

Local Governments and Primary Education in Uganda

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Abstract Decentralisation was one of the major reforms in the 1990s in Uganda, geared towards improving democratic governance and service delivery. However, districts have had variable performance, especially in providing primary education through public schools. In this article, I ask what explains the difference in local governments' performance across two districts that were given similar powers and share a similar history. I explore this through in-depth interviews in the two districts and find that local governments are severely constrained in their performance by a lack of funds, which, along with development priorities, are controlled by the central government. Within this scenario, variable performance is explained to a great extent by the presence of donors and investments by the private sector, but that these funds are attracted to areas where greater capacity exists. While this improves education performance, it can contribute to growing inequality in educational attainment across districts.

Keywords: decentralisation, Uganda, service delivery, primary education, donors.

1 Introduction

The main legal framework for Uganda's current local governments is the Decentralisation Statute 1993, aimed to transfer power to the people and promote equitable distribution of resources. The 1995 constitution detailed the modalities of a decentralised government while the Local Governments Act of 1997 made Local Government Council responsible for ensuring implementation and compliance with government policies (GoU 1997). According to Saito (2003: 203), 'Uganda today probably has the most elaborate legal framework for decentralising measures in Africa and is firmly committed to decentralisation. The amount of financial resources transferred to local governments is one of the largest in Africa'. Whereas it can be argued that the amounts of financial resources transferred are significant, what really matters is whether these financial resources have over the years translated to effective service delivery as promised in the decentralisation objectives.

One of the areas of transfer of power is primary education, which became the responsibility of local governments after decentralisation. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme was introduced in 1997, becoming part of the mandate of local governments. While initially the policy was to target four children per household, it later expanded to include all school-aged children. The reform led to the empowerment of ordinary Ugandans and improved implementation and monitoring of primary education (Mukunya 2007: 233). There was initial excitement about the policy as Ugandans would for the first time access free education (Buwembo 2016). Within this plan, local governments were to be responsible for education planning and management, school inspections, teacher management and classroom construction.

Almost two decades later, there is growing public concern over the quality of service delivery by local governments. Existing research shows that local government delivery failures are connected to a host of factors, including multiple leadership conflicts across different tiers of government, low levels of revenue collection and limited financial autonomy, distortions inherent in the decentralisation policy, and central government's control of the national budget resources (ACODE 2014: 3). Yet, not all local governments are performing badly. Some local governments are able to perform well in delivering their functions as per their mandate while others are not (ACODE 2014). What are the reasons for this differential performance?

Using the two cases of Arua and Nebbi districts in the West Nile region, I examine reasons for differences in performance across two areas with similar history, geography and powers. The question I pose is: *What factors explain the difference in local government performance across two districts that were given similar powers?* The outcome I consider here is local government performance in service delivery and the factors that account for variations in outcomes. An analysis of the two cases leads to the finding that in the case of primary education – a key mandate of local government – external factors such as private sector engagement and donor involvement contribute to the difference in performance.

For the past 15 years, there have been several studies on Uganda's decentralisation, local government and service delivery (Saito 2003, 2006; Golooba-Mutebi 2004, 2006; Uwezo Uganda 2016; Green 2010, 2013; ACODE 2014). While these have largely focused on the challenges of decentralisation or its impact on specific service delivery and popular participation, they left unexplained most of the reasons for variations in outcomes and why some districts emerge as 'islands of effectiveness'. While concurring with Crook (2010) that lack of organisational commitment is a key variable to explain why some districts underperform, I contend that this gets exacerbated in contexts where local governments have little capacity to deliver services, limited financial autonomy and decision-making powers, and remain dependent on central government, with their powers limited to legal frameworks only. Comparing the two districts of Arua and Nebbi allows

us to make some propositions in terms of which other factors account for these variations.

This study thus examines why there are variations in local government performance in service delivery when local governments have similar powers, and face similar challenges *vis-à-vis* the central government. This article is organised as follows. In the next section, I revisit decentralisation in Uganda, focusing ultimately on service delivery, and in particular, primary education. In Section 3, I explain the rationale for the use of comparative analysis in my methodology, and in Section 4, I analyse the two cases. In Section 5, I present the key reasons for variations in performance across the two cases, before concluding with policy implications in Section 6.

2 The promise and reality of decentralisation in Uganda

Uganda's decentralisation and its extensive legal framework is considered impressive on the African continent, and represents 'a radical reengineering of the mechanisms of governance towards political, administrative and fiscal devolution' (Steffensen 2006: 93). 'What is beyond dispute [...] is that Uganda's local government reforms in the last 20 years count among the most ambitious and arguably the most successful on the African continent' (Golooba-Mutebi 2006: 61). This claim of success in comparison to decentralised systems in Africa is difficult to make today in light of service delivery challenges in local government districts that are commonplace in the media and in debates about decentralisation. A recent television discussion, one of many commentaries, debated the relevance of decentralisation. The debate, entitled 'Is Decentralisation Dead?', led to an open questioning of the usefulness of decentralisation today among participants of the show (*People's Parliament* on NTV), who are Ugandan citizens from all walks of life. Throughout the dialogue, various participants echoed ongoing popular debates by affirming that Uganda's decentralisation was ineffective and was doing little to improve service delivery, which has been the main objective of the reforms all along. Members of various local governments invited for the show expressed concern over how the decentralisation policy has evolved over the years, wondering if it still existed. This questioning is not limited to citizen participation on national media, but also research has indicated that decentralisation is in trouble. Green (2013) discusses the rise and fall of decentralisation, in which he argues that much of the initial gains of the 1990s have not been matched in recent years and excitement about programmes has tapered off.

Decentralisation in Uganda happened within larger economic reforms driven by neoliberalism and structural adjustment policies that prioritised the role of the market and private actors. As a result, while services like primary education delivery were transferred to local governments, this process was implemented through a system of partnerships with the private sector and other development actors that reduced the role of the local state as the primary provider. This is evident in the way that government documents differentiate between service delivery and service provision:

Service provision refers to the whole process of planning public services while service delivery refers to mechanisms of policy implementation. In Uganda's local government system, service delivery approaches include: direct provision by the local government, public-private partnerships (PPPs), participation of civil society (CSOs) and privatization (GoU 2013: 10).

Any assessment of local government performance must inherently take into account all of these elements rather than focus on the one approach of direct provision. The government of Uganda perceived many benefits of decentralising education service delivery, including the elimination of what it saw as unnecessary bureaucratic channels; reduction of corruption; increased level of monitoring; management of the education system according to local priorities; improved financial accountability; and increased local revenue to fund services (Namukasa 2007). Empirical evidence on how things have worked out, however, is mixed. Decentralisation opened the way for more realistic planning and mobilisation of resources (Mukunya 2007) and brought significant improvements in service delivery (Katono 2007; Ssemakula 1996). The purported significant improvements in service delivery now remain under question in light of new developments such as the impulsive creation of new districts that are deemed unviable for service delivery, but formed in the spirit of political patronage as compensation for lost reforms (Green 2010) with full knowledge of their political and economic limitations (Green 2013).

In addition, a number of issues have created hindrances to positive results. These include lack of human and social capital; local power structures obstructing citizen participation; public disinterest in payment of taxes if not accompanied by improved services; and an inability of the state to effectively involve civil society (Saito 2003) and what has been termed an obsessive creation of districts (Green 2010). Dependence of local governments on the central government, limited autonomy, and limited community participation in local government decision-making processes (Nkalubo 2007) are some of the other limitations.

Evidence from the annual reports series, *Are Our Children Learning?* (Uwezo Uganda 2011) and from local government scorecards (ACODE 2014) seem to confirm this discouraging perspective in the area of service delivery and in particular primary education provision. According to an analysis of the last 2016 Uwezo report, 60 per cent of P.3–P.7¹ pupils attending private schools could read and understand a P.2 English story and P.2 maths division while 49 per cent of P.3–P.7 pupils attending government schools could read and understand the same work (Nassaka 2016: 17). All six reports Uwezo have released so far indicate that the quality of education within the UPE framework, which is the direct provision option, is something the government needs to be concerned about, with persistent low learning outcomes. The same report indicates that the performance based on districts reflects regional inequalities. All the ten best performing

districts were from central and south-west Uganda while all the ten worst performing districts were from the East, North and West Nile regions (Uwezo Uganda 2016). Despite this gloomy outlook, rankings such as these of Uwezo, based on primary education, and ACODE, based on performance of local government in various social service delivery areas, indicate that there are variations in outcomes, with some performing well and others dismally. What is also crucial is that some of these variations fit within regional inequalities identified previously.

3 Research design: comparative case study method

This study is based in the West Nile region of Uganda. Largely rural, among the poorest in the country, and with literacy rates below national averages, this region's limited access to government services – due to its remoteness, a history of war, and a continuing lack of community voice – makes for an interesting case (AFARD 2011: 4). The West Nile's level of relative deprivation in comparison to other regions of Uganda means that if we can find pockets of better performance here, we may be able to identify the factors that can work to raise the quality of service delivery.

The West Nile today consists of eight district local governments, with Arua and Nebbi districts lying in the North-Western corner of Uganda. Both partly border the Democratic Republic of Congo and Arua also borders South Sudan. Both cases were selected primarily because they were the only two of West Nile's eight districts that were assessed as part of the most recent round of the Local Government Councils Scorecard Assessment (LGCSCA) 2013/14 (ACODE 2014). They make an interesting pair for comparison because they are similar in many ways. They are contiguous districts that share a common history – together they formed the West Nile district before independence (Karibwije 2005) – which allows us to hold most social and cultural practices constant. They also received full district status at the same time in 1980, and have similar local government powers.

Yet, though they lie close together, they have had divergent outcomes in social service delivery. The local government performance in service delivery is measured by three indicators, namely primary education (including both private and public schools), primary health services, and water and sanitation services. The performance of primary education is also measured by three indicators, namely the net enrolment ratio, completion rate and the Primary Leaving Examination Performance Index.² Nebbi was among the worst performing districts in primary education delivery, ranking 6th from the bottom out of a total of 30 districts, while Arua ranked 12th from the bottom. While exploring Arua's performance allows us to look into an 'island of effectiveness' (Crook 2010), Nebbi allows us to look into complexities of local government service delivery.

I used the comparative method of difference to study these two districts, based on the fact that they are similar in many ways that matter for the delivery of primary education – such as the power and functions

of district governments, revenues transferred to them by the central government, capacity for revenue mobilisation to complement service delivery, quality of school teachers, shared history of deprivation, formerly a single local government unit and school infrastructure – but which have different outcomes, with Arua performing better than Nebbi in the delivery of primary education. I use local government performance in service delivery because they present the divergence in outcome between the districts relevant for interrogating issues of variation in outcome. This design allows us to explore both cases in detail to see what might be causing the difference in performance.

I made use of secondary data and media reports to establish the nature of allocation to education and to examine local government role in primary education in both districts, including on primary education performance in Nebbi and Arua. I strengthened this with carefully selected interviews in both districts. I conducted in-depth interviews with 12 purposively selected key players, people who worked in the education department, council and office of the chief administrative officer. At the district level, I interviewed senior staff at the education office, chief administrative offices, and local councils. The choice of these key informants is based on their role in the district, specifically in planning and management of education services.

4 Local government capacity in primary education delivery in the West Nile region

Local governments, and in particular district councils, have the power to deliver primary education services in Uganda with 'overall control over the expenditure on services for which they were responsible' (Golooba-Mutebi 2004). Their roles include inspection of schools, funding, management of teachers, school administration and planning, and school construction (Saito 2003). However, transfer of responsibility is not synonymous with capacity. As Widmalm (2008: 44) reminds us, '[T]he fact that responsibilities are given to a certain institution does not mean that the institution in question has the capacity to fulfil them... [nor] any possibility of influencing the method of implementation of the duties for which it is made responsible'. Capacity, be it human, financial and infrastructural, is crucial. The lack of capacity to deliver has raised questions about the effectiveness of decentralisation in Uganda. For instance, a respondent in Nebbi³ who coordinates a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) argued:

What I don't agree with most is the word decentralisation... It is only the word itself, but there is no practice called decentralisation in Uganda. They say power belongs to the people, that now they have transferred every responsibility to people to make their plans. If you go to the school and look at their plans, you will see that their plans are excellent, but now the funds are not controlled by the school, the funds are controlled by the centre at the district level... You cannot decentralise power when there is no money. There should be money and also power to plan.

For others, such as a member of the local government in Nebbi, the problem is more to do with how decentralisation has evolved:

Decentralisation would have added value if every stakeholder was playing their role, because I think decentralisation says manage your own issues. Where you think the classrooms are not enough, put them there... but you know now there are some things that stakeholders have to do themselves to better this education. If it is not being done, we are not going to blame decentralisation.

Particular to the case of primary education, local governments are directly responsible not only for the delivery of primary education within the UPE framework, but also for the supervision of both public and private schools. Although private schools do not receive financial aid from the government, they still write the same exams and their performance contributes to the ranking of local government performance in a particular district. While schools depend on the district, local governments depend on the central government for funds. The UPE programme funds come with an expenditure formula for every district. Most of the education expenditure is earmarked for teacher salaries. District councils are mandated to mobilise local resources to supplement the regular flow of funds from the central government in order to support other activities. However, in both Nebbi and Arua districts local government contributes under 5 per cent of the total budget. The responsibility for providing development funds remains with central government and other stakeholders.

Also, the role of district councils in ensuring improved performance in service delivery appears to be quite limited in both districts. In Arua, district officials try to do so by organising community meetings to discuss issues related to the delivery of primary education (which, according to some respondents in Arua's education department, is improving the quality of education through parents' commitment to education), while in Nebbi the district meets the challenge of having few inspectors by hiring former head teachers as assessors and inspectors. Finally, both districts have developed education bylaws, but they seem to have little role in ensuring the implementation and quality of primary education in the public schools studied here.

An interesting indicator of the poor quality of primary education in public schools managed by local governments is the fact that the children of district government staff and even public school teachers attend private schools. A respondent in Arua local government echoed the views of many when he explained, 'Our children are not in government schools. We sell the wrong thing to the people. There are many children of the poor who are brighter than our children but are condemned to this [UPE school] education'. There is a sense of regret among government officials that they are aware UPE is not working well, and yet, they have to continue to present it as a great policy to enable all children access to education. A respondent from the civil society sector in Nebbi expressed a similar sentiment when he shared,

'Teachers in UPE schools send their children to private schools. They are better off having their children taught by private schools. They are sure their children will pass'.

According to various respondents in the two districts, public schools perform poorly in both districts due to a wide range of factors, which include lack of teaching materials, late arrival of government funds, head teachers seldom being in school to supervise teaching, late arrival and early departure of teachers, and infrastructure challenges ranging from lack of classrooms and desks to pit latrines. Although the availability of UPE has provided poor children with access to education, it has also created marked disparities between the educational quality that poor children in these schools receive, and that offered in private schools that are attended by the children of families with higher incomes (Uwezo Uganda 2016).

These facts illustrate the current poor quality of public education and the failure of local government officials to fix the broken school system. Interviews provided strong evidence of the fact that most stakeholders shifted responsibility in terms of where the blame for poor delivery lies. Teachers face most of the blame from other stakeholders, while teachers in turn blame local government limited capacity and parents' lack of commitment to the education of their children. Yet, Arua District has a comfortable lead on Nebbi on primary education outcomes, as per the 2013/14 scorecard assessment rankings (ACODE 2014), despite the many similarities identified here. What explains Arua's better performance? I use evidence from my interviews to identify the main features that can help explain this.

5 Variations in education performance: the nature of partnerships

A comparative analysis of Arua and Nebbi local government performance is a useful exercise to reveal how despite most local governments facing similar challenges and having similar powers and mandates (including local governments that share geography and history), varied outcomes are possible largely due to external factors such as donor interventions, and other partnerships. While in both Nebbi and Arua, local government state schools performed almost similarly, I argue that the role of donors and the nature of public-private partnerships significantly account for variations in overall educational outcomes. The level of involvement by donors and private sector investment is crucial for success.

5.1 How central government dependency accounts for variations at the district level

At the district level, the degree of dependence on central government is crucial for investment in education. It is also important to note that the capacity to deliver implies that funds directly transferred from central government are likely to achieve their aim. This comparison starts with the understanding of the financial situation in both local governments as seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Revenue sources and education allocation for Nebbi and Arua districts for the financial years 2012/13–2014/15 (Shillings 000)

Revenue source	Total revenue (Nebbi)	Percentage of total	Total revenue (Arua)	Percentage of total
Central government	73,017,274	95.7	133,880,657	91.9
Local revenue	998,758	1.3	1,302,488	0.9
Donor funding	2,309,702	3.0	10,485,589	7.2
Total annual budget	76,325,734	100.0	145,668,734	100.0
Education allocation	38,940,425	51	78,162,787	53.7

Source Local government budget estimates, MoFPED.⁴

By observation of the two local governments, we can see that Arua has many business enterprises, and thus greater revenue mobilisation but its share of local revenue is less than 1 per cent. This, local government officials argue, is because the Uganda Revenue Authority collects most of the revenue. The little that is collected within the local governments goes to support council activities rather than services like education, which therefore remain dependent on central government transfers. In Arua, a senior local government official expressed his dilemma:

Most of the lucrative sources of revenue are taken up by the central government, they are collected by the Uganda Revenue Authority [URA]. Most of the taxes are collected by it. What is left for the local government is very hard to collect. At some times we even said, now since URA is specialised in revenue collection, why don't they collect 100 per cent?

Studies have in the past indicated the erosion of local government autonomy with the abolition of graduated tax (Golooba-Mutebi 2006). Although local governments had the mandate to levy tax, central government abolished graduated tax, draining districts of the most reliable source of revenue. In addition to market dues, other sources include trading licences (largely collected by the urban councils), licensing which is more of a regulatory service, and thus limited as a source of funds. Fees for a limited number of billboard advertisements are another potential source, but if they fall under road reserve, Uganda National Roads Authority collects it. The local service tax is a more reliable source but very small. Another revenue source is council court fees, but these provide revenue for the court system in most cases. In short, multiple state agencies collect revenue from districts.

Local governments are thus vessels through which resources from central government flow for specific activities, rather than units with power. The real question is whether local governments have any liberty to plan for activities. In the case of primary education, most of the

grants are conditional and allow little flexibility. Central government controls, even though there may be good reasons for such controls, impact negatively on service delivery. The dysfunctional nature of decentralisation is demonstrable through the practice of recruitment of teachers or making capital expenditures – for a district to recruit teachers or buy a vehicle, they need clearance from the central government. This is in line with what ACODE (2014) found, that dependence on the central government and inability to generate local revenues are highlighted by 75 per cent of the districts.

5.2 How donor involvement accounts for variations at the district level

Currently, local governments are overly dependent on the central government for resources, particularly conditional grants. One main reason is that the central government and the donors are not fully convinced that local governments are capable of managing large amounts of funds (Saito 2003: 145).

Although Nebbi has a larger contribution of local revenue (1.3 per cent), Arua's dependence on central government is lower due to contribution from donors (7.2 per cent) while that of Nebbi stands at 3 per cent (see Table 1). Whereas the difference appears small as a percentage of a district's total budget allocation to education, it is substantial in absolute terms. Donor criteria for more involvement in Arua is not explicit, but may be connected to the fact that it is a regional centre, and as such, has more NGOs and thus more capacity to deliver on funds outside the local government structure.

Donor contribution differentials, as seen in Table 1, boosted the capacity of Arua local government through budget support but also through direct investment in schools. Arua local government department of education, as a result, has developed higher capacity in terms of human capital and infrastructure. This is not the case in Nebbi, which has continued to face both human resource and infrastructural challenges for several years. This was corroborated by staff in the education department in Nebbi, who lamented, '[A]ll our vehicles are now grounded in the garage. We have no means of transport for supervision and inspection'. This is attributed to a ban on departments purchasing vehicles. Sitting at the Arua District local government headquarters, I observed at least three vehicles for the education sector, procured through non-state funds, and none of the interviews in Arua identified such challenges.

The quality of administrative staff accounts for differences in performance and creation of effective organisational culture, and this too was connected to the role of donors and a regular flow of funds by respondents. Arua District has experienced a considerable level of continuity and consistency in political and administrative leadership. Most members of council had been there for over a decade and understood the problems of their area well. On the other hand, Nebbi faced staff shortages, but was unable to recruit new staff due to a pending wage bill. Within Nebbi's district council, respondents

suggested that these administrative problems were not helped by limited donor intervention. For instance, two members argued:

The problem with Nebbi is that we have limited NGOs, limited stakeholders to support Nebbi. We have only the NGO Forum and now we have UNICEF. The major one is UNICEF. And UNICEF mainly supports us with sports.

UNICEF cannot do it alone, not even the government, not even the councillors. At least I would suggest that if other NGOs or donors could come around, it would be fairer. It is becoming too big for UNICEF alone to handle it.

These revelations, by a male and female member of council, all underscore the important role of donors in improving capacity of the district to better deliver educational outcomes. This is also acknowledged in the literature. For instance, Boko notes:

The contribution of international donor agencies to the development of local communities in Africa must not be underestimated. For though they have gained the political power for self-determination, the vast majority of local communities in Africa lack the financial resources to assert that power, making financial and technical support from international development organisations a very important source of development action (2002: 61).

In the case of district performance, given the current dependence on central government for funding of programmes, re-centralisation of functions, compounded by creation of districts that are not viable, suggest that indeed contributions of international donor agencies cannot be underestimated. Donor support fills capacity and budgetary gaps, especially when channelled through districts in specific areas of need.

5.3 How private sector involvement accounts for variations at the district level

Arua also performs better overall because of the extent of private sector investment in education. Arua has several private schools, which contribute to the better performance and ranking of the district. Nebbi has far fewer private schools that can contribute in a similar way. As one respondent in Nebbi put it:

If you are talking about government-aided schools, I don't think Arua is doing any better. The difference is, Arua has so many private schools. So when they say Arua has got so many first grades, nobody says government schools has got this, private schools has got this. It's just like Zombo [neighbouring district] here. Zombo gets more first grades than Nebbi because of one private school. But if you are talking about government schools, then it's all the same. People don't look at which schools are private schools and which schools are public.

Respondents in Arua District local government agreed with this position. A recent analysis that deals with the country as a whole, the 2016 Uwezo report, also suggests that the role of the private sector in a district's performance in education cannot be ignored considering that district rankings take into account private schools as well. It reveals that:

... for P.3 to P.7 pupils, attending private schools boosts their competence over their government school peers 17 percentage points in English, 10 percentage points in mathematics and six percentage points in local languages (Nassaka 2016: 16).

There are, therefore, large attainment inequalities between pupils attending private schools and those enrolled in schools run by local government.

6 Local government and primary education delivery: implications for policy

Our two cases show that contrary to claims that local governments have power as per the legal frameworks, districts still largely depend on central government for the delivery of primary education under their mandate. Local government contribution in terms of local revenue is non-existent due to the limited collection of local revenue, despite the existence of taxable private businesses in these districts. And although there is an argument that decades of reform efforts, capacity building and huge donor spending appear to have brought little improvement in service delivery, where direct donor involvement in schools is available, primary education performance is significantly better. The larger donor contribution to Arua's local government – as compared to Nebbi – gives it an added advantage in improving performance, not only by building local level capacity, but also by reducing its degree of dependence on central government.

The *ad hoc* nature of partnerships between local governments and other stakeholders has benefited some local governments at the expense of others. Both private sector investment and donor monies flow to certain districts, often the same ones because of capacity issues, and not to others. This calls for greater coordination among central government, local government, the private sector and donors in defining where donors and other partners are most needed depending on existing challenges, and so that available funds can be distributed more evenly across districts. Results of the 2016 Uwezo survey show that the ten best performing districts are all located in central and south-western Uganda while the ten worst performing districts are all located in the East, North and West Nile regions. If this continues, not only will inequalities increase between poorer and less poor children attending public and private schools respectively, but also regional inequalities are bound to become worse. There is a need for a comprehensive review of the powers of local governments and the services they can realistically deliver in line with the resources they can mobilise. While many of their powers remain as stipulated in the constitution, the context has greatly changed in the face of liberalisation, privatisation and government re-centralisation of some functions.

The promise of decentralisation was to create an effective system of service delivery, where local governments would bring services closer to the people and infuse local populations with the power of popular participation. But this does not seem to have happened

in Uganda. Based on the analysis presented in this article, I draw three broad conclusions, which manifest the difference between decentralisation rhetoric and reality. First, that there is a disconnect between decentralisation as policy and as practice, as demonstrated by local government delivery of primary education. Second, with central government controlling at least 95 per cent of the financing of districts, development priorities are still decided by central government, through pre-determined indicative figures to guide budgeting. Local governments have little power and freedom to decide what their priorities might be and even if they do, even less power to act upon them. Third, because local governments fail to achieve meaningful local revenue collection, the quality of the delivery of public services suffers, as central government disbursements are, by themselves, inadequate and local governments have minimal capacity to contribute. The case of West Nile suggests that the performance of districts in delivering services such as education has much to do with donor presence and the extent of involvement by the private sector. Local governments that succeed do so through the strength of partnerships with donors and the private sector.

Notes

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- 1 The Ugandan Primary Education cycle runs from Primary One (P.1) to Primary Seven (P.7) when pupils write the national primary leaving examination from which they join secondary education, which runs for six years.
- 2 Net Enrolment Ratio (number of primary school children aged six–twelve years to the number of children of the same age range in the population); completion rate (ratio of total number of pupils who successfully complete the last year of primary education); and Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) Performance Index (number of candidates that sat for PLE examination multiplied by the weight of the highest grade) (MoES 2013).
- 3 All interviews took place in May 2016, either in Nebbi or in Arua.
- 4 Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, www.finance.go.ug.

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