sought to improve financial accountability and responsibility by establishing a clear link between payment of taxes; provision of the services they finance; and to improve the capacity of local councils to



plan, finance and manage the delivery of services to their constituents (Asiimwe 1989 quoted by Bashasha *et al.* 2011:2).

The decentralisation policy in Uganda is thus based on three inter-linked aspects, namely political and legislative empowerment of the people, fiscal development and control of the administrative machinery by local councils (Bashaha *et al.* 2011:2). Under decentralisation, the interlinked aspects were expected to provide better services in local communities than was the case under a policy of the centralisation of authority.

## **DECENTRALISATION CONCEPTUALISED**

The term decentralisation generally refers to the transfer of authority to plan, make decisions manage functions, resource raising and allocation from the national level to any organisation or agency at the sub-national level. According to Rondinelli, Nellis and Cheema (1984:58), decentralisation is the transfer of legal, administrative and political authority from the central government, to semi-autonomous public corporations, area-wide development authorities, functional authorities, autonomous local governments or non-governmental organisations. It is a gradual process that evolves within an appropriate legal framework (Mills 1990:89).

Decentralisation can be political, administrative or fiscal, and it often takes four major forms: devolution, delegation, deconcentration and privatisation (Robertson 2002:3). The degree of political, administrative and fiscal power (or responsibility) that is transferred or delegated may be one way of differentiating the forms of decentralisation. Political decentralisation refers to the transfer of political authority to sub-national levels of government. The most obvious manifestation of this type of decentralisation is the elected and empowered sub-national forms of government from village councils to state level bodies. Political decentralisation requires a constitution and a legal and regulatory framework to ensure effective functionality. It also necessitates restructuring institutions and developing linkages with civil society and the private sector.

Devolution is considered a form of political decentralisation. Devolution refers to the full transfer of responsibility, decision making and resource and revenue generation to a lower level public authority that is autonomous and fully independent of the devolving authority. However, local units remain linked to the central government through supervisory and funding controls by the central government (United Nations Development Programme 1995:67).

Administrative decentralisation aims at transferring decision-making authority, resources and responsibilities for the delivery of specific public services, from the central government, agencies, field offices of the central government and line agencies. There are two major forms of administrative decentralisation. According to the Ministry of Local Government and the Decentralisation Secretariat (1994:8), deconcentration involves only a minimum authority transfer by shifting responsibility and duties from the central government to staff located outside the national capital. Under this system, field administration is administered by government officers who, although they work within local jurisdictions, remain employees of the central government. In Uganda, this was the system during the period 1966 up to 1986. Under this arrangement, services were provided by administrative staff appointed, deployed, promoted and disciplined by the central government. In this system, such officials were accountable to the central government.

Delegation redistributes authority and responsibility to local units of government or agencies that are not always necessarily branches or local offices of the delegating authority. In this form, responsibilities are transferred to the sub-national units, however, the bulk of accountability remains with the delegating central unit (Wunsh 1991:87).

Privatisation involves government transfers certain functions and services to various sections of the private sector, namely business, community groups and non-governmental organisations. This is practised primarily for reasons of efficiency (Cheema and Rondinelli 1983:8). In the Ugandan context, the *Local Government Act, 1997*, only allows local government to directly procure goods and services with a value not exceeding five hundred thousand Uganda shillings. This implies that any procurement involving an amount exceeding that figure has to be transacted by the Local Government Contracts Committee. Local Government Contracts Committees are provided for under the *Local Government Amendment Act, 2006* (Sect 91) of 1997, which replaced the District Tender Boards. The Contracts Committees comprise senior civil servants appointed by the Secretary to Treasury. The main duty of the Contracts Committees is to regulate procurement functions in Local Governments.

Fiscal decentralisation entails the resource re-allocation to sub-national levels of government. Generally, it involves local decision making on the allocation of financial resources including powers to levy local taxes (Lubanga 1996:69).

## HUMAN RESOURCE SYSTEM

Human resource capacity is central to the success of a decentralised system in local government especially for effective service delivery. Without competent elected leaders or technical staff to supervise and monitor the provision of services, decentralisation will not wholly attain its objectives. Siddique (2003) argues that the accomplishment of an organisational mission and objectives depends to a large extent on having the right persons in the right positions as well as the commitment and contributions of those involved (Ssonko 2009:1). Kelly and Gernard (1996) further argue that a sound and effective human resource system is the most significant variable that determines the performance of an enterprise (Ssonko 2009:1).

The decentralisation policy in Uganda introduced the Separate Personnel System (SPS) for management of local government staff. The aim is to strengthen the capacity of local government to deliver more efficient and effective services that fall within their mandate. Section 56 of the *Local Government Act, 1997*, establishes the District Service Commissions (DSCs) with powers to appoint persons to hold or act in services of a district or urban council including powers to appoint, confirm, discipline or even dismiss staff. Its powers, however, exclude appointing and disciplining of the chief administrative officers (CAOs) or their deputies and town clerks of the municipal councils as these are appointed and disciplined by the central government through the Public Service Commission (as amended by the *Local Government Amendment Act, 2006*). The implication of this framework is that the administrative officials of the respective local government structures, with the exception of the chief administrative officers and town clerks are fully accountable to the local councils through their chief executives. The chief administrative officers and the town clerks, although they are responsible to the central government, still perform statutory roles of their respective councils and therefore are bound by law to implement decisions of their respective councils.



However, the recentralisation of the chief administrative officers and the town clerks has undermined the autonomy and authority of local government since they do not have control over these officials. The critical question, then, is whether districts such as Wakiso and Nakaseke have the necessary human resource capacity both numerically and qualitatively, to promote and sustain service delivery.

## STAFF COMPOSITION

A study of Nakaseke and Wakiso reveals serious staffing gaps in primary schools, health service centres, agriculture and extension services, works, environment and forestry and entomology departments. There are also staffing gaps at the district and sub-county headquarters (See Tables 1-4). Employees at the headquarters execute plans, supervise and provide guidelines to lower bodies while the sub-county employees are responsible for implementing activities.

The shortage of staff affects the effective and efficient delivery of services to the local communities. For instance, by 2010 Wakiso District had 3 655 approved positions for teachers but 3 345 had been filled (or 92%) leaving 310 vacancies. In the health sector, out of 1 144 health workers available, 82 were untrained (Wakiso Human Resource Annual Report 2010). Nakaseke District had 532 established positions for health workers but only 219 had been filled leaving a gap of 213 accounting for 39,9%. For teachers, out of 1 510 approved positions only 1 100 had been filled leaving a shortfall of 410. From those recruited, 162 were untrained teachers (Nakaseke Human Resource Annual Report 2010).

The reasons given for the above staffing shortfalls were mainly lack of funds to cater for employees' monthly wages and particularly technical staff such as medical doctors being reluctant to work in rural areas where there were fewer facilities. Poor remuneration and

**Table 1 The current staffing situation in Wakiso District by Directorate in 2011/2012**

Item	Directorate	Establishment	Filled	Gap	%
1	Management and Support services	37	29	8	22%
2	Finance and Planning	23	19	4	17%
3	Production	22	9	13	59%
4	Works and Technical service	33	14	19	58%
5	Education	17	12	5	28%
6	Health	11	6	5	45%
7	Community service	9	5	4	44%
8	National resources	30	18	12	40%
9	Planning Unit	7	7	0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>189</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>37%</b>

Source: Wakiso District Human Resource Department

**Table 2 The current staffing situation in Wakiso District by sub-counties in 2011/2012**

Item	Sub-county	Establishment	Filled	Gap	%
1	Katabi	16	13	3	19%
2	Makindye	18	15	3	17%
3	Masulita	22	14	8	36%
4	Nabweru	15	12	3	20%
5	Namayumba	21	10	11	52%
6	Nangabo	20	18	2	10%
7	Wakiso	18	17	1	6%
8	Kasanje	19	16	3	16%
9	Kakiri	19	11	8	42%
10	Busukuma	19	15	4	21%
11	Gombe	22	16	6	27%
12	Bussi	16	4	12	75%
13	Mende	17	6	11	65%
<b>Total</b>		<b>242</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>31%</b>

Source: Wakiso district Human Resource Department

unattractive working conditions were also responsible for the high attrition rate of many staff, preferring to work in the private sector or in the central government where there are better opportunities for career advancement and better working conditions. Conflict between elected leaders and technocrats in local government are also a major cause of the widespread human resource shortages in both districts.

**Table 3 Nakaseke District staffing situation by directorates in 2011/2012**

Item	Directorate	Establishment	Filled	Gap	%
1	Management and Support services	19	11	8	42%
2	Finance and Planning	21	3	3	86%
3	Production	15	5	10	67%
4	Works and Technical service	10	8	2	20%
5	Education	9	8	1	11%
6	Health	10	4	6	60%
7	Community service	20	15	5	25%
<b>Total</b>		<b>104</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>48%</b>

Source: Nakaseke District Human Resource Department

Note: For health workers, out of 532 established positions only 313 were filled, leaving a gap of 219 vacant posts.



**Table 4 Current staffing situation in Nakaseke District by sub-counties in 2010/2012**

Item	Sub-county (Administration)	Establishment	Filled	Gap	%
1.	Kapeeka	20	15	5	25%
2.	Kasangombe	9	6	3	33%
3	Kinyogoga	9	7	2	22%
4	Nakaseke	12	8	4	33%
5.	Ngoma	10	7	3	30%
6.	Kinoni	8	3	5	63%
7.	Semuto	12	10	2	17%
8.	Wakyato	10	7	3	30%
9.	Kito	8	3	5	63%
10.	Kikamulo	12	7	5	42%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>34%</b>

Source: Nakaseke District Human Resource Department

The above shortages in various departments in the two districts indicate that the services provided are affected mainly by a shortage of personnel. The District Service Commission continues to recruit untrained teachers, indicating that service discrepancies are still experienced by the two districts. Similar human resource issues were cited in a report by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (2009:42) and a Joint Annual Review of the Decentralisation report by the Uganda Local Government Association (2011:4). The two reports point out similar impediments in the human resource composition in Uganda.

## **CAPACITY OF DISTRICT OFFICIALS**

Laurie (1999) quoted by Maicibi and Nkata (2005:8) argues that all organisational achievements are products of the performance of people in the organisation. Laurie identifies people's acquired competences as one of the main factors that promote performance in the organisation. Drucker (1999) quoted by Olum, (2009:7) asserts that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century every job and every unit is subject to change hence everyone needs to acquire management skills. For organisations to perform, they need people with relevant training and competences that match the demands of the changing institutions and the needs of the clients they serve.

Uganda's local government structures are composed of the political wing (elected Councillors) charged with the responsibility of initiating policies, planning, monitoring and making vital decisions. The administrative wing (the appointed officials) is responsible for implementing policies. In order to deliver services more effectively, both groups have to work together as they handle the complex programmes characterised by government bureaucratic tendencies. The political and the administrative staff should have the basic competences to run the affairs of local government. This is critical because their roles are interrelated

**Table 5 Qualifications of different categories of staff in Wakiso District in 2011/2012**

No	Post/Title	Minimum required qualification	Qualifications of the incumbent	Comments
1.	Chief Administrative Officer	Bachelor's degree in humanities and post-graduate training in Public Administration	The holder has relevant qualification	The holder appointed by the Public Service Commission
2.	Heads of Department (managers including works, health and finance)	Master's degree required in relevant fields	All have the relevant qualifications	
3.	Principal Officers (Clerks to council, Chief Internal Auditor, District Planner, and Principal Personnel Officer)	Bachelor's degree with post-graduate training in relevant fields	All have the relevant qualifications	
4.	Sub-county chiefs (Senior Administrative Officers)	Bachelor's degree with a Certificate in Administrative Law	All have the relevant qualifications	
5.	Town Clerks	Bachelor's degree with a post-graduate Diploma in a relevant field	All have the relevant qualifications	

Source: Wakiso District Human Resource Department

and complementary. However, while local government legislation in Uganda requires the chairperson of the district to have equivalent qualifications as those of a Member of Parliament, the councillors who are members of the district councils are not required to have any basic educational qualifications. The technical staff must possess respective competences as shown in Table 5 and 6. Table 5 shows qualifications of different categories of staff in Wakiso and Nakaseke districts. Table 5 indicates that technical personnel in key areas in Wakiso District possess the required qualifications, while for Nakaseke Table 6 indicates that particular technical staff do not have relevant qualifications and therefore are not yet confirmed in their respective positions. However, this could be attributed to the fact that Nakaseke is a new district, created in 2005. The process of recruiting staff was still continuing.

Lack of requisite qualifications by holders of key positions in the districts undermines their confidence and subsequently impairs their ability to deliver quality services. It also creates suspicion and frustrates the work of the other appointed officials. For example, by the end of the Financial Year 2010/2011, Wakiso and Nakaseke had each received transfers from the central government averaging about 96% of their budgets. However, at the end of the Financial Year the two districts had not spent all funds received, mainly because of the slow decision making process of the district councils. Also, a number of audit reports and those of the Local Government District Public Accounts Committee (LGDPAC) for the last five years had never been discussed by the district councils as required by law, mainly because of a lack of competence and commitment.

In addition, there is a legislative ambiguity in the *Local Government Amendment Act*, 2006. The section of the law defines the role of the chief administrative officer, resident district commissioner and local council chairperson of the district, as accountable for the



**Table 6 Qualifications of different categories of staff in Nakaseke District in 2011/2012**

No	Post/Title	Minimum required qualification	Qualifications of the incumbent	Comments
1.	Chief Administrative Officer	Bachelor's degree in humanities and post-graduate training in Public Administration	The holders have relevant qualifications	
2.	Heads of department (managers including works, health and finance)	Master's degree required in relevant fields	Only two have the required qualifications	There is a high risk of shortage of competencies
3.	Principal Officers (Clerks to council, Chief Internal Auditor, District Planner, and Principal Personnel Officer)	Bachelor's degree with post-graduate training in relevant fields	Three have the relevant qualifications	There is a high risk of shortage of competences
4.	Sub-county chiefs (Senior Administrative Officers)	Bachelor's degree with a Certificate in Administrative Law	Two do not have the required qualifications	
5.	Town Clerks	Bachelor's degree with a post-graduate Diploma in a relevant field	All have the required qualifications	

Source: Nakaseke District Human Resource Department

affairs of the district. The resident district commissioner is the representative of the President and the central government. This commissioner is appointed by the President to monitor government programmes in the district. The local council chairperson is elected by universal adult suffrage through secret ballot. He or she is the political head of the district, presides over the meetings of the executive committee of the district, monitors the general administration of the district and co-ordinates and monitors government functions. The chief administrative officer is appointed by and accountable to the Ministry of Local Government through the Public Service Commission. He/she is the head of the Public Service in the district and is the accounting officer. He/she also monitors the activities of the district and lower council employees and departments. However, they report to different centres: the resident district commissioner reports to the President's Office, the local council chairperson reports to the district council and to voters, while the chief administrative officer reports to the council and to the Ministry of Local Government as the central government ministry that supervises and monitors the activities of Local Governments in Uganda. This situation has created power struggles as it promotes egos between the high level district officials and in the end this power struggle impairs service delivery in local government.

In an effort to address the human resource capacity challenges, the government of Uganda has initiated capacity building programmes, which have filtered down to local government. This programme is mainly donor driven and is top-down. This approach has a problem in the identification of the additional skills which may be required in local government. Employees of local government end up undergoing training in areas of their choice and, in some cases,

after the training they consider other employment opportunities elsewhere. This affects the capacity building efforts for the local government workforce implying that the capacity building policy needs to be reviewed.

## ROLE OF DISTRICT COMMISSIONS AND BOARDS

Members of commissions and boards in the district local government structures play an oversight role in safeguarding the quality and standards of human, physical and financial resources and consequently promote service delivery. Commissions and boards include the district service commissions; local government district public accounts committees; land board committees; and contracts committees. Members of each committee are required to have a basic qualification of Senior Six or its equivalent (*Local Government Act 1999:7*).

In summary, the main functions of a district service commission are to recruit and discipline employees. The local government district public accounts committee examines reports of the Auditor-General, the principal internal auditor and commissions of inquiry, and recommends actions to be taken by relevant authorities. The *Local Government Act, 1997* provides for internal audit departments in local governments. The internal audit department carries out financial audits and produces quarterly reports. The Auditor-General produces reports on local government for each financial year. The local government district public accounts committee examines the above reports and submits them to district councils on

**Table 7 The composition of Commissions and Boards in Wakiso and Nakaseke districts for FY 2010/11**

No.	Commissions and Boards	District	Established membership	Filled	Gap	Comments
1.	District Service Commission	a) Wakiso	5	4	1	For two years the council has failed to fill the gap due to political wrangles.
		b) Nakaseke	5	4	1	Town Councils have failed to agree on which members to submit.
2.	Local Government District Public Accounts Committee	a) Wakiso	5	3	2	The district council has not yet appointed the two members.
		b) Nakaseke	5	4	1	The district council has not yet appointed one.
3.	Contracts Committee	a) Wakiso	5	5	–	–
		b) Nakaseke	5	5	–	–
4.	Land Board Committee	a) Wakiso	5	4	1	The district council has not yet appointed a member.
		b) Nakaseke	5	4	1	The district council has not yet appointed a member.

Source: Wakiso and Nakaseke Human Resource Departments



a quarterly basis. The land board committee allocates land within the district's jurisdiction while the contracts committee awards contracts for supplies and procurements in the local government. Due to the nature and importance of the role of the commissions and in order to provide better services, members of these committees should have the relevant competences such as requisite skills, experience and integrity.

In the Ugandan districts, members of the commissions and boards are recruited by the district councils and those recruited tend to be mainly former campaign managers of the politicians. Such a recruitment process may ignore competences required for specific commissions and boards and it may promote political interference in the work of these commissions and boards. Yet, some of these commissions and boards handle specialised areas such as accounts and recruitment and therefore appointments to such commissions should take into consideration those competences required for effective performance of the committees. In Wakiso and Nakaseke districts, the commissions and boards were not fully constituted as required by law in the Financial Year 2011/2012 (See Table 7). If the commission is not fully constituted it means it will not benefit from the special skills and competences of its members. The recruitment process for members of the commissions and boards need to be reviewed to make the boards more effective.

## CONCLUSION

In Uganda, the decentralisation process has produced some positive changes, especially in the way public sector management is being handled, and it has increased involvement of non-central government players in public management. The policy, however, is experiencing implementation challenges, specifically relating to human resource capacity in the districts.

The districts of Wakiso and Nakaseke, are constrained by capacity problems in different sectors. Wage allocations from the central government are insufficient and poor working conditions in local government do not attract talented employees. Highly skilled employees move to central government or to the private sector in search of promotional opportunities, better remuneration and good working conditions. Local government fails to pay pensions and gratuities to retired civil servants due to their weak revenue base. All these factors have greatly reduced efficiency within local government structures.

Although elected leaders in local government are required to play a pivotal role as they have been empowered by law, their performance is curtailed by a lack of capacity to make vital decisions on key programmes and projects through various committees. The law does not require elected leaders of local government to possess academic qualifications. Consequently, some elected leaders lack the competence to effectively internalise complex issues associated with government systems such as development plans, budgets, work plans, project appraisals and approvals. This lack of competences delays the implementation of most government programmes and submission of reports. It also breeds role conflicts, leading to misunderstanding the mission, vision, and objectives of decentralisation. Supervision of services cannot be effectively carried out by uninformed leaders. The *Local Government Act*, 1997, thus needs to be reviewed to specify basic academic qualifications for office bearers in local government. To minimise conflicts between the key leaders of the districts, sections of the Act regulating their roles should also be reviewed.

The capacity building needs of local government should be reviewed on a regular basis to respond to the current socio-economic and political challenges. Local government should be provided with additional funding and empowered to identify appropriate gaps to be filled through appropriate training programmes. To minimise cases of workers who acquire the much needed skills and then leave the districts, contractual obligations binding the employees to serve in local government for at least five years should be made between local government and the beneficiaries of the training programmes. In addition to regular training, Result Oriented Management (ROM) techniques that stipulate benchmarks against output need to be strengthened. However, this will require a regular appraisal to test the competences of employees against agreed upon set targets *vis-à-vis* the results. This tool for promotion of competences among employees also requires the district councillors to possess appropriate skills, which will assist them in performing their supervisory role over employees more effectively.

The performance of members of the district commissions and boards is also compromised mainly due to deficiencies in the appointment process. There is a need to review the recruitment process to enable commissions and boards to provide improved services without undue influence from the politicians.

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