CURBING CORRUPTION AND PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The Experience of Bushenyi District, Uganda

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CURBING CORRUPTION AND PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: EXPERIENCE OF BUSHENYI DISTRICT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objectives of the case study are:

- To give the experience of a District Local Government in combating corruption and promoting transparency.
- To put on record the good practices of curbing corruption in Local Governments for replication in other areas.

This study gives a diagnosis of corruption in Uganda, the underlying causes and its effects. Furthermore, it highlights the actions taken to combat corruption at the District Local government level, the impacts of those initiatives, the challenges faced in fighting corruption and the way forward.

The main lesson learnt is that corruption is a cancer that eats the social, political and economic fabric of development and requires the involvement of every citizen to combat it.

The case study recommends enhanced public awareness and strengthening of institutions for fighting corruption.
1. Background

Uganda adopted a system of democratic decentralisation to improve systems of governance and foster economic growth especially in rural areas, both of which are essential to eradicate poverty. Devolution is the model of decentralisation that was adopted by the Government of Uganda. Through the policy of democratic decentralisation significant powers, functions, responsibilities and resources were devolved from the centre to Local Governments. Decentralisation in Uganda is firmly based on the presumption that improved local governance can be achieved through devolution of political powers and functions, along with fiscal resources, and that this will improve service delivery and in turn positively impact on poverty. The paradigm is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995) and the Local Governments Act, 1997.

The Local Government system in Uganda is based on the district, as a unit under which there are lower local governments and administrative units. There are fifty-six (56) Districts in Uganda. Bushenyi District is one of the Districts in Uganda. (Refer to Appendix 1 for details of Bushenyi District).

The decentralisation policy has been implemented with emphasis placed on institutional arrangements, and capacity building. Many achievements have been registered so far, with varying degree of success across the Districts in the country. Government completed a phased devolution of recurrent financing for most government services to all districts. A clear schedule of mandated service responsibilities for Local Governments were established in the Local Governments Act. Local governments are now responsible for the bulk of administrative and political processes within their respective areas of jurisdiction. Various reports point to improved local decision making, improved accountability and ownership of public investments under Local Government control. There have also been improved local administrative and planning capacities. In addition, elections of Local Government Council leaders by universal adult suffrage, is a regular occurrence.

Despite the achievements, many challenges have been faced. These include inadequate capacity in Local Governments to handle the devolved functions and responsibilities, reduced locally raised revenue in Districts and corruption. Various measures have been put in place to deal with the challenges and significant improvements have been registered. However, corruption remains a very big challenge at all levels in the Country. Corruption manifests into two types namely petty corruption and grand corruption.

This paper attempts to outline the experiences of Bushenyi District during the implementation of the decentralisation policy and the measures taken to deal with the various challenges, especially corruption. The paper brings out the forms of corruption, the causes, the effects, measures taken to curb corruption, the achievements and the challenges. The broad conclusion reached is that corruption is a cancer that eats the social, political and economic fabric of development and
requires the commitment and involvement of all stakeholders (including all levels of Government, civil society organisations, private sector, and the citizenry) to combat it.

2. **The Mission of Bushenyi District Local Government**

Bushenyi District mission is to provide quality services through a co-ordinated delivery system, which focuses on the national and the local priorities for sustainable development of the district.

3. **Corruption in Local Governments**

3.1 **Definition of Corruption**

The case study defines corruption in the Uganda context as “a diversion from the set/accepted norms in the course of performance of one’s public duties, for selfish personal gain”.

3.2 **Forms of Corruption**

The major forms of corruption include abuse of office; fraud and embezzlement; misappropriation of public funds and assets; paying for goods/services not delivered (‘air supply’); paying salaries to non-existent workers (‘ghost employees’); bribery and extortion; nepotism and favouritism.

3.3 **Causes of Corruption**

The underlying causes of corruption include poverty; peer group pressures; political turbulence; weak institutional controls and supervision, moral decay, greed and excessive ambitions; inadequate remuneration to public servants; and HIV/AIDS scourge.

4. **Measures Taken**

The fight against corruption involves government, development partners, private sector, civil society organisations and the citizenry. The Government has put in place the legal and institutional framework to combat corruption. The development partners have enhanced the capacity of Civil Society Organisations, Private Sector and citizenry to monitor and complain about corruption at all levels of governance.

Efforts at both national and district levels have been evolved to combat corruption in Uganda. At the national level, the legal framework exists that entails numerous enacted laws and regulations to contain corruption and are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995. They are:

Local Government Financial and Accounting Regulations (FAR 1998);

Furthermore, government has established institutions at National and District level to fight corruption.

**At National Level they include:**

- Public Accounts Committee of Parliament.
- Auditor General.
- Directorate of Ethics and Integrity.
- Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in police.

**At district level, they include:**

- Internal Auditor Department (Answerable to District Council).
- External Auditor Department.
- District Council which operates through the following organs:
  - Council Committees
  - District Service Commission (DSC).
  - District Tender Board.
  - Local Government Public Accounts Committee.
  - District Land Board.

4.1 **Actions Evolved to Fight Corruption in Bushenyi District**

The measures taken by Bushenyi District to fight corruption include the following:

- Functional Councils, Committees, Boards and Commissions.
- Bottom–up participatory planning and budgeting.
- Building consensus on resource allocation based on agreed priorities by stakeholders.
- Allocation of funds to sectors according to priorities and percentages approved by council.
- Effective Public Service Management.
- Multi-sectoral monitoring of projects and programmes by both political leaders and the technical staff.
- Involvement of private sector and civil society in service delivery.
- Timely production and submission of activity and financial reports to the Finance Committee, District Executive Committee, District Council and Line Ministries.
- Launching and commissioning of projects in public.
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- Public notices on resource allocation, projects to be implemented, their locations and costs.
- Information dissemination on projects using print and electronic media.
- Effective Investment Committees at Sub-county level and Project Management Committees (PMCs) at community level.
- Mentoring of lower councils, private sector and civil society organisations.
- Apprehending corrupt civil servants/political leaders and prosecuting them.
- Public suggestion box.

4.1.1 Results

Bushenyi District Initiatives to combat corruption have yielded the following:
- Public funds are being spent on community priorities, for example: Primary Health Services, Water and Sanitation, Education, Feeder Roads and Agriculture Extension.
- Increased community contribution, ownership and sustainability of projects.
- Good working relationship between political leaders and the technical officers.
- Increased involvement and participation of civil society organisations and private sector in service delivery.
- Enhanced service delivery in the district, e.g. District revenues have increased from Ushs.13.9 billion in 1998 to Ushs.26.4 billion. In the same period water coverage increased from 51% to 62.5%, while Feeder Roads coverage increased from 670kms to 810kms in 2002. Out of these kilometres, 65% are well maintained.
- Recruitment and retention of qualified and competent personnel in public service
- Selection of competent contractors.
- Increased public awareness on key issues of development and corruption.
- Adherence to financial regulations.
- Apprehending, prosecuting, interdicting and dismissal of corrupt civil servants.

4.1.2 Challenges

The following challenges are being faced while fighting corruption:
- Low household incomes and high dependency burden on civil servants and political leaders.
- Inadequate resources to facilitate the process of fighting corruption.
- Very high salary compression ratio (1:75 i.e. Lowest earns Ug. Shs. 60,000 (US$ 33) and highest earns Ug. Shs. 4,500,000= (US $2,500)
- Political influence and moral decadence of society.
- HIV /AIDS scourge.

4.2 Inter-District Measures to Fight Corruption

Given the challenges faced by the Districts and lower local governments during the implementation of the decentralisation policy, the local governments formed Local Government Associations, namely the Uganda Local Authorities Association (ULAA)
and Urban Authorities Association of Uganda (UAAU). The mission of the Associations is to unite all Local Governments and to build democratic and accountable Local Governments capable of delivering efficient and sustainable public services. The role of the associations is to build unity of Local Governments in order to advocate and lobby for their interests at Central Government level.

Amidst accusations of increased corruption in local governments and calls for re-centralisation to ‘reduce powers of local governments’ and thus ‘curb’ corruption, the local government associations formulated a *Charter on Accountability and Ethical Code of Conduct* to strengthen Local Governments’ commitment to uphold the principles of accountability, transparency and integrity. The Charter was adopted by all Local Governments at a National Conference on decentralisation on 23rd April 2003.

5. **Recommendations to Strengthen the Fight against Corruption**

To curb corruption at all levels, the following recommendations need to be adhered to:

- Increased Political commitment to fight corruption
- Intensified Capacity building in Planning, financial management, investigation and prosecution of corruption cases.
- Strengthen co-operation and collaboration between the government and civil society organisations in service delivery and fight against corruption
- Establish mechanisms to ensure greater accountability and control over corruption.
- Increase public awareness on corruption through the print and electronic media.
- Increase citizen participation in governance
- Efforts to fight HIV/AIDS should be strengthened.

6. **Conclusion**

Corruption is a cancer that eats the social and economic fabric of development, people need to be involved in the planning, formulation and implementation of anti-corruption programmes for them to be successful.
1) **Background**

**District Mission:** To provide quality services through a coordinated delivery system, which focuses on the national and local priorities for sustainable development of the district.

**Geographical Location:**
- Bushenyi became a District in 1974 and was curved out of the then Ankole District. It was originally known as W. Ankole. It is located in S.W. Uganda. It is surrounded by the following Districts:- Kasese in the North, Kamwengye in the NE, Mbarara in the East, Rukungiri in the West, Ntungamo in the South and the Republic of Congo (Zaire) in the NW along L. Edward.
- The district lies between 0°N and 0°46’S of the equator and 29°41’ East and 30°30’ East of Greenwich.

**Land Area, total population and population density:**
- Bushenyi district has a total Land Area of 3949 sq. km and a population density of 187 persons per sq km and a total population of 738,355 (as of 2002 population and housing census).

**Water Coverage:**
- The Water coverage is 370 sq. km. The district has 53 crater lakes of which 52 crater lakes are in Bunyaruguru County.

**Altitude:**
- It is between 2440 ft and 3660 ft above sea level (910 mm – 250 mm). It is lowest in the Rift Valley along the shores of Lake George and Lake Edward.

**Climate: Rainfall:**
- It has a relatively wet climate ranging from 800 mm to 2000 mm of Rainfall annually. The rainfall is lowest towards Katunguru Sub County in the rift valley. Much of the district receives between 1500 – 2000 mm of rainfall.

**Temperature:**
- Mean annual maximum temperature 22.5°C – 30°C.
- The Mean annual minimum temperature ranges from 12.5oC – 20oC.

Major forests in Bushenyi District include:
(a) Karinju (b) Imaramagambo (c) Kasyoha-Katomi.

Major crops grown are: Bananas, beans, coffee, finger millet, cassava, sweet potatoes, tea, Passion fruits.
- Dairy farming is being expanded with exotic animals.
- Bushenyi district is mainly inhabited by banyankole.

2) **Administrative Units:**
- Bushenyi has 5 counties; (a) Buhweju (b) Bunyaruguru (c) Igara (d) Ruhinda (e) Sheema

- Bushenyi has 7 constituencies namely:- (a) Buhweju (b) Bunyaruguru (c) Igara East (d) Igara West (e) Ruhinda (f) Sheema North (g) Sheema South Constituencies.

- It has 27 Sub-counties and 2 Town Councils. It also has 162 Parishes and 8 Wards to make a total of 170 parishes.
- The number of villages (LC1s) are 2,034.