

Indigenizing Citizen-Based M&E Mechanisms in Africa: Lessons from Uganda's Barazas

Finding a path towards sustainable development will require the pooling of diverse perspectives, knowledge and resources, but more importantly a citizen-based approach.

As countries take greater ownership of, and leadership in, their development processes, they have increasingly developed their systems to lead, manage and account for resources invested in these processes and results produced by them. As part of its efforts to strengthen accountability in public service delivery and improve the performance monitoring of the local governments, the Government of Uganda, in 2009 under a presidential directive, introduced Community-Based Advocacy Fora called Baraza. Baraza creates a platform for technical officers and political leaders to provide evaluative information about the status of service delivery to the citizens and in turn paving the way for citizens to participate in the development cycle by monitoring the usage of public funds and other resources.

This article documents the experiences of Uganda in implementing Baraza platforms as a step towards "Made in Africa Evaluations", highlighting the history of the decentralization policy framework in Uganda, the Baraza concept, the CLEAR model and its application to findings, emerging lessons and conclusions.

Josephine Watera, Parliament of Uganda

Key Messages

- The global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals calls for “Leave no one behind” while the African Union Agenda 2063 pledges to mobilize people and their ownership of continental programs.
- Evaluation plays a critical role in accomplishing these great aspirations. Evaluations examine actions and results and ask the questions: are we doing the right thing? and Are we doing things right? These questions can only be relevant if asked in the right context, hence the debate on Made in Africa Evaluations.
- Barazas are public fora conducted at sub-county level for the local leaders to justify to the people how public funds received for a specific financial year were being utilized and what results were achieved.
- Citizen participation in monitoring and evaluation offers renewed opportunities to strengthen democracy, accountability and the rule of law.

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, marked by international movement towards widely shared information, greater group and individual engagement solidarity, citizen participation offers renewed opportunities to strengthen democracy, accountability and rule of law (Mindzie, 2015). In Africa, this renewed participation is made possible by a relatively conducive, normative and institutional environment. As a result, citizens have been able to counter poor governance practices perpetuated by the monopolization of power, control over national resources by ruling elites, and the marginalization of groups, including women and youth, who still constitute Africa's largest component of the population.

The United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development sets out 17 goals, and at the core of this discussion is the Sustainable Development Goal 16 on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, the provision of access to justice

for all, and the building of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, offer additional prospective for strong citizen-based monitoring and for holding African governments accountable.



Similarly, the African Union Agenda 2063 pledges to mobilize people and their ownership of continental programs; promote the principle of self-reliance and the importance of capable, inclusive and accountable states and institutions at all levels and in all spheres (Africa Union Commission, 2015:1). Evaluation ➡

► plays a critical role in accomplishing this pledge.

It examines actions and results and asks the questions: are we doing the right thing? Are we doing things right? Are we getting results that make a difference? Are these the right results, and what is the impact and value? (Sukai 2013:77). The Baraza platform asks similar questions with African lenses of the involvement of the community.

Uganda’s decentralization policy framework

In 1992, Uganda introduced a decentralization policy in which the central government cedes some of its power to local governments to carry out part of its mandates on its behalf. The policy was strengthened by its inclusion in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda and further consolidated in the Local Government Act (1997). Decentralization is both a technical and political process as illustrated in figure 1.

Uganda’s decentralization policy was designed to: improve service delivery in local government and lower levels; strengthen people’s participation in initiating, planning, implementation and control of their socio-political and economic developments; strengthen transparency

“ A prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena

Pan African Vision, Para 4, Agenda 2063

All power belongs to the people...

Article 1 of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda

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and accountability in the management of local governments; and promote people’s ownership of development policies.

In 2008, H.E. President Yoweri Museveni of the Republic of Uganda directed that meetings be held at sub-country level across the country as community dialogue platforms that engage the local population and their leaders on matters of service delivery. Since 2009, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) has been implementing this directive under a community-based monitoring and engagement mechanism-Barazas.

Setting the Made in Africa Evaluation agenda: The concept of Barazas in Uganda

There is a growing concern across the globe that a one-size-fits-all program ►►

Figure 1: Technical and political processes of the decentralization policy in Uganda





► evaluation approach according to the Western evaluation models is not always appropriate in the cultural and developmental contexts of Africa (Cloete 2016:55). The concept of a more appropriate Africa-rooted program evaluation management model has now been explicitly placed on the evaluation agenda in Africa. Barazas are public fora conducted at sub-county level for the local leaders to justify to the people how public funds received, for a specific financial year, were being utilized. In these fora, the local government leadership is expected to demonstrate what resources they have received, and what results have been achieved in five (5) key priority sectors, namely: health, education, water, agriculture, and roads.

Moreover, building on the field of Community Engagement partners, Babler (2015) argue that every context is different, so evaluation has to be attentive to what people care about and are experiencing in their community. The ultimate purpose of the Baraza platform is to bring together stakeholders to share public information; and generate debate and dialogue on how to develop collective strategies to improve service delivery at the community level. The uniqueness of each community informs decision-making and defeats the one-size-fits-all evaluation approaches

typical of Western evaluation practices and models.

Exercising evaluation in an independent, credible and useful way is essential to realize the contribution it can make to good governance, including accountability from governments to their citizens, transparency in the use of resources and their results, and in learning from experience (Segone et al., 2013:8). The results chain of Baraza platforms as illustrated in figure 2 strongly agrees with the observations made by Segone et al. (2013).

These fora are among the measures instituted by government to stamp out corruption, increase transparency in the management of public funds, improve accountability and enhance the public's involvement in holding the government to account for service delivery as illustrated in figure 3.

Theoretical framework underpinning “Barazas”-CLEAR model

In order to facilitate a deeper reflection on what has worked about the Baraza, this paper employed the “CLEAR” model for citizen participation at the local level (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2010). The ►

Figure 2: The results chain of the Baraza platform

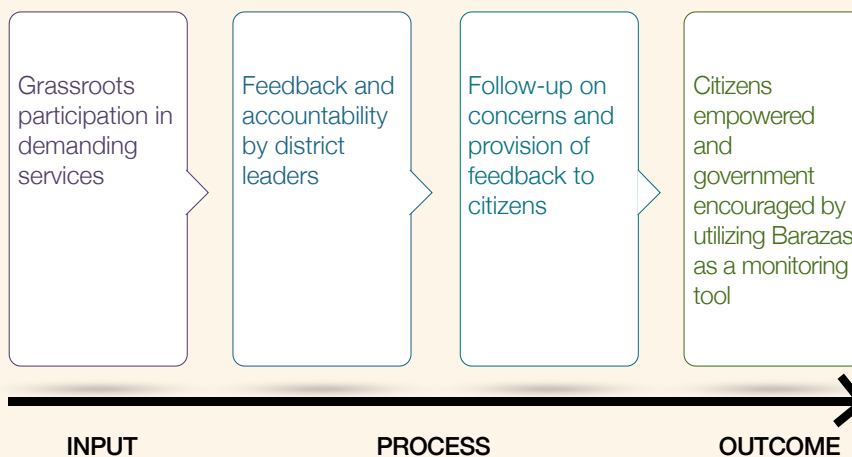
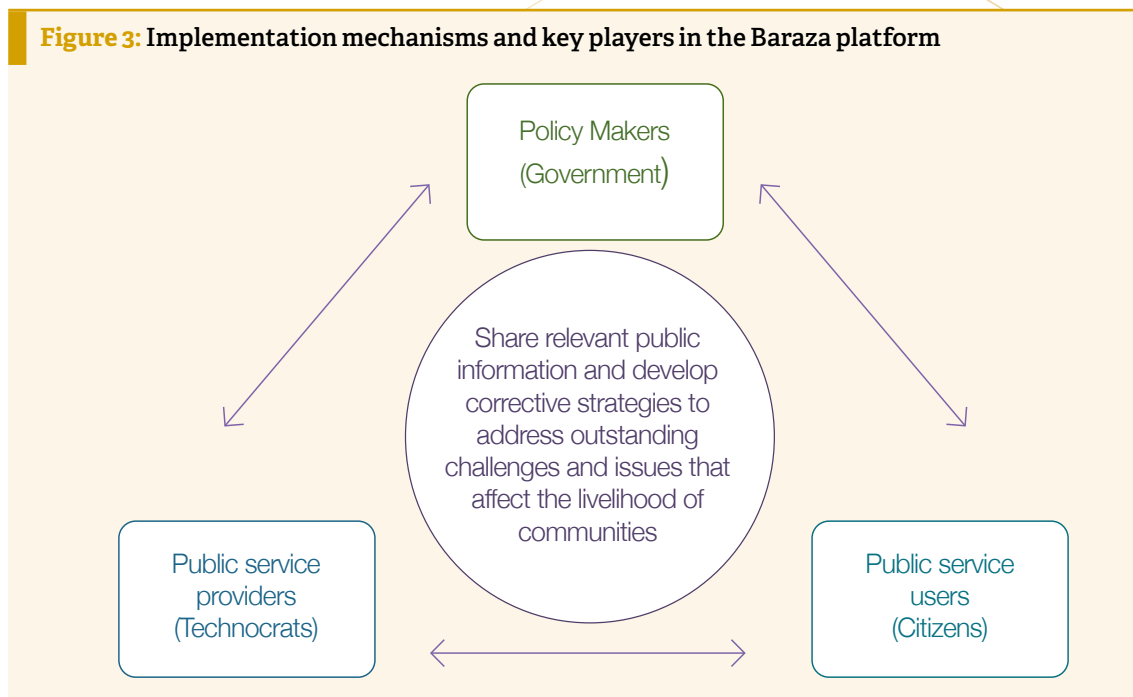


Figure 3: Implementation mechanisms and key players in the Baraza platform

► CLEAR model was operationalized for international use at the request of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Local and Regional Democracy since 2006. The CLEAR model presents a framework for understanding public participation and argues that participation is most successful or effective where citizens Can do, Like to, are Enabled to, are Asked to and are Responded to, as illustrated in figure 4. This paper places this model in the context of Barazas based on the financing, governance, organization, documentation and follow-up of outcomes.

Findings on Barazas against the five factors of the CLEAR model

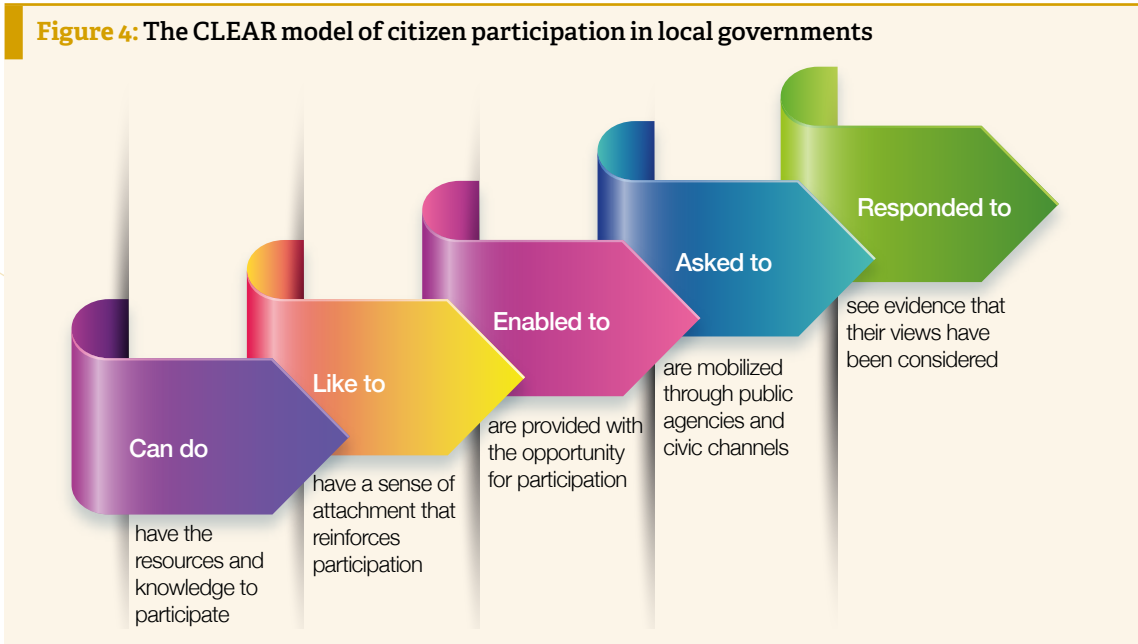
Can do

"Can do" refers largely to arguments about socio-economic status, in that when people have the appropriate skills and resources, they are more able to participate (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2010). These skills range from the ability and confidence to speak in public or write letters, to the capacity to organize events and encourage others of similar mind to support initiatives.

Barazas are initiated, coordinated and logistically supported by the OPM, but their implementation has been decentralized, with the office of the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) in each respective district taking the lead in local coordination and mobilization, hence reinforcing a sense of attachment and participation. In some instances, however, there have been reports of delayed payment of facilitation funds to the Resident District Commissioners and the coordination team at the local level, causing delays in the mobilization process and awareness campaign within the district, hence a great threat to the success of this initiative (Office of the Prime Minister, 2017).

The RDCs and selected moderators have been equipped with additional skills on how to facilitate Barazas and report in a timely way to relevant authorities (Office of the Prime Minister, 2017). Additionally, as part of the steps towards standardized and formalized procedures of conducting Barazas, a manual was developed in 2013 to guide the implementation of the Baraza program.

Despite these milestones, a number of studies have pointed out low ►►

Figure 4: The CLEAR model of citizen participation in local governments

► literacy levels as an impeding factor for the success of Barazas (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, 2018). Literacy is one of the outcomes of basic education and it is defined as the ability to read with understanding and write meaningfully in any language. Whereas Barazas are supposed to be conducted in local languages, some of the local leaders and technocrats cannot easily make presentations or respond to issues in local languages. The 2017 National Governance Peace and Security Survey showed that nationally, 66% of the adult population was literate, with males (76%) more literate than females (58%). The literacy rate was even lower among rural residents (61%) than those in urban areas (79%), yet the biggest Baraza participation is in the rural areas. One of the objectives for the manual is to support training of trainers and other capacity building initiatives on the Baraza program (OPM, 2013).

Like to

“*Like to*” rests on the idea that people’s felt sense of being part of something encourages them to engage. The argument is that if one feels excluded or senses a lack of belonging, then there are low chances of participation (Lowndes

and Pratchett, 2010). A sense of trust, connection and linked networks can, according to social capital argument, enable people to work together and co-operate for participation.

Unlike the former centralized government structure where public service officials at the lower local level (sub-county) would implement development plans formulated by the central government at the district level and report back again, the decentralized system and more importantly the Baraza approach has placed an uphill task for technocrats to be directly accountable and responsive to the citizens within their purview (Campenhout et al., 2017). This system has been essential in creating a sense of belonging for programs at the local government.

Barazas were found to be not only means for evaluating project implementation, but also a mechanism for identifying priority areas that require further or future action. Citizens can exceedingly attend Barazas if information about them is availed in time using different platforms and citizens mobilized through the use of multiple means (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, 2018). ►



► However, reports from districts have pointed out that the Baraza concept is still misconstrued by several people as a political forum at which grievances and sentiments between varying political factions are aired (Office of the Prime Minister, 2017). The government has already responded to this challenge with a revised manual for conducting Barazas.

Enabled to

“Enabled to”, as a factor in participation, is premised on the research observation that most participation is facilitated through groups or organizations (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2010). Collective participation provides continuous reassurance and feedback that the cause of engagement is relevant and that participation is having some value.

Article 38 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda provides for citizen participation and thus the Baraza initiative is one of the mechanisms that enables and affords citizens an opportunity to participate in the government service delivery process.

On a given Baraza event, the three stakeholders are represented by both district level and sub-county level equivalents. The political heads (principals) constitute committees that initiate projects, approve budgets and monitor government programs and service delivery. The technical side is led by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), who is head of civil service at the districts and is mandated to oversee the various sectors and each of the sector heads (agriculture, education, health, water and roads). Based on this set-up, community members are enabled to address their matters directly with the principals and technocrats with a reassurance of positive results.

However, in other areas, the people living in remote hard-to-reach areas had low participation. Such factors, if not properly addressed, can disable the success of the initiative and probably miss out on key issues that could be of significance (Office of the Prime Minister, 2017).

Asked to

“Asked to” builds on the finding that mobilization matters. People tend to become engaged more often and more regularly when they are asked ►



► to engage. People's readiness to participate often depends upon whether or not they are approached and how they are approached (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2010). Mobilization can come from a range of sources, but the most powerful form is when those responsible for a decision ask others to engage with them in making the decisions. Lowndes et al. (2006) observe that the degree of openness of political and managerial systems has a significant effect, with participation increasing where there are a variety of invitations and opportunities.

Barazas are preceded with posters relaying information about the service delivery strategic locations across the sub-county where Barazas will take place and community members called upon to participate (Campenhout et al., 2017). In order to attract good attendance, they are held in or near public places like schools and during community meetings like market days.

The agenda of a Baraza event starts with opening remarks by the Resident District Commissioner of the host district who explains the objectives and process of

the engagement, followed by speeches of district and sub-county political heads and of a representative from the Office of the Prime Minister, and at the core of it, a presentation by the CAO on the performance of the previous financial year. Where necessary, that presentation is further reinforced by submissions from respective heads of departments. The question and answer session constitutes the largest part of the interactive meeting where citizens are asked to make submissions in response to the presentations, in terms of additional information, questions or complaints.

Largely, the participants raise their issues or contribute to the proceedings through verbal communication and, to some extent, written anonymous notes to not only cater for individual communication, but also ensure maximum participation where there are time constraints. Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (2018) observed that poor and marginalized groups including the youth and women reasonably participated in the Barazas and, indeed, in some cases, women were found to have participated more than men. ►

► Responded to

“Responded to” captures the idea that for people to participate on a sustainable basis, they have to believe that their involvement is making a difference, which is achieving positive results. For people to participate, they have to believe that they are going to be listened to and, if not always agreed with, at least in a position to see their views taken into account (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2010). Responsiveness is about ensuring feedback, which involves explaining how the decision was made, and the role of participation in that.

From a number of assessments, service users/community members felt that they were being responded to (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, 2018). According to Campenhout et al. (2017), stakeholders thought that Barazas are useful for improving service delivery across all sectors and had no difficulty in providing examples of changes they felt were a direct result of the Barazas being held. These were in terms of projects that were previously dragging being finished or taken up afresh, sub-standard work being redone and in some instances, priorities were changed to better align with citizen's needs. A substantial part of these outcomes seemed to derive from the Baraza's potential to simply fix information asymmetries.

Emerging lessons and recommendations

As Africa through its agenda 2063 aspires for an Africa whose development is people-driven (African Union Commission, 2015), there is a number of emerging lessons from such initiatives with no exception to Barazas in Uganda.

Capacity to engage - Barazas have been instrumental in providing accurate information to the citizenry on how government operates. However, low literacy rates remain a big challenge

“Information is power only if you can take action with it. Then, and only then, does it represent knowledge and, consequently, power.”

Daniel Burrus

for the effective implementation of the Baraza program.

Participatory planning - This promotes ownership of decisions, effective implementation of actions and sustainability of results. Barazas are premised on the principal of participatory planning right from the village level. It has enabled Government and Local Governments to better understand the local needs of people.

Timing/periodicity - Barazas are planned for only once a year, yet the original directive by the president was twice a year. He could have envisaged the first session for planning and the second for reporting results or giving feedback. There is need to move beyond traditional models of governance where citizen input is received just once per election cycle, or sometimes not at all.

Feedback mechanisms - With only one annual opportunity to hold the Baraza in a district, the process of providing feedback still remains weak. Enhancing central government's responsiveness to citizen's development demands and public service delivery concerns is critical for the success of the initiative. There is a need to build institutional frameworks that incorporate citizen voices in decision-making processes. There is also a need to develop a corrective strategy aimed at enhancing public accountability through which the central government's quick responsiveness can rebuild government's popularity towards its citizens.

Funding - Whereas the original presidential directive was to conduct Barazas ►



► at sub-county level, with about 1,400 sub-counties in Uganda, amidst limited resources, the Office of the Prime Minister is still constrained to deliver on this mandate. There is a need to devote more resources to this initiative which has been key in increasing a sense of citizenship amongst Ugandans. The financial support from development partners could also make a great difference towards the effective implementation of Barazas in Uganda.

Institutionalization of downward accountability - Have each sub-county and district plan own Baraza within a financial year. This is critical in bringing about improvements in public service delivery and transparency in the use of public resources. This will instil a home-grown culture of independent citizen monitoring for constructive criticism sustained the wellbeing of the people.

Assessment of the Baraza initiative - The Baraza initiative has been implemented now for almost a decade, but so far only one comprehensive assessment has been conducted. It is important that the Office of the Prime Minister and districts themselves engage in continuous assessment of the initiative to take stock of what has worked

and what has not and make necessary adjustments to the conceptualization and implementation of the initiative. Even more important is an extended study on the assessment of the Baraza Process, in terms of its effectiveness in influencing decision-making processes.

Conclusion

Evaluation is a judgement of value or worth and provides information to support decision-making (Sukai 2013:77). In development evaluation, it supports accountability for the effective use of resources, lessons for improvement, knowledge sharing, and the distillation of this knowledge for use.

Barazas are good accountability platforms or mechanisms and can thus be very instrumental in enhancing citizen-based monitoring and improving local public service delivery systems.

Barazas have been at the centre of sharing information and educating masses of their role in holding the government accountable and ultimately tapping their knowledge on ►►

► community needs-based planning and service delivery, which is core in advancing the learning function of evaluations.

Barazas are instrumental in contributing to the overall aspirations of Agenda 2063, “the Africa We Want” which other African countries can learn from despite the gaps identified. It is noted that SDG 16 addresses three interrelated topics, namely “peace”, “inclusion” and “institutions”. “Inclusion” and “institutions” are also highly relevant

“ Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family

Kofi Annan

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for the achievement of other SDGs. These two topics are the core drivers of Baraza platforms in Uganda, but more important at the centre of advancing Made in Africa Evaluation approaches.

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Author's profile

A Social Worker by profession, **Josephine Watera** is the Head of the Monitoring and Evaluation Division in the Parliament of Uganda with over twelve (12) years of working experience in program design, implementation, performance management, community-driven development, and action learning, including planning, monitoring and evaluation, research and advancing evidence use in decision-making.



Josephine holds a triple master's degree in Monitoring and Evaluation; Business Administration; and Social Sector Planning and Management.

Josephine is the Sub-Saharan Africa representative on the Board of International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS), Advisory Committee Member of the Africa Center for Evidence (ACE) at the University of Johannesburg, and the Secretary-General of the Uganda Evaluation Association (UEA). She is part of the team that is currently reviewing the African Evaluation Guidelines led by the African Evaluation Association.

As an author, presenter and speaker, she has made great contributions in the field of monitoring and evaluation. She is greatly involved in delivering training in monitoring and evaluation; and in the recent past, she has engaged as mentor in the Piloted EvalYouth International Youth Mentorship Program by EvalPartners, and in the Development Monitoring and Evaluation for Peace (DPME) Mentorship Program 2018 by Search for Common Ground, both aimed at developing Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity of Young and Emerging Evaluators.

Josephine's works have been internationally recognized, as she was awarded as the most promising evaluator from developing countries during the 2017 American Evaluation Association Conference.