

A Comparative Analysis of the Uganda Public Service Across Time Since Independence

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Abstract

Uganda attained independence on 9 October, 1962. Since independence, the Uganda Public Service sector has undergone three phases of reforms. The Public Service is the administrative machinery through which the government effects and delivers public services. These reforms have had far-reaching impacts on public service delivery in Uganda. Nonetheless, the common focus on service delivery improvement has not critically analysed these reforms and their impact on the same. There is therefore a need to understand the reforms, their implementation and impact on the Uganda Public Service. This article therefore brings out a comparative analysis of the different phases of the Uganda Public Service since independence, and analyses the reforms and resultant impact. Specifically, the status of the Uganda Public Service is identified, while critically reflecting on the administrative bureaucracies and the respective Public Service regulatory regimes. This analysis is based upon a critical review of the existing literature on Uganda's administrative bureaucracies, with a focus on reforms in the Public Service. The article establishes that before the reforms, specifically during the period of autocratic and corrupt regimes, the Public Service remained highly centralized and politicized. Further, it was characterised by poor remuneration, rampant corruption, non-performance and very poor delivery of public services. In response to these inadequacies and shortcomings, the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP) was initiated in the 1990s. In its initial stages, the CSRP recorded considerable success. Nonetheless, the reforms stalled in the mid-1990s and, in some instances and areas the reform efforts reversed. This reversal led to the initiation of the third and current phase of reforms which are focusing on human resource policies, institutional environment and public management systems that facilitate national development, improved service delivery and poverty eradication. To date (2016), there are significant achievements in terms of outputs. Nonetheless, it is difficult to translate these achievements into positive outcomes for successful public service delivery.

Key words: Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP), Uganda Public Service sector, Public service delivery, Reforms, Performance, Results-Oriented Management.

Introduction

Uganda attained independence in 1962. Since independence, the Uganda Public Service sector has undergone different phases of reforms. The Public Service is the administrative machinery through which government effects public service delivery. These reforms were mainly initiated from 1986, after the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took over government power. Prior to the reforms, the Uganda Public Service remained highly centralized and politicized, with poor remuneration, rampant corruption and non-performance. These shortcomings prevailed following the succession of autocratic and corrupt regimes. In response, a Public Service

Review and Reorganization Commission (CSRRC) was formed with the aim of analysing the performance of the Public Service and proposing remedial measures for improving public service delivery. It identified several key problems and inadequacies, including inadequate pay and benefits, poor management, dysfunctional Public Service organization, and inadequate personnel management and training. The CSRRC articulated a new vision of the Public Service thus: “a smaller, better paid, more efficient and effective body, guided by fair, simple and consistent rules and procedures to foster discipline and accountability, while promoting personal initiative in the achievement of assigned duties and objectives” (Mutibwa, 1992). It is upon this new vision that in 1990, the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP) was introduced by the Government. The CSRP programme paved way for the current Public Service reforms that have been characterized by a variety of management initiatives to improve service delivery.

Despite the common focus on service delivery improvement across the different administrative regimes since independence, it is also imperative to understand the milestones and impact realized on service delivery. This article brings out a comparative analysis of the Uganda Public Service across time since independence (1962 to-date). Specifically the status of Public Service is identified in reflection of the administrative bureaucracies and respective public sector regulatory regimes. The analysis is based on a critical review of the existing literature of the Uganda administrative bureaucracies with a focus on reforms in the Public Service.

The article is divided into five sections; with section one as the introduction. Section two of the article provides background information. It presents a review of the pertinent literature in respect to the post independence developments in relation to the Public Service reforms. It presents a critical analysis of the Uganda Public Service before and after the implementation of the Public Sector Reform Programme. Section three deals with the research question in respect to the topic presented. This research question is informed by the literature on public service as well as over 30 years experience that the author has had in respect to public service delivery in Uganda. Section four presents the observations and together with a discussion. The section also looks at the implementation of the reform programme, achievements and challenges. Section five concludes the article with the major contributions that the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP) has achieved. It also points out the challenges that the reform programme is still facing.

Background information to the Reforms in the Public Service before the Implementation of the Civil Service Reform Programme (1962-1985)

When Uganda attained independence in 1962, she inherited the Westminster model in the Public Service that was originally set up and nurtured by the British colonial rulers. This model was premised on political neutrality in an environment of competitive party politics. The model emphasized the principle of meritocracy or the career of open talent. To this end, public servants were recruited on non-discriminatory basis by open competition regardless of class, ethnicity, race, sex, or religion. Promotions were based on merit and performance. The principles of honesty, integrity patriotism, incorruptibility and dedication to duty were emphasized. Public servants enjoyed attractive terms in reward for their royalty (Langseth and

Mugaju, 1996). They were protected from open criticisms by the political leadership. According to Karugire (1996), independent Uganda had a strong, viable, and reasonably impartial and corruption-free Public Service which was reputedly one of the best in sub-Saharan Africa. It was lean, efficient, well-paid and highly motivated. At independence, the Public Service was dominated by the British expatriates. Management of Public Service was vested in the Public Service Commission.

The Obote I Government/ Regime:

Soon after independence, the principles of the Westminster model were eroded. During the early years of then Prime Minister Obote's political regime (1962-1966), the Uganda Public Service was characterized by political intrusion at the expense of meritocracy or generally the principles of the Westminster model. The regime pursued a policy of "Africanization" without regard for performance, integrity, effectiveness and good governance in Public Service. Further, the regime promoted ethnic, religious and regional considerations in the recruitment and promotions of public servants at the expense of meritocracy. As a result senior positions in the Public Service lost professional expertise as the skilled and experienced white expatriates were replaced by fresh Ugandan graduates. In addition, the Public Service lacked the culture of learning, further training and upgrading for professional development which constrained performance (Langseth and Mugaju, 1996). The powers of the Public Service Commission were reduced to an advisory and the management of the Public Service was gradually taken up by politicians of the ruling Uganda People's Congress (UPC) party. This political intrusion further extended into the districts, where the UPC politicians took positions in the district appointment boards and also took positions as district commissioners and chiefs. The party card began to be a substitute of academic qualifications. Political intrusion meant a loss in discipline, morale, confidence and institutional cohesion as the public servants who enjoyed political protection misbehaved and misappropriated funds with impunity while those who had no political protection suffered severe penalties, dismissals and arbitrary transfers on grounds of mere suspicion, contrary to the Public Service regulations. Consequently the Public Service institutional solidarity collapsed. The Public Service operated under duplication of services, poor coordination and low service performance standards (Langseth and Mugaju, 1996).

The quality of Public Service was further undermined by the 1966 political (Buganda) crisis and the subsequent drift to a one-party dictatorship between 1966 and 1971 (Langseth and Mugaju, 1996). The 1967 Constitution put at stake the credibility of the Public Service with the centralization and concentration of power in the hands of the President. Further, the President was vested with the powers to appoint and dismiss public servants without reference to the Public Service Commission and the Public Service regulations. Hence, the Public Service was left at the mercy of the politicians both at the national and district levels. Public servants at the districts were answerable to central ministries which were remote and insensitive to the local circumstances. Thus constitutionalism and democratic governance in respect to Public Service accountability to the local authorities collapsed (Langseth and Mugaju, 1996). The appointment of UPC functionaries undermined the credibility, legitimacy and respectability of the Public Service. Karugire (1996) observes that school drop outs, drivers and hawkers filled vacant posts in Public Service which undermined performance and morale in the service. Public servants became more and more demoralized and mediocrity, incompetence and the

abuse of power were pronounced. Highly experienced public servants quit Public Service jobs and joined the private sector while those who remained in service became too scared to perform their duties. Public servants who enjoyed political patronage and protection were rude, arrogant and often demanded bribes to obstruct service delivery for personal gains. The needs of politicians ruled over the delivery of services to the public (Langseth and Mugaju, 1996). Hence the initial collapse of the Westminster model was attributed to lack of a viable Public Service culture, administrative inexperience, political interference and sectarianism. Public Service was an artificial institution which did not have solid social foundations. It had no strong traditions of royalty, cohesion and dedication to duty. The Ugandan public servants were more interested in benefits and sought personal privileges without hard work and sacrifice. This problem of absence of a deep-rooted Public Service culture was thus compounded by the problem of administrative inexperience.

The (Amin) Military Regime

When Idi Amin seized power in 1971, Uganda fell under a military dictatorship. President Amin promised to end the abuses, injustices and sectarianism of the Obote 1 government. His areas of focus included the revitalization of the Public Service. He assured Ugandans that the military regime would restore the moral and political neutrality of the Public Service and enhance its capacity to deliver public services (Langseth and Mugaju, 1996).

However, this was not to be the case. Public administration was shifted from the traditional Public Service to the Army. The traditional methods of recruitment, promotions and discipline in the Public Service were discarded. Public servants were appointed and dismissed by Amin's permanent secretaries without reference to the Public Service Commission, contrary to the Public Service Regulations, a scenario similar to the Obote I Government. The Public Service Commission was rendered completely redundant in the management of the Public Service. This compounded the issues of favouritism, nepotism and ethnicity. Army personnel were also recruited into the public service. The uncontrolled recruitment process gave rise to a new problem of "ghost" public servants. Public servants operated under the command of the illiterate soldiers. The Public Service was converted into a tool for the pursuit of private interests of the military personnel and the privileged few. Human rights violations fear and intimidation of the public servants persisted. Hundreds of public servants were killed while those who survived fled the Public Service and the country. They were replaced by unqualified persons.

The military regime did not only destroy the security of tenure in the Public Service but it also sunk the morale and performance of public servants. Ultimately, the Public Service ceased to be a viable, confident, secure and effective public institution. Performance standards, morale and the integrity system collapsed almost beyond repair. Offices were converted into business premises and points of contact rather than places of official work. Diversions, embezzlement, false claims and outright plunder of public resources were institutionalized. Record-keeping and accountability ceased to exist while corruption became an open and pervasive integral practice in virtually all official transactions. In official circles, accountability, integrity and honesty were replaced by greed and predation (Langseth and Mugaju, 1996).

The National Liberation Front (Liberators) and the Obote II Regime (1979-1985)

In 1979 following the fall of the dictatorial regime, the Public Service continued to be characterised by corruption, inefficiency and incompetence. The Uganda National Liberation Front “Liberators” who took over power from the military regime engaged in corruption, misappropriation of public resources and embezzlement (Langseth and Mugaju, 1996). They used their political power to maximize personal gains.

National elections were held in 1980 in which Obote’s political party, the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) emerged victorious, and Obote once again became president (Obote II regime). Thus even with the restoration of Milton Obote in 1980 (the Obote II Government), the regime had no chance of reversing the decay in the Public Service. A lot of time and resources were spent in fighting off the guerrilla warfare of the National Resistance Army (NRA) that was led by Yoweri Museveni. The evils of corruption, sectarianism and poor performance continued with renewed vigour. The informal culture of absenteeism, malingering, moonlighting became more entrenched in the Public Service. UPC functionaries were again appointed and deployed as public servants in the central and the local administrations. These put party above public interests and remained instruments of terror in the Public Service. Public funds and property were stolen and incriminating documents were destroyed as records keeping had ceased to exist. The Uganda Public Service was characterized by lawlessness, abuse of power, indiscipline and the fatal collapse of accountability systems. By 1985, the Public Service was in a state of complete immobility and institutional disintegration. The paralyzed Public Service was no longer a credible and legitimate public institution (Langseth and Mugaju, 1996). At that time, there were virtually no public services being rendered to the people.

In 1985, there was a lot of political uncertainty which culminated into a military junta led by General Tito Okello Lutwa. The soldiers ruled Uganda for about six months before the then rebels of the National Resistance Army (NRA) led by Yoweri Kaguta Museveni took over the reins of power.

It can, therefore, be summarised that from 1979 to 1985, all the governments that came into power had no positive effect on the public service and service delivery was virtually non-existent.

The Public Service after the implementation of the Civil Service Reform Programme

In 1986, The National Resistance Movement (NRM) assumed power and formed a Public Service Review and Reorganization Commission (CSRRC). The commission was tasked to review the Public Service and propose ways of recovering the institution for improved public service delivery. The CSRRC unleashed several key problems, including inadequate pay and benefits, poor management, a dysfunctional Public Service organization, and inadequate personnel management and training. The CSRRC articulated a new vision of the Public Service: a smaller, better paid, more efficient and effective body, guided by fair, simple and consistent rules and procedures to foster discipline and accountability, while promoting personal initiative in the achievement of assigned duties and objectives for improved Public Service delivery. Cascading from the recommendations of the CSRRC, the Civil Service Reform Programme

(CSRP) was introduced by the Government in 1990 (Opio-Lukone, 2004; MoPS, 2012). The new vision of the Public Service was: “by the year 2000, to have smaller, result-oriented, transparent and better paid Public Service personnel with proper management and training, having shared values, supported by regulations that would ensure savings and eliminate waste through competitive approaches to contracting for goods and services towards realizing a more efficient and effective Public Service”. The first phase of reforms (1989-1996) focused on downsizing the bloated public service, while the second phase of reforms (1997-2002) involved the introduction of Results-Oriented Management, and continued restructuring and salary enhancement. In 1997 the CSRP was renamed the Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP) to reflect the increasing importance of managerial practices of the private sector in government work. It comprised six components: (1) management of reform; (2) enhancing efficiency and effectiveness; (3) management information and control system; (4) developing the human resources; (5) time management and organizational discipline; and (6) good governance and private sector development (MoPS, 2012). The third phase of reforms (2005-2011) focused on building the institutional environment and public service management systems that would facilitate national development, improve public service delivery and eradicate poverty.

Despite early successes, reform stalled in the mid-1990s while in some areas the achievements that had been made were reversed. For example, the number of public servants that had been reduced increased significantly; there was a decline in the levels of performance and service delivery; and no progress was made on the pay reform. In response to these challenges, a Third Phase of reforms was launched in 2005. It was meant to run up to 2009 but was extended up to 2011. It placed emphasis on results and outcomes to create and maintain human resource policies, an institutional environment and public management systems that would facilitate national development, improved service delivery and promote poverty eradication. Implementation of the programme got underway with support from international donors, including the World Bank, UNDP and three bilateral donors (the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Sweden). Significant results were realized but with critical challenges that triggered the change of focus as reflected in the three programme phases (MoPS, 2012).

Research Questions and Methodology

The major research question is whether the post-NRM reforms in the Public Service have enhanced public service delivery in Uganda. While public service reforms bear huge potential to contribute to improved public service delivery in Uganda, this article identifies that this potential is yet to be realised mainly due to the critical gaps in the design and implementation of the initiatives towards the improvement of service delivery under the reform programme. Strategic measures to address the errors and improve the effectiveness of the reforms should target to address the critical gaps that have been identified in the design and implementation of the Civil Service Reform Programmes. Special attention should be paid to building institutional capacity, addressing corruption, implementing a motivational pay to Public Servants as well as ensuring the enforcement of auditing systems and the enforcement of the Standing Orders in the Public Service. There is need for a clear comprehensive conceptualization of the reform change process. The reform programme should be informed by a clear understanding of the problems to be resolved by the reform, as well as having an agreement on the vision of the reforms and the implementation strategies.

Observations, Discussions and Validation

Implementation of the Reform Programme and Achievements

The First Phase of the Reforms (1989-1996)

The first phase of the reforms that focused on downsizing the Public Service were implemented through the restructuring of the ministries and districts. These were rationalized with the aim of; producing smaller and more accountable organizations performing only core functions, eliminating duplication and enhancing coordination among institutions. Down-sizing meant that more funds could be released towards improving the remuneration of public servants and offering opportunities for the privatization of non-core activities, thus eliminating duplications and offering coordination among ministries (MoPS, 2012).

Restructuring took course in the aspects of the role of government at the district level, set objectives and priorities, performance indicators, elimination of redundant staff, and focused specifically on capacity-building plans. The focus here was to decentralize functions from the central ministries to the local governments according to the Decentralization Act of 1993, and to decide to transfer operational responsibility for the delivery of public services and the necessary staff, plus funds and assets previously controlled by the central government to the local governments.

In 1992, the restructuring process showed the number of ministries to have reduced from 38 to 21, as recommended by the Public Service Review and Re-organization Commission. The process led to the removal of “overdue levels” of staff (approximately 6,339 officials and 7,421 teachers) were removed from the payrolls, removal of ghost workers (about 42,000), the abolition of the group employee scheme (temporary short-term employees, about 30,000), the removal of redundancies arising from ministerial reviews, and the application of a voluntary retirement scheme in which about 4,500 public servants participated. In addition, 11 of the 32 permanent secretaries in the central government were laid off. Overall, the downsizing exercise realized a 50% reduction (60,000 workers laid off within ministries and districts) was realized. The rationalization process led to a proposal to increase the wage bill from 21 (1994/95) to 31 per cent (1996/97) of the recurrent expenditures of government over a three-year-period so as to achieve the payment of the minimum living wage to the reduced establishment (MoPS, 2012).

The Second Phase of the Reforms (1997- 2002)

The Second Phase of Reforms focused on Results-Oriented Management. The restructuring process continued and an initial step in the salary enhancement that was introduced in 1992 was undertaken, responding to the issues of slow implementation, with the assistance of an advisory service to focus and simplify the report of the Civil Service Review and Reorganisation Commission’s broad recommendations. This was in a bid to accelerate the reform process to the actual realization of benefits given the circumstances in Uganda at the time (MOPS, 2010). The objectives under this phase were; introduction of a minimum living wage payment and the introduction of results-oriented management, leading to improved public service delivery.

The world over, the minimum living wage is a cornerstone for creating a motivated, result-oriented public service. It sets the minimum acceptable salary for the most junior grade of public servant. The living wage concept incorporates a base salary where all allowances, including housing, transport and health are consolidated into the pay package and reflects full monetization and non-cash benefits.

The Result-Oriented Management (ROM) process was instituted, launched and disseminated in 1993. It was intended to provide practical guidelines for defining objectives with measurable performance standards and suggesting how and when the reform components should be implemented by ministries, districts and individual public servants. ROM was introduced with a detailed action programme. It would be evaluated based on data from baseline service indicators that would be established with the help of the World Bank. The revised action plan for implementing the minimum wage payment and ROM were packaged with six major components; (i) further rationalization of ministries and districts; (ii) strengthening the capability of the Ministry of Public Service (MPS) to manage and champion the reform; (iii) Monetization of benefits; (iv) Job grading; (v) Code of conduct and discipline and (vi) Information programme and communication strategy for reform (MoPS, 2009; 2011; 2012).

The Third Phase of the Reforms (2005- 2011)

The Third Phase of Reforms focused on building an institutional environment and public management systems that would facilitate national development, improved public service delivery and poverty eradication. To that end, a decentralization process was initiated, led by the Decentralization Secretariat in the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) supported by an inter-ministerial committee that was responsible for monitoring the decentralization programme with other reform efforts. Working within the legal framework provided by the Decentralization Act of 1993 and Local Government Act of 1997, the decentralization process showed a transfer of real powers from the overburdened and under-financed central government officials to the local authorities. Decentralization was meant to bring political and administrative control over services to the point where they are actually delivered, and in the process, promoting people's participation and ownership of programmes and enhancing administrative accountability and effectiveness (Decentralization Statute, 1999). The District Service Commissions took over the selection, promotion and other personnel matters of staff under the District Services. The decentralization process came along with capacity building initiatives to enhance implementation. These included the following, among others:

- a. Development and dissemination of the Local Government Act and A Councillor's Handbook and increasing financial flows from the centre to local bodies amounting to some 30 per cent of national total revenues;
- b. Training local bodies in the aspects of financial management including the budgeting process, budget implementation and monitoring, and cash flow management;
- c. Continued orientation workshops for all new councillors, District Tender Boards, accounts officers, and administrative officers;
- d. Training in decentralized planning, development of district plans, and preparation of annual budget of local bodies, in tandem with the national budget, assisted and advised by the support of the Local Government Finance Commission.

Critical challenges

Throughout the implementation process, the CSR and thereafter the Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP) faced critical challenges that constrained its effectiveness and efficiency in public service delivery.

The programme lacked specificity on the implementation areas and the respective implementers. The recommendations to be implemented were dispersed over too many areas without indicating key ideas or themes that would inform and bind them into some coherent plan of work.

Further, the programme did not properly articulate the roles of the government organizations that were to embed the reform systems that would be introduced by the Ministry of Public Service. In addition, the programme set unrealistic targets, faced management issues such as procurement delays and had little analysis of how different programme components might interact. The programme further faced the challenge of the increasingly growing number of districts leading to the growing numbers of public servants, which developments led to an increase in administrative costs.

Lastly, corruption has prevailed despite efforts of the general campaign in the reforms to combat it. Partly, this is due to the costs of political campaigning, in which the rising expenses for the candidates contending at all levels foster corrupt practices, a very low level of Public Service pay and a laxity enforcement of the auditing systems; plus the manifest failure to implement the Public Service Standing Orders and the weak laws or punitive action against corruption (Olum, n.d; Nkata, 2010). All these weaknesses have increased the element of corruption in the Uganda Public Service, thereby negatively impacting on public service delivery.

From the foregoing, it can be discerned that the public service and public service delivery largely depends on the type of political environment within which it operates. When the political leadership is not stable, there is an environment of uncertainty and instability which inhibits the performance of public servants, thus negatively affecting the delivery of public services.

Conclusion

As noted from the above discussion, this article sought to compare the Uganda Public Service across time since independence.

Based on a critical review of the existing literature on Uganda's administrative bureaucracies and the performance of the Public Service, the article has undertaken a systematic comparison of the post independence Public Service in Uganda. It has established the status of the Public Service in the reflection of the administrative bureaucracies and respective Public Service regulatory regimes.

The article has established that prior to the reforms, the Public Service remained highly centralized and politicized, with poor remuneration, rampant corruption and non-performance

which led to poor service delivery. These shortcomings prevailed following the succession of autocratic and corrupt regimes. To address the errors and improve service delivery, the Civil Service Reform Programme was introduced by the NRM government. The first phase of reforms focused on downsizing while the second phase involved the introduction of results-oriented management, continued restructuring and salary enhancement and the third phase of reforms focused on institutional enrolment and public management systems for improved public service delivery. These, to some extent, improved public service delivery in Uganda.

Despite the early successes, reform stalled in the mid-1990s while in some areas the successes attained were reversed. For instance the number of districts and the public servants increased significantly; there were declining levels of financial and human resources, which impacted negatively on performance and public service delivery; and no progress was made on pay reform. In response to the challenges, a third and current phase of the Public Sector Reform Programme was launched with an emphasis on results and outcomes 'to create and maintain human resource policies, maintain an institutional environment and public management systems that facilitate national development, improved Service delivery and poverty eradication. Till today, the reform programme leaves a lot to be desired and is constrained by critical gaps in its design and the implementation of the reforms that are compounded by the failure to curb corruption. Besides, there are crucial institutional capacity gaps in the management and implementation of service delivery. Other than corruption, there is very low level of Public service pay, laxity in the enforcement of auditing systems and the failure to implement Public Service Standing Orders.

In addition to this, if government has to take charge of the Reform Programme, government has to set aside adequate funds for designing and implementing the reforms, other than relying on funding from the donors and development partners, who may have their own priorities and dictates.

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