

# Twenty-Four Years of Decentralised Local Government in Uganda: Measuring Responsiveness, Effectiveness, and Accountability

MP Galukande-Kiganda  
North West University  
LB Mzini  
North West University

## ABSTRACT

The article explores the implementation of decentralised local governance in Uganda and the factors that inhibit the realisation of decentralised local governance. Decentralisation efforts seek to promote a more responsive, efficient and accountable governance at the local level. The 1995 Constitution of Uganda and subsequently the 1997 Local Governments Act, gave impetus and legal backing for the decentralised local governance in Uganda. Since their establishment in 1997, local governments have played a fundamental role in democratisation, service delivery, maintaining security, expediting local justice, enhancing local economic development and above all promotion of good governance in Uganda. Based on the local council system, local governments have undoubtedly been critical channels of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) – the ruling party's manifestos and governance agenda. The concern among scholars, practitioners and the civil society is the need to generate a balanced assessment of the governance achievements and challenges facing the local governments in Uganda. Whereas government and the policy makers argue that this system has been a great success, many scholars, academicians, civil society and even street level bureaucrats are of the view that all is not well. This article intends to address this gap by making a balanced assessment of the governance achievements and challenges of the local council system in Uganda. The study presents findings based on analysis of available literature, reports and assessments carried out on the performance of local governments in Uganda in the period 1997- 2016. The article shall make suggestions on enhancing responsiveness and accountability in decentralised service delivery in Uganda.

**Key Words:** Decentralised Local Governments, Responsiveness, Effectiveness, Accountability

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralisation is defined as the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, resource raising and allocation from central to lower levels of government or other agencies (Rondinelli, 1986). The underlying assumption

is that lower levels of government are more responsive and accountable to addressing local concerns and are more effective in delivering services to local people (Ojumbo, 2012).

Decentralisation is therefore an important institutional reform effort

pursued in all developing countries (SAITO, 2001) Decentralisation usually takes both political and administrative forms. Political decentralisation takes many types ranging from Privatisation, Delegation, Deconcentration and also Devolution (Agrawal, 1999). Whereas there is no country in the world without any form of decentralisation, countries adopt different types of decentralisation with varying degrees of responsibility transfer.

Some decentralisation systems have resulted in improved quality, effectiveness, accountability and responsiveness of public service delivery at local level, while other systems have created chaos and anarchy (Treisman, 2002). Since 1997, Uganda adopted a hybrid type of decentralisation operationalised through a local government system. (Lambright, 2011) This paper assesses responsiveness, effectiveness and accountability issues in the local government system in Uganda over the last twenty-four years.

The history of decentralisation in Uganda can be traced back to as far as the pre-colonial times. Before independence and before formal declaration of Uganda as a British protectorate, there existed both state and stateless society from whom Uganda was forged as a nation. In both pre-colonial state and stateless societies, there existed forms of power sharing and division of responsibilities between the kings or paramount chiefs and the subjects in distant territorial boundaries.

The kingdom of Buganda, for example, had counties - Saza and county

chiefs, as well as sub-county – Gombolola and Gombolola chiefs, parishes – Muluka and Muluka Chiefs up-to village chiefs. All these tiers of local administration enjoyed some forms of decentralised responsibilities. Similar forms of decentralisation existed in the kingdom states of Bunyoro, Toro and Ankole. Even in stateless societies, there were paramount chiefs who shared some of their political and administrative functions to clan leaders and other the king –Kabaka.

Between 1884 and 1962 when Uganda was under British colonial rule, the colonial administrators governed Uganda through a formal decentralised structure operationalised through several colonial ordinances (Ministry of Local Government, 2014). Notably, the 1919 native Authorities Ordinance that gave district commissioners supervisory powers over appointed chiefs at county, sub county, parish and village levels. The 1949 Local Government Ordinance was probably the most effective colonial ordinance aimed at ushering decentralisation to the Ugandan protectorate.

This ordinance established four kingdoms (Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole, and Toro) and eleven districts covering the rest of the protectorate. The 1949 Local government Ordinance also established elected district councils mandated to oversee district administration. However, the district commissioner and local chiefs remained responsible to the colonial government (Ojumbo, 2012). The 1955 District Administration Ordinance established local councils at district and county levels

and granted them several local functions including collecting and spending locally collected revenues and taxes. The 1959 Local administration (Amendment) Ordinance empowered the Governor to appoint District Chairpersons and members of district appointments boards (Ministry of Local Government, 2014).

The first efforts towards decentralised governance in post-colonial Uganda were reflected in the 1962 independence constitution. This was a semi federal constitution that among others attempted at devolving powers of the central government to lower levels especially in the functions of tax collections and administration, land management, rural water and roads maintenance, agricultural extension services, as well as primary education. The 1962 constitution gave federal status to Buganda kingdom and semi federal status to the kingdoms of Bunyoro, Ankole, Toro, and the territory of Busoga. The rest of the country was administered through elected district councils. These areas included the districts West Nile, Bukedi, Bugishu, Acholi, Kigezi, Madi, sebei, and Lango (Ojambo 2012).

The 1962 constitution was abrogated and a republic constitution of 1967 re-centralised almost all the local government functions that had been created by the 1962 independence constitution. Notably, the 1962 Local Government Ordinance was repealed and the Urban Authorities Act (1964) and the Local Administration Act (1967) passed into law. These two acts recentralised all the functions that

had been granted to the local governments and their powers vested in an appointed minister responsible for local administration, directly under the control of the president (Nsibambi, 1988).

In the period 1971 -1979, Uganda was under the rule of President Iddi Amini. President Amini dissolved parliament, the constitution, and rule of law and the country was administered by military decrees. District and urban councils were dissolved as well and the country ten provinces headed by royal military generals also named governors (Hamilton, 2005). During this time, there was total collapse of all government structures including all elements of decentralisation, the economy, and even security.

The period that followed after the overthrow of President Iddi Amini was also characterised by little efforts to re instate decentralisation and local governance. In 1981, national elections were held but local council elections were never held. The Local Administration Act (1976) that had been suspended by President Iddi Amini was re- instated and district commissioners were appointed by President Milton Obote and posted to all districts. The basis of this appointment was loyalty to the ruling political party- Uganda People's Congress- UPC.

Staff were recruited by the central government and de-concentrated to districts and could be transferred to other districts by posting instructions from the centre. Because there were little efforts to re-introduce democratic

governance, especially re-establishing district councils and holding local elections, there was an urgent need to re-establish democratic governance, peace and security in most parts of the country. Many parts in central Uganda were already in civil wars that saw the National Resistance Movement - NRM capturing state power in 1986.

When the NRM captured power democratisation and good governance were already very critical. Even before capturing state power in 1986, the NRM bush war tactics of the 1980s had developed a grassroots community mobilisation strategy commonly known as "Resistance Committees". Whenever NRM fighter capture territory in the bush war, residents in the captured territory were mobilised to form resistance committees, some of the objectives of which were to safeguard and manage local security in areas captured by the fighters and to provide an alternative to local administration which was lacking because it had been neglected by President Milton Obote's government (SAITO, 2001).

The resistance committees would manage local governance including local dispute resolution, resource mobilisation, environment, security, and above all, local politics. The resistance committees were composed of nine members directly elected on "individual merit" and not political party sponsored. Gradually, members of the resistance committees became converts, sympathizers, mobilisers, spies, and later cadres of NRM. On capturing state power, the bush war Resistance Committees were gradually

transformed into "Resistance Councils" and institutionalised into the local government structure. In 1987, the Resistance Councils and Committees Statute was passed that paved way to non-political party elections of resistance councils from Resistance Council 1 (Village /Cell), Resistance Council 2(Parish / Ward), Resistance Council 3 (Sub-county/ Town Council/ Municipal Division), Resistance Council 4 (municipalities), Resistance Council 5 (Districts/ Cities) and the National Resistance Council -NRC (National Assembly).

A committee of experts that was appointed to study and recommend a local government system for Uganda recommended the decentralisation system of local government that was based on the resistance committees/ councils structure. Decentralisation as a local government programme was launched in 1992 and a year later, the Local Government (Resistance Councils) Statute was passed. The constituent assembly -CA recommended the decentralisation system of local government and the constitution adopted the devolution type of decentralisation which was operationalised in 1997 in the Local Government Act -LGA. Resistance Councils were renamed "Local Councils" and granted six devolved local government functions, viz: executive/ political, planning, budgeting, administrative, legislative, and judicial functions (Government of Uganda, 1995). Twenty-four years after establishing local governments in Uganda, this paper aims at measuring for responsiveness, accountability and effectiveness of these local governments towards the objectives of de-

centralisation upon which they were premised.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical underpinning of decentralisation, and of this study, can be ably quoted from (SAITO, 2001:1-2) in which he states:

“Decentralisation brings public services closer to people, who have more opportunities to participate more actively in decision-making process of local policies and activities than in centrally decided ones. This participation in turn contributes to improve accountability of public services, because people can scrutinize local governments more closely than central governments. The services are also delivered more speedily than in the case of a centralized administration, since decentralization reduces often lengthy bureaucratic procedures for decision making and implementation. The services then become more responsive to and are tailored for different needs of different localities. Accordingly, often large bureaucracy at the center can be reduced, and limited public resources are more efficiently and effectively utilized”.

Decentralisation is both a political and an administrative intervention to enhance government's responsiveness to local needs by involving local people to find local solutions to solve local

problems. Decentralisation is also an economic intervention as well as an intervention of administrative theory (Hart, 1972). This therefore brings us to the conclusion that no single theory may ably explain decentralisation in any country. Since decentralisation is a convergence of several disciplines, theories underpinning it are related to the various disciplines and angles upon which decentralisation has been directed. For purposes of this paper, several theories were relied upon and included, but were not limited to the Rational Choice (Tiebout Model), The Principal-Agent Theory and the Normative Theories and Principle of Subsidiarity.

The rationale for decentralisation therefore is that the central government is very far and even if the central government wished to solve local problems, it will do so with macro and magnified lenses. Finding local solutions to local issues would not only be cheap, but also would take less time. Local responses to local issues make public management more effective because solutions can easily be identified and implemented. The above theoretical underpinning to decentralisation is double edged and only applicable to some limited degree. Sometimes, local problems can be locally solved, in other instances local interventions may fail to handle them, depending on the degree of magnitude of the issue at hand.

Quite often, the issues may either be of a national or global nature (such as natural disasters and epidemics) or the local skills and resources cannot ably give a workable solution to what seems a local problem such as floods

and landslides. Therefore, in as far as citizens are to be involved in solving local affairs, the public administrator should gauge the capacity for them to accomplish specific tasks (Mamdani, 1996).

Decentralisation theory is therefore not exempted from criticism. Some scholars have paraded a number of shortcomings linked to decentralisation theory. SAITO, (2001) has highlighted possible challenges of decentralisation theory. Decentralisation may result in local royalty when it breeds localism that may harm both regional and national interests and at worse incite secessionism. Besides decentralisation may be manipulated by the local elites who may hijack decentralised services for personal interests. Some scholars are of the view that decentralisation breeds local corruption especially when local resources become scanty to support the decentralised functions. In some cases, when some regions are more endowed with resources than others, decentralisation may result in uneven development within a country with resource endowed regions prospering more than those with meagre resources. In all, decentralisation theory may either be good or bad depending on particular contexts and practices and it is therefore untenable to judge it as good or bad theory (Litvack, 1998; Crook, 1999).

### **3. DECENTRALISATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Accountability has been defined as the obligation of a decentralised unit to answer to a hierarchically super-ordinate body of government for

its activities and also to the citizens and the public (Christiph Demmke, 2006). Accountability is a key public management lever and is not only a tool but also an indicator of effective and good governance (OECD, 2005).

Enhancing local accountability is one of the foundations of decentralisation and hence public accountability and decentralisation are mutually exclusive. Accountability entails that decentralised local governments are in position to respond to questions relating to abiding by the rules and procedures, complying with the expectations of the principal, meeting external expectations, giving performance information and responding to performance consequences. Accountability therefore results in effective delivery of public services. In a decentralised government system, accountability is simplified by narrowing the distance and time between the principal and the agents. Responsiveness on the other hand is the capacity of decentralised units to address local concerns in terms of quality, quantity, cost and time. Several studies such as that of (Sjahir, 2013) have generated empirical evidence to prove that decentralisation increases responsiveness to local gaps in service delivery. Indeed, there is a global conviction that decentralisation, participation, and responsiveness indicators of good governance and result into effective service delivery.

However, responsiveness especially to vulnerable groups may be hampered by lack of political accountability (Crook, 1988). Decentralisation is broad and cross cutting ranging

from administrative, political, economic and also public management. The objectives and measuring of decentralisation are as wide as its forms. This paper limits itself to measuring decentralisation as has been implemented under local governments in Uganda in the last twenty-four years. In this article, decentralisation is measured in three mutually inclusive parameters: Responsiveness, Accountability, and Effectiveness.

Uganda established a decentralised local government system based on an elaborate, representative, democratic and a unique model. Saito (2000) identifies three features that make Uganda's decentralisation system unique. First of all, unlike decentralisation in many developing countries that was donor driven, decentralisation in Uganda was born out of the aspirations of Ugandans driven by internal desires to enhance democratisation through participatory democracy and inclusiveness. Secondly, Uganda's decentralised local government system is based on the "movement" system which limits political party activities at local level and encourages a united non-political party approach to managing local affairs. Lastly, the local government system is based on the lo-

cal council system is also a tool for democratization, development and local security management. The local government structure is based on the local council's system with five levels of local councils (LC). Firstly, there is a Village/Cell Local Council- LC (LC1) as the lowest LC, (LC 1). The second level is the Parish/ Ward –LC 2, the Sub-County/ Township is LC 3, the County/ Municipality is LC 4, and the District / City is LC 5. Some LC are local governments while others are administrative units. In turn, the local government system is based on the district as a unit under which there are several other local governments and administrative units (Government of Uganda, 2010). The district/ city is a higher local government – HLGs, while municipalities and towns are lower local governments - LLGs of the districts where they are situated. LC 1, LC 2 and LC 4 (in rural areas) are administrative units of their respective local governments. In terms of numbers, as by 1st July 2016, there are 134 districts, 249 counties, 1,403 sub counties, 7,431 parishes, and 57,842 villages that all in all total to 67,060 local governments and administrative units (Ministry of Local Government, 2016). The structure is demonstrated in Table 1

**Table 1: Local government structure**

Local Council Level	Rural	Urban
LC 5	District	City
LC 4	County	Municipality
LC 3	Sub county	Municipal Divisions
		Town Council
LC 2	Parish	Ward
LC 1	Village	Cell



Local governments are governed by directly elected local councils with the district as a unit and other lower local governments and administrative units. The elected local councils have supreme political, executive and legislative powers over their areas of jurisdiction. (Government of Uganda, 2000). Local councils are highly representative and are composed of elected chairpersons, councilors representing electoral areas, two youth councilors (one of them female), two councilors with disability (one of them female), two elderly persons (one of them a female), one third of the whole council should be women. The chairpersons of local women, youths, and disability councils, as well as elected leaders of higher electoral constituencies in a particular local government are ex officio members of council (Government of Uganda, 2000).

Local councils are mandated to provide the basic public services to the local communities and to bring service delivery closer to the local people (Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development, 2013). The Second Schedule of the LGA gives the functions of the central government and local governments and specific functions for districts and lower local governments in both rural and urban areas.

In all, most of the operational government functions other than those of maintaining macro stability are vested in local governments. The objective of involving many stakeholders at all levels of local governments and administrative units was to improved quality of service delivery at the grassroots level

(Nsibambi, 1988).

#### **4. DECENTRALISATION PROBLEMS IN UGANDA**

Several studies, reports and analyses depict Uganda's decentralised local government system as an ideal model in the developing world that is exceptional in terms of the scale and scope of devolution (Steiner, 2006). The local government system was hailed as one of the most far reaching local government reform programmes in the developing world (Paul & Robert, 2003).

Uganda's local government system was described by (Mitchinson, 2003) as one the most far reaching reform programmes in the developing world. Local governments in Uganda were established to fulfill specific policy objectives; notably, enhance local participation, improve quality of the public good, make efficient and effective use of local resources, quicken decision making, improve local democratic participation, promote local ownership of government programmes and enhance local economic development (Ministry of Local Government, 2011).

The specific objectives of Uganda's local government system therefore are in line with the conceptual objectives of decentralised governance of creating an enhanced environment for responsiveness, accountability and effectiveness (Government of Uganda, Decentralisation: The Policy and its Philosophy, 1993; Government of Uganda, 1994).

After twenty-four years of local government's administration in Uganda,



a lot of achievements and challenges have been realised. There is mixed interpretation of the achievements of the local government system in Uganda. Whereas some analysts regard the local government system in Uganda as a success story worth emulating by other developing countries (Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation and Local development in Uganda, 2014), others have reservations when it comes to measuring its achievements (Golooba-Mutebi, 2005).

Studies carried out in other parts of the world have concluded that decentralised governments many sometimes fail to achieve the objectives of their formation (Ergas, 1980; Furguson, 1990; Mawood, 1993; & Rondinelli & Cheema, 1983). This paper fills this discrepancy by providing an independent analysis of twenty-four years of local governments in Uganda in terms of responsiveness, accountability and effectiveness. With increasing globalisation and inter connectedness, the experience gained from twenty-four years of local governments in Uganda can be shared with other parts of the world.

Achievements and challenges may be compared with the aim of improving public management generally and local governance in particular.

## **5. UGANDA'S DECENTRALISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The physical and social conditions in Africa, the inability of the governments to reach to all its people, the expansion of the democratic processes and the quest for improved

governance, inevitable place decentralised local government at the forefront of public sector reforms in the developing countries (Kasfir, 1993).

Whereas in many developing countries decentralisation was conditioned by donors, (Steiner, 2006), in Uganda's case it emerged to an internal quest for improving delivery of public services by government institution. With over 67,000 local governments and administrative units, Uganda's local government system is by far among the most popularized in the world.

The local governments system in Uganda is premised on, among others, the objective of improving delivery of quality services by creating mechanisms that enhance responsiveness, accountability and effectiveness. There is mixed experience of decentralised local governments in Uganda (World Bank, 2003).

The underlying factors for establishing local governments in Uganda were similar to that elsewhere in the developing world. First of all, the central government had failed to provide basic services such as education, health, community roads and even rural water to the people. In Uganda, the civil wars of 1980s and 1990s made it practically difficult for government to provide basic services to the communities. There was a lot of political uncertainty and in period 1980 – 1986, Uganda was governed by six heads of state. None of them had ample time to plan and deliver basic services to the communities which resulted in national crisis in delivery of basic services. Even the few

funds that managed to be transferred to local communities did not translate into improved outcomes because of corruption, political uncertainty, and absence of a framework for public monitoring and evaluation.

The other factor underlying the quest for decentralised local governments in Uganda was the belief that local problems needed local solution. Central government was either too far or not in good position to provide sustainable appropriate solutions to local problems. Therefore, there was need to mobilise local people into local governments to forge local solutions to local problems. Whether the above assumptions were genuine, requires another forum of debate.

However, what is undeniable is that local governments faced many challenges in executing their created mandate. First of all, they lacked local capacity in form of education, skills, and experience to manage the government functions. Many elected councilors were illiterate and even those who were literate; had not skills in public management. Technical staffs recruited to guide political leaders were no better. Besides, the country experienced budgetary shortfalls because of low tax base and tax capacity.

This meant that the created local governments could not get sufficient budget to execute their functions yet at the same time, local governments had been created in regions with no known or proven local economies. Functionality of the local governments therefore met a snag from inception.

Other challenges faced by early local governments included the increasing pressure on the central government to give semi autonomy to minority groups that ignited the demand for more local governments. Of course more local governments meant increased public expenditure.

With twenty-four experimental years, local governments have become of age and therefore need to measure their responsiveness, accountability and effectiveness. This article analyses the twenty-four years of local governments in Uganda under two broad themes: responsiveness and effectiveness, and accountability and effectiveness.

### **5.1 Local Governments' Responsiveness and Effectiveness**

Conceptualisation of local governments to service delivery cannot be stated better than Akapan, (2008:9). It is argued that the lower levels of government can deliver services such as water, education, sanitation and health effectively. Also, at the lower levels of government, politicians and civil servants are more aware of the needs of their community that will be more responsive to providing such services. Preferences of local populations are better known at lower levels of government.

As previously stated, there are mixed evaluations of the responsiveness of local governments in delivery of public services (Akapan, 2008). Whereas some analysts such as (Kato, 1997; Ministry of Local Government, 2016) cherish local governments in Uganda

for having improved responsiveness to the delivery of public services, others like (Saito, 2000; Golooba-Mutebi, 2005) are of the view that the local governments have not done much. Ahamad *et.al.* (2005) further analysed the responsiveness of Universal Primary Education schools in delivery of quality education and identified challenges that restrict local governments in being responsive to service delivery.

These include the limited budgets; recruiting, motivating and retaining staff; corruption, misuse and abuse of resources; and low institutional capacity to deliver services. In order to come up with a standing analysis of whether local governments have been responsive to service delivery, let us briefly highlight the legal and institutional frameworks guaranteeing responsiveness of local governments in Uganda:

- Article 176(3) (Government of Uganda, 1995) provides for a local government system based on directly elected councils on the basis of universal adult suffrage.
- There are over 67,000 local councils established for all districts, counties, sub counties, municipalities, municipal divisions, towns, parishes, wards, villages and cells throughout the country.
- The Political Parties and Organisations Acts (Government of Uganda, 2005) provides for political parties to sponsor, mentor, and groom members and potential election candi-

dates.

- Section 3 of the Local Government Act Cap 243 and The Second Schedule of the same Act share government functions between central and local governments (Government of Uganda, 2010) with the following functions devolved to local governments:
  - ✓ Planning Powers (Section 35)
  - ✓ Legislative Powers (section 38)
  - ✓ Administrative Powers (Section 45) and,
  - ✓ Financial Powers (Section 77)

The above framework provides for rich avenues of enhancing local governments' responsiveness to service delivery. However, the outcome of the above framework varies from local government to another. There are some local governments which have used the framework to enhance service delivery and there also others which are performing below expectations.

This article is of the informed view that to enhance responsiveness in the local government system, we have to operate beyond the legal and institutional framework. There is no doubt that the framework for local governments responsiveness is one of the best in the developing world (Francis & James, 2003), but it is also true that different participants apply the framework differently and this makes it hard to come to a common conclusion. For effective delivery of public services, local

governments build capacity among the stakeholders and in the institutions themselves necessary to spearhead the devolved functions.

## **5.2 Local Governments, Accountability and Effectiveness**

Putting people at the center of service delivery and enabling them to monitor the service providers gives a framework of best practices for enhancing service delivery in developing countries (World Bank, 2004). Effective service delivery requires a strong accountability relationship among the actors who may be the citizens, government and service providers (Ahmad, Devarajan, Khemani, & Shah, 2005).

Effective accountability therefore takes a long route by citizens demanding services from the government, the government holding policy makers accountable, and the proper rules and procedures are followed. Accountability in delivery of public services is conceptualized on the notion that by narrowing the jurisdictions of governments, citizens are in better position to monitor and evaluate programmes because they are visibly near and at hand.

Local governments therefore bring government closer when local people exert more pressure on governments to provide accountability (Devarajan, Eskeland & Zou, 1999). Recent debate has put emphasis on political accountability as key requirement for effective local governments (Besley & Coate, 1999; Persson & Tabellini, 2000; Seabright, 1996). Central governments have continuously given up tasks they

could not perform well to other tiers of government which could be more effective perform them (Ahmad *et.al*, 2005). In many developing countries including Uganda, creation of local governments has acted both as a tool and approach to enhancing accountability (Bardham & Dilip Mookherjee, 2006). Such views are held by other scholars such (Mitchinson, 2003; Nsibambi, 1988; Rondinelli & Cheema, 1983). However, there has been growing debate to the contrary that creation of many local governments that are inadequately facilitated, as the case is in Uganda, breeds corruption (Khaman Stuti, 2000). Several reports by ACODE (a local NGO spearheading good governance and public accountability in local governments) have continuously unearthed shocking levels of corruption and abuse of public resources in several local governments in Uganda (Jonas Mbabazi *et.al*, 2016; Lillian Muyomba-Tamale, *et.al*, 2010; Naomi Asimo *et.al*, 2014).

In Analysing as to where twenty-four years of local governments have enhanced accountability, this article shall first highlight the accountability of institutional and legal frameworks in Uganda.

- Article 164 of the constitution provides for accountability by all public officers and empowers the state to recovery from the personal estate of public official who fail to account for public funds (Government of Uganda, 1995).
- The Leadership Code Act provides for the establishment of

the office of the inspectorate of government to enforce accountability in government institutions (Government of Uganda, 2002).

- The Uganda Police Force, Uganda Prisons Service, Courts, Tribunals and Commissions of inquiry formed from time to time.
- The offices of the Auditor General; Accountant General; Public, Education and Health Service commissions.
- Section 173 of the Local Government Act Cap 243 operationalizes Article 164 of the constitution and provides for the establishment of several public structures enforce accountability in local governments (Government of Uganda, 2010). These include: The District Public Accounts Committee, District Service Commission, District Land Board, District Contracts Committee, internal audit, District Physical Planning Committee, district, municipal, sub county and town councils (Government of Uganda 2010), to mention but a few.
- The general public can also engage local governments to account through Barazas-community engagements; the media, civil society organisations, and their elected representatives.

The above framework gives unmatched opportunities for citizens to engage their local government and demand accountability. This article therefore presents the view that accountability in local government in Uganda has been greatly enhanced. However, two questions still arise: (i) Why is corruption still rampant in local governments in Uganda? (ii) Why is the quality of decentralised service delivery (such as in education, health, community roads, water and sanitation) not improved over the last twenty-four years? Answers to the above queries seem to lie in other factors that are not directly related to accountability in local governments. Concerns of high population growth, high poverty levels, increasing informal sector, ineffective regional development planning, and or high levels of unemployment may account for the above challenges.

### 6.3 Policy Recommendations

From the above study, this article proposes the following policy recommendations to enhance effective responsive and accountable service delivery in local governments.

- To address the challenge of inadequate funding of local governments which in term hampers their effectiveness in responding to local issues, this paper recommends the following:
  - That their regional development planning should be introduced as another tier of national develop-

ment plans. Regional development plans should address regional development issues that cannot ably be handled by individual local governments.

This recommendation is in agreement with Article 178 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (Government of Uganda, 1995).

- For full utilisation of the devolved functions of local governments, creation of new local governments should consider local economies of these governments. If local governments are created to bring services closer to the people, they should have economic capacity to provide these services. Relying on central government grants and transfers not only undermines the spirit of devolution, but also inevitably comes with conditionalities which in many cases are contradictory to local priorities.
- Human resource capabilities of both technical and political staff in the delivery of services should be emphasised. Inadequate skills especially by elected leaders hamper their capacity to formulate, manage and spearhead local development. When the leadership lacks appropriate skills, local governments cannot effectively respond to and manage local needs.

On the side of accountability, as this paper observed, the factors responsible for the established accountability frameworks not to effectively facilitate improved delivery of quality services lie outside the local government system itself. For example, corruption in Uganda is national problem and cannot squarely be attributed to local governments. This paper, therefore recommends the following policy interventions:

- Government should prioritise the control population growth. Uganda has one of the world's fastest growing populations with a mean population density of 173 persons per square kilometer and a mean household size of 5.5 persons (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Accountability challenges facing local governments have traces in the high levels of population and the scramble for the ever diminishing public services.
- Government should intensify programmes to eradicate poverty which has created big challenges to accountable delivery of services in local governments. Cases of corruption experienced in many local governments are out of need (Nsibambi, 1998). To address these challenges, we need to address its root cause- poverty.
- There is need for national cul-

tures and ethical conducts that emphasize public accountability. Uganda has a diverse culture of mixed religions, tribes, traditions, beliefs, value systems, languages, and ethnic groups that have shaped public behaviour (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Because of intermarriages, migrations and integration, national accountability values have been eroded. This trend has to be reversed by government in creating national values that emphasize public accountability.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Local governments have played an important role in the delivery of decentralised services in Uganda. The local government system in Uganda, which was launched in 1997, has become of age necessitating its evaluation. Local governments were premised on the general theory of decentralisation with aims bringing government closer to the people. This paper conceptualized on three theoretical underpinnings of decentralisation: Responsiveness, Accountability and Effectiveness in public service delivery. However, available literature gives mixed evaluation of local governments in Uganda, some calling it a success story and others as not good enough.

Bearing in mind the afore contradictions, this paper has zeroed on two main findings: First, that there is an adequate legal and institutional framework for local governments in Uganda

which has been emulated by many countries and international institutions such as the World Bank. Secondly, that local governments in Uganda are experiencing delivery challenges that are mainly arising outside the frameworks for local governments. The general findings of this paper therefore, echo several similar findings on local governments and service delivery in other parts of the world.

These findings therefore have implications for both public administrators and scholars. First, the capacity of local governments to respond to local needs depends not only on the legal and institution frameworks accorded to particular institutions, but also to the budgetary allocations apportioned to these institutions and to the capacity of the human resources in charge of the institutions and the feasibility of the institutions themselves to undertake designated functions. In this case good legal and institutional frameworks may not be translated into responsive agents of local service delivery. Secondly, accountability challenges facing many local governments are just part of the national and global ethical challenges and cannot be addressed at or accounted to individual local governments.

This article leaves many unanswered problems surrounding service delivery in local governments. For example, issues of allocative efficiency, local governments as channels of democratization and good governance, forms and nature of local participation are all that can be subjected to future study. Finally, the challenges faced by local gov-



ernments in Uganda and elsewhere, as presented in this paper, do not in any way suggest that recentralization is the solution. As systems mature, their functions also keep on changing. Over the last twenty for years, the functions of local governments have gradually changed to emphasizing poverty eradication and spearheading local economic development.

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