



Improving Local Government Efficiency; Systems And Approaches: A Global Review.

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ABSTRACT: It is pertinent to analyse the historical context of decentralization in Uganda. In this paper, emphasis was put on the pre-colonial era of governance in Uganda, the colonial era of governance, and the independence period up to the current decentralization policy using documentary review. The historical overview of local governance in Uganda has logically led to the formulation of many challenges as well as achievements in the current governance like the current Local Government Act, 1997.

KEY WORDS: colonial governance, political centralization, National Resistance Movement, Military regime, decentralization service delivery, independence and Local government Act.

Received 03 November, 2018; Accepted 16 November, 2018 © The author(s) 2018. Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. PRE-COLONIAL ERA OF GOVERNANCE IN UGANDA

The concept of governance has been around in both political and academic discourse for a long time and refers, in a generic sense, to the task of running society (government) (Hyden, 1998). Therefore, it can aptly be asserted that governance of society is as old as the human race except that it has always manifested itself differently depending on the generation, environment, and what society considers to be good governance. According to (Rosenau.M, 1992), governance is a system of rule that works only if it is accepted by the majority or at least by the most powerful of those it affects.

In Uganda, like it was in the rest of Africa, governance of communities' depended on the nature of stratification in the communities. Pre-colonial Ugandan communities manifested themselves in either centralized or decentralized/ segmented communities. Centralized communities/tribes had a unitary system of governance with a well-defined institution like the Kingship and personality who enjoyed inherited authority. The communities in Uganda that cherished such a system were the traditional kingdom areas of Ankole, Bunyoro, Toro and Buganda. The Baganda had the Kabaka, the Banyakole had the Omugabe, and the Banyoro and Batoro had the Omukama. These are leaders by birth and they wielded a lot of authority and a result all citizens had to bear allegiance to them.

On the other hand, the decentralized or segmented system, authority was diffused since the communities did not have paramount chiefs and, as a result, operations rotated around clan heads. Such communities included the Iteso, Sabiny, Langi, Acholi, Bagwere, and Banyole among others. In these communities, if an issue was beyond the clan, clan heads converged to form consensus, hence there was law and order. Each clan head had a council of elders whose decisions were by all clan members: this was indeed a form of government. It must, however, be noted that regardless of the system of governance, both centralized and decentralized communities aimed at creating harmony, self defence, expansion of territory, and delivery of services and therefore to enhance development (Semakula Kiwanuka, 1971). The Heligoland Treaty was the second Anglo-German Agreement. The first one had been concluded in 1886 by which the German occupied Tanganyika (Tanzania) and the British occupied Kenya.

In Buganda, for instance, the pre-colonial Kingdom had a highly centralized and institutionalized political system with the Kabaka (King) at the apex of the political hierarchy. The Kabaka wielded a lot of authority in that:

- All land belonged to him.
- He appointed the Prime Minister (Katikilo)
- He appointed the cabinet (Bakungu).
- He appointed the legislative council (Lukiko) whose role was advisory.

- He had a judicial system that made him the ultimate court of appeal.
- He also appointed the minor chiefs at the county (Saza), sub-county (Gombolola), parish (Muluka), and village (Bataka).

This system ensured Kabaka's presence was felt at every level of governance. Most centralized communities in Uganda had a replica of the above political system although the designation of different offices differed from one society to another (Nsibambi, 1998).

The last quarter of the nineteenth century ushered in the epoch of colonialism in Africa, Uganda inclusive. Uganda was in 1890 declared by the Heligoland Treaty as a British sphere of influence and it was later in 1894 declared a British Protectorate.

II. COLONIAL PERIOD OF GOVERNANCE IN UGANDA

European colonial rule in Uganda was occasioned by the entrance of explorers like Speke, Grant, Burton, and the Bakers, who were followed by the missionaries in 1877 and 1879 for the Protestants and Catholics respectively, then came the European traders under the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) led by Lugard and finally British Commissioners like Sir Henry Johnston.

What has to be noted, however, is that the British colonialism was received with mixed feelings depending on the mood of the community and its leadership. For instance, whereas Mutesa I, the King of Buganda between 1856 and 1884 welcomed HM Stanley and later led to the coming of missionaries, his son Mwanga (1884-97) resisted the colonial masters, just as Kabalega the Omukama of Bunyoro did. Generally, British colonialism in Uganda was resisted by the indigenous aristocracy in Bunyoro, Ankole and Buganda who saw their traditional privilege being abolished and their authority eroded, (Karugire, 1980).

This partly explains why the British had to use the divide and conquer policy as the Baganda were used to constitute colonial armies by which the Batoro and Banyoro were conquered and subjugated. Indeed, in 1899 Kabalega and Mwanga were arrested using Baganda commanders like SemeiKakungulu. However, after the Baganda forces had been used and achieved the colonial goal of furthering British hegemony, they were colonized. In 1894, Uganda was declared Protectorate; therefore, from then Uganda including the kingdom areas lost its independence until 1962.

Since the British lacked traditional or acquired legitimacy as they did not have inherited authority nor were they elected respectively, they had to adopt the indirect rule system by which indigenous leaders were used to serve as colonial junior functionaries who translated colonial policies into practical terms. The indirect rule system was British in essence and African in burden because the British formulated the policies while the African leaders implemented them. This exposed African leaders to a lot of risk in the event of resistance against colonial policies. This indeed happened to Miti a Muganda colonial agent to Bunyoro during the Nyangire rebellion of 1906 (Karugire, 1980).

To make the conquest and effective occupation of Uganda cost effective, the British adopted the Kiganda model of local administration already described under the pre-colonial period. This model was adopted by British and transplanted to other parts of Uganda using Baganda chiefs who served as collaborators. Such chiefs included James Miti who was sent to Bunyoro and SemeiKakungulu who conquered Busoga, Bukedi, Bugishu, Sebei and Teso areas. This in the history of Uganda is referred to as the sub-Baganda imperialism.

What is worth noting is that during this period, the British practiced a highly centralized political system because although they had Baganda colonial agents who established Local Governments where they were deployed, they had no discretionary power. Therefore, It can be argued that centralization of power in Uganda was a colonial legacy. This situation continued until 1962 when Uganda attained independence (Kisakye, 1996).

However, the centrally placed kingdom of Buganda enjoyed a reasonable degree of autonomy, which is traceable to the 1900 Buganda Agreement. This agreement, which was signed between the regents of Buganda and Sir Harry John Stone the British Commissioner, recognized the kingdom of Buganda, its legislative council (Lukiko) and established a freehold system known as Milo land. This land tenure system allocated land to the British Crown (Crown land) and the rest was given to the Buganda royalty and the peasantry (Mailo land). Agreement were concluded with the kingdoms of Ankole, Bunyoro and Toro, while the non-kingdom areas were controlled by District Commissioners. By the time Uganda attained its independence, Buganda was treated like a state within the state of Uganda (Semakula Kiwanuka, 1971).

As the British controlled the whole of Uganda, it became cheaper and more convenient to apply the system of indirect rule that gave some autonomy to kingdom areas (Apter, 1997; Burke, 1964). This colonial legacy of giving differential systems of autonomy to different areas of Uganda was inherited in the Independence Constitution 1962.

Buganda is the territory, Baganda is the tribe and Kiganda is the form hence, Kiganda model of administration. In 1897 Mwanga was deposed by the British Protectorate government and his son David Chwa

who was just one year old was enthroned. This led to regency of Zakaria Kisingiri, Stanslus Mugwanya and Apollo Kagwa

III. INDEPENDENCE PERIOD UP TO 1966

Under the 1962 Constitution, federal status was given to the kingdoms of Buganda, Ankole, Toro, Bunyoro and Busoga, while the other districts like Acholi, Bugisu, Bukedi, Teso, Karamoja, Kigezi, Lango, Madi, Sebei, and West Nile were centrally controlled. This arrangement was resented by the ten latter districts and this led to the crisis of the 1960s.

In reality, however, it was only the kingdom of Buganda that enjoyed meaningful financial and personnel powers and these were enshrined under schedules 7 and 9 of the Independence Constitution. Therefore, Buganda's power sprang from two major sources- political and financial. Buganda's political cohesiveness under its Kabaka and a militant Lukiko, made it possible to dominate the politics of Uganda.⁹

At the time of independence, three political parties namely the Democratic Party, Uganda Peoples Congress and Kabaka Yekka (King only) participated in the elections during which UPC and KY formed a coalition.

This was more evident because before independence, the Buganda government organized a political movement called Kabaka Yekka (KY) that was so powerful locally that the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) under Milton Obote, could not form a national government without allying with it. It was so powerful that, if at that time the Kabaka resolved to ally with Democratic Party (DP) under the leadership of Benedicto Kiwanuka, UPC would have never ascended to power on 1 May 1962 (Kanyehamba, 1975).

The Western Kindoms and Busoga Act of 1963, which never applied to Buganda greatly reduced the power of federal kingdoms of Ankole, Bunyoro, Toro and the territory of Busoga. According to this Act, before a bill was introduced before the assembly of the federal state, it had to get prior approval of the Minister in charge of Local Government. This meant that changes in the bill had to obtain consent of the Central Government Minister. In reality therefore, the Act made federalism apply to Buganda.

However, between 1962 and 1965 a number of factors facilitated the devolution of powers. During this time, UPC, the party in power did not have majority, it therefore had to appease the Buganda kingdom including granting it autonomy. There are also economic reasons that justified devolution of powers.

It is argued by (Allen, 1982) that it was cheaper to employ local people rather than civil servants from the centre who would have needed allowances for transport and accommodation. This is generally true in that proximity to the local environment and conditions enables local people to plan more realistically for the needs of their areas than bureaucrats from the centre who tend to behave like "tourists" when they occasionally visit local areas. Decentralization enhances participation of the local people who become committed to local implementation of the policy, making the policy more sustainable.

From 1964, however, politicians started defecting from Kabaka Yekka and Democratic Party to the Uganda Peoples Congress and this gave Obote and his UPC ruling party the majority needed in parliament. It ought to be noted that some politicians joined UPC with the hope of overthrowing Obote from within through a constitutional coup. Realizing that, Obote suspended the Independence Constitution in 1966, which was eventually replaced with the 1967 Republican Constitution (Kanyehamba, 1975; Obote, 1968). These constitutional manoeuvres led to highly centralized political governance in Uganda. Mengo was the seat of the Buganda Kingdom where the Kabaka resided.

IV. THE ERA OF POLITICAL CENTRALIZATION

The era perpetuated by a number of regimes, namely, the first Obote regime, which extended up to 1971, the military regimes of Amin and UNLF (1971-79), and the second Obote regime of 1980-85. During this era, there were no elected Local Councils and Local Government management was controlled from the centre through the Minister in charge of Local and Provincial Administration.

(a) The military confrontation of May 1966 between the Central Government and the Buganda (Mengo) establishment led to the defeat of Buganda and availed Obote the opportunity to recentralize power. Obote and his UPC party had the majority in 11 parliament and therefore Buganda could no longer pose a threat to the Central Government. Besides, Obote as Commander in chief had replaced Brigadier Shaban Opolot with Amin Dada as Army Commander who was to execute the UPC plans.

Shaban Opolot the first African Army Commander after attainment of Independence.

The parliament went ahead to pass the Local Administration Act of 1967, which "streamline" Local Administration. Accordingly, the word "Government" was abolished and circulars were sent out to all civil servants warning them not to refer to Local Administration as "Government". This was psychologically intended to eradicate the view that local administrations possessed authority (Government) which could have made them autonomous, legitimate and command the loyalty of the citizen.

These changes implied that Local Administration owed their existence not to the Constitution but to the wished and power of the only legitimate Central Government. This probably explains why Obote always chanted the slogan of One Government, One Parliament. Local Governments were only supposed to deliver services to the people in a manner prescribed by the Central Government. Ochola, the then Minister in charge of Local Government, while introducing the Local Administration Bill to parliament in 1967, said:

“The suggested changes will remove all vestiges of separatism and federalism and will lead to the creation of unitary system of administration with strong centralized powers. Mr. Speaker, the Bill is designed as an instrument for national unity..... The Bill is further designed to enable all people of Uganda to have to think in terms of their own sub-groups, but also in terms of the common problems confronting different parts and different tribes in Uganda, so that eventually, it should not be difficult for the people of Uganda to comprehend problems confronting the nation as a whole” (Parliament, 1967).

Kampala the capital city and seat of the Central Government is in the Buganda Region yet Obote and the UPC party that was in power was dominated by leaders from other regions.

As a result of these changes, services like provision of water, forestry, veterinary services, courts, fishing among others were recentralized while Local Administrations retained education, medical and health services, maintenance of water supplies, roads, prison services, control of vermin, trading centres, the registration of births and deaths, plus any function which the Central Government Minister may by order prescribe.

This centralization of power was facilitated by a number of factors, which included the fact that other parts of Uganda resented the seeming special position of Buganda. Therefore when Obote confronted Buganda militarily he was supported by the other parts of Uganda. (Low, 1971), states that, Buganda’s special position generated profound ambivalence towards the kingdom, which in the end came to express itself more particularly in envy. This resentment was orchestrated by some impolitic decisions and statements of some leading Baganda, like when the Lukiko passed a resolution proposed by Kaggwa that Obote’s “illegal” government should be removed from Buganda’s soil (Kampala). This was indeed an imprudent resolution that the Baganda could not enforce, instead, it gave Obote the opportunity he had waited for over time to encircle Buganda and subjugate it with the approval of the rest of Uganda. (Kanyehamba, 1975) remarked us:

“Obote suspended the Independence Constitution not that he loved it less but because he loved Uganda more”. This was in approval of Obote’s actions, which gave credence to the centralization of power. It was asserted by parliament in 1967 that centralization would enable the hitherto defiant kingdoms realize that power lies at the centre (Parliament, 1967).

The other reason for centralization, but which politicians are reluctant to accept, was the lack of political legitimacy. According to the Independence Constitution, general elections were to be held every five years but in 1966/67 this constitution was abrogated and hence elections were not held. Therefore, when Obote forcefully abrogated the Independence Constitution, he lost the right to rule (political legitimacy). Hence, he could not have shared stolen power with local authorities and to secure his personal survival, he had to centralize power (Mutibwa, 1992). Yet there was the need to centralize national resources in order to redistribute them so that regional imbalances could be avoided.

Article 104 of the 1967 Constitution substantially limited the powers of Local Administrations because it transferred loyalty from the local/electorate to the centre, which greatly undermined responsiveness to service beneficiaries and accountability to local leadership. Indeed to the 1967 local Administration Act, the Minister of Local Government had to appoint Local Councils, approve their by-laws and even revoke them at will and approve Local Councils; budgets on behalf of the Central Government.

Accountability for transferred resources was made to the Minister of Local Government and not local people to whom leaders are accountable under devolution (decentralisation). The Minister had power to dissolve and terminate the mandate of Local Councils. All council employees, including office messengers had to be appointed by the president (Nsibambi, 1998). This situation remained the same until the end of the military regime by Amin that was ushered in by a military coup in 1971.

(b) Military regimes

On 25 January 1971, there was a turning point in the history of Uganda when the Uganda Army under its Commander Idi Amin overthrew the first Obote regime. This was the beginning of a series of military coups that were to follow and write the history of a nation once described by Churchill as the Pearl of Africa. Amin’s regime prevailed until the 11 April 1979 when it was overthrown following a military coercion between the Uganda Army and the Ugandan exiled who was assisted by the Tanzania Defence Forces.

During Amin’s rule, the appointed Local Councils were abolished altogether and in their **stead**, local and regional administration was placed in the hands of District Commissioners and Provisional Governors respectively, who were presidential appointees and in most cases military people. These leaders operated without councils, more often than not using decrees that were from time to time from the head of state. They were therefore accountable to the president and not the people they were to serve. This regime was characterized

by tyranny, which forced many Ugandans into exile. It was these asylum seekers who were helped by Julius Nyerere to form the Uganda National Liberation Front/ Army (UNLFA) in Moshi (Tanzania) in 1979. It was the UNLFA that formed the next government of Uganda under Prof Yusuf Lule.

MayumbaKumi is derived from the Swahili words Mayumba meaning houses and Kumi meaning ten, hence mayumbakumi referring to the ten house cell system.

The fall of Amin saw the emergence of the Uganda National Liberation Front/Army which was more of transition leadership characterized by political intrigue. It was indeed this intrigue that explains why there were three regimes in less than two years. During this period, Prof Yusuf Lule, Godfrey Binaisa and Paul Muwanga's military commission ruled Uganda between 1979 and 1980. The UNLFA government did not have Local Councils elected or appointed in a real sense, instead, a system similar to Local Government known as MayumbaKumi was established (Nsibambi, 2000).

According to this system, every the homesteads elected a chairperson who presided over local conflicts. Since the economy had been run down during Amin's economic war during which foreign investors especially of British origin were expelled, basic necessities like sugar, salt, were in acute shortage and had to be rationed although at a price. The MayumbaKumi was responsible for this besides being in charge of security. Part of the security roles of this system was to identify from among the communities those who had served with Amin especially under the State Research Bureau. By and large, the MayumbaKumi system was more of security arrangement than a form of Local government.

Paul Muwanga's Military Commission Regime organized elections, which were in December 1980 and were "won" by UPC, ushering in the second Obote regime of 1980-85 during which Paul Muwanga was the Vice President. This second Obote regime ruled the country until 1985 when it was overthrown by the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) under the command of General Tito OkelloLutwa.

Gerrymandering- the practice of changing the size and borders of an area for election purpose, to deliberately give one group or party an unfair advantage over others.

The 1980-85 regime was a replica of the Obote regime between 1967 and 1971 because Local Councils were just appointed by the Central Government through the Minister of Local Government and local council budgets, bye-laws and lifespan were determined by the centre. Appointments of Local Administration staff were all made by the president through a centralized Public Service Commission (Nsibambi, 2000).

During the December 1980 elections, four political parties namely the Uganda Peoples' Congress (UPC), the Democratic Party (DP), the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM), and the Conservative Party (CP), participated. A lot of malpractices were cited like gerrymandering competitors were held at roadblocks and only set free after 5 o'clock the official closing hour for nominations, there were arbitrary arrests of opponents, election officials were partisan and these among others made the other parties complain about the fairness of the election. Yoweri Museveni, the presidential candidate for UPM promised that if elections were rigged, he would go to the bush, which he did on the 6 February 1981 when he launched a guerilla war that lasted five years under the banner of the National Resistance Movement/Army.

c)The National Resistance Movement and the evolution of the current decentralization system

Following the 1980 elections that were allegedly rigged, the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) waged a protracted peoples' war between 6 February 1981 and 1986 when they overthrew the military regime that had seized power from Obote in July 1985. The NRM waged war at the time when most Ugandans, especially from the Buganda region (which, being central, is very strategic) were disgruntled with the Obote leadership. In 1966, when Obote invaded Mengo the seat of the Kabaka of Buganda, Mutesa II who was the president fled the country and eventually died in London in 1969 under very suspicious circumstances.

On July 1985, the Commanders of UNLA overthrew the second Obote regime. This was the second time Obote had been overthrown by the army following that of Amin in 1971.

"Bush" war is the term generally used to refer to the five years' war waged internally by NRM/L during the period 1981-85 which ushered in the Museveni's regime.

In 1967, Obote had abolished kingdoms including Buganda, which the Baganda resented. Yet the "brutal" leadership of Amin exerted lot of suffering on them. Therefore, when Museveni and NRM/A decided to wage war against the Obote regime, the Baganda had the opportunity they had been waiting for. Therefore, the success of the NRM/A revolution in Uganda was mostly due to goodwill of the ordinary population that was yearning for change.

During the "bush" war, the NRM/A mobilized and politicized the masses about their democratic rights. This movement managed to transform itself into a mass organization which captured people's sympathy. To create coherence amongst the population in the war zone (Luwerotriangle), NRM/A introduced a form of local government through elected people's councils, which were in villages called the Resistance Councils/ Committees in all the areas they conquered. These Resistance Committees mobilized the masses to support the revolution, mobilized resources especially food, recruited soldiers into the NRA, and also acted as arbitrators/courts in the case of conflicts. These committees laid the foundation of the current local government

system, which the NRM government extended to the whole of the country after gaining power in 1986 (Kisakye, 1996).

A process is continuous and dynamic as it manifests itself in different forms depending on circumstance; a project has limited time frame and resources.

While in the “bush”, the NRM formulated the Ten Point Programme, which articulated the vision and mission of the revolution. One of the central issues was the “establishment of popular democracy” and it can therefore be asserted that the roots of the current decentralization system can be traced back to the bush struggle.

Since decentralisation is a process and not a project, it undergoes a metamorphosis on changes in the political and economic environment, including changes in government. The current decentralisation policy was occasioned by the appointment in August 1986 of the Mamdani Commission, which carried out an inquiry into the Ugandan Local Government system with a view of devolving power from the center to the periphery (Mamdani, 1987).

In order to legitimize the Resistance Committees formed during the “bush” period, the 1987 Resistance Councils Statute was enacted by the National Resistance Council (NRC), which was the parliament of the day formed by historical senior members of the NRM revolution. The recommendations of the Mamdani Commission were crystallized in the decentralization policy that was launched by YK Musenveni (President) on 2 October 1992. Subsequently, in November 1993 the Local Government (Resistance Councils Statute) was passed by the NRC (Government, 1994).

Decentralisation was further strengthened by the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution and subsequent laws that operationalized the policy. Chapter One of the 1995 Constitution provides that power belongs to the people and Chapter Eleven of the same Constitution states that decentralisation shall be the form of government applicable to all levels of Local Governments. The same Chapter provides that the details in this respect were to be elaborated on by parliament, which was indeed done in 1997 when the (GoU, 1997) which was enacted with subsequent amendments in 2001 and 2005.

Financial management issues were also streamlined by the enactment of the Local Governments Financial and Accounting Regulations, 1998. From then, functions that were previously undertaken by the centre like human resource management, land management, financial management, procurement, provision of services like health, education, technical services and community based services were devolved to the Local Governments at the district and sub-county levels.

Following the devolution of the functions and resources, Local Governments assumed legislative, judicial and administrative roles. Local Councils exercise legislative functions by formulating policies that the administrative officials implement. Councils also make bye-laws and ordinances as long as they do not contravene existing laws like the constitution.

Lower Local Councils also exercise judicial powers through village, parish and sub-county courts whose verdicts are respected by the mainstream judicial system.

The separate Human Resource Management System involves decentralization of personnel management through the District service commissions.

The administrative roles involve the management of administrative officials by recommending the structure, recruitment, promotions, discipline, and retiring of human resources through the “Separate Human Resources Management System”. Local Councils do this through the District Service Commissions (DSCs) established in every district.

Development planning has also been devolved as it deemed that decentralisation in Uganda would lead to effective governance and thus development. The decentralisation policy in Uganda is established in terms of a five-tier system which facilitates bottom-up development planning from local council one (LC1) to Local council five (LCV) which are the village and district/city councils respectively (Lubanga, 1998).

The historical investigation can result into attempts to establish whether the decentralisation has enhanced development and, if not, researchers can assess what the bottlenecks. The Local Government Act, 1997 (GoU, 1997), operationalizes the decentralisation policy by outlining the services that have been decentralized to the districts, urban authorities, and sub-counties which include education, health among other services.

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*Nabukeera Madinah " Improving Local government efficiency; systems and approaches: A global review." (Quest Journals) Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science 6.10 (2018): 105-111