

# WHAT CONSTRAINS A TRANSFORMED PUBLIC SERVICE IN UGANDA?

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## ABSTRACT

The reassertion of government's role in the last decade has led to a revival of scholarly and practitioner interest in public services, more so in developing countries (Batley, McCourt & McLoughlin, 2011). The most contentious debate, however, remains first, how best to offer the public services efficiently and effectively and second, what usually stands in the way of most governments to have functional public service systems. Governments deliver services only through efficient and effective public service systems, which ought to be driven by core public service values as opposed to 'managerial values'. Public servants are the backbone and heartbeat of the public service (Mle, 2012:29). In 2011, the government of Uganda adopted, through the Ministry of Public Service, a tripartite panacea for public service ailments that include strategies to improve the public service infrastructure (structures, processes, systems and practices), and the public servant and the client at the tail end of service delivery. However, the implementation of all designed strategies has suffered the usual 'systemic implementation paralysis'. As a consequence, the public service is still perceived as slow and unresponsive to the needs of service users, particularly citizens and the investors. The public servants who have citizen trust are accused of corruption and inefficiency. There are incidences of poor client/customer care, and outright mistreatment. The structures of public service do not function as expected and citizen apathy has increased as those entrusted are not held to account. Such a crisis makes it imperative for public administration scholars to engage in debates on the nature of the problems and suggest possible prescriptions. This article is intended to examine the constraints to the transformation of Uganda's public service. It makes proposals on how the government can create a well-functioning public service.

## INTRODUCTION

Public expectations worldwide regarding the role of the state in providing public goods and services are on the increase and will possibly remain so. Governments are challenged to find new and more efficient ways to deliver public goods and services. Government's role in public service delivery in the last decade has led

to a revival of scholarly and practitioner interest in public services in developing countries (Batley, McCourt & McLoughlin, 2011). With the apparent failure of public management prescriptions, governments are now challenged to play a rather dominant role in service delivery. The public management theoretical prescriptions offered public service solutions from the late 1980s but the cumulative effect has not posted desired results. The prescriptions have been accused of not being 'fit for purpose' and as (Osborne, Radnor & Nasi, 2013:1) recently forcefully argue, public management has possibly never been a solution to public service problems due to two fatal flaws: it focuses on intra-organisational processes at a time when the reality of public services delivery is inter-organisational, and it draws on management theory derived from the experience of the manufacturing sector, which ignores the reality of public services as 'services'. With this onslaught on public service management, the intellectual discourse has now tended to shift to public service management.

A literature synthesis of the classical paradigms of public administration (the politics-administration dichotomy and the principles periods in particular) point to a consensus that earlier scholars of public administration conceived their ideas based on fundamental public service values. In his public service revival call, Coats (2006, preface) demonstrates that contrary to the experience of the last thirty years, there is a need for a deep-rooted political consensus about how public services should be managed. His call was that establishing a well-founded agreement that recognises the importance of the public realm and accepts the need for flexibility and diversity in provision of services, as well as placing democracy at the centre of a new model of public management, was a critical challenge for adoption. This would still leave ample room for political disagreement about the size of the state and, at the margin, room for discussion about the role of markets. Citizens urgently need better services from their governments but are not getting them due to serious impairments in the public service delivery systems. African governments increasingly operate in an environment of unprecedented changes driven by technological transformations, as facilitated by the internet. Within this environment, governments have found themselves challenged on what their appropriate size and role in service delivery should be. The role of the private sector and other non-state actors has complicated the debate on what exactly the role of government should be.

The advocates of private sector dominance in service delivery come from the public choice school of reasoning. They advocate for a minimalist state and support increasing the role of the market. They have lined up a number of alternative modes of public service delivery such as outsourcing, contracting out, public-private partnerships, as well as third party governance as the alternatives to the centrality of the state. Their prescription is contained in the 3 Ms – markets, managers and measurement. Through such prescriptions, governments have undertaken numerous reforms to involve the private sector and other non-state

actors in service delivery. Work that was initially done by the government has been handed over to the private sector under various service model arrangements. The entrepreneurial spirit has entered the systems of government where private sector styles of management have been introduced.

The state is the most important catalyst of development (Amuwo, 2008:1). Citizens interact with their government through public servants. Public servants are the backbone and heartbeat of the public service, but if this heartbeat is unethical and unprofessional, there will be no blood circulation and the public service will 'die' (Mle, 2012:29). Literature from pre-colonial times to the present remains largely elusive on solid examples of societies that have been transformed to see reduced poverty and substantial growth without the central role of governments of the time. Literature is scanty on successful stories of societies that have developed solely in the hands of the private sector, given the undisputed difference between the public and private motives. It would not be out of context, therefore, to posit that societies will only see development with a strong state.

Legitimate governments are run on institutionally strong, efficient, effective systems, anchored on publicly determined, predictable and increasingly rational rules of behaviour. In such a system, the public service becomes a central pillar of the government as it regulates, administers, executes, mediates, invests and delivers the construction, operations, maintenance and servicing of service delivery infrastructure, and ensures that the public service machinery is oriented to diligently serve the citizens.

A debate on the constraints to the transformation of the public service in Uganda aims at generating an intellectual platform on which solutions to the impediments can be hinged. Prescriptions to the ailment of the public service must, as a matter of logic, consider the ecological dynamics in a particular country. The skills and values required in the public service are defined by a country's development priorities and challenges as well as the specific institutional conditions that exist or may need to be created. This, however, presupposes a number of things, particularly about the democratic developmental state and what it is (Fakir, 2007:1). First, public servants are not simply employees of the state, but have a constitutional role to play. Second, while ultimately such employees must be responsive to the government of the day, they must use their professional knowledge, skills and competencies to ensure a better life for all by offering their best services in the most known efficient way while being economic and effective in the use of taxpayer's money. Thirdly, the public servants must be fully accountable for their decisions.

The African Public Service Ministers' meeting on the occasion of the Third Pan-African Conference of Public Service Ministers, held in Windhoek, Namibia, on 5-6 February 2001, reaffirmed the political commitment made by African Public Service Ministers at the Second Pan-African Conference held at Rabat from 13-15 December 1998, to enhance professionalism and ethics in the public service in

Africa, in close collaboration with their colleagues from the other ministries. In their resolution, it was documented that the recommendation of the Rabat Declaration on the elaboration of a Charter for the Public Service in Africa, which affirmed the professional values of the public service in Africa, redefined its objectives and missions and specified the fundamental conditions required for strengthening its role, competence, ethical values and image, including a code of conduct for African public service employees, which was to be a central pillar.

In 2011, the Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Public Service, formulated a policy paper on the transformation of Uganda's public service. This initiative was a product of the analysis of the impact of previous reforms on public service in the public sector in Uganda, and lessons learnt from international experience. The policy paper presents proposals for the transformation of the public service under three main pillars, namely, the public service infrastructure, the public servant and the client and was to be implemented over a period of ten years beginning with quick wins to be implemented within the short term (one to three years). It stated in its strategic outlook that to transform the public service infrastructure, Government would: (i) strengthen supervision, coordination, monitoring and evaluation and inspection functions; (ii) improve staff recruitment and selection methods; (iii) review, simplify and automate Government processes; (iv) establish a connected Government; (v) implement a stringent performance management system; (vi) review fiscal transfers of local governments with a view to stepping up the size of the local government budgets to match their core service delivery mandates; (vii) allow flexibility in management; and (viii) review and restructure the local government administrative set-up to become centres for service delivery and local economic development and not purely as a political and administrative tool.

To transform the public servants, Government will: (i) enhance the capacity of public officers through regular skills development, attitude shaping and performance improvement training; (ii) improve public officers' motivation through salary enhancement and improving work environment to deliver quality services; (iii) establish a Salaries Commission with mandate to determine, review and harmonise salaries of all public servants and political leaders paid from the Consolidated Fund; (iv) conduct periodic National Service Programmes for public officers to develop a sense of commitment to the wellbeing of their country and the people and re-orient them into the value system and culture of the Uganda Public Service; (v) strengthen the rewards and sanctions system in the public service; and (vi) enhance leadership capacity in the public service.

To empower citizens to demand services and accountability, Government will: (i) review the curriculum for primary and secondary schools to include civic education, including knowledge about human rights, obligations of citizens so that citizens know their rights, and national values from a tender age; (ii) disseminate service delivery standards and client charters; (iii) establish call-in centres to provide

an effective feedback mechanism from the population to enhance transparency and accountability and hence service delivery; and (iv) gazette specific days for all citizens to participate in national service such as: cleaning, road and water source maintenance; and building a sense of commitment to the wellbeing of the society.

In this article, the author explores the major constraints that have and will possibly remain a hindrance to service transformation unless specific interventions are put in place. Since the launch of the public service transformation policy paper in 2011, there remains a serious deficit on its implementation as most of the initiatives had specific time periods that have never seen the light of day. There is indeed poor coordination of government and the public servant has not changed as much as had been anticipated by the transformation policy. The public service systems, procedures and rules are not working and there is growing collusion across government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) to defeat the same systems established to deliver the services. Public servants recruited to guarantee and strengthen the public service systems are the same servants who work tirelessly to undermine the systems. Politics has entered the public service and its detrimental effects on the meritocracy are glaringly seen in Uganda's public service.

The following sections are discussed in the article. Section two gives the problem at the heart of the article. In section three, a theoretical framework that provides a template for analysing the public service transformation debate is developed, and then the major constraints that impede the process of transformation in section four are discussed. Finally, the article makes concluding remarks and offers policy suggestions on what needs to be done to address the challenges of public service transformation.

## **THE PROBLEM**

Fakir (2007:1) is authoritative on the centrality of the public service in the functioning of a democratic developmental state. He posits that the public service essentially focuses not only on the delivery of services, but is also crucial for economic and social development through providing the essential services and basic infrastructure necessary to help spur economic development and improve the lives of communities, especially poor communities. The public service not only focuses on the hard issues but has to be keenly aware of outcomes – the soft issues. In doing so, it has to deliver services in ways that are efficient, effective and maintain the dignity of citizens. However, the performance of the public services, from education and policing to health and recycling, is a matter of concern in many countries. Issues of public service efficiency, cost and effectiveness have moved to the forefront of political debate.

The central problem addressed by this article is why the public service in Uganda has not been transformed to a level at which it would discharge its duties to the satisfaction of stakeholders. It tackles the bottlenecks that are likely to impede

the initiatives aimed at legitimately creating well-functioning public administration machinery. The management of service delivery institutions as critical links with citizens is lacking. Yet, virtually all citizen experiences of the public service are through service delivery institutions such as hospitals, schools and home affairs offices. These service points are often run down, have shortages of staff, equipment and vehicles are in a poor state, and there is virtually a silent struggle to provide basic services. They remain poorly managed with rates of absenteeism even for those in senior position reaching unacceptable levels by all human standards.

Uganda used to be widely acclaimed as an African success on account of achievements in macro-economic reforms, poverty reduction and political stability, following years of civil war, economic decline and worsening poverty. The country's public service was regarded as among the best after independence in 1962. Progress has been made on governance reforms, ranging from an ambitious programme of civil service restructuring, the creation of a series of semi-autonomous public agencies, reforms in public expenditure management, decentralisation, and innovations in service delivery, to legal and institutional measures to combat corruption. These achievements were, in the early years of the 1990s, attributed to the personal commitment of President Yoweri Museveni and a dedicated core of technocrats in the Ministry of Finance, and the Movement system of no-party politics (Robinson, 2006).

A number of public service reform initiatives have been implemented over the last two decades aimed at improving the capacity and performance of the Public Service, as the implementing arm of Government. To date, however, the Public Service is still criticised for being slow, corrupt, inaccessible and rigid, and therefore unresponsive to the needs of the people. The National Development Plan (NDP) listed weak public sector management and administration as the number one constraint to attaining the economic growth envisaged in the country. This public sector was and still remains characterised by weak policy, and legal and regulatory frameworks, and weak institutional structures and systems. Corruption has become endemic and manifests itself in many different ways across the governance institutions.

It is thus clear from the foregoing discussion that, in Uganda, while there is an adequate legal and institutional framework, the capacity of the public sector to deliver services has remained questionable. Corruption, maladministration and general inefficiencies remain a big threat to achieving the national objectives. This, coupled with a weak and underfunded civil society, raises questions on the progress of the public service transformation agenda. To understand the deep-seated causes of this malaise, however, it is useful to situate the discussion in a theoretical framework and it is to this that the discussion now turns.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Modern governments have found themselves entangled in different modes of service delivery amid an increased demand for better services due to the changing paradigm shifts in the discipline of public administration. Central to the debate of modern governments is the question of what exactly should be the role of the government in service delivery. One clear stance is that public servants must be able to discharge their vital mission of safeguarding the fundamental values of the public service. In order to preserve their legitimacy, public servants must adapt to and respond in a sustainable, quality-conscious and efficient manner to the needs of users by placing them at the centre of their concerns, while ensuring transparency and respect for human rights and democracy. These expectations are to be met in a changing complex environment with multiple players, stakeholders and demands based on the developments in public administration study, and more so the prescriptions offered by the market-oriented New Public Management (NPM) philosophy. The complexity theory and NPM paradigm are the theoretical strands upon which this article is based.

According to Cilliers (1998), a complex system is a system of inter-relationships between nodes, with the nodes deriving their significance not as atomistic units but as products of the particular inter-relationships embodied at each node. This is how complexity theory has been associated with democracy. As far as accepting the need for regular monitoring of important outcomes so that problems can be identified are concerned, complexity theory and the new public management have common cause. But the new public management has tended to see the results fed back within a coercive and hierarchical audit culture. In contrast, feedback in complex systems goes directly to the elements running relevant parts of the system and problems are explored openly rather than in an atmosphere of blame and sanction.

Complexity theory and the new public management have a common focus on monitoring and feedback in steering the behaviour of organisational systems. However, they are profoundly different. New public management theory focuses on results (Strathern, 2000). It emphasises the measurement of performance against objectives, with defined responsibilities for achieving these objectives and the use of data – especially cost and output information – to evaluate performance and decide whether to apply sanctions or rewards. Complex systems are defined by relationships and networks rather than by their constituent elements. A complex system interacts with its environment both in terms of feed-backs and feed-forwards, so its boundaries connect the system with its environment rather than separate it (Blackman, 2000). The roadblocks that will remain on the way of public service transformation are internal and external. Some are located within the broader societal values in which the country operates and others are shaped by global forces. Political leaders and technocrats in government have their share of the blame in a complex system.



## **CONSTRAINTS TO PUBLIC SERVICE TRANSFORMATION**

In a public service context, transformation covers a deliberate and well-coordinated process of radical change intended to re-orient the public service machinery and systems in a new direction to make them more efficient and effective to facilitate fulfilment of the government mandate to citizens and 'other customers'. Unlike public service 'turnaround' (which implies incremental progress) public service transformation suggests a basic change of the entire machinery of the public service. Public service transformation should cover the public service infrastructure, which includes the processes, procedures, policies, rules and regulations, as well as the practices in public service at all levels. It will also need high-level deliberate interventions to re-orient the character and attitudes of all the public servants to do a good job in the context of the re-oriented public service infrastructure. At all times, such public servants, at whatever level, must do their work within the prescribed rules and regulations. The transformation efforts should equally be extended to emancipating the citizens in whatever capacity possible to enable them to demand accountability from those delegated to manage the state apparatus.

A number of obstacles lie in the path of effective public service transformation in Uganda. The public service infrastructure, processes and technology have not been effectively aligned to the realities and expectations of citizens. Resistance to change to new ways of government service delivery mandates remains a common problem at various levels. There are significant institutional weaknesses: poor human resource management and inadequate skills among public servants; lack of planning and development; and widespread gaps in the quality and relevance of training and institutions of service delivery. There is also reportedly increasingly poor linkages and partnerships between government departments and other non-state actors and a declining trend in public service culture. Less focus is now attached to public service norms, values, attitudes and the orientation of public officials to true public service. Political intrusion into the activities of the public service is increasingly becoming a hindrance to effective public service transformation. Coupled with a citizenry too weak to demand accountability from those managing government delivery systems, politics has become so pronounced that even public service recruitments are highly politicised, a development that has negative effectives on the merit doctrines.

Uganda's public service is not unique in having such problems. Fakir (2007), for example, while writing from a South African context, reports that the public service has to deal with complex and interrelated challenges that include (i) internal staffing and capacity, including supervision and management; (ii) streamlining processes for effective, efficient and equitable delivery; (iii) interacting and coordinating with other institutions, including state institutions; (iv) interfacing with a variegated, complex and demanding citizenry; and (v) responding to the



complex contemporary challenges that have been shaped by apartheid policies. In this article, the constraints to public service transformation are analysed under three sets of parameters, namely, the public service infrastructure, the public servants, and the citizens. However, because the public servants are central for the effectiveness of the public service infrastructure and citizen empowerment, the article prioritises the debate by first analysing a set of variables that impede the public servants from doing a good job.

### **Public servant-related constraints**

In any country, to find maladministration and corruption in the public sector serves to fault the capacity of public servants to discharge their mandates. It is true that any country expects its public service to manifest professionalism and ethics. Uganda is not an exception. This will increase citizens' trust in public servants. However, in Uganda, most citizens do not regard public servants as honest any more, due to the dishonest behaviours that characterise their activities at all levels. Gildenhuis (1991:41) rightly opines that poor, dishonest management of public affairs and corruption (immoral acts) are among the most serious manifestations of unethical conduct. On this same subject, the findings of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Public Economics and Public Administration (2000:3) report that scandals involving public officials had captured world attention, with the public not distinguishing between elected and appointed officials in government.

Public servants hold offices in trust. Codes of conduct intended to ensure that they cleave to that trust have been designed in almost all countries. Kernaghan and Dwivedi, (1983:157-158) elaborately demonstrate how, since the dawn of civilisation, an expected code of conduct for public officials different from and in many respects superior to the code in the private sector has been in usage. Public service codes provide minimum standards of behaviour for public servants, and all practising professionals are expected to follow the agreed pattern of conduct in respect of how they go about their public service roles. These practices are as old as antiquity (Gilman, 2005:1). Failure to implement the public service codes of conduct is the primary constraint to effective public service transformation. The public service of Uganda has an elaborate framework that provides the codes of conduct for public officers. Only such codes of conduct are used when unwanted public officials who fail to toe the common line, are in focus. The poor enforcement of the codes of conduct has created a problematic cadre of public officials whose behaviour deviates from what is expected, and they always act with impunity. Unless there is universal implementation of the public service code of conduct at all levels, the transformation of public service will remain on paper. For centuries, the military has remained one of the most efficient institutions because of strict observance of the codes that regulate military conduct.

Any accountability system in any country, organisation or business is based on certain assumptions about human behaviour. It is assumed that officials

in a specific government ministry, working in different departments, cannot collude. Even if this happens, it is assumed that officials in different government departments cannot collude on one transaction. That is why internal auditors in any ministry are appointed and transferred by the Accountant General, who sits in the Ministry of Finance. Yet all these assumptions have been false, resulting in the total collapse of the entire public financial management system. Collusion among public servants with motives intended to defraud government and defeat the established systems is a major constraint that is currently standing in the way of public service transformation. Uganda has recently witnessed high level scandals that were perpetuated through a well-calculated scheme of senior public servants. The two most prominent scandals involving billions of shillings were exposed in Uganda simultaneously as 2012 came to an end; one in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), and the other in the Ministry of Public Service. These two are in addition to several other scandals in other critical service delivery institutions such as the Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development and Ministry of Works and Transport.

According to the Auditor General's report, which exposed the scandal in the Office of the Prime Minister, a systems administrator for the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) at the Bank of Uganda gave the then principal accountant in the Office of the Prime Minister the powers of permanent secretary (an accounting office) to sign and approve expenditures in the ministry on specific dormant accounts. It was unearthed by the Auditor General that the Accountant General eventually transferred money from a donor account, bypassing the Consolidated Fund, to the said dormant account in the OPM directly controlled by the principal accountant who had been given approval rights; which in a functioning system should have been detected given the levels of approvals involved. Government has elaborate internal controls that should have stopped such theft of public monies, but collusive behaviour ensured all these systems did not work. Public finance rules further provide that for such monies to be paid out, they would have to be approved by an Internal Audit Officer in the Ministry of Finance, appointed and supervised by the Accountant General. Secondly, before the Central Bank can honour a cheque, it has to ensure that the signature on it is the same as the specimen signature in their records. Before paying money out of government accounts, the officials in the Bank of Uganda (BOU) are required to call the accounting officer of the concerned ministry and confirm telephonically that he signed the said cheques. After spending the money, the Auditor General's Office is supposed to establish whether all these procedures were followed. Unfortunately, in the unearthed scandals, all such procedures were not followed because of collusion.

Uganda, like other African public services, has financially indebted public servants who are often vulnerable to unethical behaviour. Reports indicating the

persistent indebtedness of members of parliament (MPs) have been very regular. This is a major constraint to their legislative duties as they cannot demand accountability from thieving and well-connected bureaucrats. A suspicious deal by the country's parliamentary commission to buy off the loans of the MPs through a Chinese firm was recently blocked by the president of the country, who through his own manipulative calculations, wanted them to remain indebted. The indebtedness malaise that has hit the legislature has found its way to most public servants across all levels and sectors. The majority of public servants have been entangled in a debt trap which has serious implications for their efficiency levels. Not only does it portray a negative unethical image of the public service in general, but it derails effective and efficient service delivery. The outright impact is that the affected public servants will have to engage in irregular activities and do many other jobs to earn a living, and this happens at the expense of their legitimate office work.

The indirect consequence of indebtedness is that a heavy strain and fatigue is exerted on the public servant, which in itself leads to low productivity. The overall impact is the poor performance of public service organisations. When public servants have to perform the duties they are employed for in their respective departments, they put in half the time due to stress. Relatedly, public servants who have debts are forced to do private work using public resources such as time, the telephone, stationery and vehicles. Others deliberately create inefficiencies in public service systems and processes so as to allow space for corrupt tendencies. In other cases, employees resign from their jobs to get access to their pensions, pay their debts and end up being jobless, a situation that holds more dangerous long-term impacts, not only to the individual and his or her family, but to the economy. Hard-earned skills and experience are lost. Social behaviour for the individual changes, family life suffers and people turn to substance abuse as a means of managing (Mle, 2012).

In Uganda, efficient public service transformation is at times hampered by attitudinal impairments of public servants. They have a poor attitude reflected in poor time management and the blatant misuse of public resources, absenteeism and doing less than expected in a full working day without much concern. Public servants are supposed to be citizen-centred, where consulting the recipients of services, treating them with courtesy and providing them with information on service delivery-related matters is of paramount significance. Unfortunately, most public servants in Uganda regard customers' questions and complaints as disruptive of their work. Yet, true public service demands openness on the part of the servants who run the public institutions so that the public may know more about the way government institutions operate, as well as to emphasise a need to identify quickly and accurately when services are falling below the promised or expected quality (Mle, 2012).

Public servants in Uganda have poor communication skills, which affects the quality of services they offer. Moreover, government needs to respond to societal

shifts by learning to navigate multiple channels, not only to communicate but also to give feedback on key achievements as well as constraints that impede satisfactory service delivery where it has occurred. In his classic work *The functions of the executive*, Chester Barnard pronounced, "The first executive function is to develop and maintain a system of communication" (1938:226). For Barnard, communication was not just an executive function but the primary function. In another classic write up Simon, Smithburg and Thompson (1950) acknowledge the crucial nature of communication to government performance. They counsel that, "Blockages in the communication system constitute one of the most serious problems in public administration" (1950:229). However, Uganda's public service remains with the perennial challenge of effective communication. Formulated communication strategies lag behind implementation schedules.

Finally, most public servants in Uganda have been accused of various forms of corruption. This malaise remains pervasive in Uganda's public service. Some of Uganda's bureaucrats have often been accused of lining their own pockets at the expense of the citizens. Indeed, Larmour (1990:64) persuasively argues that people are self-interested and opportunistic maximisers. Public equipment, office supplies and other stock may be used for the improvement and maintenance of a public official's private property. Public servants are sometimes used as workers in political campaigns while on government time – an illegal advantage of incumbency. This is straightforward stealing. Opportunities for public servants to be involved in unethical conduct arise from the power they exercise in both the development and administration of public policy. Mle (2012:22) adds that corruption taints the image of the public service, and it is therefore a source of concern to most citizens. It deprives the citizens of services due to them.

### **Public service infrastructure-related constraints**

The second set of variables in the way of Uganda's public service transformation undoubtedly relates to the public service infrastructure. The public service infrastructure includes the public service structures, processes, rules and regulations as well as the practices which, if well nurtured, should facilitate the operation of the public service. The public service infrastructure means the interconnected structural elements that provide the framework supporting public service at all levels. Both hard public service infrastructure such as roads, bridges, water supply, sewers, electrical grids, telecommunications and soft infrastructure such as ethics infrastructure are necessary. The soft infrastructure further relates to all the institutions required to maintain the economic, health, cultural and social standards of a country. The financial system, the education system, and the health care system are other examples of soft infrastructure.

The basic function of the public sector, which comprises a number of institutions for the making and implementation of decisions with regard to interests of various kinds, is to provide needed goods and services to citizens (Haque, 2001:65).

Within the context of market-led ideologies, the public sector is expected to create a conducive environment. It is expected to provide a strong regulatory role; a task that can be possible with institutions that are well coordinated. Strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will be a key necessity for governments to be able to play a regulatory role. Unfortunately, Uganda's public sector structures suffer significant ailments. There is poor coordination of government programmes and this has been further compromised by duplicated mandates across sectors with the cumulative effect that it sometimes is hard to know which institution should be held accountable. The duplicated structures and mandates across sectors have resource utilisation implications as scarce resources are distributed across the various structures. Monitoring and evaluation systems are significantly too weak to create the desired benefits. As a result, the private sector; through the alternative modes of service delivery introduced, continue to exploit the citizens.

The constraints to public service transformation above have created negative implications for public service structures. Inefficiencies, unnecessary rigidity and red-tape continue to characterise most government institutions. Indeed, in a country where there is lack of a supportive social infrastructure for the transformation of the public service, the public service rules and regulations are quite often used by public servants for private gain. The system of government and law enforcement, including the political, legislative, law enforcement, justice and penal systems, as well as specialised facilities and systems for collecting, storing and disseminating data, laws and regulation, are not supported. They are too inefficient to facilitate the purpose for which they were established. The public service, which also needs to build a strong economic infrastructure for the government, has not done so to the satisfaction of stakeholders. Uganda's education system has been hit by complaints about the quality of education. There is too much absenteeism and low pay for teachers, which have combined with other factors to undermine the purpose of true education. Universities are underfunded and there is not much research output.

The public service in any country is expected to serve the interest of the public without much discrimination against its employees. However, the problem of discrimination has affected the public service institutions. The neutrality of the public service institutions as a whole remains questionable in respect to demands by the ruling government. Public service recruitments are increasingly becoming biased and merit-based doctrines are being replaced by informalities. Within public service institutions, there is a paralysis with regard to implementation of well articulated policies. This has been partially blamed on poor funding, but the 'public service culture', where public interest has been increasingly replaced by private interest, becomes suspect. Performance contracts only target the invisible officers at local government level. There is increased political influence and 'NRMisation' of Uganda's development processes.

Public service systems in Uganda are highly entrenched and embedded in a bureaucratic culture managed by public servants, the majority of whom have behavioural impairments, such that any effort made to transform the public service is not an easy job. The public servants have a critical role in ensuring the effectiveness of government. The inefficiencies generated by the sheer incompetence of public servants, when combined with the dysfunctional public service infrastructure and a weak citizenry, can have wide-ranging ramifications on the capacity of government to function.

Fox and Meyer (1995:98) define politics as the process of decision making; determining who receives what, when, where and how; a conflict resolution process which determines the apportionment of resources; the process by which power is applied in order to determine whether and how government is to be exercised in any given area; and/or the apportionment of values. Public service processes have become too politicised and, as some have argued, the country suffers from a 'presidentialisation syndrome'. The president has become such an institution himself that every major policy shift requires his personal intervention. As a result, the policy strategies may not have been thoroughly assessed and it could discourage innovativeness in policy making. There are duplicate offices that have been established under State House and the numbers of issues that are addressed by His Excellency the President are too many, yet there are already established institutions for such activities. There is a belief that too much power and resources are being concentrated in State House as opposed to building institutions of democracy and governance.

### **Citizen-related constraints to transformation**

For ordinary citizens, problems of poor public services by government should embolden them to hold errant public servants to account. A high level of involvement and participation by ordinary people is conducive to sustainable development. It has become common currency in development circles that we cannot rely exclusively on technical, capacity-based explanations in order to understand bottlenecks and inefficiencies in public services. Citizens have not held their leaders to account. There is growing citizen apathy and this has increased the impunity of public servants and politicians. Thus, transformation of the public service is not given priority.

## **CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The idea of public service transformation is not new. From the 1940s when the idea of a welfare state emerged, governments have been concerned with how to deliver public services efficiently. One of the primary challenges has been how to balance the market and the role of the state. Reforms upon reforms have come but the desired results of an efficient public service have not been achieved. In Uganda's case, most previous public service reforms targeted only the public



servants and have ignored the politicians, yet government work is shared between their two constituencies. Politics has continued to play a fundamental role in either facilitating or undermining the public service transformation processes. Questions have also been pointed at the institutions and implementation strategies adopted. Reform efforts have ignored the non-state actors whose buy-in and support is fundamental to the implementation agenda of any public service transformation efforts. The gaps in implementation are so glaring that something has to be done. It is critical to have a good team of public servants to do what is expected of the public service.

To address the problems militating against transformation of the public service in Uganda a total reconstruction of the country's moral infrastructure is needed. This has to be based on Ugandan values and must take into account the diversities within the country. The transformation should be based on commonly agreed values that reflect the cultural diversity of the country and are aimed at rallying a common support for the transformation. Much effort should be directed at harnessing the opportunities presented by a diverse society. The reconstruction of the moral infrastructure requires consensus building. With appropriate commitment by the top bureaucrats and politicians to the transformation agenda, the chances of success become clearer. For the public service transformation agenda to succeed, it should be beyond party affiliations and, as a matter of necessity, should involve a wide array of stakeholders – government, the Civil Society Organisations, the media, the private sector, church and traditional institutions, academia and development partners. Adequate financing for the transformation agenda will be critical. However, such finances must be put to efficient and effective use. The citizens must be vigilant and hold the elected and unelected leaders accountable.

The following policy proposals need to be undertaken by government under the direct championship of the Ministry of Public Service to address the challenges that stand in the way of public service transformation:

Public servants need to be educated on their philosophical roles and inherent public service values. Most public servants appear to have been more driven by the public management approaches at the expense of public administration philosophies in a democracy. A public service built on public management values will certainly never be like one built on public administration values. There is therefore a need for a renewed public service culture. The elected leaders themselves seem not to understand the foundation of government. To reverse this trend, the implementation of national service courses becomes a matter of necessity, not choice. Practices of public administration have ignored the theoretical foundations of public administration, which undoubtedly provide useful answers to pressing public service problems. People who manage government affairs must appreciate how governments have historically evolved in relation to the concepts of a state and citizens. Recruitment in public service needs to be reoriented to those with training in public administration, as opposed to the apparent emphasis on business-



oriented graduates who confuse the long-standing notions of public service values.

There is a need for attention to policy preparation and evaluation. If the government wants to have impact, it is critical that decisions are taken based on well thought-out visions that have seen major stakeholders participate and feel a degree of ownership of the policies. The culture of minimalist consultation during policy development needs to be replaced with the true meaning of consultation. While participatory representation may be a challenge due to the complexities of its implementation, the representative representation itself has to take the heterogeneous nature of the country into account. Once there is ownership of the policy of public service transformation, for example, its implementation will be smooth, as everybody will value its vision. It is up to these stakeholders to build the platforms for successful implementation and monitoring of the outcomes and the impact of the government's role. Strong re-orientation to evaluation of public policy interventions is a critical pillar.

A more regulatory role of the government in a complex society is urgently required and will be a catalyst for an effective public service transformation agenda. While most government activities in Uganda are driven by the business approach, government's strong arm remains paramount in such a service delivery mechanism. Government has to exert its influence through a robust monitoring role if its regulatory function is to succeed. An effective government must have an elaborate instrument to safeguard the well-being of its citizens. Uganda's rather complex society needs an intelligent government that supports opportunities for further growth towards a harmonious organisation and an effective and safe society. Regulatory issues should have a positive impact on these ambitions.

New delivery through partnerships of its various forms needs to be explored but with a caveat that government retains the role of conducting due diligence and performs its regulatory and monitoring role efficiently and effectively. Government; it has been argued by public choice theorists, can no longer have the ambition to accumulate all needed knowledge and budgets. To safeguard the positive impact, governments have to elaborate new collaboration models with different stakeholders and private partners. Controlled trust and respect instead of distrust should be the main driver in the relation between government, citizens and companies.

Attention to the doctrines of good government and governance, guided by the century-old principles of separation of powers and checks and balances in the context of democratic doctrines is, an important likely strategy that will support public service transformation. Democratic principles of public financial management will need to be at the centre of government-citizen interaction. Reliability, transparency and accountability should be key words for a government with interests in ensuring societal transformation. Identification of clear objectives, development of transparent processes, adapting checks and balances, with strong monitoring, accountability and communication should be at the heart of all public

service delivery institutions and political and other non-elected leaders will need to be champions. The use of civil society organisations and other non-state actors in instilling a stewardship culture and demanding accountability on behalf of the people will most probably post impressive outcomes. This, however, has a caveat that government recognises the positive roles of such non-state actors and that they are availed of a conducive policy regime to perform their activities.

Building the public sector landscape of the future, with foresighted public servants, is a suggested area for policy intervention. To increase government relevance in society, perform its roles in an efficient way and cope with the complexity of public service delivery, public administrations need to embrace new concepts of an open organisation: new collaboration models between administrations of similar level, between administrations of different governance levels and/or between public and private organisations will have an impact on the organisations' design of the overall public sector. The specific application and relevance of such interventions will remain a critical area of policy intervention.

The culture of designing efficient processes and managing complexities needs urgent policy attention. All administrations will need to have a continued desire for innovation in the public service processes, while they optimise the processes – adapting to the specific strategy, legal changes, innovation, new services and delivery models. An efficient government should look for standardised solutions in domains such as finance, human resources, public procurement, all adapted to the specific public sector environment.

The power of an efficient coordination and monitoring framework is critical. Government urgently needs to re-evaluate the mandates of its various departments and agencies with a view to consolidating existing mandates into related areas. This will build synergy among related functions and will see significant saving of resources, which will be put to good use. The relationship between the central government and local government should be a major area of emphasis in debating, coordinating and monitoring.

Performance measurement for senior managers will need much more robust attention than it has attracted in the past. Even public servants in responsible, supervisory positions must be given clear benchmarks of performance, and remedial action needs to be taken where adherence to agreed benchmarks is not upheld.

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