

Chapter Two

2.0 REVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE PREVIOUS YEAR

2.1 Performance of planning functions

Arua district has made remarkable progress in actualising the decentralized development planning as required by the law and as a mechanism for achieving rational utilization of development resources.

There are established institutional frameworks required for planning at both the district and sub-county levels. The District and Sub-county Councils as supreme planning Authorities do exist and meet regularly (once in two months as required by law). The Technical Planning Committees of the District and Sub-counties also exist and are quite active in discharging their roles. At the District level, A district Planning Unit, staffed with the core professional staff is established and services the DTPC as well as backstops the Sub-county TPCs. Standing Committees within which a lot of sectoral issues are discussed and prioritised before they are brought before the TPC also exist and are quite active.

Over the years, a number of interventions have also been made to equip the district and Sub-county officials with the desired planning skills with a view to improve on the planning processes at all levels of local government. Sub-county Chiefs, Sub-Accountants, Sub-county Facilitators and Investment Committee Chairpersons and members have been trained on the various aspects of planning. District Heads of department have also been trained in participatory bottom-up planning. A number of other donors/NGOs and central government line ministries have equally contributed towards this endeavour.

The concept of decentralized development planning is now reasonably well understood and applied both at the district and sub-county level.

In the area of data collection, which is essential for realistic planning, some progress has also been made. In 1998/99, ACBP sponsored a pilot scheme to establish Community Based Management Information System in five Sub-counties. Training on CBMIS was also carried out in the rest of the sub-counties. Whereas no adequate follow up was done on the process, a number of communities and Sub-counties have been able to operationalise the CBMIS and have generated a lot of simple but very useful data to support their planning processes. Additionally, plans are underway to collect socio-economic data on a yearly basis as a follow-up to the UBOS/ADLG survey of 1999- 2000. The second survey was undertaken early 2001. Furthermore, the district has undertaken resource mapping of key facilities. Institutional data collection covering schools and health units has also been undertaken.

The district and all the sub-counties now have three year rolling plans, reviewed annually albeit of varying qualities. All local governments are also able to prepare and indeed have annual work plans and budgets. These have all been achieved because of the efforts mentioned above.

The capacity for planning at the sub-county level is still weak. Although the recruitment of graduate agricultural officers and Community Development Officers has improved the staffing at situation, most Sub-counties do not have the required number of extension staffs to backstop the Technical Planning Committee and ultimately the Sub-county planning

authorities. The available staffs are insufficiently versed (and have few available manuals and guidelines) in some of the basic skills required in planning and managing service delivery- investment planning, budgeting, financial management, tendering, contract preparations etc.

Committee Institutional Performance: Much of the Local Governments planning actually take place through the standing committees, where councilors work together with the civil servants. Often the councilors are not adequately versed with the technical issues and this limits their effective participation considerably. The problem may be exacerbated by the fact that politicians are elected after every four years, where by new entrants have to be inducted into their roles.

Lack of adequate, accurate and timely data: while the recently concluded 2002 population and housing census is expected to provide the most comprehensive data for planning, a lot of efforts are still required in this area particularly in updating the data regularly and putting in place mechanisms for proper storage. Capacity for data management as well as systems for regular collection, update, and analysis will continue to be required.

Lack of effective data collection mechanism: A framework for co-coordinated and sustainable data collection, analyses, storage and dissemination is still lacking at all levels. While a number of data collection exercises have taken place in the district over the years by different agencies, there has been no framework to enable all data users have access to such data. The District Planning Unit, which is a central institution where most data users converge to obtain data, has hardly been involved or informed about many of such interventions. In instances where the DPU has been involved, the unit has been ill equipped (both in terms of skills and software) to capture data from such surveys for use by other stakeholders including the district itself. The department lacks the necessary software for data analysis and storage.

Inadequate funding of the District Planning Unit: In spite of the pivotal role played by the DPU in facilitating the formulating and integrating the planning processes; monitoring and evaluating the implementation of projects/programmes; co-coordinating the various development efforts, the department remains one of the least funded departments. The department suffers from chronic lack of operational funds and other equipment to enable it function effectively.

Challenges associated with rapid changes in information technology. The contemporary global economy, which is highly anchored on information technology, is rapidly changing. The rapid changes have consequences on policy dimensions. Development planning at the district level should of necessity be constantly informed by the changing global policy trends (dimensions). In that respect, the District planning Officers should be able to have constant interface with the emerging policy issues in order for them to be able to provide up to date advice to the district council on priority areas for intervention.

Against the backdrop of the numerous challenges associated with establishing effective planning system in the district, some of which have been highlighted above, it is imperative that capacity building for strengthening district development planning should be looked at

as a continuous process. Secondly, there is need for proper co-ordination and pooling of resources from the various sources.

2.2 Revenue Sources and Performance

The budget of Arua district is financed through three major sources:

- ♦ Local Revenue
- ♦ Donor Funds and
- ♦ Central Government Transfers.

Overall, there has been a remarkable improvement in revenue performance during the period under review. However the increment has mainly been due to the introduction of the Poverty Action Fund and other donor supported programmes such as the Local Government Development Programme, NWSHAP, NAADS, PMA, and LGDP among others.

Implications of Revenue Performance for Decentralisation

Since a substantial proportion of the district budget is financed through the central government transfers, ability of the district council to finance locally perceived priorities is likely to be affected. The District priorities will be largely constrained by decisions/priorities of central government.

Low local revenue base also adversely affects the ability of the district to meet its co-financing obligations for donor funds as well as affect the ability to sustain investments financed through donor funds. All these factors will impact negatively on the process of decentralisation. It is therefore important that considerable effort is made to expand the district revenue base.

Financial Management in the District

The management of funds under decentralization is governed by the Local Governments Financial and Accounting Regulations stipulated in the fifth schedule of the Local Governments Act 1997.

Internal Audit Department

Before decentralization, internal audit was a section within the finance department. Under the decentralized system, however, internal audit department has been provided for separately in district. The head of the internal audit department prepare quarterly audit reports and submits to the Chairperson of district council, and copy to the Local Government Public Accounts Committee. While attempts have been made to improve on the performance of this department through recruitment and training and provision of necessary equipment, there is still need for continuous strengthening of the department in view of the amount of work that it is required to carry out.

Auditor General's Office

Every account of the district council and its sub-county councils audited by the Auditor General's office. The Auditor general may also carry out surprise audit, investigations or any other audit deemed necessary. The report of the Auditor General is submitted to the Parliament for the necessary attention of the Public Accounts Committee, Ministers responsible for Finance and Local Government, Local Government Finance Commission, Local Government Public Accounts Committee, Inspector General of Government and the Chairman of the District Council.