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Decentralization and Rural Service Delivery in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Uganda introduced the decentralization policy in 1997 under the Local Government Act of 1997 that has since undergone four amendments. The policy inherently decentralized service delivery institutions and their governance in order to improve access to services for the rural poor. Based on an analysis of available literature, the paper documents the state of knowledge regarding rural service provision in Uganda under decentralization and identifies knowledge gaps for further investigation. Its focus is on education, health, and agricultural advisory services, as well as the management of natural resources in Uganda. Although enlightening, a review of the broader decentralization literature is beyond the scope of this work. The analysis revealed that results in terms of attaining the objectives of decentralization are mixed. While as anticipated generally decentralization resulted in greater participation and control over service delivery and governance by local communities, local governments are still grappling with a range of challenges, namely, inadequate local financial resources and over-reliance on conditional central government grants; inability to attract and retain sufficient trained and experienced staff; corruption, nepotism, and elite capture. With regard to the specific services, while universal primary education (UPE) policy under the decentralization framework is credited with a dramatic increase in primary school enrollment, public primary education services are still dogged by concerns over financing, equity, quality, and the need for curriculum reform. Some studies show that there has been no improvement in health services with many health status indicators either stagnating or worsening. In general, decentralization of education and health services has not resulted in greater participation of the ordinary people and accountability of service providers to the community. Regarding agricultural extension and advisory services, except for areas serviced by NGOs, the majority of the country does not readily access extension services, because districts have been unable to prioritize the operational expenses. However, there is some evidence that the devolution of responsibility for natural resource management (NRM) has contributed to greater compliance with some NRM requirements in some areas while in other areas forest conditions have declined following decentralization. Generally, evidence on whether decentralization has improved service delivery in Uganda is still inconclusive, and more research is needed.

Keywords: Uganda, decentralization, rural service delivery

1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralization of the authority over administering redistribution programs to local communities has recently become widespread in the developing world. These initiatives have transferred responsibility of procurement, selection of local projects, and identification of beneficiaries from central ministries to local governments or community representatives. Such experiments were first introduced in the 1980s in several countries, including Armenia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, China, El Salvador, Georgia, India, Mexico, South Africa, Uganda, and Uzbekistan (Conning and Kevane 1999; Jimenez and Sawada 1999; Mookherjee 2001; World Bank 2000). The presumed argument in favor of decentralizing delivery systems is that local governments will be subject to electoral pressures from local citizens, who are able to monitor delivery better than a distant central authority.

As noted by Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006), however, this presumption of greater accountability under decentralization is frequently questioned, and numerous case studies exist of development programs being stymied by the capture of local governments by powerful local elites (see, for example, Gaiha, Kaushik, and Kulkarni [1998, 2000] for the state of Uttar Pradesh in India and Tendler [1997] for the Brazilian town of Ceará).

According to Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006), the trend toward greater decentralization has been motivated by disenchantment with previous centralized modes of governance, due in part to a perception that monolithic government breeds high levels of rent-seeking corruption and lack of accountability of government officials. Empirical studies and theoretical analyses by Bardhan and Mookherjee (1999, 2000) have led to no uniform or general conclusion about the relative vulnerability of different levels of government to special interest capture. This work contrasts the approach of Seabright (1996), who asserted that accountability is invariably higher at the local level.

The purpose of this paper is to review existing evidence on the service delivery implications of decentralization in Uganda, which involves the establishment of local governments (LGs) at various levels with attendant powers and responsibilities for service delivery. The policy inherently decentralizes service delivery institutions and their governance in order to improve access to services for the rural poor. We document the state of knowledge regarding rural service provision in Uganda under decentralization and identify knowledge gaps for further investigation. Our focus is on education, health, and agricultural advisory services, as well as the management of natural resources in Uganda. Although enlightening, a review of the broader decentralization literature is beyond the scope of this work. This paper is arranged as follows: Section 2 presents a historical review of decentralization and governance in Uganda, Section 3 examines the challenges and opportunities of decentralization, Section 4 presents the effect of decentralization on the delivery of rural services, and Section 5 discusses the impact of decentralization on natural resource management. Section 6 concludes the review with a summary, conclusion, and policy implications. This final section also identifies some of the outstanding issues for further investigation.

2. HISTORICAL REVIEW OF DECENTRALIZATION AND GOVERNANCE IN UGANDA

The first step in Uganda's decentralization process was the enactment of the 1987 Resistance Council/Committee's (RC's) Statute 9, which legalized RCs and gave them powers in their areas of jurisdiction at the local level (Asiimwe 1989). Thereafter, the government embarked on an effective implementation program of decentralization with the enactment of the 1993 Resistance Council Statute (Lubanga 1996). The decentralization policy was later enshrined in Uganda's constitution in 1995 and was legalized by the Local Government Act of 1997, which established local councils at the district (LCV), municipal (LCIV), and subcounty / division / town council (LCIII) levels as corporate bodies of local governments. The act devolved to these councils far-reaching powers and responsibilities in such areas as finance, legislation, politics, planning, and personnel matters. The devolution of powers, functions, and responsibilities to local governments was intended to achieve the following objectives:

- Transfer real power to the districts, thereby reducing the workload of the remote and underresourced central government officials;
- Bring political and administrative control over services to the point that they can actually be delivered, thereby improving accountability and effectiveness and promoting people's ownership of programs and projects executed in their districts;
- Free local managers from central government constraints and, as a long-term goal, allow them to develop organizational structures tailored to local circumstances;
- Improve financial accountability and responsibility by establishing a clear link between payment of taxes and provision of services they finance; and
- Improve the capacity of local councils to plan, finance, and manage the delivery of services to their constituents. (Asiimwe 1989)

Hence, decentralization in Uganda is based on three interlinked aspects: (1) political and legislative empowerment of the people, (2) fiscal devolution, and (3) control of the administrative machinery by the local councils.

3. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF DECENTRALIZATION

In a largely qualitative study of Uganda's decentralization experience, Scott-Herridge (2002) was optimistic. He noted that the lessons from decentralization in Uganda hold out the prospect for improved governance and better service delivery and that these lessons can be applied throughout the Third World to bring sustainable improvements to peoples' lives. Although optimistic, however, the author cautioned that though decentralization has potential advantages, there are serious challenges to be faced, and it will not succeed without full commitment from national and local governments. Some of these challenges, including financing, human resource capacity, and elite capture, are discussed in this section.

Financing

One of the most critical challenges faced by local governments is their low financial resource base due to limited sources of local tax revenue and overdependence on grants from the central government. This challenge is of major importance because all activities performed by local governments (LGs) require adequate financial resources. The imperativeness of adequate financial and staff resources was also recognized by the World Bank's World Development Report (1999, 117). For Uganda, in the process of introducing the decentralized system of governance, the political and administrative aspects moved faster than the fiscal decentralization. A study by Green (2008), which examines the reasons for district creation in Uganda, makes a qualitative case that cites patronage as the most plausible reason for district creation. Green's analysis also runs several logistic regressions and examines election data to strengthen the case for patronage. One of Green's conclusions is that decentralized services were not matched with adequate financial resources for LGs to deliver services effectively.

Currently, LGs in Uganda obtain their finances from four main sources:

- Locally generated revenue, such as market dues, trading licenses, rent, and rates;
- Government grants;
- Donor and project funds for specified activities; and
- Fund-raising from well-wishers.

However, LGs also depend heavily on subventions from the central government. This dependence of LGs on funding from the central government increased when the graduated tax, which contributed 80 percent of the local revenue, was abolished in 2005 (Green 2008). According to Onyach-Olaa (2007), central government transfers to LGs account for 30 to 37 percent of the national budget and constitute about 95 percent of LG revenue. Central government grants are by and large earmarked for the services for which they are given. Only a slight degree of flexibility is permissible with restrictions. There are three main forms of grants from the central to the local government:

- The unconditional grant, which is the only grant that LGs may use as part of their revenue, is mainly used to pay staff salaries. In many districts, the amount from this grant is not adequate to cover the wage bill. LGs have to obtain the rest from their local revenue.
- The conditional grant, which is by far the largest source of revenue to LGs, accounted for up to 85 percent of LG revenue in 1999/2000. This grant finances programs agreed upon between the central and local government, such as primary education, feeder roads, and primary healthcare, including the Local Government Development Program (LGDP), through which grants are available to lower councils for specific projects identified in development plans.
- The equalization grant is paid as a special provision based on the extent to which least-developed districts lag behind the national average standard for a particular service.

As noted earlier, for quite a while, the main source of local revenue was the graduated tax (GT), accounting for about 80 percent of all local revenues. In total, the GT contributed about 60–80 billion Uganda shillings (UGX) per year. The other sources of revenue collected by LGs either were of low yield or were difficult to collect. It is also important to note that in the past, the districts collected some development levy for education, administration, agriculture, health, and other services through the GT. This yielded about UGX 20 billion per year. The GT offered LGs the flexibility to put up administration blocks at the district and subcounty level and to undertake their own local priority projects in various sectors.

Over time, GT collection became a highly politicized tool used by candidates aspiring for political offices, both at the local and national government levels, to canvas for votes. It was labeled as regressive to the poor and outdated and was consequently abolished in 2005. The government promised to compensate the LGs for the lost revenue until a suitable alternative could be found. In fiscal year (FY) 2005/06, the total government release for GT compensation was UGX 34 billion, which was increased to UGX 45 billion in 2006/07. In his July 2007 budget speech, the minister of finance planning and economic development stated that he had decided to stop the GT compensation, a decision that was made without consulting the LGs, on the assumption that there would be new taxes introduced to replace the GT with effect from July 1, 2007. However, it was not until July 2008 that the local service tax and the local hotels¹ tax were introduced as a replacement for the GT. The implementation of these new taxes has been gradual, and the impact is yet to be realized.

A number of reservations have been expressed about the potential yield of these two taxes and the fact that they require massive civic education and community buy-in. The difficulty of raising funds through this means is already recognized in the literature. Scott-Herridge (2002) noted that many people in Uganda are not used to paying property or poll taxes and have insufficient income to do so. He further noted that revenue collectors may use their influence with local politicians to avoid payments. In the medium term, it would be advisable for the government to undertake wide consultations on the proposed new taxes for LGs, so that the ills of the GT are not allowed to permeate the new tax measures.

A more sustainable situation, however, should emerge from a national consensus regarding financing of LGs in a manner that shields local taxes from politicization and default. The Local Government Finance Commission is examining alternative sources of LG financing, such as royalties, agency fees, and devolution of some of the taxes that could be effectively managed by the LGs. The commission will study and advise the government on the question of financing decentralization in a comprehensive way. Such a study will include measures to strengthen LG accountability in order to establish a stronger link between payment of taxes and services. Scott-Herridge (2002) suggested that the central and local governments work together to seek donor funding, particularly for capital projects, with the central government reassuring donors that democratic processes are being pursued and that corruption is being tackled. However, the downside of seeking donor funding is a deepening of dependency on external funding.

Innovative ways of mobilizing funding for LGs are still rare. Suggestions revolve around forging international partnerships and increasing cooperation and networking between councils to enhance capacity, share experiences, share facilities and equipment, and increase bargaining power with governments and donors. To depoliticize procurement at the LG level and to enhance financial efficiency, procurement reforms have recently been undertaken. Among other things, these reforms entail abolition of the Local Government Tender Board (LGTB) and replacing it with contract committees. According to Onyach-Olaa (2007), the funding dilemma of LGs is certainly not helped by the continuous creation of new districts. Twenty-one new districts were recently created—13 districts effective FY 2005/06 and 8

¹ The Local Government Act of 2007 provides for a local government hotel tax to be charged to occupants of hotel and lodge rooms. It also imposes a local service tax on people with gainful employment—that is, those in business, large-scale commercial farmers, self-employed professionals, and artisans. The rates are US\$2 per room for five- and four-star hotels, UGX 2,000 for three- and two-star hotels, and UGX 1,000 per room for other types of accommodation. The act allows salaried employees to be charged between UGX 10,000 and 100,000 per year, depending on the level of income. These resources are to be retained and used by local government authorities, without interference from the central government.

districts effective 2006/07—bringing the total number of districts in the country to 80. This made Uganda the fourth country in the world with the largest number of subnational administrative units² and, consequently, the smallest average number of people per subnational administrative unit among large countries in Africa³ (Green 2008). The emerging concern is that the districts are becoming too many, too small, financially nonviable, and difficult to supervise and monitor by the center. Estimates by Onyach-Olaa (2007) show that the fixed cost for a single district is about UGX 1.2 billion per year. Multiply this by 112 and the magnitude of financing the LGs becomes very clear.⁴

Another dimension of the LG financing problem has to do with a lack of financial management skills, a point expounded on further in the subsequent section. There is a general shortage of qualified accountants, and the financial audit system remains weak.

Human Resource Capacity

There is general agreement that the problem of inadequate capacity in Uganda's local government continues to exist. The problems highlighted by De Muro, Salvatici, and Conforti (1998) as affecting many sub-Saharan African countries also exist in Uganda. These problems include shortages of qualified and experienced staff to deliver public services and a lack of training opportunities to develop professional and technical expertise. The problems noted by the study as constraining staff recruitment and retention in the LG include, among others, low pay and salary payment delays, which, in turn, lead to low staff morale. In Uganda, the staffing problem is exacerbated by a shortage of equipment and materials. A study by Azfar et al. (2000) that used a combination of analytical tools, including regression analysis and an innovative adjustability index, found that only 17 percent of health facility respondents reported that all their employees had the necessary equipment and resources to do their jobs well.

The central government is, however, making efforts to increase the capacity of local governments through training of administrative and support staff. The decentralization secretariat also runs sensitization courses for new council chairs and councilors. A related problem is the insufficient capacity of training institutions in Uganda to train qualified staff, despite a recent growth in private universities. Having a sufficient professional and well-trained staff is essential for LGs to realize their potential for serving their communities. However, LGs in Uganda continue to operate at less than the acceptable minimal personnel structures, in some instances as low as 9 percent of the approved personnel structure (Onyach-Olaa 2007).

Elite Capture, Participation, and Exclusion of Vulnerable groups

A key ingredient of decentralization—the transfer of more political and administrative power to local leaders—may also provide an avenue for abuse. This feature opens the system to corruption, especially in awarding lucrative service contracts to friends, family, relatives, clansmen, and those who pay kickbacks. This corruption can lead to the poor, women, the disabled, the less politically favored, and other minorities being marginalized, unless measures are explicitly put in place to deter it. One of the key issues raised in the literature on decentralization is the relative capture of the democratic process by special interest groups at central and local levels of government. The Madisonian presumption holds that the lower the level of government, the greater the extent of capture by vested interests and the less protected minorities and the poor tend to be (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2000). Research by Bardhan and Mookherjee (2000) examined the LGs' proneness to capture under diverse factors. The results suggest that the extent of relative capture at local levels may turn out to be context- and system-specific, thus justifying the need for empirical research to identify the nature of relative capture in any given setting.

In Uganda, the constitution and the Local Government Act of March 1997 and subsequent

² The first three are Russia, Philippines, and Turkey (Green 2008).

³ By July 2010, the total number of districts had increased to 112.

⁴ This translates to a total of UGX 134.4 billion per year, which is about 2 percent of the total government budget of UGX 7,044.5 billion in 2009/10 (Republic of Uganda 2010).

amendments of July 1997, June 2001, November 2001 and November 2003 require the representation of special interest groups, such as women, youth, and disabled, on local councils. However, evidence on the status of accountability and corruption in Uganda's decentralized structures remains mixed and inconclusive. On a rather positive note, a report by Kullenberg and Porter (1998), argues that the budgeting and expenditure process has become more transparent, though it also recognizes that institutions and legal frameworks to promote accountability are not strong. The report concludes that "whereas malfeasance and corruption went undetected at the central level, increased transparency in local government has greatly improved the capacity to expose these practices and initiate corrective action." The discussion by Kullenberg and Porter (1998) is largely a descriptive discussion of why various issues of accountability have become central in decentralization policy and practice. Meanwhile, a report of the World Bank's Mission to Uganda (Flanay and Watt 1999) and other studies highlight the contribution of the Ugandan press to exposing corruption.

However, most of the literature points to rampant corruption in Uganda's decentralized system. May and Baker (2001) observed that despite pressures on local politicians and staff at both the district and the subcounty level, corrupt behavior still occurs. The authors further observed that, in general, financial management, procurement, and audit systems were weak and that decentralization had exacerbated this weakness through a chronic shortage of qualified accountants at all levels of government. Another documented observation pertains to weak internal audit systems, which open the way for corruption, such as with tender boards. The authors concluded that "corruption itself has been devolved, creating opportunities for the enrichment of local elites." Flanay and Watt (1999) also referred to what they called the decentralization of corruption. The problem with elite capture is best summarized by Olowu (1990, pp 74-99), who noted that "in many instances, it is local elites rather than the most vulnerable that capture decentralized power."

Naidoo (2002), in a comparative analysis of decentralization of education in several sub-Saharan African countries, including Uganda, concluded that "initial indications are that decentralization creates intermediate levels of power which are accountable not to the grassroots they are supposed to serve but to the central authority or their own institutional interests. In general the location of power has not really shifted from the center to the periphery but has reinforced the central control of the periphery" (18). Perhaps the most compelling evidence of local capture that is very specific to Uganda is that provided by Reinikka and Svensson (2004), who used panel data models to assess the extent to which the education capitation grant actually reached the intended end user (schools). The study revealed that schools received an average of only 13 percent of the grants, with most schools actually receiving nothing. The authors noted that local officials (and politicians) captured the bulk of the school grants.

4. THE EFFECT OF DECENTRALIZATION ON RURAL SERVICES

Decentralization of social services, including education, health, agricultural advisory services, and rural infrastructure (rural roads, water, electricity, and so on), is embedded in the larger decentralization processes that are occurring in the sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region. Although the motives of decentralization differ across countries (Naidoo 2002), the major arguments supporting decentralization in developing countries include economic and political gains. The economic justification for decentralization is allocative and productive efficiency aimed at improving public service delivery. Allocative efficiency involves better matching of public services to local preferences, whereas productive efficiency involves increased accountability, fewer levels of bureaucracy, and better knowledge of local costs (Naidoo 2002). The political justification relates to considerations of local participation, good governance, and democratization.

The participation rationale developed as a consequence of changed approaches to development. It aims to make the people central to development by ensuring involvement in interventions that affect them (Cooke and Kothari 2001). This rationale is also seen as a means of ensuring political stability where there are deep divisions along ethnic or regional lines, as in South Africa or Uganda (World Bank 1999). The basic assumption behind the political rationale is that there is a positive causal relationship between democratization and decentralization, with the expectation being that decentralization brings about the devolution of meaningful authority to local bodies that are accountable and accessible to their citizens, who enjoy full rights and political liberty. However, simply creating decentralized structures or new procedures for participation in planning and administration does not guarantee that they will be effective or that they will generate greater economic growth or greater social equity. Neither do they necessarily imply greater democracy or a change in political and social power relationships (Naidoo 2002).

This section analyzes the effects of decentralization in Uganda on selected rural services—namely, education, health, agricultural advisory services, and road infrastructure.

Effects of Decentralizing Education Services

Structural and Governance Reforms in Uganda's Education Services

As noted earlier, the 1997 Local Government Act decentralized social services, including education. The act provided for five levels of local government: village, parish, sub-county, county, and district. The district and sub-county levels have political authority and significant control over resources. District councils have autonomy over primary and secondary education, primary health services, and basic services in water provision, roads, planning, and licensing. Each district has the authority to formulate, approve, and execute its own development plan. Primary education, community-based health services, hygiene, and low-level health units were devolved by districts to lower-level councils (Azfar et al. 2000). However, the central government continues to play a key role in policy setting, governance, management, finance, and curriculum development. Essentially, national guidelines regulate the translation of state policy into local reality and define how schools are run (Naidoo 2002).

In 1997, decentralization coincided with introduction of the universal primary education (UPE) policy, which provided for free primary education for all school-age children, which at first had a limit of four children per family but was amended to benefit all children in 2003 (Nishimura, Takashi, and Yuichi 2008). The UPE policy aimed to expand access, enhance equity, and increase efficiency in education systems. Specifically, the UPE policy objectives include the following:

- Establish, provide, and maintain quality education as a basis for promoting necessary human resources development;
- Transform society in a fundamental and positive way;
- Provide the minimum necessary facilities and resources to enable every child to enter and remain in school until the primary cycle of education is complete;

- Make basic education accessible to the learner and relevant to his or her needs to meet national goals;
- Make education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequalities; and
- Ensure that education is affordable to the majority of Ugandans.

By aiming to achieve universal primary education, the government would be fulfilling its mission to eradicate illiteracy while equipping every individual with the basic skills and knowledge with which to exploit the environment for self and national development (MOES 1998, 135).

4.1.2 The Performance of Education Services under Decentralization and Universal Primary Education Reforms

A survey conducted to assess the impact of UPE policy on educational attainment and private costs in education found that the UPE policy has led to increased public funding for primary education, as well as an increase in the number of teachers and schools (Nishimura, Takashi, and Yuichi 2008). The immediate result of the policy was a dramatic increase in primary school enrollment, with the number of students in public primary schools nearly doubling by mid-1997. The net enrollment ratio of school-age children (6–12 years) grew from 85 percent in 2000 to 92 percent in 2007⁵ (MOES 2007). The UPE policy has also decreased delayed enrollment in primary school and achieved higher educational attainment of at least up to fourth grade for boys and fifth grade for girls. In addition, it has achieved a low economic burden of education at the primary level for all households, regardless of their expenditure level. In a nutshell, the UPE policy has contributed to access and equity of education as a pro-poor policy (Nishimura, Takashi, and Yuichi 2008).

However, other than enrollment, the policy's actual effects are yet to be realized or empirically determined. Various studies have revealed flaws in its design and operation. Whereas some studies conducted a few years after implementation indicated that UPE policy has improved access to primary education for children of poor families by removing tuition fees, others revealed that due to the various other charges that are still levied (such as uniforms, meals, exercise books, local materials for building classrooms), a dropout rate as high as 55 percent has been reported by the government (Nishimura, Takashi, and Yuichi 2008). The dropout rate has also been attributed to the high opportunity cost of sending children to school when they could instead provide the much-needed household labor in rural areas. There are also problems of capacity to accommodate the large numbers, inadequate instructional materials, and qualified teachers. Other problems observed include internal inefficiency, such as delayed enrollment and repetition of grades by pupils, and funding arrangements that do not reward performance. UPE performance is measured mainly by using number of students enrolled; little effort has been made to measure the academic performance and competency of students and teachers. In addition, the increase in enrollment has not been matched by increases in the number of teachers; thus, the reported decline in the quality of public primary school education (Nishimura, Takashi, and Yuichi 2008). Other problems include weaknesses in teacher training and insufficient investment in secondary education to absorb the expected increase in graduates of primary school (Mushemeza 2003). However, the universal secondary education program, which started in 2007, is designed to address this gap (MOES 2007).

Government responses to these challenges have been limited to the provision of sufficient school facilities in nearby neighborhoods, paying special attention to schools in hard-to-reach areas. Other responses include paying teachers in these areas higher salaries and providing them with housing **as well as** school construction in remote areas (Nishimura, Takashi, and Yuichi 2008). However, the effectiveness of these responses has not yet been thoroughly investigated.

According to Vokstrup (2001), a fundamental flaw in the design of the UPE policy is the lack of a research-based strategy for structural and curricular reform aimed at aligning the education system with

⁵ Net enrollment is a ratio of primary school children aged 6–12 years to the number of children of the same age range in the population.

current national education needs. Vokstrup expounds this flaw as follows:

Uganda's education system is a transplantation of the British education system initiated under colonialism for attainment of their economic and social goals. Efforts to revive the education system after the decline of the 1970s has unfortunately focused on reconstruction and not a new construction aimed at making it more relevant to the current needs. The official belief seems to be that the key to national development is rapid quantitative expansion of current educational opportunities. Since the majority of Uganda's population is poor and dependent on agriculture, there is a big need for development and implementation of an agricultural human resource strategy, which includes adequate basic education for the rural poor. However, the goal of the current system is to prepare all children to pass standard qualifying exams for secondary schools. Thus the curricula have a strong urban bias meeting the assumed educational needs of the urban and middle class while minimal attention is given to educational needs of the majority of students, those who live and work in the rural areas. . . . Currently, formal education in Uganda does not impart knowledge and skills that empower the majority of individuals to function as economic change and development agents on national and local levels. Its bias on western ideas, attitudes, and aspirations may not support the nation's development objective. The education system faces the challenge of being relevant to the rural population. (Vokstrup 2001, 134)

UPE has also failed to bridge the rural–urban and private–public school divide in quality of education. Historically and currently under UPE, Uganda's primary education system consists of two parallel formal systems: a public system mainly attended by the rural and urban poor, or the majority, and a private system of day and boarding schools for the more affluent households. According to Graham-Brown (1998), except in the rhetoric, the Ugandan educational system does not reflect any vision toward a society of more equity, though it does, in its structure, reflect continued growing inequality in society. Access to education continues to favor the more affluent groups. Net enrollment rate continues to be skewed against the poor from primary education to higher levels, with the situation getting worse with the advancement in levels. The net enrollment rate for secondary education varies from 2 percent for the poorest quintile to 27 percent for the richest quintile, and the net enrollment rate for higher education varies from 1 percent for the poorest quintile to 5 percent for the richest quintile. Decentralization and UPE have made no meaningful contributions to alleviating these equity constraints.

Accountability of Education Services to Beneficiaries under Decentralization

The need for active participation of parents and communities in school governance has assumed increased importance under the decentralization of education. Concurrent with decentralization, the implementation of the UPE policy puts much emphasis on local management of schools, in particular management of the UPE grant. Local councils (LCs) at the various levels are expected to monitor the flow and use of the UPE grant. At the school level, the role of the school governing bodies is stressed. In Uganda, every primary school is required by law to have a school management committee (SMC), which takes overall responsibility for running the school. The SMC consists of four members appointed by the LCV (local district-level council) education committee; two members elected by parents (often the chairperson and treasurer of the parent–teachers' association [PTA]); and three members appointed by the commissioner for education of the central government. On one hand, the SMC represents the government, while on the other hand it could have the potential to provide an avenue for exercising local democracy, given its broad stakeholder representation. However, an in-depth study conducted in four schools in the Mukono district in 2000 revealed this not to be the case, despite parents being represented in school management structures and participating in various school activities (Suzuki 2002).

Suzuki's (2002) findings do not support the contention that decentralization leads to greater participation, which should increase accountability of decentralized units. On the contrary, it was found that participation has had little effect upon accountability. Three factors identified as affecting parents'

perceptions of the lack of school accountability are a lack of transparency in school finances; a power imbalance between parents and teachers (including the head teacher); and the social distance between ordinary parents and school leaders, including those elected to represent them on the school management committee. Most parents reported that they do not feel that they are involved in the SMC, where they are often represented by the local elite “big” people, who are not accountable to them.

Regarding the lack of financial accountability, the sanctions open to parents—namely, withdrawing their children from the school and refusing to contribute to school finances—have not affected the remuneration of the head teachers directly and therefore do not evoke any improvement in behavior. Likewise, the power imbalance between parents and teachers hinders parents from accessing needed information. Many parents, including some of their representatives on the SMC, feel intimidated by the teachers, who parents perceive to be more educated and knowledgeable; this is especially true in rural areas, where the parents’ level of education is low. However, the situation in the schools in Mukono may not be generalized to the whole country, because of the often context-specific nature of the outcomes of decentralization. As Naidoo (2002) correctly pointed out,

Internal dynamics and institutionalized features of environments or sectors condition their evolution and impact. The exogenous force of a school’s prior history, surrounding economic conditions, and its coherent (or chaotic) management structure, all affect the implementation of decentralization reforms. Whatever the specific context of decentralization, contests over political authority and power, the role and interests of local actors, as well as institutionalized organizational routines and taken for granted or cultural assumptions regarding authority, expertise and participation have an impact. (5)

Reinikka and Svensson’s (2004) empirical study on local capture under decentralization in Uganda cited a lack of information by users and a system of patronage politics as two factors explaining local capture and lack of government accountability to beneficiaries. They found that beneficiaries are not able to hold government accountable because the central government’s policy regarding the capitation grant is not well-known to parents, particularly those outside the capital. This lack of knowledge means that local officials and politicians can take advantage of the gap in information and divert resources, because they know such actions will not attract political attention. The system of patronage politics and the lack of other sources to fund the local political apparatus—features shared by most sub-Saharan African countries—help explain why and how this information gap is exploited. Measures aimed at curbing local capture in response to Reinikka and Svensson’s public expenditure tracking survey include publishing monthly transfers of public funds to districts in newspapers and requiring primary schools to post all inflows of funds on public notice boards. These measures are expected to help promote accountability by giving schools and parents access to information needed to understand and monitor the workings of the grant program, which in turn will lead to improved outcomes.

Another explanation for weak accountability relates to social capital (Suzuki 2002). Suzuki’s study found that social capital determines a community’s ability to produce local public goods, raise funds, and cooperate on policies in order to improve the community’s welfare. The ethnic diversity and the history of the politics of ethnic division in Uganda have undermined the development of this much-needed social capital at local levels (Suzuki 2002).

Analysis of the literature on the decentralization of education services in Uganda shows that despite all the associated problems, decentralization in education does have some potential benefits. Naidoo’s (2002) theoretical comparative analysis of education decentralization in six sub-Saharan African countries—Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe—found that educational decentralization in some countries (namely, Uganda, Tanzania, and Mali) indicates that communities are capable of increased involvement in educational management issues at the school level and of improvements in the school environment. However, certain key elements are needed in order to achieve the desired outcomes; these elements include, among others, community-level capacity building, enhanced social capital at the local level, and building partnerships between community stakeholders and local educational authorities. It is also critical to reconcile the explicitly stated reasons for decentralization

with the real underlying rationales for decentralization. Naidoo (2002) contended that although education decentralization is publicly advocated as a means of improved service delivery and local empowerment, it may actually be motivated by cost reduction or increasing political control. However, “education decentralization efforts are not likely to have the desired effects if the chief motivation remains cost reduction and a shifting of the financial burden from the center to the under-resourced local communities” (Naidoo 2002, 20).

Effects of Decentralizing Health Services

Structural and Governance Reforms in Uganda’s Health Services

A comparative study of the experiences of Zambia and Uganda with decentralization of the health sector (Jeppsson and Okuonzi 2000) describes the structural and governance reforms in Uganda’s health services and provides an assessment of its performance. The study—which used a range of data sources, including a study tour to Zambia, extensive document review, interviews with key informants in the healthcare system, and many years of first-hand experience by the authors with the sector—found that prior to the 1990s, Uganda had a highly centralized healthcare system with considerable differences in health services standards between urban and rural areas (Jeppsson and Okuonzi 2000). After decentralization, the central government, through the Ministry of Health (MOH), is responsible for resource allocation and hospitals. However, it has devolved much of the responsibility of operating the lower health units, such as health centers and dispensaries, to lower levels of local government under the Ministry of Local Government. Health facilities run by faith-based organizations, which constitute 40 percent of the country’s healthcare facilities, offer better services than non-faith-based facilities (Jeppsson and Okuonzi 2000).

The process of fiscal decentralization in Uganda began in fiscal year 1993/94, when the central government devolved many functions and responsibilities, including the provision of basic health services and the control of medical personnel from the central MOH to the district level. Fiscal decentralization occurred in a phased manner, with some districts being decentralized before others (Akin, Hutchinson, and Strumpf 2005). Health sector reform was part of an overall reform of the public sector, consisting of liberalization, constitutional reform, civil service reform, and privatization. Public sector reform essentially drove the changes in the health sector. Therefore, health sector decentralization follows and uses the general administrative and political structures of the public sector. At the central level, the MOH’s functions were revised to include policy formulation, the setting of service standards, quality assurance, provision of training and human resource guidelines, provision of technical supervision, responses to epidemics and other disasters, and the monitoring and evaluation of health services. The MOH headquarters divested all service provision to regional and national hospitals and was significantly reorganized and reduced in size.

At the local levels, formal powers over the implementation of health services lie with the district’s political bodies, as well as with the hospital management boards, which are appointed by elected local councils. Technical management teams are charged with the day-to-day running of health services. The district health team, headed by the district director of health services (DDHS), provides technical leadership for the health sector in the district, including for hospitals. However, the DDHS only plays an advisory role in the affairs of regional and national referral hospitals, which are under the leadership of medical superintendents and hospital committees or boards. The next level below the district is the subdistrict, which is an innovation of the health sector and is not a formal structure of the decentralized system of government. This level was established to increase equitable access to health services, because there were too many subcounties for the existing healthcare infrastructure and resources to handle. The headquarters of a subdistrict is a hospital or an upgraded health center. Planning is mainly the responsibility of district health teams. Plans and budgets are approved by the local councils over which they have jurisdiction. All staff, except those at the national and regional hospitals, have been transferred to the districts (Jeppsson and Okuonzi 2000).

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), especially church missions, play an important role in the provision of rural health services; the private for-profit sector is very small and remains an urban phenomenon. However, a large informal sector comprised of health providers not formally registered as such is booming in both urban and rural areas (Jeppsson and Okuonzi 2000).

The Performance of Decentralization Reforms in the Health Sector

As noted earlier, the general objectives of decentralization within the wider context are to bring political power closer to local communities, to respond to local needs, to build local capacity, and to improve accountability. Specifically for the health sector, improvement was expected in the form of increased utilization of health services, better access to health services, more coverage of the population with basic services, better quality of healthcare and, ultimately, a decline in the rate of illness and death (Jeppsson and Okuonzi 2000). However, according to Jeppsson and Okuonzi (2000), existing data show no improvement in social services or people's quality of life during the period of the reform. In fact, many indicators have either remained the same or worsened. Komakech (2005), in an analytical paper not based on an empirical study, challenged that the criteria used by MOH to determine the performance of the different districts are unreliable and misleading. He observed that these indicators were mainly facility and management indicators derived from Uganda's first Health Sector Strategic Plan and that most of the data used for the ranking were obtained from the facility health management information system reporting forms, which were submitted to the MOH without triangulation with other sources. Examples of the indicators used include proportion of health management information system forms submitted timely and completely, the proportion of the approved posts that were filled by trained health personnel, and pit latrine coverage, among others. According to the paper, these indicators have limited value in monitoring progress toward the attainment of the national health sector objective of improving health status. Accordingly, it is no wonder that in 2004, the war-torn district of Gulu in northern Uganda topped the ranking, despite its widely documented appalling health situation.

The inadequate performance of Uganda's decentralized health services can be explained by a range of factors, including financial resource management and allocation patterns at the local level and personnel quality and management. A case study conducted between December 2000 and February 2001 that used key informant interviews and analysis of Uganda's budget system and policy history found evidence of a steep decline in spending on primary healthcare following decentralization; it also found that funds intended for schools and health facilities were used for administrative costs, that health workers were rarely present, and that drugs and supplies were diverted for personal gain (Foster and Mijumbi 2002). Similar findings were obtained by Akin, Hutchinson, and Strumpf (2005), who analyzed district annual health work plans and budget patterns for fiscal years 1995/96, 1996/97, and 1997/98. Their findings supported the hypothesis that districts altered the budget shares of public goods and other types of health activities during the decentralization process. From 1995/96 to 1997/98, the overall budget share allocated to the public goods category of health activities decreased from nearly 50 percent of the total budget to around 30 percent. Their results also indicate a movement of resources out of highly public activities into brick-and-mortar and staff amenities—in other words, away from societal benefit goods and toward expenditures that benefit health sector managers and employees. These results bring into question the widely held assumption that decentralization necessarily increases social welfare (Akin, Hutchinson, and Strumpf 2005). Apparently, it is the budgetary allocation patterns by local governments that prompted the central government to introduce conditional grants to local authorities in an effort to force them to cater for basic essential services (Foster and Mijumbi 2002).

In addition resource allocation at the local level, the actual total resources allocated to the sector are inadequate. According to Jeppsson and Okuonzi (2000), Uganda is still heavily dependent on external support, with insufficient internal commitment of resources to the health sector; this is indicative of the precarious sustainability status of the services. Faced with competing priorities in other sectors, Uganda's government does not usually rate health high on the priority list, as reflected in the budgets. Regarding human resource quality, Bossert and Beauvais's (2002) comparative analytical paper on the

decentralization of health systems in Ghana, Zambia, Uganda, and the Philippines, based on secondary literature, found that given the wide variation between subcounty resource revenues, there are significant equity and quality issues associated with changes in human resource management. As the MOH system in Uganda is no longer nationally unified, district health officials no longer have the same geographic mobility and access to promotion, making it significantly more difficult for poorer rural districts to attract qualified personnel. Different levels of resources and prioritization of the health sector tend to lead to nonuniformity in the training and capacity of district health personnel. Moreover, wealthier urban districts provide better amenities, as well as more opportunities for complementary private sector employment. Hiring and firing decisions are susceptible to tribalism which contributes to a deterioration in staff quality.

Accountability of Health Services to Beneficiaries

Uganda's holistic decentralization offers substantial opportunities to involve political and administrative leaders in the local decision process over health services at local level (Jeppsson and Okuonzi 2000). However, this potential is yet to be fully tapped, as Jeppsson and Okuonzi summarized:

The fact that the reforms have been promulgated in good democratic order does not in itself suffice to achieve legitimacy. Other factors also need to be accomplished. Do the users accept the system? What are the mechanisms whereby the users can control the system? . . . [The local government system is strong and provides a potential mechanism for the users to institutionalize the control of services through various political bodies. . . . However, these possibilities are still largely under-utilized and remain a theoretical possibility not yet realized. . . . Health is still seen, to a large extent, as a technical issue rather than a social or political one. . . . So far the country has to a large extent practiced a push rather than pull system of the services, which is more sensitive to the views of the health professionals than to the users of the services. (288)

For instance, Komakech (2005) observed that healthcare consumers are absent at the annual stakeholders' National Health Assembly convened by the MOH to determine the performance of different districts, with the assumption being that they are represented by technical district officials.

Effects of Decentralizing Agricultural Extension Services

Public sector extension, in both developed and developing countries, is undergoing major reforms. Coupled with the reforms is a gradual rethinking of the theoretical paradigm underpinning agricultural extension practice. The linear technology transfer model that traditionally informed extension practice in the 1960s was replaced by the agricultural knowledge and information systems perspective in the 1990s and, more recently, by the innovation systems concept (Rivera and Sulaiman 2009). The technology transfer model, which was informed by the diffusion of innovations theory suggested by Rogers (1962), defined innovation as new technology developed by scientists, transferred by extension personnel, and adopted by farmers. Extension also provided feedback about farmers' problems to researchers. Governments thus established extension organizations or ministries to operationalize this model. According to Rivera and Sulaiman (2009), this model came under challenge in the 1980s and 1990s, when it was recognized that innovation could come from multiple sources (including farmers—hence, the importance of a wider set of information sources and the value of creating systems that assist in the generation and dissemination of knowledge. Recognition of the value of multiple actors, including local voices, informed the emergence of structural reforms in extension that espouse participation, farmer ownership, and empowerment. In Uganda, these reforms included privatization of funding, delivery of extension, and decentralization of authority to lower levels of government, including delegation to NGOs, farmer organizations, and other grassroots control.

Structural reforms were implemented in tandem with other reforms in the mode of funding, organization, and management, as well as with other extension programs. This section analyzes the effects of decentralization and other agricultural extension reforms in Uganda.

Decentralization and Civil Service Reform in Uganda

In Uganda, decentralization has been characterized by a transfer of powers, functions, and responsibilities for planning and implementation of agricultural extension services from the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries (MAAIF) to district local governments. MAAIF was left with the role of planning and policy formulation, regulatory functions, technical backstopping and training, setting standards for and monitoring performance of the agricultural sector, and managing funds of selected projects. Extension workers at the district level were put under the direction of the local district governments (Friis-Hansen and Kisauzi 2004; Mangheni 1999).

In 1998, the MAAIF's directorate of extension was abolished, central staffing was reduced by some 80 percent, and the major responsibility for supporting field-level extension was transferred to the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO). In the same year, in a move contrary to downsizing, restructuring, and contracting out or privatizing objectives, the central government introduced a plan to employ up to three graduate specialists per subcounty, with salaries paid by the central government as conditional grants; the districts and subcounties were expected to cover operational expenses (Crowder and Anderson 2002).

Parallel to the changes in public extension in the 1980s and 1990s, liberalization of service delivery led to a proliferation of private companies and NGOs operating at the grassroots level, providing channels for agricultural technology and information service delivery to farmers (Friis-Hansen and Kisauzi 2004). While private companies hired their own full-time staff to provide the complete package of services required for the production and marketing of commodities of interest, many NGOs tended to use government extension staff to provide services to farmers within their area of jurisdiction (Kibwika and Semana 1998). The NGO technique is one of the two kinds of public-private sector partnerships that have operated in Uganda, the second one occurring when the government contracts the private sector to offer services (Crowder and Anderson 2002).

In 2001, Uganda embarked on a process of transforming its public extension system to conform with the rest of its economic transformations. Under the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) Act of 2001, the public extension system was gradually phased out and replaced by a contract privatized system implemented by NAADS, a new statutory semiautonomous body under the MAAIF and implemented within a broader policy framework of a multisectoral Plan for Modernization of Agriculture (PMA), decentralization, liberalization, and privatization (Mangheni 2007).

The Performance of Agricultural Extension Services under the Various Reforms

Under decentralization, district extension staff are to be paid by unconditional block grants from the central government, with districts expected to bear the bulk of the operational expenses supplemented by the subcounties. However, these contributions are, in reality, often not forthcoming, and extension is greatly constrained by operational funding, except for situations where supplements from donor or NGO funding are available (Crowder and Anderson 2002). Other negative effects of decentralization include the misappropriation of funds by local authorities and reduced staff satisfaction, stemming from lack of job promotions, resentment from being supervised by local councils that are not technical in the field, perceived unrealistic expectations from political supervisors, and isolation from headquarters. On a positive note, however, decentralization is perceived to have enhanced participation of local communities in planning and implementing programs and has ensured closer staff supervision (Kibwika and Semana 1998).

Another reform is what Crowder and Anderson (2002) referred to as "contracting in." Under this arrangement, public extension staff, who are often underutilized due to lack of operational funds, are contracted or seconded to national and international NGOs to offer services in areas targeted by the respective NGO. The NGO thus provides operational funds, travel allowances, per diem supplements, and in some cases salary supplements to augment the low civil servant wages of the extension staff. This arrangement potentially benefits both the institutions involved and the farmers. The public extension staff enjoy better working conditions and terms of service, while the public extension institutions benefit

through increased mobility of staff; better training of staff in planning, organizing, and supervising local development activities; participatory community-based approaches; and improved production practices. The NGO is able to utilize already-salaried government employees, which is more cost effective, and to tap the often scarce technical expertise in rural areas. Likewise, farmers benefit from the technical skills of the extension agents. The synergy and complementary nature of functions resulting from this arrangement may be more efficient and effective than either sector working in isolation.

However, one limitation to the sustainability and replicability of this model is the fluid, location-specific nature of these coalitions, which, to a large extent, depend on local networks, available staff capacity, and organizational needs. The other drawback is that such arrangements are often driven by the donor's or NGO's interests, with limited farmer involvement in developing programs and evaluating performance. In addition, some NGO programs are not developed in the context of district agricultural development plans. Other problems include managerial confusion and inefficiencies that results from extension staff having two masters—the NGO and the local government; this confusion could cause a conflict of interest. To compound the problem, sometimes an extension worker may be contracted by more than one NGO and may work with the same favored group of farmers to carry out the activities of each NGO. In the absence of government mechanisms to ensure equitable spread of NGO interventions, this model has tended to concentrate services on a few farmers in areas favored by NGOs. For example, Jagger and Pender (2006) observed that programs and organizations with a focus on agriculture and environment are concentrated in areas with high market access in Uganda. Direct quantifiable impacts of this approach on farmers' production, productivity, and incomes have not been studied (Crowder and Anderson 2002).

In addition to contracting in, another kind of private–public partnership occurs when the government provides conditional matching grants to district and subcounty local governments to contract private firms, farmers' associations, or NGOs to provide extension services; this is also referred to as “contracting out” (Crowder and Anderson 2002). Scott-Herridge (2002) underscored the importance and the potential of improved service delivery through local government–private sector / NGO partnerships, while also noting that there appears to be little study of this situation. Anecdotal evidence is provided by Obwona et al. (2000), who suggested that revenue from markets has increased where management has been tendered to the private sector. The privatized contract farmer–owned agricultural extension approach introduced in 2001 under NAADS is a classic example of this model. The major features of the NAADS program include private delivery of publicly funded services, a demand-driven and farmer owned, decentralized service delivery approach, and poverty and gender targeting (Mangheni, 2007). Private extension service providers who operate as either individuals or firms are contracted by subcounty farmers' forums to deliver enterprise-specific services to specific groups of farmers over a period of three to six months. In order to foster farmer articulation of needs, ownership, and control over the program, NAADS used the farmer institution development process to facilitate the establishment of farmers' forums from parish to district level.

The performance rating of the program is mixed. Benin et al. (2008) found that farmers participating in the NAADS program have better access to extension and other rural public services, are more organized in groups, have better capacity to demand for improved technologies, and have experienced welfare gains. For example, 41–58 percent of the NAADS participants perceived that their average wealth, their access to adequate food, the nutritional quality of their food, and their ability to meet basic needs or overall well-being improved between 2000 and 2007, as compared with 27–44 percent of their nonparticipant counterparts. These impacts were found to vary by region, with the largest impact occurring in the central and western regions. However, certain key anticipated benefits of such an extension system—such as more operational efficiency and cost effectiveness, greater accountability of extensions to farmers, and diversity or plurality of service providers (Crowder and Anderson 2002)—were not fully realized. Some of the documented deficiencies include a prescriptive farmer demand articulation process which is too complicated for farmers especially the poor and illiterate ((Obaa, Mutimba, and Semana 2005; Draa, Semana, and Adolph 2004), failure to actively engage the farmer group members in monitoring service providers and quality assurance; weak private service provision

capacity; unfavorable conditions for private service providers; and unsustainable funding arrangements (Mubangizi 2006). Therefore, although Uganda has been lauded for what is considered an innovative reform, attainment of the potential benefits seems to be hampered by, among others, absence of critical prerequisites for success of this kind of extension approach—namely, a conducive policy environment, sufficient farmer capacity to articulate their demands, sufficient private service provision capacity, efficient and effective service quality assurance mechanisms, adequate and sustainable funding, and effective coordination of the multi-actor processes that are part of this complex approach (Mangheni 2007).

5. DECENTRALIZATION AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Literature on decentralization and natural resource management (NRM) is fairly thin. This section reviews some of the recent studies and reports that have relevance to the Uganda situation.

Issues with and Opportunities for Enhancing Natural Resource Management under Local Governments

At the central government level, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) is the principal institution in Uganda responsible for environmental matters, with the mandate to coordinate, monitor, and supervise all activities in the field of environment (NEMA 2006/07). NEMA, which was established under the National Environment Act of 1995, relates horizontally with the different sectoral agencies and departments that were previously called environment liaison units (ELUs) but are now known as lead agencies (LAs).

Under decentralization, the districts and lower local governments are responsible for managing the environment in their respective jurisdictions. NEMA links vertically with local governments and assists them through technical backstopping, capacity building, and, where funds are available, funding of demonstration projects. The recent creation of a department or directorate of natural resources at the district level to manage the environment and natural resources is hailed as a significant improvement from the previous situation, in which the environment was either alone or included with planning, production, or health departments and directorates. Although this arrangement lends greater weight to the office of the district environment officer, it still needs further improvement (NEMA 2006/07). For example, this arrangement does not give adequate recognition to the cross-sectoral nature of the environment. In addition, the opportunity to bring all the diverse institutions under one umbrella, as recommended in the National Environment Management Policy of 1994, has only been partially achieved. One important advantage is that under the new structure, the department or directorate for natural resources represents significant opportunities for districts to raise non-tax-resource-based revenues (NEMA 2006/07). It also allows districts to innovate to protect their environment.

Recently, there have been important developments in the management of Uganda's natural resources. First, the Local Government Act of 1997 entrusted the local government to enact and enforce bylaws, including natural resource management regulations. A study by Nkonya, Pender, and Kato (2008) used econometric methods to analyze the determinants of enactment, awareness, and compliance with regulations that affect NRM. The study found out that only 11 percent of the 234 Ugandan communities investigated enacted NRM regulations between 1992 and 2003. Comparison of the level of compliance with NRM regulations enacted by different levels of government showed that people are more likely to comply with a tree-planting or protection regulation enacted by the local village council than to follow one enacted by higher levels of government (Nkonya, Pender, and Kato 2008). These results suggest that the devolution of responsibility contributes to greater compliance with some NRM requirements.

Second, the Forest Act of 2003, which formed the National Forest Authority (NFA) and the district forestry services, transferred the management of centralized forests to local governments. Banana et al. (2007) conducted an empirical investigation that used an algometric equation developed by Brown, Gillespie, and Ligo (1989) to estimate dry biomass. One of the key findings of this study is that district forest services were successfully offering advisory services to decentralized forests, which currently account for 70 percent of Uganda's total forest area (Banana et al. 2007). This finding is harmonious with the provisions of the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act of 2003 (GOU 2003).

Comparison of centralized and decentralized forest management reveals ambiguous results. Consistent with Nkonya, Pender, and Kato (2008) and with Gibson, Williams, and Ostrom (2005), Banana et al. (2007) observed that compliance with timber and firewood harvesting regulations were higher in communities that enacted or enforced forest-harvesting regulations. They authors also observed that communities with a high degree of awareness of the benefits of forests and the impacts of their degradation had a higher degree of compliance with forest regulations than those with lower awareness.

These results underscore the importance of environment knowledge that NEMA is promoting in schools and local communities. However, Banana et al. (2007) also observed that forest conditions in the study area (the Mpigi district) generally declined following decentralization. The number of trees in the study area decreased mainly due to the increasing demand for timber and fuelwood and to an institutional failure to regulate management of forests (Banana et al. 2007). These results suggest the need to strengthen local institutions in order to increase their effectiveness in managing natural resources.

Third, according to the PMA (2008), various subsectors, such as wetlands, forestry, fisheries, meteorology, and environmental management, already have investment plans. These plans were consolidated into a draft 10-year Environment and Natural Resource Strategy and Investment Plan (ENR SIP) for 2007–2017. However, this plan has not yet been submitted to the cabinet for approval. An encouraging development is that most districts and subcounties have environment action plans (EAPs) integrated into their district development plans. More than 90 percent of districts have integrated environment issues into their district development plans (DDPs) (PMA 2008a). However, NEMA still needs to support more districts (especially the new ones) and subcounties to update or prepare their EAPs.

Fourth, the central government has worked with LGs to undertake wetland inventories for district wetlands action plans in seven districts. Restoration plans for wetlands in the Kampala, Wakiso, and Mukono districts have also been drawn. The central government has also held consultations on wetland bylaws in 10 districts in southwestern Uganda and also supported the development of community wetland management plans.

Fifth, the Sawlog Production Grant Scheme (SPGS), implemented by the NFA, succeeded in stimulating the private sector to establish long-term commercial forestry in central forestry reserves as well as in privately owned forests. During FY 2006/07, NFA planted 760 hectares and the private sector planted 3,900 hectares of trees under license in central forest reserves.

The main challenge to the NFA is the large encroachment on forest reserves for subsistence cultivation. For example, the NFA reported that encroachment increased by 23 percent (from 180,000 people in 2005 to 220,000 in 2006/07). In addition, despite concerns over soil degradation, which leads to diminished arable land and crop yields, the National Soils and Rangelands Policies remain incomplete. NEMA and MAAIF are leading the reformulation of these policies. Other challenges to optimal management of environment and natural resources include poor funding for environment activities in the districts, as well as limited political support to control degradation of the environment and natural resources.

NGOs play a key role in enhancing the capacity of local institutions to manage natural resources. Nkonya, Pender, and Kato (2008) observed that programs and organizations with a focus on agriculture and environment in Uganda increased the likelihood of communities to enact NRM regulations. The Local Government Act of 1997 grants NGOs representation in the local environmental and natural resource committees. Civil society organizations (CSOs), especially those with a focus on conservation, have been the traditional friends of the environment and the voice of rural communities. NEMA also links vertically with these CSOs, which are often national and international NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), and community-based associations (CBAs). The challenges faced by these organizations is that they lack capacity; in addition, the recent shift by major international donor organizations away from project to budget funding has denied them their traditional sources of funding. All else remaining equal, it is likely that there will be a rationalization of the CSO industry, with a number closing due to lack of funds for implementation of conservation projects or reorienting activities away from their traditional focus of operations. On the other hand, there are opportunities for national NGOs to partner with foreign NGOs that may have the financial resources to carry out conservation work.

Challenges of Natural Resource Management under Decentralization

Decentralization seems not to be quickly achieving the envisaged natural resource management and conservation results. Recent estimates of the cost of natural resource degradation is as high as 17 percent of gross national income (GNI) per year, of which 6 percent consists of forest degradation and 11 percent

soil degradation. Despite improvements in the institutional, policy, and legal framework, Uganda still faces daunting environmental challenges. One of the biggest challenges is in the enforcement of existing environmental instruments, which is exacerbated by a lack of adequate human resource capacity at the LG level. Ugandans are essentially enjoying environmental goods and services today at the expense of those not yet born, contravening the principle of sustainable development to which the country subscribes. This assertion is supported by a number of observations, including neglect of the provisions of environmental laws; horrendous hidden annual costs of soil erosion; increased land scarcity; and fish and other natural resources offtake rates close to or beyond long-run sustainable yield levels. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS; 2008), total fish catch in Uganda dropped by 10.2 percent, from 416,800 tons in 2005 to 374,300 tons in 2007, whereas fish exports dropped by 18 percent, from 39,000 tons to 32,000 tons over the same period. According to the fisheries department of MAAIF, 40 percent of Uganda's annual fish production is immature, and the number of fishers on Lake Victoria alone increased by 52 percent, from 129,305 to 196,426 between 2000 and 2006 (UBOS 2007).

According to national biomass studies, the volume of total biomass declined by 20 percent, from 299,119,000 tons in 2000 to 239,126,000 tons in 2005 (NEMA 2004/05). According to the same report, the amount of tropical high forest declined even faster—by 64 percent, from 44,216,000 tons in 2000 to 15,832,000 tons in 2005. In addition, the amount of woodland biomass declined by 31 percent over the same period. Meanwhile, as of 2005, Uganda's rate of deforestation is estimated at 2.1 percent per year, or 92,000 hectares of the total forest cover of 3.6 million hectares (NEMA 2004/05). At this rate, it is feared that Uganda will have no forest left by the year 2052.

Furthermore, apart from the Kampala City Council, virtually no meaningful efforts are being made to manage solid waste in other urban areas, especially the nondecomposable components (plastics). There are still low levels of private sector involvement in environment and natural resources management. There are also signs of an intensifying conflict between the environment and development. The absence of land use plans leads to poor administration of land-related matters, including ownership, dispute settlements, inappropriate uses, and many others.

6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Summary

The analysis in this paper constitutes one among several studies that examine the implications of decentralization on delivery of services. The results in terms of attaining the objectives of decentralization are mixed.

The Local Government Act of 1997 legalized the policy of decentralization. The aims were to transfer real power to the districts and lower-level local governments; to bring political and administrative control over services closer to the people; to free local managers from central government constraints; to improve financial accountability and responsibility by establishing a clear link between payment of taxes and provision of services they finance; and to improve the capacity of local councils to plan, finance, and manage the delivery of services to their constituents. However, LGs are still unable to mobilize adequate local financial resources, and the financing of local governments still relies heavily on central government grants. The local service tax and local hotels tax, which were introduced to fill the financing gap caused by the abolition of the graduated tax in 2005, are yet to make a significant contribution to the local resource base.

Local governments are still unable to attract and retain sufficient trained and experienced staff, and there is still insufficient capacity within training institutions in Uganda to train adequate qualified staff, despite a recent growth in the number of private universities. Evidence regarding the status of accountability and corruption in Uganda's decentralized structures remains mixed and inconclusive. However, there is sizable literature pointing to the existence of corruption, nepotism, and elite capture.

Meanwhile, implementation of universal primary education (UPE) under the decentralization framework is credited with a dramatic increase in primary school enrollment, with the number of pupils in public primary schools nearly doubling by mid-1997. However, the UPE is still dogged by concerns over financing, quality, and the need for curriculum reform.

Regarding health services, some studies show that there has been no improvement in services or people's quality of life as a result of the reform. Many indicators are seen to have either remained the same or worsened. Factors responsible include weak financial resource management and allocation patterns at the local level that prioritize private benefits of staff, as opposed to investment in services of a public nature; another factor involves shortcomings in personnel quality and management. In general, decentralization of education and health services has not resulted in greater participation of the ordinary people and accountability of service providers to the community.

Regarding agricultural extension and advisory services, decentralization coincided with other reforms—namely, civil service reform, privatization, and liberalization of service delivery, which attracted a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to offer services. NGOs supplemented the efforts of local governments and largely improved service delivery in the targeted areas. However, except for areas serviced by NGOs, the majority of the country does not readily access extension services, because districts are unable to cover the operational expenses. With regard to outcomes of the privatization of extension services under the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) Act of 2002, it is widely believed that the anticipated benefits—such as more operational efficiency and cost effectiveness, greater accountability of extension officers to farmers, and diversity or plurality of service providers—are yet to be fully realized. Confounding factors include an absence of a conducive policy environment, insufficient farmer capacity to articulate their demands, insufficient private service provision capacity, lack of efficient and effective service quality assurance mechanisms, and inadequate and unsustainable sources of funding.

Regarding natural resource management (NRM), available evidence to date suggests that the devolution of responsibility contributes to greater compliance with some NRM requirements. In particular, involvement of locally accountable and representative authorities in enacting and enforcing NRM requirements appears critical for the legitimacy and success of such regulation. With regard to forest conservation, comparison of centralized and decentralized forest management reveals ambiguous

results. Some evidence indicates that forest conditions in some areas declined following decentralization.

Meanwhile, NGOs, civil society organizations (CSOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs) are also involved in environmental conservation and NRM. What is common among them is lack of capacity in terms of both skills and finances. The main NRM constraints include inadequate capacity at the local government level, neglect of provisions of environmental laws, high and hidden costs of soil erosion, increased land scarcity, fish and other natural resources depletion, and poor management of solid waste. There is still limited private sector involvement in NRM, as well as an apparent conflict between environment and development.

On whether decentralization has improved service delivery, the evidence is still inconclusive, and more research is needed.

Policy Implications

The results of service delivery as compared with pre-decentralization present a mixed scenario. With regard to education, although local governments implement both UPE and universal secondary education (USE), funding is provided by the central government, and there seems to have been a rush for numbers at the expense of quality. The human resource capacity implications of this phenomenon will be seen in the near future. Local governments also oversee the delivery of the public funded and (until recently) private sector delivered NAADS extension services. Beyond donor and central government support for NAADS, the LGs have found it difficult to mobilize resources for agricultural extension. Local government-run health services are also under budget and understaffed and deliver less-than-adequate health services. Despite the policy of decentralization and the creation of NEMA, a number of challenges still persist in NRM, including alarming soil erosion levels, high rates of deforestation, depletion of fish stocks, and the recent climate change.

It is thus evident that Uganda still has some way to go to realize the full benefits of decentralization. There is a need for regular assessment on the part of the government, with a view to making hard choices and adjustments when necessary. The Local Government Act of 1997 is more than 10 years old and may require a review, as circumstances have greatly changed to warrant this. On the domestic front, there were about 35 districts in 1997, as compared with today's 112. In addition, since the law was enacted, the population has increased by over 6 percent from 28.2 million in 1997 to the current 30 million persons. There have also been regional and global changes—such as rising food prices, the financial crisis, and others—that may support the need to revisit the act.

To enhance sustainability and to anchor firmly the benefits of decentralization, the education, sensitization, and increased involvement of service recipients (beneficiaries) in planning and executing service delivery programs must go hand in hand with capacity building for effective service delivery. The central government needs to devise a means to rein in the tendency of local governments to spend more on recurrent, rather than development, elements of the budget. This tendency leads LGs to degenerate into consumption, rather than development, nodes (stages) of government. It is practically possible for the central government to offer guidelines on the proportions of the budget to be spent on development investments, as opposed to recurrent spending, without being accused of interference. Uganda still has a great opportunity to be a shining example in the region by deepening decentralization and enhancing the delivery of public services for the good of her people.

Gaps and Implications for Future Research

The analysis in this paper has identified some outstanding issues that call for research to make a contribution and allow for a better understanding of the opportunities and possible solutions to the challenges facing rural services in Uganda.

Education:

- What are the challenges to a full realization of the objectives of the UPE and USE policies? To what extent has government responded to these challenges? What lessons have been learned?
- What are the opportunities and contributions of UPE to community-level capacity development and empowerment? That is, does the rural populace's increased literacy level as a result of UPE translate into a better-informed society that assumes leadership at local levels and is able to participate more actively in rural service provision, as well as to hold rural service providers accountable? How can UPE be integrated with other pro-poor rural services within a comprehensive rural development strategy?
- To whom are the school governing bodies under UPE accountable—the central government, local politicians, the community, or parents? If the purpose of educational decentralization is to facilitate participation of parents in democratic decision making over the education of their children, how can school governing bodies become more accountable to parents, who have the greatest interest in the education of their children (Suzuki 2002)?
- What factors drive local decision-making processes and choices regarding resource allocation for pro-poor services? What tools or incentives are most likely to improve local government compliance with national objectives or beneficiary priorities—for instance, would sanctions be more effective or monetary incentives and investment in popular participation (Bossert and Beauvais 2002)?

Health:

- To what extent has decentralization of health services been effective in achieving anticipated goals? What are the effects of decentralization on health sector performance (efficiency, quality, equity, and financial soundness)? How have sector outputs per expenditure changed, if at all, as a result of decentralization reforms? What degree of variation among local governments do we see in the levels of expenditure, utilization, and the quality of services provided? What factors account for this variation? What is the impact of decentralization on the major objective of the health system—that is, improving health status (Bossert and Beauvais 2002)?

Agricultural extension:

- What local dynamic processes make for effective public–private extension coalitions under decentralization—for instance, which aspects of the local environment foster coalitions, negotiation processes, organizational roles and how organizations perceive each others' roles, transaction costs and how to diminish them, creating collaborative platforms and managing conflicts, and measuring farm level impacts (Crowder and Anderson 2002)?

Natural resource management:

- What social, environmental, and other factors drive the high rates of natural resource depletion, and how can these be mitigated in a decentralized framework?
- What are the most efficient policy instruments for achieving sustainable rates of forest use and fishing?
- What are the farmer level costs of soil erosion, and what incentive structures can enhance soil conservation, especially in soil erosion–prone environments?
- What is the level of awareness and knowledge about climate change among farmers and local governments? How are farmers coping with the effects of climate change?
- What are the sustainable levels of fishing and deforestation in the face of growing population and climate change?

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