



ISER

Facilitating Social Justice

INITIATIVE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

An assessment of the role and effectiveness of Barazas in decision making processes



June 2018

Through the Barazas, the District Technical Officers led by the Chief Administrative Officer present the implementation status of Government and Non-Government Organizations programs to the citizens and representatives from the office of the prime minister. She / he is supported by the heads of departments. Citizens are given time to supplement, seek clarifications and make recommendations. The CAO and the heads of departments respond to the raised questions before the representative from the OPM submits and closes the Baraza.

Table of Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations	ii
Introduction	1
The <i>Baraza</i> methodology and process	3
Key Observations	3
Organization and mobilization of <i>Baraza</i> participants	4
Communication medium	7
Attendance and citizens' participation	7
<i>Baraza</i> Financing	9
The performance of the District technical team	9
Assessing the effectiveness of <i>Barazas</i>	10
Highlight of the common issues raised across the four <i>Barazas</i>	11
Conclusion and Recommendations	11

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DINU	Development Initiative for Northern Uganda
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ISER	Initiative for Social and Economic Rights
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PWDs	Persons With Disabilities
RDC	Resident District Commissioner
UHRC	Uganda Human Rights Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Introduction

As part of its effort to strengthen accountability in public service delivery and improve on the performance monitoring of the Local Governments, the government of Uganda introduced *Barazas*¹, following a presidential directive.² The *Barazas*, which are managed by the Office of the Prime Minister and supported by the office of the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) at the district and lower levels, are also known as community information forums. They are accountability platforms through which local leaders and civil servants are required to inform the communities about government policies and programmes and thereby account for their performance, whilst also seeking for the views of the people. This initiative commenced in 2009 and has since been faced by praises and criticisms in both approach and effectiveness.

In that light, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER), undertook to assess the organization, popularity and effectiveness of *Barazas* and thereby launched a short study. The study was undertaken as part of the broader **Social Accountability and Community Participation project** and it involved the observation of four *Barazas* in the districts Adjumani³, Gulu⁴, Amolatar⁵ and Bundibugyo.⁶ The *Baraza* creates a platform for technical officers to provide information about the status of service delivery to the citizens and in turn paving way for citizens to participate in the development cycle by monitoring the usage of public funds and other resources. In addition, it is a platform that is used to collect information from citizens; this is done by providing an opportunity to citizens to raise issues in concerning service delivery in their respective areas.

1 They are community based information fora for monitoring performance of programmes which are implemented by the Government of Uganda in the local governments. The programme creates a platform for the citizens to participate in the development cycle through monitoring the use of public resources in the delivery of services at Local Government level <http://opm.go.ug/Baraza-program> (Accessed on the 5th September 2017)

2 Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (2016), Are they working? An Audit of Social Accountability mechanisms in Government processes in Uganda

3 Held on the 25th February 2017 at Ciforo Sub County Headquarters

4 Held on the 29 June 2017 at Gulu Main Market in Laroo Division

5 Held on the 30th June 2017 at Awelo Sub County Headquarters

6 Held on the 14th July 2017 Bundibugyo Town Council

The pilot phase of the *Barazas* was conducted in the four districts of Masaka, Kumi, Nebbi and Bushenyi. The programme was gradually rolled-out to 112 districts, with each supposed to conduct at least two *Barazas* in a year.⁷ In some districts, however, there are *Barazas* that are supported by Non-State Actors.

The Constitution of Uganda in Article 38 provides for citizens participation and thus, the *Baraza* initiative is one of the mechanisms that affords citizens an opportunity to participate in government service delivery process aside from the Budget conferences and village meetings among others. The citizens participate in the development cycle by directly engaging with service providers and government officials, and also demand for accountability on the use of public resources.⁸

For purposes of ownership, awareness and accountability, it is important for citizens to participate in the formulation of public policies and programmes and their implementation monitoring and evaluation. Such engagement is, however, insufficient and in some cases lacking, due to several reasons that can variably be attributed to all key players in the public service delivery systems. As a result, many decisions and programmes fall short of performing to expectations because of lack of adequate awareness and embracement of the beneficiary communities. In that light, it is important to make an assessment as to whether the *Barazas* are being effectively used in addressing such gaps concerning citizen participation. This brings us to the focus of this observation study that seeks to investigate the role and effectiveness of *Barazas* in local public service delivery decision making processes.

7 <http://opm.go.ug/Baraza-program> (Accessed on the 5th September 2017)

8 International Food Policy Research Institute (2016), the state of public service delivery in Uganda: Report of a baseline survey.

The Baraza methodology and process

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) funds the *Barazas* and works closely with the Resident District Commissioners (RDC) and District and lower Council leadership that play a major role in the scheduling and mobilisation for the community meetings. The *Barazas* are chaired by the RDC of the host district, who usually opens the meeting by explaining their objectives and processes through which they are conducted. This is followed by speeches of the district and sub county political leadership and the representative from the OPM, who provides more insight on the purpose of the meeting, past experiences elsewhere and the role of central government in the process. The core of the discussions is based on the Chief Administrative Officer's presentation on the performance of the previous financial year, in general and also with a specific focus on the jurisdiction for which the meeting is intended to cover. Where necessary, that presentation is further reinforced by additional comments by the Heads of Departments, especially in the areas of great importance or concern to the target community.

The citizens are thereafter allowed to make their submissions in response to the presentations, in terms of additional information, questions or complaints. The responsible officers are required to respond to all the questions or concerns before the representative from the Office of the Prime Minister responds to some of the issues as raised by the citizens. The question and answer session constitutes the largest part of the interactive meeting. Although some of the issues raised are instantaneously answered or noted for action, others may require to be answered at a later date. Therefore, the *Barazas* are supposed to have a feedback mechanism managed by the RDCs and the OPM and that process should be considered critical in the assessment of citizen satisfaction with service delivery.

Key Observations

With the purpose of assessing the level of mobilization and participation of citizens, a research team from ISER attended four *Barazas* in the districts of Adjumani, Gulu, Amolatar and Bundibugyo and observed the following:

- **Evaluation of government projects;** on a positive note, the *Barazas* were found to be not only means for evaluating project implementation but is also a mechanism for identifying priority areas that require further or future action. *Barazas* ought to therefore, be among the major contributing forums to the budget making. They tend to allow for extended discussions and are attended by many persons that may not necessarily be interested or able to attend the budget conferences.
- Since citizens' attendance is not limited, there is always a high level of participation from citizens especially when there is representation of the OPM at the meeting. However, observations showed that where mobilization was properly conducted, citizens turned up in big numbers especially by the locals of the sub county in which the *Baraza* was conducted. The districts are supported to conduct only one *Baraza* in a financial year, and this means holding it in only one sub-county. The proceedings and outcome of the *Baraza* is expected to guide the rest of the sub-counties in their planning and engagement with the communities, duty bearers and other stakeholders. The question of cost notwithstanding, the coverage of one sub-county per district is a very small sample size to effectively cater for varying and peculiar interest among sub-counties.

Organization and mobilization of Baraza participants

In order to attract a good attendance, *Barazas* are usually held in or near public places or during community gathering events such as the market days. However, other than scheduling and location, the level of attendance of the *Barazas* is determined by other factors, key amongst which is the legitimacy of local leaders and level of community mobilisation. As can be observed in the picture below, for instance, the *Baraza* held outside Gulu main market, did not appear to impact on normal operations of the market, as market goers and vendors continued with their business. According to the women who attended the meeting, a situation arose from lack of involvement of the market leadership in the mobilisation for the *Baraza*.

Effective citizen participation is significantly dependent on the level of their attendance of the *Barazas*. Low attendance leads to limited discussions and thus a probable miss out on other key issues that could be of significance in bringing out the holistic state of affairs in service delivery.



Baraza in Gulu District organized in front of the main market

Comparing the attendance of *Barazas* in Gulu, Adjumani, Amolatar and Bundibugyo districts, it was noted that attendance was highest in Adjumani and Amolatar Districts. Gulu and Bundibugyo recorded low attendance of participants. Despite being strategically situated in front of the Gulu main market, citizens' attendance was really low at this *Baraza* due to what citizens termed as poor mobilization.

It was observed that the *Baraza* conducted in the urban area (Gulu and Bundibugyo) did not attract as many participants as those that were held in the rural areas (Amolatar and Adjumani). This could perhaps be attributed to the higher number of formal workers in urban areas and large business community which seem not to pay much attention to the *Barazas*. It further infers that much as the urban dwellers need social services, they may not be as vulnerable as citizens

“... even our Chairman of the market was not aware of the Baraza until when he saw the tents this morning; it is very easy to mobilize women in the market but it seems our top leaders were hiding something...”, a female market vendor.

in the rural areas whose dependence of public services appears to be higher.

The experience was different in Amolatar district, where the *Baraza* was held in a rural setting, at the Sub County Headquarters. The picture below demonstrates that the *Baraza* held at Awelo Sub County was well attended by citizens perhaps because of the choice of location, but it could also have been due to good mobilization.



Baraza at Awelo Sub County in Amolatar District.

We therefore think that citizens can exceedingly attend *Barazas* if information about them is availed in time using different plat forms and citizens mobilized through use of multiple means. It is for example, expected that a large population can easily be mobilized through their respective village chairpersons; secondly mobilisation could also involve the placing of posters at strategic positions such as trading centers, churches, schools, sub county and district headquarters, media and social places. The intention is to have as many people as possible being informed about the programs. This would ensure the avoidance of letting a small number of citizens to plan for the majority as it does not promote or instill the spirit of program ownership among the citizens.

Communication medium

Whereas *Barazas* are supposed to be conducted in local languages, it was observed that some of the local leaders and technocrats could not easily make presentations or respond to issues in local languages. Most presentations were made largely in English yet the majority of participants, in all the *Barazas*, were not conversant or comfortable with English. Indeed, many of them kept interjecting the presentations with a demand for the presenters to speak in the local languages.

The documents that were circulated at the *Barazas* are written in English and this made it even more difficult for many participants to closely follow all matters discussed at the meeting. None or limited use of the appropriate local languages is at times considered to be deliberate with the aim of constricting effective local participation. This, in some cases, led to protests or disruptions of the meeting, as locals insisted on the meetings being fully conducted in the local language. This was noted in Gulu and Bundibugyo Districts where the RDCs and *Baraza* Coordinator from the OPM had to intervene for the presentations to be made in Local Languages.

“As ISER, we suggest that presentations are made in local languages unless the officer does not know the local language but even so a translator must be sought”.

Attendance and citizens’ participation

Among the reasons for conducting *Barazas* is to provide information and accountability to a considerable number of citizens from different spheres of life, and allow them to participate in the meeting. Men, women, youth, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) were given platforms to submit at the *Barazas*

As such, *Barazas* are open to all citizens ranging from male, females, youth, PWDs, people living with HIV/AIDs, the poor and marginalized communities where each person’s contributions counts. The team could not verify the exact number of citizens who attended each of the *Baraza* in a District but by estimate, Adjumani had over 700 participants, Amolatar had about 500 citizens, Bundibugyo could only manage to pull about 150 while Gulu District had less than 100 participants attending the *Baraza*. As such, the *Baraza* is open to all citizens in the district. All development partners in the district including international agencies are invited to attend the *Barazas* and in fact a good number of development partners were recognized at the *Barazas* by the OPM and the RDCs.

A number of citizens participated in the meetings by pointing out service delivery gaps; asking questions and; seeking for clarifications on unclear submissions by the technical and political leaders.

It was observed that the poor and marginalized including the youth and women, reasonably participated in the *Barazas*. Indeed, women were in some cases found to have participated more than the men. Notwithstanding the level of engagement and disaggregation of participants, the outstanding matter remains as to whether the local contributions call for time action or count in decision making. It was in fact revealed by some respondents of an earlier study, under the same project, that disinterest in attending *Barazas* was partially attributed to lost confidence in their effectiveness in attracting appropriate action and influencing decision making processes.

Largely, the participants raised their issues or contributed to the proceedings through verbal communication. There was, however, the use of written anonymous notes. The second option is not only intended to cater for individual communication preferences, but also ensure maximum participation, especially in the event where the allocated time is insufficient.



A woman raising her issues at a Baraza in Ciforo Sub County in Adjumani District

While participants in Adjumani, Bundibugyo and Gulu presented their issues verbally, they were, in Amolatar, also required to write their issues on papers provided by the RDC. The notes were sorted to avoid duplication of questions and their contents were loudly read out by the moderator, who in turn invited the concerned officers to respond. It was however, difficult to establish whether the moderators acted objectively and read out all the notes since some of the participants were overheard complain that their questions have not been raised on the floor. Actually, the writing may not bring out the matter as intended or rather, it may be distorted by the moderator. For such reasons, the use of papers might not be effective much as the RDC of Amolatar District argued that the method protects the identity of participants, especially those in fear of physical or psychological retribution or both.⁹ The other limitation of written submissions owes to the fact that many persons, especially in the rural areas do not know how to write.

It is imperative therefore to promote the use of verbal communication, which accords the contributors to effectively express themselves, irrespective of education level or ability to communicate in English.

Baraza Financing

The *Barazas* conducted by the OPM are funded by the Government of Uganda and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which also fund the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHCR) to conduct human rights *Barazas*. It is also pointed out that the recently launched Development Initiative for Northern Uganda (DINU) programme implemented under the OPM will support *Barazas* implementation for five years across sixteen districts in Acholi, West Nile, Lango, Karamoja and Teso Sub Regions. It is worth noting that a number of *Barazas* have also been supported by CSOs in different districts.

The performance of the District technical team

Information was presented according to service delivery sectors by the CAO supported by the Heads of those Departments. This process flowed well without interruptions except for the answer session where occasionally citizens would be

9 Statement made by the RDC of Amolatar District while chairing the *Baraza* held at Awelo Sub County on the 30th June 2017.

10 New Vision News Paper, Vol 33, No. 93, Wednesday May 9, 2018.

heard chanting and showing faces of dissatisfaction in some *Barazas*. This means that some answers were either wrongly answered or not to the expectation of the citizens. Some issues or questions were also not attended to by the technical leaders. On one hand, the Local Government technical heads attributed some of their failures to the central Government for low funding and late disbursement of funds which they said hindered the implementation of programs within the required time frame.

Assessing the effectiveness of Barazass

Issues implemented or not; it is not clear if there are formal mechanisms in place by the OPM to follow up matters raised in the *Barazas*. Much as the OPM has conducted several *Baraza* evaluation missions, the study team was not able to establish the existence of a consistent follow-up and feedback mechanism of the *Baraza* programme. Notwithstanding the districts that completely miss out in conducting *Barazas*, the OPM conducts only one *Baraza* in a district in a financial year and no follow-up link was found between past and planned ones. As such, it is highly probable that the chances of attending to the raised issues remain low and even in cases where action is taken; timely delivery of a feedback to the communities is not necessarily assured.

According to the OPM, the evaluation of *Barazas* was contracted to a private firm, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), which has conducted the evaluation for the past three years. The report produced by IFPRI does not, however, show the issues addressed per *Baraza*, by a district for appropriate follow-up by relevant authorities.

Failure to keep track and address the issues arising from the *Barazas* implies that these community meeting are used more as a mechanism for providing information but not platforms for citizen participation in the development cycle. This is in greatly contradiction with the definition or description of *Barazas* by the OPM.¹¹

11 <http://opm.go.ug/Baraza-program> (accessed on the 5th September 2017)

Highlight of the common issues raised across the four Barazas

- In the production sector, the most common issue raised was that of late supply of inputs or technologies under government's Operation Wealth Creation programme. The local communities also complained the discriminatory selection of beneficiaries, poor quality inputs that are moreover, at times, received in November and December, at the setting in of the dry spell.
- The road sector was characterized by issues of shoddy work; poor or no periodic maintenance which also affects education and health services; high levels of corruption, especially bribery in the award of contracts and supervision of works and; delays in completion of road projects.
- In the education sector, poor performance of children was blamed on government's failure to provide scholastic materials and school facilities; poor working conditions for the teachers some of whom have to walk for over five kilometers because there are no staff houses in the schools and; poor inspection of the schools by the district education department.
- The issues raised in the health sector included massive drug stock outs due to limited supply by the National Medical Stores and theft by the medical staffs; staff absenteeism; inadequate health workers and; unconducive environment for patients. On a general note, corruption and the misuse of public resources by the duty bearers stood out across the four districts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Ideally, *Barazas* are good accountability platforms or mechanisms and can thus be very instrumental in contributing towards the improvement of local public service delivery systems.

These platforms are designed to allow for citizen participation in decision making processes through direct interaction with duty bearers. Such interactions are expected to either call for instantaneous answers or feedback or even future action, whose undertaking is communicated through the inbuilt feedback mechanism of the *Baraza* process.

This brief observation has however showed that, in practice, the conducting of *Barazas* in Uganda is essentially not to expectations. While some of the gaps are solely attributed to shortfalls in government intervention, others are clearly a result of the local arrangements. The *Barazas* are not conducted in every district and even

where they are conducted, one *Baraza* per district per financial year is a very small sample size. No evidence was adduced to suggest the opinions and concerns generated at the *Barazas* are often well considered in the planning process and a feedback provided to the respective communities. Some of the evaluations conducted seem to be more inclined to the assessment of individual meetings than detailing a holistic picture of the entire *Baraza* process, which ought to entail strong links between the past and planned *Barazas*. The *Baraza* Impact Evaluation in Uganda, which is being conducted by a private firm hired by government, is more focused on the outcome of the *Baraza* process, in terms of service delivery improvement. Therefore, there is still a strong need for an extended study on the assessment of the *Baraza* process, in terms of its effectiveness in influencing decision making processes.

Notwithstanding cost implications in terms of financial, human and infrastructural resources, government remains with the obligation of ensuring that its brainchild *Baraza* programme is conducted in a manner that would yield its objectives. This entails the provision of proper guidelines and adequate resources to ensure that the *Barazas* are not only held in every district, but also in a timely and consistent manner that is cognizant of a strong follow-up and feedback process.

The Office of the Resident District Commissioner and OPM should put in place or strengthen monitoring and feedback mechanisms of issues raised during the *Barazas*. Currently, citizens do not get to know whether their issues have been addressed or not. This will reduce cases of mistrust from citizens. In addition to serving the citizens to satisfaction, follow up and feedback mechanisms would ensure that issues raised and addressed do not arise again in the subsequent *Barazas* conducted in the same area.

Barazas need to be institutionalized so that each sub county or District can plan for its own *Baraza* within a financial year without necessarily waiting for instructions and resources from the OPM. Such an arrangement would also strengthen the aspect of ownership. The office of the RDC and that of the prime minister can still provide the required technical support and oversight role.

The other aspect that requires significant improvement concerns the local organisers and participants of the *Barazas*. The attendance and participation of citizens is still and much lower in the urban areas. This could be attributed to high levels of citizen apathy towards government programs, which some citizens regard

to be non-result yielding. Efforts should, therefore, be put in place to make sure that government programs are effectively implemented and the processes and results, in terms of achievements and challenges, communicated. Citizens need to embrace and own government programs, in order for them to appreciate the direct link between service delivery and the taxes that they pay.

The efforts of the OPM can be supplemented by other government accountability agencies such as the inspectorate of Government and Auditor General. This effort can similarly, be joined by the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the private sector, with interest in local service delivery. These state and non-state entities often have significant information or resources that can be useful in accountability and decision making processes.

As a social accountability mechanism, the *Barazua* programme should not solely look at providing information and improving participation of citizens, but also aim at ensuring that the issues raised by citizens and their demands are attended to and a feedback provided. Lack of effective follow-up mechanisms within the *Barazua* programme creates not only a state of discontent among citizens but may also suggest that the *Barazuas* are in some cases conducted for the sake of fulfilling the obligation of organizing the public gathering aspect of programme and not the entire process. Key to the success of *Barazuas* is involvement of citizens at all levels of *Barazua* process, including the planning, implementation, follow-up of the deliberation and monitoring of the eventual outcome.

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About the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights

ISER is a registered national Non - Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Uganda founded in February 2012 to ensure full recognition, accountability and realization of social and economic rights primarily in Uganda but also within the East African region.



Contact Information

Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER)
Plot 60 Valley Drive, Ministers, Village, Ntinda
P.O Box 73646, Kampala - Uganda
Email: info@iser-uganda.org
Website: www.iser-uganda.org
Tel: +256 414 581 041
Cell: +256 772 473 929

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