

Analysis of the Pre-colonial, Colonial, and Post-Colonial Bureaucracy of Uganda.*Masokoyi Wasswa****ABSTRACT**

This paper analyses the nature of bureaucracy in Uganda from the pre-colonial period to the present. The study was undertaken because the nature of bureaucracy in Uganda has been changing under the influence of political, economic and social trends. There is therefore, need to know the effect of these changes on the bureaucracy in Uganda and to compile this information in a single record. The paper draws on the political history and Public Service literature on Uganda to derive major insights on the nature of bureaucracy and makes conclusions on its trend. The analysis indicates that the bureaucracy has been changing in terms of size, skills and values according to the paradigm shifts that have affected public administration globally and nationally, and according to the internal political and economic situation as well. The analysis also reveals that the Ugandan bureaucracy is in a constant struggle to improve its welfare and remuneration by government. The paper concludes by noting that as the world continues to change, bureaucracy in Uganda will also continue to change and remain dynamic.

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Key words: bureaucracy, paradigm shifts, remuneration

INTRODUCTION:

Bureaucracy in Uganda has been growing and changing. During the pre-colonial period, it was basically traditional serving the interests of traditional leaders, (Karugire, 1980). The kings appointed chiefs to serve their own interests. In the colonial times the bureaucracy was both traditional and bureaucratic. It was traditional in the sense that the British, who colonized Uganda, under the policy of indirect rule, maintained the traditional chiefs as civil servants under the 1900 Buganda agreement, (Mamdani, 1999).

It was also bureaucratic because of the British model of administration that was introduced alongside the traditional leadership of the Kabaka of Buganda which was later on rolled out in the whole of Uganda.

From independence to date the bureaucracy has been exclusively bureaucratic serving the government of Uganda under the control of the president and the Public Service Commission, (Kanyehamba, 2012). It has however grown in terms of size and skills since independence but highly influenced by politics from the regimes that have ruled Uganda, (Kabwegyere, 1995).

Studies indicate that the bureaucracy in Uganda has been largely influenced by ideological, political, economic and social trends that account for its ever changing nature, (Oyugi, 1994), (Langseth et al, 1996), (Almond et al ,2008). The influences to the bureaucracy in Uganda have not only changed its form but affected its values as well. Issues of corruption, lack of responsiveness and inefficiency have been cited to be characterizing the Ugandan bureaucracy. The inefficiencies therefore, have led the government from time to time to adopt various strategies to avert the situation. Some of the strategies adopted since the 1980's has been New Public Management and Governance, (Langseth et al, 1996).

Despite all these changes and happenings in the bureaucracy in Uganda, little has been done to analyse it and bring out its characteristics in a single record from the pre-colonial period to date. This paper has attempted to fill this gap.

The paper concludes by observing that bureaucracy in Uganda has been growing and developing in terms of size and skills under the influence of different paradigm shifts and the internal political situation in Uganda. These forces have also had positive and negative influences on the values of the bureaucracy.

UGANDA (PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD)

Uganda in the pre-colonial period had two types of governance. The centralized states and sedentary clans, (Kabwegyere, 1995). The centralized states included the kingdoms of Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole and Busoga. These were ruled by kings under a centralized administration. The kings mainly ruled through councils and local chiefs who were appointed as the King pleased. The role of the chiefs was mainly to keep law and order, collect taxes and to mobilize the masses for collective action for example building of roads, wells and for security purposes.

In the segmented societies for example Acholi, lango, Teso, Bugisu, Bukedi, Lugbara, Karamoja Kigezi and Alur, administration was based on clans headed by clan leaders, (kanyeihamba, 2012). The role of the clan leaders was basically to keep law and order, solve disputes, organize cultural functions and to mobilize masses for collective or social projects. Both in centralized and segmented societies in Uganda leadership during the pre-colonial period was based on traditional arrangements. Those who were in charge of these societies in centralized states were chosen because they were born to Kings or Chiefs. These appointments were traditional. They were not based on merit or technical expertise.

In segmented societies, the clan leaders were either children of former clan heads appointed according to wealth, charisma or courage during harder times like war and natural disaster or people appointed according to their status in society. The Weberian bureaucracy is difficult to trace at this time because of the absence of its characteristics in the real sense of the word.

Weber observed that a bureaucratic organization should be impersonal which means that decisions are made without personal considerations, (Prasad, 2010). This was greatly lacking in the pre-colonial period because everything depended on the Kabaka or King's wish. Weber also observed that in a bureaucratic organization, the organization is based on written rules. During the pre-colonial period, Uganda's leadership was based on traditional rules which were not written down but found in traditional norms.

Further to the above, the Weberian bureaucracy requires that staffs are appointed on merit according to their technical expertise, (Malcolm, 1989). During the pre-colonial era officials in the centralized states were appointed according to their birth status (i.e. whether born from a royal family or a local one) and jobs were given not based on one's technical ability but the status of birth. This therefore, sharply contradicts the Weberian bureaucracy which emphasizes recruitment based on technical merit. Furthermore, Weber observes that a bureaucratic organization should have officials who hold career positions and are appointed and promoted on merit, (Hitt et al, 1989). Although officials in the pre-colonial Uganda held positions for a longer period probably until they died, their appointment was not based on merit.

Bureaucracy also requires that decisions are made according to standard operating procedures written in policies, decisions. During this pre-colonial era, decisions were made basing on personal judgment and discretion without due regard to any written rules or guidelines. Of course, standard operating procedures would not be thought of in an era where people did not know how to read and write.

At the time Weber introduced bureaucracy societies were being managed traditionally. His bureaucracy was an effort to improve the excesses of traditional and charismatic leadership, (Tripath et al, 2008). It would be therefore, an overstatement to expect to find bureaucratic principles in a traditional arrangement which is an alternative of bureaucracy on the same continuum of leadership and organization. All in all, according to the above discussion, it is difficult to assert that there was a bureaucracy during the pre-colonial era in Uganda. Administration was largely traditional, un technical, and not based on merit. There were no written records because people did not know how to read and write. All these negate the existence of bureaucracy in the weberian sense. The major point to note about this era is that the administration was majorly traditional and driven by traditional norms.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

In 1884, Britain declared Uganda a British protectorate (Mamdani, 1999). By this declaration, Uganda came under a law. "Africa order in council of 1889", which authorized the local consul to establish local jurisdiction under which he was to exercise considerable executive, judicial and administrative powers (Kanyehamba, 2002). The officer responsible for the administration of the protectorate was called the commissioner. He was assisted by a deputy commissioner both of whom were responsible to the Secretary of State in Britain. The commissioner was vested with the powers of Government of Uganda. The commissioner also had powers to make laws, rules and regulations. He was responsible for the administration of justice, the raising of revenue and generally for the peace, order and good government of all persons in Uganda.

Ibid (2002). These functions required that the commissioner is assisted by some staff. After the signing of 1900 Buganda Agreement, the British took full control of Uganda and in 1902 an order in council was enacted and provisions were made for the administration of Uganda.

Under Art, 15 of the order, a High Court of Uganda known as the Majesty's High Court of Uganda was established with full civil and criminal jurisdictions in all cases and over all persons in Uganda. Judges of this court were appointed and dismissed at the pleasure of the King in Britain. Art.10 of the order gave the commissioner, power to appoint, discipline and dismiss public officers, magistrates and judges other than those of the High court, (Ibid,2002). These appointments and many others signified the beginning of formal bureaucracy in Uganda. The British however, used indirect rule to govern Uganda meaning that although they took over the administration of Uganda because they did not have enough staff, they used the native structures of administration and their chiefs to assist them run the country hence combining the British model of administration and the traditional one. Under the 1900 agreement the native chiefs became salaried civil servants of the colonial government. This was a big milestone in the development of the bureaucracy in Uganda for the first-time workers were salaried and governed under written law. Other officials

appointed to serve the colonial government included the colonial clerks, clergymen ,interpreters, primary school teachers, administrative chiefs, sergeants, policemen and soldiers' who were controlled by the orders of one man-The commissioner, (Kabwegyere 1995). The traditional leaders lost control of these civil servants to the British. The major role of this bureaucracy was to assist the British to govern Uganda and all of them were under the patronage of the commissioner who was the head of the Colonial Government.

Kanyehamba (2002) further says that while it is true that other public officials assisted the commissioner, the fact that he exercised patronage over them made them mere tools for the implementation of the commissioner's policies rather than government officials with a separate functional role. The period 1902 and 1920 may be described as despotic and dictatorial in terms of Public Service management because the commissioner had arbitrary powers over every body and he was final in his decisions as far as civil servants were concerned. Other civil servants in the protectorate included the Chief Secretary, the Attorney General, Finance Secretary, Director of Medical Services, Director of Agriculture and the resident of Buganda who were all British, (Karugire 1980). These officials were technically competent compared to the native officers who were traditionally appointed. Because of lack of expertise the native officers basically served as clerical officers to facilitate the British to do their work. In 1919, in order to organize the civil service, a native authority ordinance was passed which clarified the powers, duties and privileges of the African chiefs in all the protectorate areas except Buganda. The duties included the following:

- i) Maintenance of law and order and the prevention of the commission of crimes
- ii) Prohibition of the carrying of arms by Africans.
- iii) Requisitioning of free labour for public projects.
- iv) Prevention of crimes, Karugire (1980).

This was the first time in the history of Uganda that duties were being specified for government officials and written down in form of a document as Weber specified in formal bureaucracy. During the colonial

period the senior and middle ranks of the Uganda civil service were monopolized by the white and Asian personnel. The Africans were confined to the positions of junior clerks, office messengers, cooks and Shamba boys. Accordingly, until independence the Uganda civil service was an alien institution with weak roots in the African society. The bulk of the African population was isolated from this institution by the politics of indirect rule and the separate system of native authorities. (Langseth et al, 1996).

As colonial administration expanded it became necessary for the British to have more civil servants who were technical. Consequently, the missionaries in the 1920 started establishing schools to offer formal education. Schools like Namilyango, Makerere technical college, Gayaza and Buddo were established. These schools trained clerks, clergymen, primary teachers and interpreters who later on served as government bureaucrats in the native wing. The opening of these schools marked the beginning of formal training for civil servants and it was a big milestone in the development of bureaucracy in Uganda. The students who attended these schools were sons and daughters of the royal families and chiefs, (Kabwegyere, 1995). Consequently, these formed the majority of the first civil servants in the colonial government and even immediately after independence. These civil servants at first worked in the central Colonial Government and the Buganda Government. However, in 1949 a Local Government ordinance was passed establishing districts based on tribes, (Karugire, 1980). Consequently, the bureaucracy was expanded to districts. District commissioners were appointed to take charge of the districts but these were all British. In 1955, the 1949 Local Government ordinance was amended and placed the chiefs under the district councils. In the same year 1955 a Public Service Commission was established for the first time but only to advise the Governor, powers to appoint still remained with him. The implication of the tribally based districts was that the civil servants in these districts would be appointed from within the district, a thinking which encouraged tribalism in the civil service than a national outlook. The civil service was also discriminatory protestants were preferred to Catholics and Muslims which Karugire attributes to the reason that the British were protestants. This unfortunate

situation permeated the post independence civil service and it remains a problem even up today.

Colonial administration was characterized by arbitrary rule. Power was concentrated in the field officials which they exercised arbitrarily, (Kabwegyere, 1995). This arbitrariness was carried even in the civil service after independence, until today we still experience some arbitrary use of power in the civil service which was inherited from the colonial administration.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the colonial bureaucracy was based on traditional and the British mode of governance through the indirect rule. It was not skillful in the beginning but improved as schools were opened to provide education basically for the children of the Kings and Chiefs who formed the majority of the civil servants. The civil service served the interests of the colonialists than the interests of the natives, they also exercised arbitrary rule. The civil service was discriminatory in terms of religion. Some of these problems were inherited at independence and they remain a problem even today.

POST COLONIAL UGANDA

In 1962 Uganda gained independence from the British colonialists. The civil service that was inherited from the British was viable and had gained some experience and training. However, it was not enough to cover the independence human resource need created by the departure of the British. The immediate challenge was to Africanize the bureaucracy which was basically alien during colonialism. Obote who became Prime Minister after independence began to use the civil service to award jobs to his UPC Party supporters irrespective of whether they qualified or not. (Karugire, 1980). This kind of political influence began to erode the independence and the impartiality of the civil service. It meant that the bureaucracy had become politicized and therefore, lost the impartiality it was supposed to exercise. There was also victimization of those who were sympathizers of the Kabaka of Buganda Muteesa II, after the 1966 conflict with Obote who eventually deposed him and abolished the kingdoms, (Kanyehimba, 2002). Those who supported the

Kabaka were removed from their jobs and replaced by Obote supporters.

The Public Service commission, like under the colonial government had only an advisory role to the prime minister who was Obote. He had the powers to appoint and dismiss the civil servants at will.

It also meant that the bureaucracy had become polarized between the traditionalists who supported the Kabaka and the Republicans who supported Obote.

Given this kind of situation it was hard to expect a productive bureaucracy. Civil servants were only worried about appeasing their political heads rather than service to the people.

Matters became worse when Iddi Amin took over government in 1971. The Military regime left the Public servants little discretion and they worked in a regimented climate nurtured through fear for personal safety, (Maxon ,1994). The Public Service was working on military orders rather than Public Service regulations. This state of affairs left the Public Service system of control broken down; organizational processes i.e. communication, coordination, team work disrupted and above all the breakdown of work ethics. It is thought that lack of ethics in the Uganda bureaucracy started at this time.

The civil servants were demoralized and became resentful of their work situation. Many left the country for their safety and looked for jobs elsewhere. When Amin was over thrown 1979 and broken down in the Obote regime did not do much to correct the past mistakes because ethnicity and patronage played a great role in recruitment, promotion and personal advancement. Jobs were again given to UPC supporters and cadres rather than those who merited for them.

Those who were not UPC supporters were unfairly dismissed or suspended. The Public Service was full of mistrust, ethnic based intrigues and even murders, (Mamdani, 1999). Civil servants ceased to be productive and started to look for ways of making money by any means provided it succeeded.

The Obote regime was over thrown and in 1986 the NRM Government under President Yoweri Museveni took over. President Museveni in his swearing in ceremony in 1986 declared that his coming was not a mere change of guards but a fundamental change in Uganda. This meant that everything was to change politically, economically and socially for the better.

Among the changes his government proposed was the Public Service reform to provide for a well-paid and efficient Public Service to change the inefficiencies of the past. In 1992 the government payroll had 320,000 employees among these were “ghost workers, redundant employees, those above retirement age and poor performers, (Langseth, 1996). By 1994, the number of employees had been reduced to 145,000 through a cleaning process of the payroll. Among other reforms that were included in the Public Service reforms programme was the monetization of major housing and transformation benefits with support from the International Development Agency (IDA), IMF and World Bank. The other reform apart from reducing the civil service staff through a retrenchment programme was the introduction of the Result Orientated Management (ROM) tool to measure the performance of the civil servants.

There was also a proposal to establish and implement a minimum living wage based pay for civil servants to enable them cope with inflation in acquiring their basic needs from the market.

These were reforms occasioned by the new public management paradigm in the 1980's to try and improve service delivery. The reforms became conditions over which to give development loans to less developed countries, (Bissessar, 2002). Uganda embarked on a retrenchment programme in 1993 which saw many people losing their jobs. All these were very good proposals at the time but they did not last long and little was achieved. Shortly after retrenchment of the redundant and over aged civil servants and the demobilization of the army, recruitment started again especially with the creation of new districts.

The promised minimum wage for civil servants was not realized majorly due to budgetary constraints. The cost of Public Administration started to go up

because government employed more civil servants like RDC's, DISO's more teachers to cater for new programs like U.P.E and more policemen to keep law and order to pacify the country.

Because of the poor pay and other factors, the quality of service in government has been on the decline. To drive the point of poor, pay in the Public Service home, recently the teachers staged a strike through their Uganda National teachers Union (UNATU) and they refused to teach for two weeks when the third term of 2013 opened in September. Government had promised to give them a 15% increment on their salary by July 2013 in the New Year's budget which they failed to honor.

There are complaints of non-responsiveness on the side of civil servants. Political patronage is still a problem. Ministers have been reported to be involved in the misappropriation of government funds for example the CHOGM funds that were misused by government Ministers. Recently the Public Service has also been accused of a lot of corruption and misuse of government funds for personal gain, such cases have been reported in the prime minister's office and the ministry of Public Service where certain officials have been prosecuted (the kazinda case of 2013 in the anticorruption court of Uganda). Because of the complaints of non-responsiveness government is trying to involve stakeholders to manage Public Services by disaggregation of government bodies and adopting programmes like public, private partnership (PPP). This means reducing the discretion of public servants in delivering Public Services.

CONCLUSION

All in all, the post-colonial bureaucracy has been characterized by political patronage, poor pay and increased corruption. The proposed reforms in the 1990's have not fostered its professional performance and a lot has been left to be desired in the general performance of the bureaucracy since the colonial time especially in serving the interests of the people of Uganda.

From the pre-colonial period, it is evident that the bureaucracy in Uganda has been changing as the forces it serves change. Major influences of this bureaucracy have been tradition, colonialism and post

colonialism for the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial periods respectively. From the 1980's major paradigm shifts in public administration have also been a factor in changing bureaucracy in Uganda. This bureaucracy will continue to change as the world changes because it is not independent of the global forces.

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