

Local Council System And Implementation Of Government Projects In Uganda; A Case Study Of The Northern Uganda Social Action Fund Iii (Nusaf 3) In Panyimur Sub County- Pakwach District

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Abstract

The study aimed at evaluating the influence of local council system on the implementation of government projects in Uganda with a case study of the northern Uganda social action fund iii (nusaf 3) in panyimur sub county- Pakwach district and it was guided by the following objectives; To examine the challenges faced by local governments in the process of implementation of projects, to assess the key legal mandates for local government influence on the implementation of government projects and to examine the remedies to the challenges faced by the local councils in the implementation of government programmes. The study involved a cross sectional research design. The cross-sectional study design is defined as a type of observational research that analyzes data of variables collected at one given point in time across a sample population or pre-defined subset. This study was conducted in Panyimur Sub County. Panyimur sub county is one of the sub counties of Pakwach district located in the south western part of the district bordered by Pakwach sub county, Dei sub county, Parombo sub county in Nebbi district and Lake Albert and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The sub county covers an area of 168.2 square kilometers and a population of 54,000 people consisting of 26,700 males and 27,300 females as of 2020 and an annual population change of 3.8%. The study targeted those working in the local government, elected leaders, people from the civil society, the general citizen body, private contractors which implement government project, and others. The findings indicated that majority of the respondents concurred with the notion that the government policies impact on the manner in which local councils implement public projects in their localities. It was evidenced that 37 respondents which account for 46.25% strongly agreed with the notion, whereas 26 (32.5%) agreed with the notion though 3.75% (3) were not sure of the government policies dictating project implementation. Local governments need to come up with better mechanisms which can encourage local citizens to participate in the government programmes which affects them. They can do this through engaging the locals from the beginning to end of the project process. Through organizing workshops and seminars, community outreaches, radio talk shows where views of the locals are sought, providing for community dialogues and conducting researches on the primary overarching needs of the locals.

Key words: local council system, implementation and government projects

Background to the study

Countries that wish to improve service delivery and achieve citizen empowerment, democracy and citizen participation in development must embrace good governance through practices such as decentralization. The transfer of powers from central ministries to local units promotes rapid transformation in rural areas (Christopher, Muhindo, et al., 2022).

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This involves delinking political and administrative burdens on ministries to local government, however their success depends on leadership potential in the political and civil service (Faith et al., 2023).

In Uganda, the system of local councils is established in the Constitution of Uganda 1995 and put into practice by the Local Government Act 1997. It is based on the realization that decentralization was to ensure effective governance by devolving functions and powers to the people at the appropriate levels. . For some time, decentralization seemed to have achieved its stated goals. Recently, however, service delivery has begun to decline in the education, health, and labor sectors (Christopher, Komunda, et al., 2022).

In Uganda, the local government/council system is divided into urban and rural settings. The rural environment is formed by the district council as the overall planning body in the given district headed by the elected chairman Local Council V (Christopher, Muhindo, et al., 2022). followed by the district administrative unit, which is staffed by civil servants and assists the district council in implementing and/or coordinating the activities of the sub-regional councils, and therefore monitors the implementation of programs and resolves disputes within their areas of jurisdiction (Christopher, Mojžiš, Muhindo, & Komunda, 2022b). They are followed by sub-regional councils, which are structured as exact replicas of the district council with the same democratic structure and functions, but only with a smaller area of competence. Other councils in rural settings are parish and village councils.

Today, the LC system is a consultative forum for local decision-making. Elected council chairmen form executive committees at relevant levels (Sharon et al., 2023) and propose policies to their council legislatures, which are made up of representatives of the people. Decisions are made by state administration workers. The LC system is most clearly structured at the district level (LC5), where district development plans are made and important district policies are decided for the district. The actual services are provided at the sub-county level (LC3) where branch officers and community development workers are assigned. There are many positive contributions to the evolution of local government systems (Ntirandekura & Friday, 2022).

NUSAF 3 is a program implemented within the Office of the Prime Minister and is financed by the World Bank. The objective of the NUSAF 3 program is to provide effective income support and build the resilience of poor and vulnerable households in northern Uganda. NUSAF 3 is designed to help target poor communities in northern Uganda transition to sustainable livelihoods and achieve the government's goal of a middle-income economy (Mark et al., 2023). The program intends to achieve this goal through a series of project interventions that include regular and short-term implementation of labor-intensive public works, engagement in selective managed enterprise markets and through positive attitude change towards work, production and savings (OPM).

The NUSAF 3 project began operations in 2016 as a successor to NUSAF 2. NUSAF aims to assist local communities in 18 districts of northern Uganda that have been ravaged by conflict for the past 20 years (anti-poverty organization) (Faridah et al., 2023)

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Problem statement

Government projects, if well managed, can play a vital role in changing the well-being of local target beneficiaries (Paul et al., 2023). The local council system directly affects the way a project can be managed, particularly through policy formulation, resource allocation, taxation, among others. The projects of antiquity left their mark on society and contributed to positive changes that generally benefited society and improved the living conditions of many people (Ronald & Kazaara, 2023). Resources, where they are widely used, support community and socio-economic development and promote people's well-being and well-being. One important part of local governance is that it gives government legitimacy in the eyes of the people it governs (Victoria et al., 2023). This can easily translate into good governance and build confidence in local staff to carry out various projects and programs that positively impact society and people. The process leading to the decision to implement a project can be as important as its actual implementation. The decision to implement a project often corresponds to political considerations rather than economic rationality (Polycarp et al., 2023). Again, it is important to examine whether such a decision follows a bottom-up or top-down approach. In case the efficiency and effectiveness of the project is affected. It is against this background that this research study will be conducted to determine the impact of the local council system on the implementation of government projects with a focus on the implementation of the Third Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) in Panyimur Sub County, Pakwach District. (Derrick et al., 2023).

Purpose of the study

The overall purpose of the study was to examine the influence of the local council system on the implementation of government projects in Panyimur Sub County- Pakwach district.

Specific objectives

1. To examine the challenges faced by local governments in the process of implementation of projects.
2. To assess the key legal mandates for local government influence on the implementation of government projects.
3. To examine the remedies to the challenges faced by the local councils in the implementation of government programmes.

Literature review

Although much of the policy debate on welfare reform has concentrated on the urban poor, nearly 20 percent of the welfare recipient resides outside of central cities and metropolitan areas. They along with rural working families, rely on various social services to help them move toward self-sufficiency. Affording rural residents access to social services is a challenge even in the in best of time (Kazaara et al., 2023).

Many of the challenges to service delivery in rural areas is similar to those faced in central cities and metropolitan areas. Whereas other social service delivery challenges are more formidable to rural locations, for example, access to affordable and adequate child care and convenient and reliable transportation is especially difficult in geographically isolated areas. Encouraging economic developments in these areas is also a challenge (Christopher & Felex, 2022).

The poor implementation of government projects by local councils has enormous implications on the nature of service provided by the councils to its people. Given that local councils constitutes that part of the public sector that is closest to the inhabitants and is therefore indispensable in its roles of promoting their general welfare through, inter alia, undertaking various development initiatives (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, & Komunda, 2022b). Further, legislation imposes upon the local authorities the obligation to promote the social and economic development of the local communities and to participate in implementing national development programmes. The efficiency and effectiveness with which local government fulfils its developmental role will largely depend on the ability of the local authorities to manage development projects (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, & Komunda, 2022b).

A study conducted by an online business-oriented site, 256 Business News reveals that Uganda loses 50% of public funds to poor project management. The weaknesses include inefficient planning, absorptive capacity constraints, poor project selection and implementation, inflated unit costs (Kazaara & Kazaara, 2023), issues with compensation and outright fraud. These challenges often lead to delays and delivery of substandard works (Gracious, 2023) as cited in the 256 Business News. These two authors argue that given the huge costs of these inefficiencies, eliminating them could easily double the stock of delivered infrastructure costs (Christopher, Komunda, et al., 2022).

Methodology

The study involved a cross sectional research design. The cross-sectional study design is defined as a type of observational research that analyzes data of variables collected at one given point in time across a sample population or pre-defined subset. This study was conducted in Panyimur Sub County. Panyimur sub county is one of the sub counties of Pakwach district located in the south western part of the district bordered by Pakwach sub county, Dei sub county, Parombo sub county in Nebbi district and Lake Albert and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The sub county covers an area of 168.2 square kilometers and a population of 54,000 people consisting of 26,700 males and 27,300 females as of 2020 and an annual population change of 3.8%. The study targeted those working in the local government, elected leaders, people from the civil society, the general citizen body, private contractors which implement government project, and others.

A sample size on the other hand is defined by (Joventi et al., 2023), as a number of elements that can be selected for the research. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), assert that the main consideration

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for determining the sample size is the capability to collect in depth data at affordable costs in terms of time, finances and resources Using this, the researcher sampled participants from within the sub county.

Selective and purposive sampling in the administrative department was used because of their knowledge in this subject matter and Simple random sampling method was used to ensure that each element in the study have equal chances to be included in the sample. The researcher employed random and purposive sampling techniques to obtain the population required. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents from the administration of Panyimur sub county, members of the NGOs and the private sector, and the community members from the sub county, the researcher used simple random sampling. The technique ensured an equal representation of the respondents in their position and will help to get key reliable and grass root data.

This included; 10 elected leaders including councilors and the sub county chairperson, 20 members of the technical staff including the sub county chief, community development officer, parish chiefs and others, 15 members of the civil society including community based organizations, non-governmental organizations, faith based organizations and other similar bodies operating in the sub county and 30 members of the community who are the direct beneficiaries of government projects implemented by the sub county and finally 5 participants were got from private companies who in most cases get contracted to implement projects by the government. This gave a total sample of 80 participants for this research study.

This sample size was be ideal in helping the researcher ascertain the challenges, legal frameworks and betterment of project implementation in local governments with focus on Panyimur sub county.

Category of participant	Number to be selected
Elected leaders	10
Technical staff	20
Private sector	5
Community members	30
Members of civil society	15
Total	80

Table I: The Participants

In order to get rid of inconsistencies, the data obtained from the research were subjected to sorting, classifying, coding, and tabulating using descriptive statistics which employed frequencies and percentages with the aid of the Statistical Package for social Sciences (SPSS) program (Nelson et al., 2022).

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using measures of central tendency; that is frequencies and percentages. For ease of analysis, the researcher analyzed the data collected in terms of objectives so as to answer the three-study questions.

RESULTS

Challenges face d by local councils while implementing government projects.

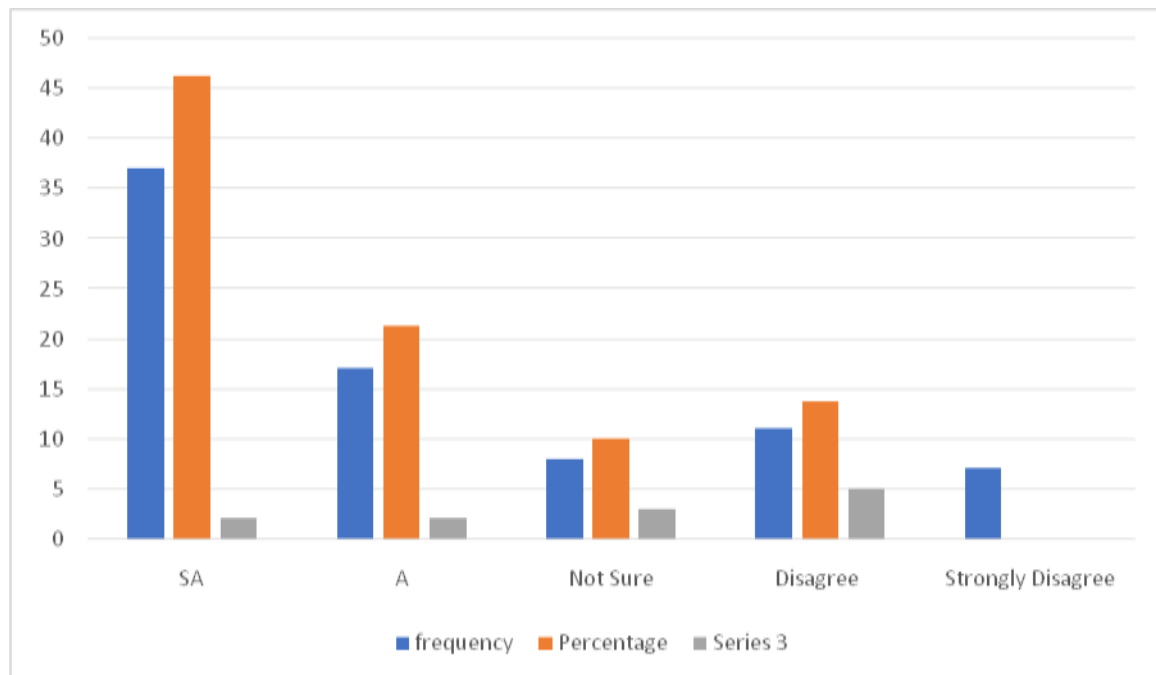


Figure 1. Source: Field data 2022

From the bar graph above, it is revealed that 46.25 of the respondents strongly agreed followed by 21.25 % who agreed that local councils indeed encounter enormous challenges when it comes to the formulation and implementation of government programmes and projects (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, & Muhammad, 2022). Those who were of the view that there are multiple challenges that local councils face in terms of project implementation accounted for approximately 67% of the total sample size. This therefore mean s that the multiplicity of challenges met by the local councils greatly impact on the quality and nature of the results from the implemented projects. In an interview with the different respondents engaged, it was revealed that local councils encounter huge challenges during project implementation which substantially affects the outcome of the project in question as it will fail to improve on the welfare of the target beneficiaries (Turyatamba et al., 2022). Respondents reported that the project performance of the local councils greatly deteriorates as they grapple with challenges such as corruption, limited manpower, delayed funding of the project activities by the funding agencies, limited participation and support by the local people as well as political influence by the political heads of local governments who tends to dictate the nature and where a given project is to be implemented (Wegulo et al., 2023).

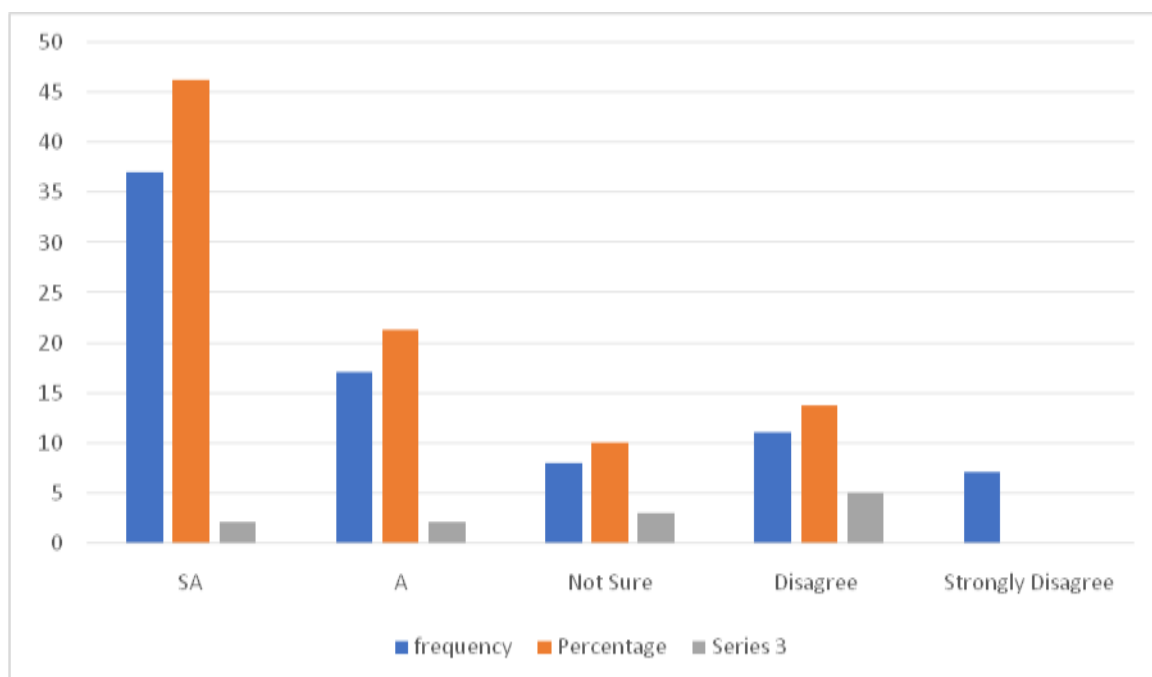
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The legal provisions that mandates local councils influence on the implementation of government projects

In order to come up with a concrete result, the researcher asked the respondents whether the available government laws, policies and instruments were supportive enough in the implementation of government projects by the local councils and their responses were as stipulated in the pie chart below:



From figure 2, it can be deduced that majority of the respondents concurred with the notion that the government policies impact on the manner in which local councils implement public projects in their localities. It is evidenced that 37 respondents which account for 46.25% strongly agreed with the notion, whereas 26 (32.5%) agreed with the notion though 3.75% (3) were not sure of the government policies dictating project implementation (Ntirandekura, 2022). However, those on the opposite who had a different view that government policies, laws and regulations did not have a direct influence on the implementation of public projects, in this case the NUSAF III project had a combined percentage of (14) 17.5%. Those on the affirmative summed up to 78.75% of the total respondents hence it shows that indeed such instruments have a direct control on the implementation of projects. “the government already has rules in place that governs project implementation and hence as local government we cannot come up with new ideas outside those provisions” “the activities of local councils are always constantly checked by the central government and this has helped in checking against corruption and mismanagement of project resources which has been

extremely rampant before” “the regulation of the activities of the local councils by the central government has limited the scope of activities carried out by the local councils as they cannot exercise any kind of discretion due to the strict supervision from government agencies” (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, & Komunda, 2022a)

Remedies to address the challenges faced by local councils in the implementation of government projects

The third objective of the study meant to come up with remedies to address the challenges that local councils face as they implement government projects aimed at improving the welfare of the local people they serve. It was guided by the question; *What remedies can be put in place to address the challenges faced by local councils in the implementation of government projects?* The researcher used questionnaires and interview guides to gather the needed data to examine this objective.

The participants came up with different activities and some of the themes that emerged were as follows;

Citizen’s involvement in the project process: The respondents strongly emphasized on the need to have the citizens who are the priority target beneficiaries of government projects and programmes to always be engaged.

When the local people are involved, they can help with better ideas as they are the ones who know what they lack in their communities, having on board will also ensure that they own the project and provide the needed security for the resulting goods or services of the project (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022). During the interview process, the following verbal arguments emerged among others on the need to have citizens included in the project cycle

“There is need to allow us the local people have a say during the designing of projects because we the one we know what we need not the government leaders”

“Efforts should be made to involve the local people I the project since they will be the custodians of the project results once it is completed and handed over to them. Sidelining them will prove disastrous”

“Citizen’s participation in government activities is a human right and as civil society who advise the local government to allow them to participate in the project process as it is a way the citizens can exercise their constitutional rights”

The concept of public participation is linked to democracy. Participation makes the individual feel his importance and human dignity and his sense of being an effective component in the development of public policies of the local unit with the ability to influence decision-making related to local affairs (Alrasheed, 2008). The patterns and forms of public participation vary from the flow of information between local government councils and citizens (communication) to dialog between the two parties (consultation) and reaches the maximum limit of participation in production (co-production) (Brian & Jacob, 2023).

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Conclusions.

Based on the information obtained from the field and backed up by the available literature, it can be deduced that local councils indeed can have a great influence on the kind of projects they implement within their jurisdictions, though they are hindered by the challenges identified above and some legal provisions which limit their freedoms to implement projects. However, if the identified hiccups are sorted, the local councils have the capacity to develop and implement public projects which would have a profound and immediate effect on bettering the wellbeing of the local people they serve (Richard et al., 2023).

Recommendations

The government should consider developing policies that can provide an enabling environment for local governments to effectively implement development projects. The policies which inhibit the actions of local councils should be revised and proper mechanisms put in place to support local governments

Local governments need to come up with better mechanisms which can encourage local citizens to participate in the government programmes which affects them. They can do this through engaging the locals from the beginning to end of the project process. Through organizing workshops and seminars, community outreaches, radio talk shows where views of the locals are sought, providing for community dialogues and conducting researches on the primary overarching needs of the locals. The government and other development agencies who fund local government projects should ensure that there is proper and timely disbursement of funds to the local councils so that they can implement projects on timely basis. This is because delay in giving out project funds can have a profound effect the quality of the results of the project.

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