



CIVIC REASON

FOR GOOD

GOVERNANCE

IMPROVING CITIZEN-STATE INTERACTIONS FOR
GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY

SOURCE

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CONTEXT & BACKGROUND:

WHICH ISSUE IS BEING ADDRESSED?

Uganda is not a resource-poor country. A sizeable proportion of its population, however, lives in extreme poverty, and there is a strong need for improvement of public services. Governance deficits have been identified as a major contributor to this situation. Power is often vested in individuals rather than institutions. There is widespread corruption; resources are distributed unequally. Since the '90s, Uganda has had a respectable legal and institutional framework for good governance and democracy. However, as is known elsewhere, good governance also depends on civic engagement and state responsiveness. In order to foster accountability, good governance requires a culture and mechanisms that support citizen-state interactions. This normative framework is not as developed in Uganda, so the governance scene reflects a lack of equilibrium between the dimensions of supply and demand. In large part due to a history of repression and civil war, citizens refrain from political activism. Many citizens, as well as political leaders, are unaware of their rights, roles and responsibilities. The efforts of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to advocate good governance through policy and direct interaction with the government have been important, but also manifest limitations. NGO input is often included in new policies and legislation, but serious implementation challenges undercut policy formulation gains. Further, the legitimacy of NGOs is

increasingly questioned by claims that they are driven by donor priorities, rather than citizens' demands. To create a culture of political accountability in Uganda, the *Uganda Governance Monitoring Platform* (UGMP) believes that it would be important to undertake a shift from conventional advocacy per se to constituency building and citizen mobilisation.

STRATEGY AND ACTIVITIES: HOW ARE YOU TRYING TO CHANGE THIS SITUATION?

UGMP is a coalition of civil society organisations keen to see a positive change in Uganda's governance. UGMP conceived and implemented a 'Citizens' Manifesto' (CM) initiative that aims to put citizens at the forefront of efforts to shape and demand a more accountable and responsive leadership, government and political system. Citizens are mobilised to appreciate their role in the political process, their rights and responsibilities, as well as a realistic understanding of what different leaders can deliver. The resulting education and creation of an active citizenry leads to the development of a new culture and mechanisms for political accountability. The CM itself is a citizen's political agenda that outlines shared aspirations, values and demands of citizens to leaders and authorities. It also outlines the roles of citizens therein. The CM is about active citizenship across the board - leaders and ordinary Ugandans alike. Developed in consultation with two hundred local communities and interest groups nationwide, the output and process exemplified by the CM embodies a social contract between citizens and political leaders with which citizens can hold their leaders accountable.

Through the CM, ordinary Ugandans identify eight values that should underpin governance and development to make them equitable and sustainable. They demand far-reaching reforms in supreme law (the constitution), policy and practice. These reforms would touch on education, health, agriculture, environment and governance in such a way that politics, economy and society would work for all Ugandans in a fair man-

ner. In the post-election epoch, the CM will assume the identity of the *Movement for Political Accountability in Uganda* (MOPA-U), a citizen-agency framework under which sustained citizen-leaders interfaces will be organised and several tools for tracking commitments applied. The CM has already generated multi-disciplinary support in religious leaders, civil servants, cultural institutions and civilians - Ugandans who are signing up for the MOPA-U in the thousands. This agenda is clearly valued as a supplement to NGOs in civil society.

SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES: WHAT HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED ALONG THE WAY?

The idea of a 'Citizens Manifesto' is not new. Contemporary Uganda has never known a process of such scale and intensity aimed at good governance, democracy and national unity with a strong desire to overcome current political divides based on regionalism, religion, ethnicity and political affiliation. Approximately eighty-three thousand citizens representing all regions, rural and urban areas, cultures and several interest groups were directly mobilised; an estimated ten million were reached through other mediums. This is a remarkable feat. The CM agenda was not only embraced by ordinary citizens, but also by many political leaders; each actor recognised its particular value for him- or herself. The CM process, however, was not without challenges. The key challenges were: a) a deeper level of civic disillusionment than earlier envisaged; b) widespread poverty causing the majority of Ugandans to be preoccupied with daily survival instead of their responsibility to the democratisation process; c) the intimidation of some partners by politicians, especially at the local level, who perceive the CM as a threat to established and disempowering power relations.

CIVIC REASON: IN WHAT WAYS COULD THIS EXAMPLE BE RELATED TO CIVIC REASON?

The CM attempts to create civic ethos and national unity for a shared agenda on the future of Uganda. It

strives to overcome the legacy of divisive politics by seeking overlapping concerns among citizens and different communities, based on common values, convictions, concerns and interests. The CM process indicates that the protection of spaces for civic reason through constitutionalism, human rights and citizenship is insufficient. The CM initiative demonstrates that an effective process of civic reason requires the active participation of civil society as well as a state that is responsive and accountable to the demands of its citizens. By providing a social contract for citizens and the state, and by introducing mechanisms for citizen-state interactions, the CM creates a basis for sustainable processes of civic reason in the political arena.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- The strategy of the CM is premised on the idea that good governance and accountability cannot be achieved through the mere advocacy of CSOs; good governance and accountability are also dependent on the quality of civic engagement. UGMP suggests that CSOs should work on re-establishing and facilitating direct interactions between citizens and the state. In other words, they signal a need to shift the focus from advocacy to constituency building. What do you think of this strategy shift?
- Does your CSO work on constituency building? Why (not)? What would be the necessary ingredients for successful constituency building in the context of your own work?
- Donor dependency is much debated in Uganda. Shifting donor priorities challenge the sustainability of CSOs. The case of the CM points to another dimension of donor dependency, namely the undermining of the legitimacy of CSOs and the development of structures of accountability within the country. Do you agree with this observation? Do donors have a voice in civic reason? Please explain your point of view.

