



TEAM UGANDA

Agencies Represented: The Directorate of Socio-Economic Monitoring and Research in the Office of the President, the Cabinet Secretariat, and the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development

Problem: Weak policy, program, and project formulation and implementation across the Government of Uganda due to gaps in capacity, data, evidence use, and stakeholder involvement

Objective: Institutionalizing use of evidence in the oversight function of the Office of the President, and establishing and facilitating evidence-based research in policy, program, and project formulation and implementation, across government priority areas

THE PROBLEM:

Over the last two decades, Uganda's progress in reducing poverty has been a remarkable success story. According to the World Bank's 2016 Poverty Assessment Report, the proportion of the Ugandan population living below the national poverty line decreased from 31.1% in 2006 to 19.7% in 2013.¹ Notwithstanding the level of stability and growth realized over the years, the country is still faced with constraints towards the realization of middle income status, as projected in National Development Plan II. These include access to improved sanitation and electricity, educational achievement, child nutrition, transport infrastructure, and governance challenges. The majority of the population is still dependent on subsistence farming, while Uganda has the world's highest percentage of its national population under 30 (78%) and the highest rate of youth unemployment in Africa, according to the 2014 European Development Fund National Indicative Program for Uganda.²

Impeding the achievement of middle income status and other goals set out in the National Development Plan II are weak policy, program, and project formulation, design, and implementation across government, as well as an absence of active government oversight players to independently monitor and evaluate the implementation process and advise government on the results of interventions. The Office of the President believes that most of the challenges to public administration in Uganda stem from capacity, coordination, and data issues. Monitoring and evaluation activities of the National Development Plan I found inconsistencies, incomparability, and gaps in the approaches, methodologies, data, and indicators produced and used by Ministries, departments, and agencies for policymaking and implementation, and submitted to oversight agencies. The National Development Plan II Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy emphasizes strengthening oversight and monitoring of implementation as a critical success factor, and recommends the establishment of systems to facilitate timely reporting and regular evidence-based follow-up on implementation issues.

THE INITIATIVE:

Unlike the other teams, the Uganda team is not focused on a specific policy, but rather seeks to create a process for the Office of the President to systematically use evidence in its function to oversee the implementation of priority areas in the National Development Plan II. To do so, the team will establish and operationalize an Apex Platform for learning and effective utilization of monitoring and evaluation results, and build capacity within the Office of the President and other oversight actors that will, in turn, enhance the overall monitoring and evidence-based reporting for all government policies, programs,

¹ Uganda Poverty Assessment 2016 Fact Sheet, World Bank. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uganda/brief/uganda-poverty-assessment-2016-fact-sheet>

² European Development Fund, National Indicative Program for Uganda, 2014. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/11th_edf_for_uganda_en.pdf

and projects. Their priority is establishing a stronger evidence base for policy formulation in order to improve the design, implementation, and effectiveness of policies across the socio-economic sphere.

The Directorate of Socio-Economic Monitoring and Research in the Office of the President reports directly to Cabinet and to His Excellency the President regarding the uptake of recommendations from various actors on any outstanding issues, for either policy direction and guidance, as well as immediate administrative action, where necessary. The Directorate has two departments, the Department of Economic Affairs, Policy, and Research, and the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation, and is mandated to monitor and independently evaluate key government policies, programs, and projects and provide evidence-based reporting to aid effective implementation.

The policy formulation process primarily originates within the Ministries, which are responsible for conducting stakeholder consultations, writing cabinet Papers, and sharing these draft policies with the Cabinet Secretariat, which falls under the Office of the President, for approval. This decentralized policy formulation process poses a fundamental challenge. Because policy analysts are recruited and trained by the Cabinet Secretariat – Office of the President and later assigned to other Ministries, their training focuses on administrative duties and operational capabilities and compliance, such as how to write professional cabinet Papers, rather than on key skills for understanding and using data and evidence in policy development and decision making. They may also have little knowledge of the particular sector to which they are assigned. Due in part to this mismatch of skills, Ministries sometimes rush to develop and propose concept notes and cabinet papers, adept at the bureaucratic process to secure approval and funding, but sometimes without solid baseline information, an adequate understanding of the problem to be addressed, or knowledge of how to create a policy that can be effectively implemented. Though they are responsible for consulting with relevant stakeholders to inform policy formulation, there is no mechanism to ensure that they identify the right ones, including community members who could be affected by the policy. Finally, Ministries may not adequately coordinate with the organizations or Local Government entities responsible for translating the policy into implementable programs, reducing the likelihood that its targets and approaches will be feasible on the ground.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND STATUS:

The Directorate of Socio-Economic Monitoring and Research in the Office of the President considers research as a critical tool to inform policy decisions when it is conceived, developed, and embedded within local policy contexts. However, this has not yet been fully realized or reflected in many of the existing policies and guidelines. Monitoring and Evaluation findings and recommendations underline this challenge and point to a need for a national set of indicators to facilitate evidence-based policy interventions across government key areas, including planning, budgeting, resource allocation, and performance measurement. The proposed Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Adoption Apex platform would help to facilitate the use of evidence-based tools and frameworks like Theories of Change and promote systematize processes to apply evidence and learning to decision making.

KEY CHALLENGES:

- There is currently inadequate policy, program, and project cycle management capacity across the public sector. This has resulted in weak public policy design and implementation. Inadequate capacity, coupled with a weak Public Investment Management System (PIMS), have impeded the successful realization of several policies.
- There has also been inadequate and uncoordinated monitoring and evaluation of programs and policies as well as ineffective accountability mechanisms. This has contributed to poor service delivery. Many policy guidelines lack monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans, which impedes the measurement of their effectiveness. This means that new policies are developed without evidence of why the previous ones did or did not work.

- Lastly, minimal engagement of relevant stakeholders and target beneficiaries contributes to less effectively designed policies and programs, including a lack of ownership on the part of the beneficiaries.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- The Office of the President has provided strategic policy guidance on strengthening project preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, in the form of a paper titled, Strengthening the Public Investments System.
- In line with its oversight role, the Office also caused an administrative action to terminate the concessional agreement for Kilembe Mines, due to a failure to fulfil the concession terms and conditions.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- The Uganda team hopes to promote the use of evidence in policy design and implementation within the Office of the President and throughout the government, with the goal of facilitating inclusive growth and social sector development. They would like to build capacity within the Office of the President to conduct independent research and evaluations to inform policy. In addition, the team looks forward to strengthening partnerships and synergies with various research organizations, including the Economic Policy Research Center at Makerere University and the International Growth Center at the London School of Economics.
- From this engagement, the team hopes to draw lessons that will inform the finalization of the framework to strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms at the oversight level. This will be done through the establishment of a learning and adoption apex platform, where the state and non-state actors will also play a role.

Written in consultation with Vincent Bamugaya Tumusiime, Director, Directorate of Socio-Economic Monitoring and Research, Uganda Office of the President, with support from Ari Gandolfo and Kelly Dale. © Results for All, July 2018. For more information, contact info@results4all.org.