# **Local Government Decision-Making:**

Citizen Participation and Local Accountability

**Examples of Good (and Bad) Practice in Uganda** 

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#### 1. Background

Uganda has been a leading exponent of decentralisation. Over the past fifteen years, the system of local government has been radically reformed, major responsibilities have been delegated and substantial resources transferred to local councils. Although the reform process has sought to strengthen both citizen participation and local government accountability, there are still significant concerns over these issues. As a result, there are always questions about whether local governments are making good use of the resources at their disposal, and whether the decisions made represent the interests and needs of their residents. Practices vary, with plenty of examples of good practice, as well as many which are not.

This briefing paper is based on a study of the practices of decision-making (informal as well as formal) about the use of resources in local governments in Uganda. The study looked at who participates in those decisions and how far local governments are accountable to citizens for their decisions. The study examined seven local councils:

- Entebbe Municipal Council
- Fort Portal Municipal Council
- Jinja Municipal Council
- Kasanje Sub-County Council
- Lira Municipal Council
- Masaka Municipal Council
- Mukono Town Council.

This paper seeks to draw out from these case studies examples of 'good practice'. We recognise that the term 'good practice' is problematic in any context, since it is always possible to identify weaknesses in any practice. We do not claim universal applicability or transferability of the examples. Rather, we outline some examples of where and how local governments and citizens in Uganda appear to have implemented relatively successful practices to extend citizen participation and enhance accountability in decision-making about resource use.

# 2. Legal and Financial Relationships

There is a constitutional commitment to democracy at every level of the system of Local Councils (LCs) in Uganda. Decisions flow upwards from village (LC1), with checks and balances between the levels specified in the Local Government Act, 1997. This system provides multiple opportunities for citizen participation and representation, from village level up to municipal and district levels. Reserved seats for women, youth and disabled at each level ensure that different sections of society are represented.

While central transfers have increased rapidly in recent years, local own revenues have been static or even declining. Local revenue collection is weak, and has been deteriorating in most places, particularly as a result of the politicisation of the main revenue source, GPT. In Mukono Town Council, for example, less than half of the projected revenue was collected. The council has embarked on several initiatives to strengthen revenue collection, such as updating resident and tax registers with the active involvement of the village councils, and monitoring and inspecting revenue sources, as well as holding sensitisation seminars. In Fort Portal, the Municipal Council introduced pre-printed GPT tickets to reduce the incidence of fraud, tendered the collection of assessment rates, and changed the tenderer for the taxi and bus park, all of which led to increased revenue collections.

The growth in resources available from the centre has been mainly in the form of conditional grants related to the delivery of services such as health and education. These benefit local citizens including the poor. Central government grants like Universal Primary Education (UPE) and School Facility Grants (SFG), are

allocated on the basis of enrolment and special needs, to combat familiar problems of poor supply of scholastic materials, inadequate classroom space, and generally inadequate funding. The early results of this initiative are encouraging, with increases in the number of pupils obtaining first grade results.

The increase in conditional transfers has been dramatic. In Masaka Municipal Council, for example, resources from the centre increased fourfold in just three years, although unconditional grants have remained static. The conditional grants have been useful in reaching targeted objectives and involving citizens to some degree in decision making over their specific use (see section 3). Particularly important among these has been the Local Government Development Programme (LGDP) – see Box 1. The central government has also sought to enhance local accountability by making information about these allocations available to citizens (see section 4).

#### Box 1: Local Government Development Programme (LGDP)

The current arrangement of the LGDP has its origins in earlier programmes, notably UNCDF's District Development Programme (DDP) and similar programmes funded by the World Bank. Under the LGDP, funds are provided to districts and municipalities for local level infrastructure. Choices are made at the local level (LC1/LC2), from a menu of options including schools, clinics, water supplies, toilets, roads and production projects. Whilst there are limitations on the use of money, the scope for choice is quite wide. Since money is available, people perceive that they are participating in real choices about projects which will be implemented. Project design and implementation is carried out by district, municipal or divisional staff, supervised by Project Management Committees drawn from the LC1/LC2 Executives, together with local councillors.

LGDP conditions require the use of local labour and contractors, in order to maximise local benefits. Local communities are required to contribute 10% of the project costs, which can come from their share of local tax revenues, and to commit themselves to maintenance. Over the past two to three years, large amounts of local infrastructure have been completed, benefiting many, particularly the poor. LGDP also includes an element for building local capacity, through workshops etc., including training councillors and local communities in project monitoring.

Entebbe Municipal Council was one of the first local government recipients to benefit from the LGDP, for the specific purpose of micro-development projects. The GOU guaranteed this grant from DANIDA which in turn signed an agreement with Entebbe in 1999/2000 to provide its funding over three phrases. Completed projects include roads, water extensions, toilet construction and purchase of waste skips.

## Box 2: Conditional Grants in Kasanje Sub-County

Central government remits various grants through the district to the lower councils. Most of these grants are conditional and are earmarked to specific spending. For example, the sub-county cannot pay for office accommodation from the Local Government Development Programme grant. Rather, this money has been used in the construction of classrooms, roads, pit latrines, a cattle crush and dispensaries. Some schools have received desks, and teachers' houses have been built.

Projects that have been agreed at village and parish level are now able to be included in the Local Government Development Fund allocations. This is visible proof that the central government is committed to the active participation of citizens in the decisions which affect them, as well as to local development and the improvement of the quality of life of the ordinary person.

### 3. Participation in Decision-Making

The multi-level LC system offers multiple opportunities for participation and election. It extends elected representation to the village level (LC1), through ward/parish (LC2) and division (LC3), to municipal level (LC4) and up to the district (LC5). Citizens have ample opportunity to participate in the political process through voting and by competing in the electoral process. Under Uganda's Movement system, any individual can, without reference to a political party, stand for any elective office, on the principle of "individual merit". Elections for reserved seats for women, youth, and the disabled are through electoral colleges.

There is movement up the LC system, with village leaders aspiring to move up to LC3 and LC4, while many of the current incumbents at LC4 and 5 started their political engagement as lower level councillors. The system brings government physically closer to its citizens. In Jinja for example, the Market Traders Association asserted that it used to be difficult to go to the municipality partly because the Municipality had a lot to deal with, whereas now the divisions are much closer and have a better understanding of their needs. This does not, however, always translate into their needs being better met. The downside of the system is the intense competition in urban areas between divisions (LC3) and the municipality (LC4) for the limited amount of political space and resources, resulting in conflicts and inadequate funding particularly for the municipality. But it seems clear that the LC system offers a closer and more engaged relationship between government and citizens, with people now being more willing than before to speak out, although many are still fearful of the consequences of doing so.

Monthly meetings of all citizens are supposed to take place at village level, although how often they actually take place depends on the local political situation and the issues to be discussed, as well as on the motivation of the leadership to convene and publicise the meetings. Through such meetings, citizens have opportunities to raise issues and make proposals at village level, which are then taken up to higher levels for funding. Since some funding is available, at least for basic infrastructure, some of these identified priorities are implemented.

#### 3.1 Budget Conferences

The 1997 Local Government Act requires each level to begin its budget process with a budget conference which is open to the public. The municipal and division budget conferences formulate proposals for resource use for the next financial year, as well as for the three-year rolling plan. At LC1, the budget conference is, effectively, an annual public meeting of all citizens since at that level all adults are Councillors. However, they do not always take place as they should in every village. At LC2 the budget conference is a meeting of the Executive Committee members from each LC1 within the ward. The LC3 (Division) budget conference invites the Chairpersons of the constituent LC1s and LC2s, together with the Councillors for LC3 and other interested stakeholders. At LC4 (Municipality) and LC5 (District), leaders of local stakeholder groups, business community, community organisations and NGOs are also invited. However, since invitations to the budget conference are in the hands of the local Executive Committee, it is unlikely that stakeholders who are not in the Committee's "good books" will be invited. Thus, participation in the budget conferences may be unrepresentative of important interests.

## Box 3: The Budget Conference: Jinja Municipal Council

The budget conference is held over one full day, with a lunch provided. The Town Clerk begins by making a general overview, and heads of department make their presentations on what has been done and what has not been done. Discussion is then open to the floor for complaints and suggestions. People's contributions are guided by the technical staff within the framework of the three-year plan – in other words, discussions are guided by an agenda set before the conference starts. After the budget conference some proposals are included in the municipal budget, and others are forwarded to central government or communicated to the divisions.

The budget conference allows for direct accountability for lack of achievements in the previous budget year. In the words of the Town Clerk, 'it has helped to put houses in order'. This also enables discussions about problems with tax collections, and provides space for citizens to voice criticism of government. There were discussions about roads and garbage collection at the last budget conference. The Town Clerk found there was some misunderstanding among people over the costs involved in providing services, which he was able to correct. The Budget Conference also gave him an opportunity to discuss with citizens the negative practices which affect service provision, such as improper disposal of waste. The council also used this opportunity to explain to citizens the difference in roles between the municipal and the division councils. This helps people to know where they are supposed to go over different issues.

The Chairman of the Market Traders Association found the Budget Conference a useful platform where old plans and new ideas were discussed. For example, there was a move to buy a new generator for the municipality but people were against it as it was too expensive and there were more pressing needs. Accordingly, the idea was abandoned. In his opinion, the budget conference is a useful process: people are able to speak the language they felt comfortable in although mostly the discussion is in English. Despite some clear limitations, there is a positive feeling about the budget conference process: people are more aware of what is going on and the council feels more part of the community.

Budget conferences involve soliciting the views of individuals and organised stakeholders. However, it is a new concept that has not yet been developed to its full potential. In practice, participation is still quite limited, mainly involving people like LC1 Chairpersons who are already part of the system. At LC3, LC4 and LC5 levels, the agenda for discussion and the form that the discussion takes is mostly driven by technocrats, conducted in English and couched in formal, budget language, which may not be conducive to participation by ordinary citizens, let alone the poor. Better educated people also often exert disproportionate influence. However, there are attempts to make these conferences an effective mechanism for local accountability as well as participatory planning, as illustrated in Boxes 3-5.

## Box 4: Making the Budget Conference More Inclusive

In Mukono Town Council, attempts have been made to enable citizens to contribute to the discussion in the Budget Conference. Participants can make their contributions in whatever language they wish. The discussion is organised through small groups, each covering a particular sector. Each group elects its own chairperson and secretary. Participants may join whichever group they wish. People feel more free to make their contribution in a small group, especially since the council officials are not present, except when called upon to explain some point. The outcomes of the discussions are then refined by the technical staff into clear objectives, specific inputs and defined outputs with monetary values.

#### Box 5: Budget Outreach Programme: Entebbe

The Mayor of Entebbe has adopted a positive foreign policy strategy for this municipality aimed at creating friendship with municipalities and actors internationally to the benefit of Entebbe Municipality. EMC has linked with the Municipal Development Programme, based in Harare, Zimbabwe, which has provided extra funding for EMC's budgetary process activities, with the objective of supporting the active participation of a wider cross-section of stakeholders in local government budgetary processes. It has also enabled EMC to conduct a Budget Outreach Programme in two divisions, and provided a facilitator to guide these processes.

The budgetary process in Entebbe begins with the Budget Outreach, an intensive exercise involving the Mayor, councillors and heads of departments, visiting all the villages in each division in a facilitated way to determine the priorities and concerns of the local population. In EMC there is clear political commitment by its top leadership towards participatory politics. This immensely assists the seriousness with which the exercise is carried out. One day is spent in each of EMC's 24 villages, so the whole process takes a month. Although it involves a lot of effort and is time consuming, it has clear advantages, since the Mayor, councilors and senior staff are able to hear first hand information about local concerns, from people in their own localities. In turn, citizens feel they have a more involved relationship with the Municipal Council.

#### Box 6: LGDP Projects in Masaka

#### Water standpipe project: Kasa Village

This project was funded under the Peri-Urban Infrastructure Project, a predecessor of the LGDP. In 1998, a Community Development Council (CDC) was formed with representatives from three neighbouring villages (LC1s), to identify priority projects in their area. Each CDC was allocated USh 3 million. Projects had to be from the five priority sectors: water, sanitation, solid waste management, drainage, roads. They decided that water was the top priority. Although water was available in the area, there were only a few private taps, and the owners of these charged USh 300 for 40 litres. The standpipe was installed in 1999. Because there was already a pipe in the area, the cost was modest (USh 700,000). The community had to contribute 10% of the cost. The tap serves around 100 people, who now pay USh 50 for 40 litres. This is paid to someone who maintains the taps and pays the water bill. Any surplus can be used as a community contribution to other projects. The project was supervised by the CDC, subsequently renamed the Project Management Committee (PMC), made up of local residents. The Chair of the PMC is also Vice Chair of the LC1 in Kasa village.

Under the LGDP, funding is shared between the Municipal Council (50%, division 35% and village 15%, according to population). Village projects are agreed at LC2 level, with LC3 contributing to the costs of projects spanning more than one parish, and LC4 meeting the costs of projects which span more than one division. Technical staff from the Municipal Council provide advice to the LC2 on project selection and design, and assist the LC2 Project Management Committee to supervise construction. 19 standpipes have now been provided within the division, along with toilets, waste bins and improved access roads.

#### Health clinic at Kitazi Village

The Project Management Committee here is headed by the Chairman of the Kitazi village LC1, a retired civil servant. They had already succeeded in establishing a small clinic, with the District Health Department providing the staff. 800 patients per month are being served. They are now building a 20-bed health centre, and the present clinic will become the doctor's house. The project is substantial (USh 90 million), so is taking most of the money available to the LC2 and the 5 constituent LC1s, plus money from the LC3, over a three-year period. The local counterpart contribution has been in the form of foregoing their (LC1 and LC2) share of local taxes over three years. The project is justified as serving a large area, including villages outside the Municipality (in total 20,000 people), for whom the nearest facility is 5 kms away. Although the District Health Department will provide staffing, there is a concern about how operating costs (e.g. water, transport, staff incentives) will be met now that fees ("cost sharing") can no longer be charged.

This LC1 has also carried out other projects: a standpipe, two protected springs, and an electric power line.

#### 3.2 Civil Society

Civil society is often viewed as the institutional solution to people-centred, pro-poor development. There are many small CBOs and NGOs working in Uganda, but generally these are concerned with specific local issues or needs and do not have experience of working with government or in lobbying for change. In Jinja, for example, there are 110 women's groups. The Jinja Municipality Women's Association co-ordinates the activities of this network. These small groups organise mainly around economic activities such as handicrafts, pottery, distilleries and agriculture. The association puts project proposals to donors on behalf of these groups with the aim of establishing a revolving fund.

There is a deliberate effort in many local areas to encourage women to form themselves into groups and elect leaders from among themselves. These women leaders later use this experience to gain confidence to compete for political office in the various local governments. The point is that economic empowerment leads to other forms of empowerment, including political.

#### Box 7: Consultation with Civil Society Organisations in Entebbe

Business leaders are regularly consulted when government grants are disbursed. In Entebbe, the Kitooro United Traders Association is regularly consulted on issues of relevance to them, for example, the planning of a new market. Both the Chairperson of that division and the Mayor of Entebbe have adopted a policy cooptation and cooperation with major civil society organisations, which in turn entrenches their support amongst the members of these organisations.

A number of civil organisations have formed in response to harsh treatment by tenderers awarded contracts to collect taxes. The Entebbe Division B *Boda-Boda* Association (EDIBBA) has a membership of more than 300. They formed an association because of problems with the then tenderers who, they allege, siphoned off huge sums money from them without providing tangible benefits. Now each bicycle owner pays Shs. 50 per day while for the motor cycles they pay Shs. 200 per day to EDIBBA, which in turn is expected to pay Shs. 200,000 per month to the division.

# 4. Accountability to Citizens

Ugandans, it seems, are becoming more aware of what they are entitled to as rights and not charity. The result is increased demands for accountability from government, not just for finances but also for political decisions and policy choices. This accountability needs to be both formal (procedures and records) and substantive (truth, honesty, etc.). Accountability can be seen in three overlapping ways:

- Vertical downward accountability: elected council/councillors to citizens
- Horizontal accountability: officers to elected councillors
- Vertical upward accountability: local councils to higher levels/central government.

In the Ugandan system, accountability should also work vertically downwards between different levels of government, so that higher levels are held to account by lower levels. Little evidence of this form of accountability was found, but as lower councils become more organised, the potential is there for this to develop.

## 4.1 Downward accountability

Regular, free and fair elections are the key to holding Mayors, Chairpersons and councillors to account. In principle, elections result in those who have not performed being ousted, although in practice electors are often influenced by other factors (ethnic loyalty, the responsiveness of those elected to social obligations, as

well as "vote-buying"), rather than by the real performance of the candidate in delivering services and improving conditions locally.

Until recently, LC1 elections used the "stand-in-line" system, but this has been replaced by secret ballots in order to reduce the scope for pressure and intimidation. The evidence is mixed about the level of electoral participation. In many places it appears to be high, particularly at village level, with people talking about elections in terms of 'people's power'. But there are also signs that electoral turnout is on the decline, perhaps reflecting both a weariness with politics and an absence of pressure for change.

## Box 8: Holding Councillors to Account

In Jinja, there was a case last year where a female councillor claimed money from the local fund for a women's netball rally, which did not happen. People complained but the financial year was up and other issues took over. This year the same woman took money from the LC3 for repairs to machines, which also did not happen. She is not standing again for election this year as people have made it clear she is not wanted. The women's association thought that this happened partly because not all councillors are aware of their roles.

However, elections held every few years are an imperfect mechanism of ongoing accountability. Increased interaction between citizens and their local governments seems to have occurred by way of the LC system and specific mechanisms to increase communication. At budget conferences it seems people are increasingly willing to speak out and challenge their leaders. There is generally a positive feeling from people who have attended budget conferences that they provide an opportunity for accountability on project implementation.

The media is becoming increasingly important both for informing citizens about available resources and for channelling complaints about local councils. The central government has made progress in providing information about the resources flowing through the grant system, enabling citizens to start holding councils to account. Thus, School Management Committees are informed by the centre about the amount of money available for their school, so that they can ensure that the money is transferred, and can hold the head-teacher to account for its use. Similarly, those operating clinics are told how much money has been allocated, so that local officials cannot pretend that the money is not there. Project Management Committees are told how much money has been allocated for their project, and they then work with the technical staff of the municipality to supervise the contractor, ensuring that money is spent properly and the project completed satisfactorily. In these ways, accountability is starting to be developed, at least in relation to the conditional grants. However the form in which information is provided, mostly through English-language national newspapers and circulars pinned on notice boards is often not accessible to ordinary citizens.

The liberalisation of the airwaves has also helped extend the debate on local accountability (Uganda has one of the most liberalised radio policies in the world, with nearly 100 private stations having been given permits to operate in the last five years). Radio phone-ins have had an important impact across Uganda. In Masaka, there are now two privately owned FM radio stations, and citizens can participate in lively discussions on local issues. In Fort Portal, a local, popular and widely listened to radio station is the Voice of Toro (VOT). Broadcasting mainly in the local language, Rutooro, VOT has become the main source of local information. Fort Portal Municipal Council communicates to its citizens through VOT and holds a once monthly programme to report back to the citizens on its activities. Citizens can phone in and interact with the leadership - asking questions, seeking clarifications and expressing grievances. Nor is access limited to those who have mobile/cell phones, since others will borrow phones in order to put their views, while many others listen.

#### Box 9: Radio Phone-In - Accountability in Jinja

Use of the media has had an impact in Jinja despite the fact that there is no local radio station. One example of citizens holding local councils to account involved a national radio phone-in. The Mayor went on to CBS radio show where he was pushed to answer a question on *boda-boda* rates. He denied that he had responsibility for setting their rates and claimed on air that LC3 had responsibility for both collecting and setting rates. Unfortunately for the Mayor, many people had heard his response. As a result the *boda-boda* drivers demanded lower rates from the LC3. The LC3 council met and decided that the Mayor had indeed given them the green light to reduce *boda-boda* rates. They reduced the rate from USh 4,500 per month to USh 2,000. When the LC4 would not agree to this change, the *boda-boda* started demonstrating, which lasted five days. The District Committee convened a conference in the end and a balance was struck of USh 2,500. The LC3 convinced the *boda-boda* to accept this and discontinue their strike.

Typically, there are differences in the motivations of councillors. Some see their role as a way to make their living, including corruptly exploiting the opportunities available, rather than as a public service to their constituents. However, increased engagement among citizens is bringing increased demands for local accountability. The capacity building element of LGDP has provided sensitisation workshops for many different groups including councillors, tenderers, *boda-boda* drivers, and community groups, covering issues such as project monitoring.

#### 4.2 Horizontal accountability:

There are many problems of horizontal accountability. These arise from, amongst other things, poor working relationships between officials and councillors, conflicts between elected representatives at the different levels, the lack of qualified finance staff, and the difficulty and cost of dismissing surplus staff. In Jinja, the Mayor has put in a number of measures to tighten up management, including holding weekly planning meetings with the Town Clerk and Treasurer to identify problems before they escalate. A sub-committee of the Finance Committee meets every two weeks to look at how the council is doing and where it is failing.

One mechanism for horizontal accountability is the Project Management Committee elected at the local level to monitor the implementation of local projects by officials of the municipal or divisional council. School Management Committees carry out the same function in the case of education projects. Councillors are also involved in monitoring the work of officials. However, there is always the risk that monitoring turns into meddling in the management of council's activities, often for dubious reasons. In the Adyel Division of Lira Municipality, complaints were raised about the lack of information from the Municipality about education and health budgets for projects at the division level.

# 4.3 Upward accountability:

New instruments of accountability have been developed, including external auditing, Local Public Accounts Committees (PACs), the Inspectorate General of Government (IGG), and the Ministry of Ethics and Integrity. IGG can investigate possible cases of malpractice. In Masaka, for example, the IGG investigated the disputed tendering process in relation to the central taxi park. However, there are problems of detection, proof, prosecution and punishment, as well as imperfect personnel within those agencies, lack of resources and lack of political will at the top, all reduce the impact of these arrangements.

External audit acts as a check up on how resources are being utilised. In addition to monthly returns submitted by sub-counties to the district, external auditing can happen any time. But people in Kasanje Sub-County complained that the auditors from the district go out to lunch with the officials whom they are auditing, thereby compromising their position. Despite this concern, auditors can advise on proper accounting procedures, which helps since some of the accounting personnel at the local government level lack knowledge of the financial rules and regulations.

#### Box 10: Central Monitoring of the Use of Funds

The Project Management Unit (PMU) of the Ministry of Local Government has developed a set of performance measures concerning the use of funds by local government, particularly in relation to the LGDP. The criteria used include the following:

- quality of development plans
- development expenditures related to national priority areas for poverty reduction
- timely implementation and accountability
- capacity-building efforts
- staff functional capacity
- tendering capacity and performance
- production of monitoring reports
- co-financing of projects.

The PMU's assessment manual spells out detailed indicators for each criterion. Assessment is carried out by a national team, together with staff of the districts/ municipalities in the case of assessment of lower level councils. Only those councils which meet the minimum conditions are able to access funds, while those that perform well are rewarded with additional funds.

Given the number of local councils, the task is enormous, and there will always be problems of verification. But the assessment is taken seriously and results are published.

Apart from a few "sensitisation" and "orientation" workshops that are offered from the centre, both district and municipal officials observed that there was hardly any forum or opportunity for them to discuss matters affecting their relationship with the centre. In the past, this was made worse by the poor telephone communications in outlying areas, although this has improved markedly with the advent of mobile phones.

One particular aspect of vertical accountability concerns the use of funds by lower level councils. While the municipal and division councils have been allocated responsibilities in law, the parish and village councils can legally use their share of local resources in whatever manner they wish. There are no accounting guidelines for this level, so this money can easily be pocketed. To avoid misuse, some municipal councils retain the LC1/LC2 shares of local revenue to set against their contribution to local projects. Jinja Municipal Council has identified a number of responsibilities that are devolved to the lower councils (see Box 11).

#### Box 11: LC to LC Relationships and Improved Accountability in Jinja Municipality

Despite the potential for improved local accountability, the multiplicity of levels of government means scope for duplication of responsibilities, and hence increased costs. Relationships between division and municipality are particularly tricky, with conflicts over political space and resources. By contrast with many other municipalities, arrangements appear to be working quite well in Jinja, where the LC3 and LC4 councils have worked to clarify their responsibilities and working relationships. At the lower levels, a political organ has formed between LC1, 2 and 3. This Inter-Council meeting is used to review and discuss various issues. People have participated in large numbers (over 200 people). LC3 Chairpersons are aware that there is a need for explanation at the local level regarding various issues and development needs. Accordingly, they claim, they attend all LC1 meetings in their jurisdiction. This procedure has evolved in response to mistakes, notably over the location of a clinic, which was based on external decisions rather than consultation with local people, resulting in the clinic not being built until the community was better engaged. According to divisional councillors, in the past, the Municipal Council used to prioritise expenditure just to the immediate and better known area of Central Division; now that divisions have been given their own powers, this kind of practice cannot happen.

The law does not attach responsibilities for resource spending at the lower councils, which provides opportunities for abuse. In Jinja, they have agreed that a maximum of 15% of LC1 income can be spent on allowances for meetings. The rest is tightly managed and allocated only for certain works, for which the LC1 has had responsibility assigned. These tasks include sweeping roads within the village, trimming verges and opening small drains. The divisions hold a ledger and village money is kept within the divisional account. Villages need to fill out an application and show meeting minutes where discussion has taken place. Expenses are only then released after verification by the Environment Officer, who may deduct from the claim if the job is not done properly. This system was developed after some bad experiences with money disappearing, and has been in practice for one year. Some money is also available for limited other uses, such as refreshments for community events. Other tasks are the responsibility of the division.

Increased resources and management responsibility at the local level do seem to have increased engagement in local development, as well as providing local employment. In addition, village councils are better able to check on the implementation of work locally than when the work was done by central government or the district. People are beginning to see things as their rights, associated with paying taxes, and not just gifts from the government for which they should be grateful regardless of what state it arrives in. As one LC1 Chairperson noted, people see what is on the ground and will complain to him if the work is done badly.

#### 5. Conclusion

Decentralisation reforms in Uganda, together with substantial transfers from the centre, has meant that citizens have real opportunities to participate in real decisions about projects, with the real prospect that these will be implemented. The LGDP is a good example of providing people from the village level up to the municipality and district with a range of options for projects with real benefits for low income groups.

However, a number of challenges remain. Effective decision-making on allocation of resources is still made at the centre, and local councils have limited influence in determining what resources go to which priority areas. In addition, participation in practice is less than it might appear from the law, with village meetings being held less often than required, budget conferences attracting few who are not already involved in the system, and processes still dominated by the better off and better educated. The process is also still predominantly technocratic. Whilst there is a growing feeling of local ownership of local development process, there are also worrying signs of participation-fatigue and declining participation in local elections and local level development activities.

Civil society organisations can and do play an important role in advocating for prioritisation of poor people's needs, but they remain relatively weak at the local level. Investment is needed to develop the capacity of such organisations to become effective vehicles for promoting change.

People are becoming increasingly willing to speak out, and accountability is beginning to be built. Publication of information, local monitoring of project implementation, the use of local radio, and the central government's system of monitoring of the use of funds, are all helping to build accountability. But there remain serious problems of misuse of funds, abuse of public office and distrust between officials and councillors and between levels. Much remains to be done to build a really effective system of local accountability.

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