

Comment

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Mr John Walugembe, ex-tax on used clothes: "The go

EDITORIAL

Public service reforms shouldn't be superficial

The move by the Government of Uganda (GoU) to embrace a civil service performance management process intended to reward excellence and punish slackness is a step in the right direction. The Head of Public Service and Secretary to Cabinet, Ms Lucy Nakyobe, recently announced the plan to conduct the performance appraisals while at the retreat in Kyankwanzi for newly-elected lawmakers aligned to the ruling NRM party. Dispensing with a flawed approach that many rightly dismissed for being riddled with bias will, if followed to the letter, undoubtedly improve operations in the civil service. Ms Kyobe said the results-oriented approach will be designed to measure actual implementation of projects and services, with a carrot-and-stick take culminating in not just a reshuffling of senior public officials like permanent secretaries but also dismissals. The latter specifically applies to non-performing staff. Which is just as well.

The issue:

Public service.

Our view:

We urge the GoU to go the whole nine yards and effect reforms that will address the root problem that has the civil service convulsing in its death throes. Surface level reforms can only do so much.

It would, however, be foolhardy to ignore the fact that this is not the first time that similar attempts have been undertaken to address long-standing gaps in public sector accountability and service delivery.

The previous promises have barely moved the needle insofar as contributing to constructive civil service reform is concerned. If anything they have only gone to some lengths to ameliorate some of the worst features of an evidently badly-designed performance management process.

They have hardly resolved the troubling features of the afore-said badly-designed process. There is an overwhelming body of evidence indicating that the outcome of performance reviews in civil service has been left not just to chance but pure, unadulterated corruption.

The system that has been willed into existence is one where performance appraisals are prone to bias shaped by so-called brown envelopes. The immovability of senior managers and line managers in civil service is predicated upon an opaque moderation or validation process where palms are allegedly greased with a disturbing regularity.

We hope that the GoU will finally crack the code, and come up with a coherent approach that will unravel the opaqueness from which many players in the civil service profit whilst barely doing what is expected of them. For one, the GoU has talked favourably about contract renewals being designed to ensure that civil servants do not rest on their laurels. And, in a sense, it has. If only for those that are not in the habit of greasing the palms of their bosses.

These, as conventional wisdom points out, are few and far between. This has therefore turned out to be a classic example of papering over cracks. We urge the GoU to go the whole nine yards and effect reforms that will address the root problem that has the civil service convulsing in its death throes. Surface level reforms can only do so much.

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