



REDEEM POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN UGANDA BY TAKLING THE POLITICAL QUESTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For many poor countries, especially in Africa, decision-making and policy formulation appear to be the easier job. Moving from policy making to policy execution and providing public goods and services is the tougher task. Many African countries, including Uganda, have made modest but significant advances in entrenching participatory politics, election management and institutionalizing the power to make decisions. However, there has been little progress in attaining socioeconomic transformation and improving the material conditions of the majority poor. Indeed some indicators of Uganda' economy display improvement, though, the improvements do not tally with the actual, lived conditions of the wider Ugandan society. Many observers have lamented the poor record of policy implementation in a robust and thorough manner as the key reason for the continued dire socioeconomic conditions of Ugandans. Why has the modest progress in institutionalizing decision-making power and producing excellent policies not matched with the capacity to execute policies? What can be done to redeem policy implementation? This policy brief attempts to provide alternatives to this question.

This Policy brief proposes the following policy options:

- a) Adopt a developmentalist route as opposed to cooptation and patronage as a source of legitimacy;*
- b) Adopt performance based incentive system as opposed to patronage;*
- c) Policy education as opposed to politicization; and*
- d) enhance capacity building for policy implementation*

THE RATIONALE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE INCENTIVE SYSTEM THAT REWARDS PERFORMANCE

Politicians do not necessarily behave out of good will and well-intentions; they respond to the challenges they face by deploying strategies that assure their hold to state power. As such any ruling regime will create position, institutions/structures, policies and strategies to bring elite political power brokers on board rather than building capacity to execute critical government programs and transform the country. For instance the incumbent ruling government has created a number of cabinet positions, Presidential Advisers and Assistants. Numerous constitutional bodies under the agenda of curbing corruption have been set up.

Multiple agencies and taskforces have been created in the name of monitoring government programs, improving service delivery, fighting poverty and graft and ensuring accountability of public resources. The cost implication of these institutional changes outweighs the benefits to the nation e.g. Local media reports indicate that President Museveni has close to 100 advisers whose monthly wage bill amounts to about 3 billion in addition to other benefits and privileges like cars, armed security personnel and office costs. The many posts, bodies and agencies created seem to have created more inefficiency, avenues of influence peddling and bribe solicitation, more red tapes; and enabled theft. Despite the inefficiency in service delivery the people who work in these agencies are paid their monthly salaries and allowances.

METHODOLOGY

These policy recommendations are based on a comprehensive review of the various documents relating to the political economy of Uganda and the policy implementation practices worldwide. The policy implementation in Uganda was compared to that of Ghana, Rwanda, Ethiopia and thereafter lessons were drawn. The brief is also informed by views and ideas developed during the public policy dialogue held on 17th March 2014 under the auspices of Uganda Development Policy Management Forum-held at Uganda Management Institute.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt a developmentalist route as opposed to cooptation and patronage

Regimes that fail to attain legitimacy through cooptation and patronage stand a higher risk of losing power. In Uganda the ruling regime has engaged in the politics of "broad-base" which inevitably has reintroduced the old modes of rule where political legitimacy is achieved through elite political inclusion and cooptation at the expense of all-round socioeconomic transformation. There are examples of co-optation such as the implementation of NAADS through private service provision which saw co-optation of elite extension workers. Supervision and monitoring the implementation of government policies by the Resident District Administrators-elites and politicians co-opted to oversee implementation of government business.

In the end programmes are not effectively implemented or corrective actions are not undertaken for the benefit of the poor. The other alternative to winning legitimacy could have been attempting a developmentalist route that has worked in the late industrializers and developers of Southeast Asia, the so called Asian Tigers. Therefore government needs to focus on building systems that ensure a degree of state autonomy that shields the state from particularistic and selfish interests of individuals and groups of individuals. Government need to create and manages a system that balances various interests and seeks to appeal and appease different sections of the private sector and society generally. This is important for Uganda that requires neoclassical “trickle-down” approach to transform society and accelerate economic growth and development. Government needs to pursue targeted manipulation of the productive forces, especially financial resources, and deploying them for the sole purpose of propelling sustained growth and accelerated development. Government needs to gather its political muscles towards a single-minded pursuit of accelerated development.

Adopt the Performance based rule orientation

Despite the existence of decentralization, the power to execute decisions in Uganda is weakly institutionalized and open to particularistic interests of individual political players, civil servants and economic elites. Limited powers to execute decisions leaves fertile ground for grand corruption, exposes the public sector to systemic inefficiency and institutionalized incompetence. This is because of the consistent pursuit of patronage politics or neo-patrimonial rule which has no incentive system that rewards excellent performance and punishes non-performance. Deriving legitimacy to rule from patronage rather than from provision of critical public goods and services for the wider public creates a network of elite supporters and their followers who profiteer from the system but at the same time it creates a culture of none accountability among public servants who are in charge of policy implementation. Therefore government needs break through the yoke of patronage. Shift its orientation to focus on performance based rule for long term legitimacy and institutionalization of powers to implement policy. Create positive incentive systems for those who deliver services to the communities and punish those who are ineffective. This increases levels of accountability not through the ritual of elections but through scrutiny and public ownership of public policies.

Make corruption a high risk and low-reward activity

One of the challenges facing policy implementation is when the implementers know what is to be done but choose to selfishly do nothing and or miss use the resources allocated for implementation. It is estimated that corruption that has become both ‘pervasive and institutionalized’ robs approximately 7.5% of the annual national budget. Therefore two policy alternatives are available for policy makers. First, corruption must be shifted from being a low-risk, high reward activity to a high-risk, low-reward activity. This can only be attained through deploying a sophisticated state agency with the capacity to go after the “big fish.” It has to start with the legal framework. But even more importantly, there is need for something akin to Singapore’s Corrupt Practices Investigations Bureau, totally shielded from politicians and economic lobbyists. Second, the myriad policy monitoring agencies, anti-corruption bodies, government commissions, parliamentary committees and presidential initiatives should be consolidated into few and focused robust institutions founded on meritocracy and not ethno-regional balancing or short-term political calculations. The fewer the agencies and bodies that impose red-tape, the fewer the opportunities of using public office for personal gain.

Capacity building for policy implementation

Limited capacity is a major cause or effect of a number of prevailing challenges including poor coordination, poor staff motivation, corruption, donor dependence, limited citizen participation and involvement and limited evaluation of policies/ programs (Box 1, capacity gaps). Limited capacity of policy makers, implementers and users render implementation ineffective. Government needs to increase capacity of citizens to participate and engage development processes through the popular participation avenues such as “Barazas”. Localizing policy implementation for greater policy outcomes needs reorienting technical staff at local government level in local economic development. Systematically handle the coordination and institutional overlap issues that thwart policy implementation. Build capacity in policy making, implementation and monitoring and evaluation among the young generation through schools.

Box 1: Capacity bottlenecks

- ★ There are weaknesses in prioritization and target settings
- ★ Budgets are not well aligned with national priorities
- ★ Poor coordination and cooperation between government agencies and limited appreciation of the value of strategic coordination.
- ★ Overlaps in institutional mandate (institutional conflict).
- ★ The motivation of staff is low due to low salaries leading to poor attitude
- ★ Civil servants have competence gaps in management and are not innovative
- ★ Acts of corruption are evident in Uganda’s civil services that hurt service delivery and limited value for money.
- ★ Government is highly dependent on donor funding which is unpredictable and hence impact negatively on budget execution.
- ★ Limited participation of citizens in policy implementation and monitoring
- ★ The missing evaluation component imply that there is limited understanding of why policies fail. Reference was made to the liberation and privatization policies that are yet to be evaluated though could have realized negative consequences along implementation.

Policy education aimed at making policies relevant to users

Policy implementation in Uganda has so many stakeholders including researchers, politicians, consumers-the public (internal and external publics to the policy), development workers, technocrats and many more. These stakeholders always have different levels of understanding of specific government policies. Policy has meaning to each of the stakeholders and the policy will bring in force both negative and positive incentives for stakeholders, who will react by resisting or embracing the policy. Government should make it a requirement that every approved policy should have an education programme, a mechanism that includes leaders, media, and champions of policy among the users. Use already existing decentralized mechanism of public servants to transfer the information. Use of ICT in popularizing the policy, SMS, TV, and radio should be encouraged to mobilize people to implement the policy. Policy education messages should be scrutinized to avoid politicizing the policy or promising what the policy may not do.

CONCLUSION

The path of popular, participatory and ultimately patronage politics currently undertaken by Uganda will continue to yield little socioeconomic progress unless the country moves to a stage where participation and performance can converge.

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