

Technical – politics dichotomy in Mid-Western Uganda: Interrelationship between municipal councillors and administrators in service delivery

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to analyse the interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators in municipal councils in mid-western Uganda.

Research Methodology: The study took a case study design, which was adopted by seeing that the problem under investigation involved a rigorous inquiry of the multiple elements that contribute to the uniqueness of public service delivery. A sample of 48 was realised from a population of 55; these were selected using the proportionate stratified sampling technique followed by a simple random sample for each of the strata. A questionnaire was used to seek opinions from both municipal councillors and administrators regarding interrelationships and public service delivery. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics to generate Means (μ) and Standard Deviations.

Results: Results suggest that the degree of interrelationship between the two stakeholders is poor for municipal councillors, yet they ought to represent the voting population; the level of municipal service delivery is average a non-linear association concerning the interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators on public service delivery in municipal councils in mid-western Uganda

Limitations: This study was only concentrated in mid-western Uganda, yet the country has 41 municipalities suggesting that the results are not representative of the conditions in the whole country.

Contribution: The results of this study can be useful to both locally elected councillors and the appointed administrators serving at Municipalities in Uganda by aiding them to improve work-relationship for better service delivery.

Keywords: *Municipal councillor, Administrators, Interrelationship, Public service delivery*

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1. Introduction

The inadequacies of traditional public administration gave rise to New Public Management (NPM) as a system of changing from traditional public administration to results and personal accountability, that is, from rule-orientation to result-orientation as well as a changing from traditional bureaucratic practices to more flexible organisations and terms of employment ([Ghrmay, 2020:260](#); [McSweeney & Safai, 2020:410](#)). One of the central issues that came along is that government functions faced challenges from market practices such as contracting out ([Ho Mok, Kwan Chan & Wen, 2020](#); [Rho,](#)

[Kim & Han, 2020](#)), tagging payment on performance ([Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020:1120](#)) and reducing the size of organisations, which led to a robust movement towards reducing government functions through market-based service delivery. NPM is a consequence of several endeavours, which aimed to offer remedies to multifaceted challenges to public policy ([Lapsley & Segato, 2019:553](#)). Consequently, from the 1970s, governments faced severe resource constraints as taxes declined. During the 1980s, a number of changes in governments such as the United Kingdom (UK) and the USA under Margret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, respectively. For example, in the UK, Compulsory competitive tendering [CCT] was introduced aimed to support public service delivery.

New public management became a managerial thought based on ideas of the private sector brought into the public sector. The movement focused on key reforms in the public sector and sought to address a variety of reforms inspired by the view that PSM techniques and market mechanisms increase public sector efficiency. Some of the reforms advocated under NPM are; performance management systems, increased responsibility of public managers, the introduction of market mechanisms into the public sector, and introduction of quality management techniques, among many others ([Douglas, Hood, Overmans & Scheepers, 2019:1560](#); [Dahlgaard, Reyes, Chen & Dahlgaard-Park, 2019:S3](#)). One of the key elements introduced under NPM is decentralising management within the public sector, which then gave rise to local government entities ([Spirandeli, Dean, Babcock & Braich, 2019:2508](#)). Consequently, many countries the world over have adopted some form of decentralisation as a way of delivering services to communities, seeing that the central government continues to be constrained and cannot reach every community.

Recent studies (such as [Musenze & Mayende, 2019](#) and [Engdaw, 2020](#)) attest to the shift towards giving more attention to structures that are charged with delivering public services to the public as more communities demand quality service and value for money when delivering those services. To this end, the narrative for service delivery, whether rural or urban, has become very exciting and desirable as communities increasingly become aware of their right to quality services despite the location. Since local governments are central in delivering much of the services to communities, the main stakeholders (municipal councillors and administrators) remain at the fore of accountability for the delivery of any services in time or desired quality ([Biljohn & Lues, 2020](#)). A case is often put forth that the quality of services delivered should be given high priority so as to enhance the livelihoods of communities. For example, a study by [Leonce \(2020\)](#) reveals that when the quality of healthcare is assured, a number of illnesses are avoided, and the cost which would have been put to ill-health is, instead, invested in economic activities for members of a community. Additionally, when quality education is offered to the community, members gain more awareness in living healthier, nutritious, and safe lives ([Jani, Alias & Tumin, 2020](#)). Thus, local governments become very significant conduits to ensuring better socioeconomic livelihoods for a number of communities.

Confronted with an ever-growing deficit in service delivery, the National resistance movement (NRM) government sought to introduce local governance so as to encourage and sustain democratic involvement through a system of elected local councils ([Onzima, 2013:3](#)). The local councils (LCs) were perceived to be essential in bolstering the socioeconomic progress of communities and the country as a whole. That way, the government of Uganda incorporated the elements of NPM through democratic local governance, including ensuring quality public service delivery to every community. A study by [Bulthuis et al. \(2020\)](#) reveals that the primary motivation for embracing such reforms was that the local governments would be mandated to deliver quality, efficient and effective public services in their specific jurisdictions. However, over the years, the delivery of public services has not been in tandem with the primary target since the interrelationship between key stakeholders (i.e., municipal councillors and administrators) is not clearly analysed nor strengthened. Ideally, through their respective council, municipal councillors are expected to function as a local parliament, leaving the administrators to implement the lawful resolutions of the council. This requires effective communication between the two parties so that appropriate feedback is given about the achievement and or accomplishment of targets otherwise stated at the commencement every financial year ([Twamley, Dempsey & Keane, 2020](#)).

Also, there is laxity on the aspect of a minimum level of formal training needed of one to become a municipal councillor, yet the council is mandated to oversee the administrators. The irony with this is that if a municipal councillor does not understand what he/she is supervising, then the entire process is a total waste of public resources. Yet, the administrators are required to be well trained so as to be able to deliver public services with confidence ([Parliament of the Republic of Uganda, 2020](#)). A particular case is where the district councillor has no specific requirement as regards formal training as long he/she is not a member of the executive yet every member on the district technical planning committee is required to have attained a minimum of post-graduate training. This irony has perpetuated tension between the municipal councillor and the administrators as the technical wing complains that those in charge of supervising them are not competent enough to do so ([Manyak & Katono, 2010](#)). This state of affairs continues to compromise the interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators in a number of local governments in Uganda.

Public service and public service delivery

The [Republic of Uganda \(2013:2\)](#) describes a public service as a product delivered or an action that is undertaken to fulfil the priorities of a wide range of communities. This calls for service providers to bear in mind the notion of effectiveness by ensuring that the service provider comprehends the community's real needs; this requires information, products, and guidance designed to the particular needs of communities ([Hall et al. 2020](#)). Service delivery denotes a link between decision-makers, service providers, and the service users and embraces both services and their supportive structures. To others, service delivery is an instrument adopted by an organisation so as to meet the community needs and objectives for which it is mandated to serve. The service delivery process suggests that confidence in local governments stems from a proven ability to deliver services in a way consistent with both national goals and community priorities. Consequently, the capacity of a local government to remain consistent with the national service delivery goals is a cause of integrity on their side ([Mwesigwa & Oladapo, 2021](#)). However, local governments are faced with a deep quiz when they are not successful in meeting expectations of a community (especially under contracted local services) in issues of liability, efficient and effective utilisation of public resources, quality of communication, and procedures of making policy ([Shakirova, 2019](#)).

Despite the fact that researchers have more interest in local governance, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there has been an unsatisfying shortage of studies that aimed to draw awareness of public service delivery from the perspective of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators. Short of such an awareness, it would be challenging to examine the achievement or failure of decentralised service delivery. As a result, the choice to raise the performance of local governments is grounded on assumption and estimation. Using a case study of a local government in mid-western Uganda (henceforth termed the) and by means of the academic foundation of localism, this article reveals that the interrelationship between municipal councillors and administrators is not always linear. Such a revelation on the key stakeholders might have an impact on the delivery of the hitherto decentralised public services. Certainly, the excellence of public services has been stuck in several issues such as planning, monitoring, and accountability.

The [Republic of Uganda \(2013:2\)](#) outlines the international principles guiding service delivery: it should be available at the time and scale that the community needs it; be provided on a regular basis and in good time; be presented in user-specific layouts so that the community can fully appreciate; be intended to respond to community needs; be used in counteracting a community problem or meeting a need thereof; be supplied in a way that allows it to be accepted by members of a community in given environments of policymaking; respond to the changing priorities of communities; be reasonably priced and reliable over time, and appropriate to diverse kinds of methods. This study focussed on those principles which apply to service in local governments.

This article is organised into five parts. The subsequent part focuses on local governance so as to offer a background of decentralised service delivery. In section two of this part, we examine localism as a theoretical basis by which the interrelationships are analysed. The fourth part clarifies the design that was adopted in the study of the interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators.

Finally, the last two parts give the outcomes of this investigation as well as the discussion on the interrelationships within the perspective of public service delivery preceding the inferences.

2. Theoretical review

The intergovernmental relations (IGRs) approach is very dominant to local governance since it emphasises a pool of undertakings and /or dealings between different government components of every kind and level in the administrative structure. IGRs have five separate features, viz. it makes out the range of interactions between all kinds of government ([Underwood, 2020:420](#)); it gives emphasis to the relations between individuals ([Rotenberg, 2019:168](#)), particularly public administrators; it is a constant and comfortable collaboration ([Nurkin & Hinata-Yamaguchi, 2020:8](#); [McNamara, Miller-Stevens & Morris, 2020:52](#)); it maintains the responsibilities entrusted to every public official, whether elected or appointed; and it gives emphasis to the partisan nature of interactions and concentrates on functional procedures especially issues of monetary. The IGRs approach, as an instrument, can be used to facilitate the interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators during the process of public service delivery by inculcating in the local government officials an awareness that their actions are continually reliant on and are affected by their counterparts whom they need to regularly collaborate with. This recognition can aid the technical officials to know that they need to have a decent rapport with municipal councillors since the municipal councillor is constantly inspecting the administrators. For example, a study by [Gebresenbet and Kamski \(2019\)](#) reveals a paradox among public servants and political figures in Ethiopia. Increasing awareness on the proper relationships, for example, through timely meetings between the administrators and municipal councillors, can bolster both officials to become relaxed, noting the benefits ensuing from that relationship. Also, IGRs can enable disciplinary actions in a way that during joint council meetings, there will be no monetary rewards for or appreciation of administrators whose outcomes are below the set standard. Nevertheless, a number of administrators may not value the importance of IGRs as a management tool to foster their relationships.

A number of studies investigate local governments as distinctive bodies and validate their observations by giving a number of interpretations. Unlike the notion of local trap facing the English local governments ([Barnett, 2020](#)), the IGRs approach is a superlative prototypic of control than the way local governments operate in the everyday implementation of public service delivery. It represents one prospect for controlling the relationships between municipal councillors and administrators. The municipal councillors lay down objectives on the basis of the perceived priorities of their constituencies, through council meetings, rather than on the budget framework paper for which they should conform ([Freeman, 2020:564](#)). The municipal councillor does not inescapably recognise what the administrators do and what their business should be since they are politically placed in the local government, lacking a strong orientation on how the system operates.

The localist approach is used as an analytic lens in this study. This study draws on localism to make the argument that there is an important relationship between stakeholders within the local government institution ([Sällberg & Ejnar Hansen, 2020](#)). Emphasis is based on the view that the localist view presents local government units as 'local' on the basis of localness, which is interpreted in terms of the institution of the local community ([O'Neil, O'Neil & Olive, 2020](#)). The local government is perceived as an institution that works in the interests of the adjacent community in which it is situated by presenting a set of six issues to support localness, viz. popular involvement of every stakeholder including those hitherto excluded from participation such as the youths, persons with disability and the elderly ([Das & Chattopadhyay, 2020:68](#)), greater local ownership of programmes and projects which results into increased sustainability ([Kluczewska, 2019](#)), enhanced accountability since every stakeholder is involved right from planning to implementation of a project ([Galanti & Turri, 2020](#)), ease to match resources with community priorities through participatory budgeting sessions that begin the village level up to the district level, ease in identifying local needs and priorities as a result of proximity between municipal councillors and the communities they represent, and getting the most out of local resources as affordable inputs, for example, human and materials can be generated from within the beneficiary community at affordable price ([Ginsburg & Keene, 2020:224](#)). To this end, the conceptualisation of localism is productive for grasping how and under what conditions

interrelationship can be understood and analysed in local public service delivery. Localism is essential in revealing that constructive interrelationships give appropriate action when it comes to actual service delivery.

Localism has become a common subject that many local governments have come to espouse ([Pill & Guarneros-Meza, 2020:542](#)). Localism denotes the readiness and ability of a community to harness its own resources to improve its situation regarding meeting joint priorities. It is about seeking possible means to achieve community goals using available or scarce resources. Localism affects the behaviour of a local community in diverse ways: scarce resources are focussed on where they are most desired, indigenous knowledge and skills are put to greater usage for the benefit of everyone in the community, and the scale of wastage of resources is reduced since members do not have many resources at their disposal ([Valentine, Perez & Weiss, 2020](#)). Members of a community become drivers, rather than passive beneficiaries, in service delivery.

Statement of the problem

Despite the understanding that local governments in Uganda are expected to deliver decentralised services in their jurisdictions, and in spite of all energies invested in nurturing positive relationships among key stakeholders, levels of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators for a number of municipalities in the country are not desirable. Evidence proposes that a number of municipal councillors are in conflict with the administrators over procedural or financial issues. Informal figures reveal that one of the issues for increased conflicts between municipal councillors and administrators is the failure to examine the appropriate interrelationships between the two stakeholders. As a consequence, poor public service delivery mirrored by particular interrelationships translates into a loss of enormous resources transferred from the central government to local municipalities as grants and or collected as local revenue. The concern of waste is significant to this study when one considers the number of patients dying at the entrance to health centres due to drug outages. Yet tonnes of expired drugs are burned every year due to local governments' failures to requisition new stocks. Poor interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators suggest poor public service delivery. One probable way to address this challenge is to analyse current interrelationships *vis-à-vis* public service delivery so that recommendations can be used as a basis for future interventions. Addressing the interrelationships has several outcomes, viz. reduced wastage of resources, low bureaucratic delays, and improved accountability, among many others. Put differently, and positive interrelationships can facilitate public service delivery in Ugandan municipalities.

Purpose and objectives of the study

This study aimed to analyse the interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators in municipal councils in mid-western Uganda. As a result, three objectives were developed to guide the study, namely: (i) analyse the degree of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators in municipal councils in mid-western Uganda. (ii) Analyse the level of public service delivery in municipalities in mid-western Uganda. And, (iii) analyse the effect of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators on public service delivery in municipal councils in mid-western Uganda.

3. Research methodology

This study embraced a quantitative case study approach ([Misopoulos, Argyropoulos, Manthou, Argyropoulos & Kelmendi, 2020](#)). It was quantitative because the research comprised of testing selected constructs and examining them by means of statistical techniques in order to determine whether the probable results hold accuracy. The case study was adopted, seeing that the problem under investigation involved a rigorous inquiry of the multiple elements that contribute to the uniqueness of public service delivery. The preferred approach was, as a consequence, projected to facilitate the effective gathering of data from a direct sample without bias to any of the specific elements. This approach matches well with the latest approvals in the discipline of local governance. Hence, it was estimated to produce accurate results not only in the quantitative aspects but also in the phenomenological aspects.

Respondents

The study was conducted in the two municipalities found in the mid-western region of Uganda, namely Hoima and Masindi (it should be noted that shortly after field surveys were concluded, Hoima municipality was officially elevated to city status, launched by the line Minister of Local Governments on August 12, 2020). Every municipal councillor and administrator was selected for this study. The target population was determined so as to attain the key demographic trends in the study population. Two subdivisions were of interest in the study population, that is, municipal councillors and administrators. By use of Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a sample of 48 was realised from a population of 55. The respondents were selected using the proportionate stratified sampling technique followed by a simple random sample for each of the strata. In the end, 25 respondents (13 municipal councillors and 12 administrators; 15 male and 10 female) were selected from Hoima municipality, and 23 respondents (11 municipal councillors and 12 administrators; 12 male and 11 female) were selected Masindi municipality, respectively.

Instrumentation

Using the three themes of the study, a questionnaire was constructed to seek opinions from both municipal councillors and administrators regarding interrelationships and public service delivery. Theme one aimed to analyse the degree of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators, theme two aimed to analyse the level of public service delivery. The last theme in the questionnaire was intended to analyse how interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators affect the quality of public service delivery. The data collection tool was a five-level Likert scale where respondents were requested to rate their scale of agreement in reaction to diverse statements concerning interrelationships and public service delivery (from which 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

Procedure for data collection

After concluding revisions on the questionnaire following the pilot study outcomes, the researcher acquired permission from the relevant authorities at each of the respective municipal councils. Every questionnaire was hand-delivered by the researcher due to scarcity of resources and later collected. Overall, 46 questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents, thus accounting for 95.8%, which was outstanding. All questionnaires were structured in English language, and no respondent reported any challenge concerning language inability.

Data quality

Data reliability was determined using pre-tests conducted in an interval of three days in the Kahoora division of Hoima municipality among eight randomly selected respondents to examine the degree of internal consistency of all the constructs. Consequently, the Cronbach's Alpha results yielded 0.811 ($F=13.864$, sig. = 0.000) in all the piloted constructs, which is greater than the acceptable 0.70 for the reliability to stand. Also, the validity of the questionnaire was measured using inter-consult indices among three experts, and the results were; expert one (0.792), expert two (0.674), and expert three (0.731), yielding an overall content validity index of 0.732. According to [Sekaran \(2003\)](#), an instrument is accepted if the average content validity index (CVI) is 0.7 or more.

Data analysis

Data were analysed basing on the responses from the closed-ended questions for municipal councillors and administrators using SPSS windows version 21. To begin with, all data on each of the constructs were analysed using frequency tables and percentages. Descriptive statistics followed this to generate Means (μ) and Standard Deviations (std. dev.) for objectives one and two. Finally, both bivariate correlations and regression matrices were applied to test the effect of interrelationships on public service delivery (objective three).

4. Results and Discussions

The central aim of the study was to analyse the interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators in public service delivery. The findings in this section are organised in accordance with three study objectives; degree of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators

in municipal councils in mid-western Uganda, level of public service delivery in municipalities in mid-western Uganda, and effect of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators on public service delivery in municipal councils in mid-western Uganda.

Degree of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators

Objective one sought to determine the degree of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators in municipal councils. Accordingly, three aspects were examined, namely, project planning, project monitoring, and project review. The results are presented using percentages, as illustrated in table 1.

Table 1. Degree of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators in municipal councils

Participation in...	Municipal councillors	Municipal Administrators
01) Formulating performance expectations and goals	44.8	55.2
02) Debating the objectives and targets of council	62.4	37.6
03) Setting the standards to be used during assessment of performance	31.7	68.3
<i>Overall participation in Project planning</i>	<i>46.3</i>	<i>53.7</i>
01) Meetings with contractors to discuss progress	41.3	58.7
02) Ascertaining any limitations	38.4	61.6
03) Offering drilling and mentoring	12.8	87.2
04) Giving regular response	5.1	94.9
05) Offering positive criticism	14.8	85.2
06) Organising sharing meetings	24.7	75.3
<i>Overall participation in project monitoring</i>	<i>22.8</i>	<i>77.2</i>
01) Review of project status reports	32.6	67.4
02) On-site review of project progress	48.1	51.9
<i>Overall participation in project review</i>	<i>40.4</i>	<i>59.6</i>
Overall	36.5	63.5

Aspect one was performance planning which included a number of tasks, viz.; articulating the prospects and objectives of performance, debating the objectives and targets of the council, and the standards to be used during assessment of performance. The results suggest that the articulation of goals is one of the central phases in the management of performance. Consequently, municipal councillors participated in debating the objectives and targets of the council (62.4%) more than the other aspects of formulating performance expectations and goals (44.8%) and setting standards to be used during assessment of performance (31.7%). The administrators participated more in setting the standards to be used during assessment of performance (68.3%) than the aspects formulating performance expectations and goals (55.2%) and debating the objectives and targets of the council (37.6%). These findings suggest that the interest of municipal councillors is bent towards objectives and targets of the council while administrators look at standards for assessing performance. These findings indicate that municipality councils rarely organise meetings on project planning to make sure that both municipal councillors and administrators are clear on what is expected of them during the performance cycle. Overall, the findings suggest that municipal councils debate issues of project planning by themselves with less involvement of the administrators.

Project monitoring is expected to follow a successful project planning phase involving scheduled meetings with contractors to discuss progress, ascertain any limitations, offer drilling and mentoring, give a regular response, offer positive criticism, and organise sharing meetings. The results suggest that there is a gap in the project monitoring phase as a number of municipal councillors rarely participate (highest of 41.3% and lowest of 5.1) compared to administrators with a highest of 94.9% and a lowest of 61.6% (see table 1). These findings show that municipal councillors do not feel

concerned about issues of project monitoring and so they abandon the entire process to the administrators.

Regarding project review, Table 1 displays the perceived participation of municipal councillors versus that of municipal administrators. The results show that municipal councillors only participate at lower than 50% overall compared to administrators whose participation remains at about 60%. During the study, it noted that many municipal councillors did not recognise project review as an important function that deserved their involvement. As many as 82% felt that they only needed to wait for progress reports from members of the technical planning committee composed of administrators rather than making site visitation. To sum it all, the overall participation of municipal councillors in the three phases from project planning, project monitoring to project review yielded 36.5% for municipal councillors and 63.5% for administrators, respectively. This result suggests that the degree of interrelationship between the two stakeholders in terms of what is expected of them is poor for municipal councillors, yet they ought to represent the voting population.

Level of service delivery in municipalities

Objective two sought to determine the level of public service delivery in municipalities in mid-western Uganda. Consequently, a set of seven principles were isolated so as to determine the scale; consciousness in strengthening Service Standards, Uncompromisable Quality of Service, professionalism and technical adequacy of contracting firms, effective and rigorous supervision of contracts, citizens' Satisfaction with Service Delivery, good governance-focused institutional framework for service delivery, inclusive and participatory planning in local governments ([Republic of Uganda, 2013](#)).

Level of service delivery in terms of consciousness in strengthening service standards

The notion of strengthening service standards is appreciated by looking at services in terms of quantity, quality, time and cost of service delivered to the community or part of it. Table 2 illustrates the means and standard deviations of eight issues arising out of what is expected of municipalities in this regard.

Table 2. Consciousness in strengthening service standards

The Municipal council should ensure that it	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Follows established procurement guidelines	4.53	0.79	Very high
Acquaints itself with public procurement and disposal of assets Act	4.22	0.72	Very high
Follows financial and accounting regulations	4.28	0.73	Very high
Follows the local government Act	4.54	0.77	Very high
Follows service guidelines issued by service sectors	4.48	0.76	Very high
Inspects and advise on services	1.24	0.78	Low
Observes to Bills of quantities in contract management	4.24	0.71	Very high
Implements agreed client Approvals	4.01	0.67	Very high
Average	3.94	0.74	High

Legend: 4.00-5.00=*very high*, 3.00-3.99=*high*, 2.00-2.99=*moderate*, 1.00-1.99=*low*, 0.00-0.99=*very low*

The study indicates a very high level of consciousness regarding strengthening service standards among municipalities in mid-western Uganda. This is revealed by the means and standard deviations obtained on eight items in which the only one scored low, i.e., 'inspect and advise on services'. For instance, in terms of ensuring that standards of service are adhered to, the scores were very impressive; procurement guidelines ($\mu=4.53$, $SD=0.79$), being acquainted with public procurement and disposal of assets Act ($\mu=4.22$, $SD=0.72$), following the existing financial and accounting regulations ($\mu=4.28$, $SD=0.73$), to mention but a few scored very high. These results suggest that municipal councils in the area of study are conscious of strengthening the standard of services delivered in their jurisdictions.

Level of public service delivery in terms of uncompromisable quality of service

In order to determine the prospects and approval of communities with the quality of service delivered to them, eight best practices are isolated and rated as indicated in table 3.

Table 3. Uncompromisable quality of service

The Municipal council should ensure...	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Effective political monitoring	0.94	0.65	Very low
Compliance with laws and procedures	4.82	1.14	Very high
Effective technical supervision	3.47	1.37	High
Harmonising work plans with outputs of the contracted services	3.19	1.03	High
Receipt of citizen grievances and give feedback	4.11	1.18	Very high
Effective project committees	4.49	1.10	Very high
Awareness of procurement procedures	4.15	1.29	Very high
Adequate capacity for contractors	4.23	0.90	Very high
The contract amount is consistent with the available budget line	0.62	0.73	Very low
Competitive bidding for service providers	1.04	0.84	Low
Average	3.00	1.02	Low

Legend: 4.00-5.00=*very high*, 3.00-3.99=*high*, 2.00-2.99=*moderate*, 1.00-1.99=*low*, 0.00-0.99=*very low*

The study reveals that while ten items were examined regarding the uncompromisable quality of service, five of them scored very high, two scored high, one scored low, and one scored very low. Of interest, the items that were rated very low and low are; 'effective political monitoring' ($\mu=0.94$, $SD=0.65$) and 'competitive bidding for service providers' ($\mu=1.04$, $SD=0.84$). By implication, the results suggest that municipal councils in mid-western Uganda have a low capacity to provide political monitoring and to bid for service providers. Although, the issue of bidding for service providers seemed to be tainted by national-oriented corruption rather than local incompetency.

Level of public service delivery in terms of competence and technical suitability of contracting companies

This aspect refers to the degree to which companies providing services observe their principled and technical abilities. Accordingly, six issues were examined, as illustrated in table 4.

Table 4. Competence and technical suitability of contracting companies

The Municipal council should ensure...	Agree	Disagree	Means	Interpretation
A thorough selection of experienced companies	29.8	12.4	1.42	Low
Impose principled practices to the contracting firms	14.7	45.1	2.03	Moderate
Timely issuance of the certificate of completion of the contract to firms	13.7	34.7	1.80	Low
Works are inaugurated and commissioned to raise public interest	26.6	17.0	1.63	Low
Gratitude to outshining suppliers before the council session	10.49	46.0	1.93	Low
Non-performing companies are prohibited	16.69	44.19	1.96	Low
Average			1.80	Low

Legend: 4.00-5.00=*very high*, 3.00-3.99=*high*, 2.00-2.99=*moderate*, 1.00-1.99=*low*, 0.00-0.99=*very low*

Regarding contracting companies' competence and technical suitability, results reveal a serious challenge among mid-western Uganda municipalities. The overall mean was low ($\mu=1.80$), with all

the items scoring low save for imposing principled practices to the contracting firms, which scored moderate ($\mu=2.03$). This suggests a very big problem in the area of competence and technical suitability of contracting companies, which needs urgent checking if the municipalities are to mitigate against the poor quality of service in terms of shoddy work in road constructing and other constructions of school blocks, health centres and bridges as well as delivery of agro-inputs, furniture and office supplies.

Level of public service delivery in terms of effective and rigorous supervision of contractors

In this aspect, interest is paid to the extent to which appointed staff and elected councillors hold service providers answerable. Consequently, eleven issues were rated using means and standard deviations, as shown in table 5.

Table 5. Effective and rigours supervision of contractors

The Municipal council should ensure that	Agree	Disagree	μ	Interpretation
Administrators are facilitated to oversee contracts	14.9	49.11	2.25	Moderate
Internal supervision fund is earmarked in every project budget	17.11	41.41	1.98	Low
Local citizens participate in monitoring contracts	14.9	49.11	2.25	Moderate
Existence of schedule of supervision	14.81	50.01	2.09	Moderate
A fraction of the contract sum is retained to enhance compliance with a contract	16.71	48.11	2.04	Moderate
Concerns of local citizens are registered in a site book to improve feedback	6.71	26.21	2.36	Moderate
Participation of management committees in school facility grant projects	30.41	47.11	2.23	Moderate
The Resident district commissioner offers teamwork	14.31	42.91	1.97	Low
Central government projects are managed by municipal councils	17.11	41.41	1.98	Low
A high completion percentage of municipal projects	14.7	49.09	2.24	Moderate
Average			1.92	Moderate

Legend: 4.00-5.00=very high, 3.00-3.99=high, 2.00-2.99=moderate, 1.00-1.99=low, 0.00-0.99=very low

Regarding the level of public service delivery in terms of effective and rigorous supervision of contractors, a set of ten items was examined during the study, and the results reveal that seven of the items were rated 'moderate', i.e., within the mean range of 2.00 to 2.99 while the remaining three items namely; internal supervision fund is earmarked in every project budget ($\mu=1.98$), teamwork is offered by the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) ($\mu=1.97$), and central government projects are managed by municipal councils ($\mu=1.97$) were all rated low (within a range of 1.00 to 1.99. this suggests that funds meant for internal supervision are either very limited or never allocated within the budget framework paper, the RDC concentrates on security issues rather than programmes that are geared towards service delivery, and the municipal council does not feel many obligations in managing such projects that are central-government driven if these issues can be given more attention, the level of public service delivery in terms of effective and rigorous supervision of contractors.

Level of public service delivery in terms of citizens' satisfaction with service delivery

Interest is put to ensuring that members in the local community are at the centre of service delivery and realises financial accountability. A set of ten aspects were rated as shown in table 6 below.

Table 6. Citizens' satisfaction with service delivery

The Municipal council ensures that...	Agree	Disagree
Periodic reports on projects are given to local constituencies	2.05	2.85
Budget conferences are conducted to increase the visibility of local projects	2.86	2.84
Increased popular accountability through local village public discussions between citizens and municipal council representatives	1.42	3.58
Public suggestion boxes are accessible in public places	2.99	2.01
Raise consensus on project execution through the participatory decision making	2.21	2.79
Citizens' issues and grievances are the centres of discussion in project management	1.46	3.54
Citizens service agreements are implemented in every municipality	0.22	4.78
Public-private partnerships are emphasised to improve service delivery	3.49	1.51
Consultants are carefully procured to enhance technical aspects of projects	2.00	3.00
Bank guarantees are required on large contracts to increase contract security	4.52	0.48
Average	2.47	2.53

Legend: 4.00-5.00=*very high*, 3.00-3.99=*high*, 2.00-2.99=*moderate*, 1.00-1.99=*low*, 0.00-0.99=*very low*

From table 6, it can be noted that the level of disagreement among respondents with three of the items presented to them was high, viz; citizens service agreements are implemented in every municipality (agree=0.22; disagree=4.78), increased popular accountability through local village public discussions between citizens and municipal council representatives (agree=1.42; disagree=3.58), and citizens' issues and grievances are the centres of discussion in project management (agree=1.46; disagree=3.54). The three items are very central in attaining citizen satisfaction with service delivery. However, the respondents expressed very high approval with the fact that Bank guarantees are required on large contracts to increase contract security (agree=4.52; disagree=0.48), followed by 'Public-private partnerships are emphasised to improve service delivery (agree=3.49; disagree=1.51), which is rated 'high'. Given the view that overall disagreement rated higher (2.53) than agreement (2.47) with a variance of 0.06 suggests moderate satisfaction with municipal service delivery in mid-western Uganda.

Scale of public service delivery in terms of a good governance-focussed institutional framework for service delivery

This index involves decent procedures and practices of service delivery. Consequently, seven issues were rated using means and standard deviation. Regarding a good governance-focussed institutional framework for service delivery, table 7 reveals that respondents were appreciative of all the items presented to them save for 'autonomy of committees and council decisions is maintained' that yielded a very low value ($\mu=0.23$; $SD=0.79$).

Table 7. Good governance-focussed institutional framework for service delivery

The Municipal council should ensure that...	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Elected councillors and technical leaders are accountable	3.51	0.80	Very low
Every stakeholder acts transparently, with clear info flows and feedbacks	3.21	0.73	Very low
Statutory bodies are aided to do their work	3.27	0.74	Very low
Shared meetings are encouraged to promote good relations between elected councillors and appointed officials	3.53	0.78	Very low
Sector committees achieve their oversight role	3.47	0.77	Very low
Autonomy of committees and council decisions is maintained	0.23	0.79	Very low
A platform is formed to synchronise relations among municipal leaders	3.23	0.72	Very low

Average	2.92	0.76	Very low
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Legend: 4.00-5.00=very high, 3.00-3.99=high, 2.00-2.99=moderate, 1.00-1.99=low, 0.00-0.99-very low

Equally impressive was the overall results that were rated moderate ($\mu=2.92$; $SD=0.76$), thus suggesting that municipalities in mid-western Uganda are moving towards a good governance-focussed institutional framework. Since the two municipalities are only less than two decades old, the results can be said to be very impressive.

Rate of public service delivery in terms of inclusive and participatory planning in the municipal council

To assess the rate of public service delivery in terms of inclusive and participatory planning in the municipal council, attention was paid to four issues, namely; support the all-encompassing and inclusive planning process for local communities, capacity for municipal leaders in planning abilities is enhanced, finances to aid inclusive planning Availability are availed, and output budget instrument is adopted at every municipal budget.

Table 8. Inclusive and participatory planning in the municipal council

The municipal council should ensure that...	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Support all-encompassing and inclusive planning process for local communities	2.29	0.71	Very low
Capacity for municipal leaders in planning abilities is enhanced	2.55	0.75	Very low
Finances to aid inclusive planning Availability are availed	2.49	0.74	Very low
Output budget instrument is adopted at every municipal budget	0.25	0.76	Very low
Average	1.40	0.74	Very low

Legend: 4.00-5.00=very high, 3.00-3.99=high, 2.00-2.99=moderate, 1.00-1.99=low, 0.00-0.99-very low

From the means and standard deviations, the outcomes were interpreted as very low given averages of 1.40 and 0.74 for means and standard deviation, respectively, suggesting that planning lacked inclusion and participation.

Effect of interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators on public service delivery in municipal councils in mid-western Uganda

The means of each of the seven aspects of service delivery were ranked to establish the degree interrelationships and the results suggested that two aspects, namely, consciousness in strengthening Service Standards and uncompromisable Quality of Service, had the highest effect. (Table 9)

Table 9. Scores and rankings of aspects affecting the interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators on public service delivery in municipal councils in mid-western Uganda

Aspect	u	Rank
Consciousness in strengthening Service Standards	3.94	1
Uncompromisable Quality of Service	3.00	1
Professionalism and technical adequacy of contracting firms	1.80	3
Effective and rigorous supervision of contracts	1.92	3
Citizens' Satisfaction with Service Delivery	2.47	2
Good governance-focused institutional framework for service delivery	2.92	2
Inclusive and participatory planning in the municipal council	1.40	3

Legend: 4.00-5.00 (very important), 3.00-3.99 (important), 2.00-2.99 (fairly important), 1.00-1.99 (less important), 0.00-0.99 (not important)

Also, the results suggest that three aspects, namely, professionalism and technical adequacy of contracting firms, effective and rigorous supervision of contracts, as well as inclusive and participatory planning in the municipal council, ranked lowest.

Table 10. Chi-square results

	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	0.000
Likelihood ration	0.773
Linear association	0.000
Number of valid cases	182

The study set H_0 =null hypothesis and H_A =alternate hypothesis. H_0 : interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators do not affect service delivery in mid-western Uganda; H_A : interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators affect service delivery in mid-western Uganda.

Source: field data, 2020.

Overall, the study reveals a non-linear association concerning the interrelationships between municipal councillors and administrators on public service delivery in municipal councils in mid-western Uganda.

Discussions

The results presented above suggest that the notion of effectiveness in terms of service provider comprehending the real needs of the community is essential ([Hall et al. 2020](#)) is raising the consciousness in strengthening Service Standards, professionalism and technical adequacy of contracting firms, effective and rigorous supervision of contracts, citizens' Satisfaction with Service Delivery, the good governance-focused institutional framework for service delivery, and inclusive and participatory planning in local governments. Success in each of these calls for meeting the expectations of a community in issues of liability, efficient and effective utilisation of public resources, quality of communication, and procedures of making policy attested by [Shakirova \(2019\)](#). As a consequence, the tension between the municipal councillors and the administrators ([Manyak & Katono, 2010](#)) is mitigated. Also, the need for flexible organisations and terms of employment ([Ghrmay, 2020:260; McSweeney & Safai, 2020:410](#)) is key is government functions faced challenges from market practices such as contracting out ([Ho Mok, Kwan Chan & Wen, 2020; Rho, Kim & Han, 2020](#)), tagging payment on performance ([Papenfuß & Keppeler, 2020:1120](#)) and reducing the size of organisations, are to be addressed.

In addition, issues of shifting towards giving more attention to structures that are charged with delivering public services to the public as more communities demand quality service and value for money when delivering those services ([Musenze & Mayende, 2019](#) and [Engdaw, 2020](#)) will no longer be seen as hurdles but as milestones to be attained from time to time. Moreover, effective communication between the councillors and bureaucrats ([Twamley, Dempsey & Keane, 2020](#)) will become an obvious thing. And so will issues of liability, efficient and effective utilisation of public resources, quality of communication, and procedures of making policy earlier coined by [Shakirova \(2019\)](#). In essence, features of IGRs ([Underwood, 2020:420; Rotenberg, 2019:168; Nurkin & Hinata-Yamaguchi, 2020:8; McNamara, Miller-Stevens & Morris, 2020:52](#)) shall be upheld as responsibilities entrusted to every public official shall face a natural attitude from both councillors and bureaucrats.

Consequently, the findings advocate that the relationship between stakeholders within the local government institution postulated by [Sällberg and Ejnar Hansen \(2020\)](#) within the framework of localism remain key. Thus far, the perception that the local government institution works in the interests of the constituent community in which it is situated is best suited when the interrelationships between key stakeholders are clear. This way, accountability, as coined by [Galanti and Turri \(2020\)](#), is enhanced as every stakeholder is involved since resources are matched with priorities of a community through participatory budgeting sessions as a result of proximity between councillors and administrators.

5. Conclusion

The subject presented in this paper is not very much about public service delivery or interrelationships in general. This paper suggested that failure to give attention to the interrelationships between local councillors and bureaucrats can have greater consequences on public service delivery in a local government. The conflict between local councillors and bureaucrats could be overstated; however, this study did establish that the absence of proper awareness of its consequence leads to a decay in the quality of service delivery, especially the issues of consciousness in strengthening Service Standards as well as professionalism and technical adequacy of contracting firms. Whereas this paper does not offer a practical solution to the concerns of poor service delivery, it has put forth significant questions on the scale of interrelationships. This paper defies the belief that interrelationships are guided by the policy framework that spells, among other things, the roles and functions of local councillors and bureaucrats. This paper advocates not only deep insights into the interrelationships but also offers preliminary awareness for probing more detailed questions on its effect on service delivery among Uganda's local governments. The results of this study can be useful to both locally elected councillors and the appointed administrators serving at Municipalities in Uganda by aiding them to improve on work-relationship for better service delivery.

Limitation and study forward

This study was only concentrated in mid-western Uganda, yet the country has 41 municipalities indicating that the results are not representative of the conditions in the whole country. As a consequence, a different study is encouraged, taking samples from other parts of the country to determine the outcomes. This study holds a nation-wide validity

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