

Government paying for air in new districts

BUTALEJA

By George Bitu

One of the district officials in Butaleja often leaves his jacket on his office seat to dupe visitors that he is in the vicinity.

According to Richard Waya, the LC5 chairperson, the concerned officer rarely settles in the office.

"He only appears on Monday and from Tuesday till the end of the week, it is his coat that 'sits in for him'. It is rumoured that he has another job outside the local government," Waya says.

In Namutumba district, the LC5 chairperson, Saleh Kumbuga, expresses concern over latecoming followed by early departure from the district headquarters.

"It is common for staff to reach work after 9:00am and leave by 2:00pm, way out of the official schedule. All staff have accommodation in the nearby Iganga district," Kumbuga notes.

In Buvuma Islands district, all local government staff board the ferry at Kiyindi landing site at 9:00am, reaching Kironko landing site by 10:00am. The taxi to Kitamiro town council arrives at midday, yet at 2:00pm, staff must sign out so as to make it for the last ferry crossing to the mainland by 4:00pm.

Adrian Ddungu, the district chairperson, observed that the ferry's timetable dictates the amount of work done by staff.

The Butaleja, Namutumba and Buvuma scenarios seem to be just the tip of the iceberg. Most local government employees in districts created after the year 2000 are struggling to satisfactorily do adequate work.

Why the slow pace?

Dr Ivan Mukasa, the Butaleja district health officer, argues that new local governments are based on models of old districts, yet they have inferior set-ups.

"A district health officer, for example, has to head a hospital, which is lacking in most new local governments. We, instead, usually have several health centre facilities with the district health officer as the only medical doctor," Mukasa laments.

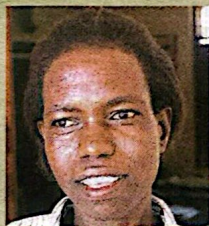
Peterson Basalirwa, the Kaliro district education officer, cites underfunding of some sectors as the reason why there is no work for officers.

"For example in the last financial year, Butege Primary School needed classroom blocks for 1,400 learners, but it received funds for only one classroom block. This meant



Buvuma district officials before boarding the ferry which leaves Kironko landing site at 4:00pm. The officials arrive for work at midday and leave at 2:00pm, in time to catch the ferry. Photo by George Bitu

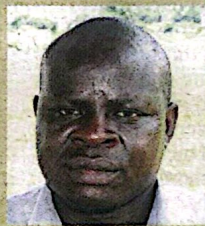
WHAT OFFICIALS SAY



Abisagi Logose, Kibuku district worker
Whenever duty calls, members of staff respond accordingly. Unfortunately, in these new local governments, there isn't much work to do.



Henry Naabye, Namutumba district planner
There is a need for better planning to ensure members of staff regularly attend to their duties. Whenever an official is not in office, it means a loss of revenue for the Government.



Edward Kamaga, Kaliro district inspector of schools
Laxity towards duty is a trait in some individuals. But I think with the right rules in force, members can be forced to get in line.

"The hilly terrain, coupled with bad soil texture, makes the movement of vehicles difficult. Most times, cars are abandoned along the way," he says.

Way forward

Fred Bangu, the Buyende resident district commissioner, calls for more supervision of local government workers to ensure efficiency.

Sulaiman Ogajo Baraza, the Mayuge RDC, suggests that no official should leave his or her duty station without informing the immediate supervisor.

"This could stimulate some kind of self-discipline and make workers be in office more regularly. The Government spends a lot of money on salaries and it makes no sense not to account for it through work done," Baraza argues.

Richard Gulume, the Butaleja RDC, cautions local government workers against taking jobs for granted.

"The level of unemployment is so high out. So, those with jobs should treat them with the respect they deserve," Gulume warns.

During a recent meeting with chief administrative officers at Hotel Africana in Kampala, local government state minister Jennifer Namuyangu appealed to them to address issues affecting service delivery in local governments as a matter of urgency.

"We need to lay strategies to strengthen and support the local government sector in delivery of services. This is what will prepare the ground for effective implementation of government programmes," Namuyangu implored.

that the insufficient funds resulted in little work for the district engineer to supervise," Basalirwa adds.

David Lubuuka, the chief administrative officer of Bududa district, attributes the little work done by staff to the fact that the local government is the most affected when there is a disaster.

"We have a high population density of 700-1,000 persons per square kilometre. The land surface is inadequate for the populace and every time it rains, everyone is worried about landslides," Lubuuka asserts.

The scenario elsewhere

Godfrey Ouma, the Namayingo district inspector of schools, argued that 'fish starts rotting from the head'.

"In Namayingo, the top managers worship on a working day — Friday. Therefore, business at the district closes on Friday mornings," Ouma explains.

According to him, those seeking services from the district headquarters get attended to successfully on only four days of the week.

Betty Namboozie, the Mukono Municipality MP, refers to Buyende district as one case of a new local government whose employees behave like 'nomads'.

"During a recent parliamentary committee tour in the area, the district workers also appeared like visitors. In fact, after our tour, a number of them were asking for lifts in our van back to Kamuli town,"

Namboozie observed.

Challenges

There are instances when development partners want to help move things in new local governments, but are let down by bureaucracy.

Dr Sarah Kasewa, the Kaliro district health officer, says lack of land titles for health facilities is a stumbling block to development.

"Many times, we have got donors willing to push us to another level. However, when they start asking for mandatory land titles as security for setting up structures, we fail to deliver," Kasewa laments.

Lubuuka cites bad road networks as another stumbling block in the path of staff in new local governments.