

Social administration and societal transformation in Uganda today

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ABSTRACT

Any attempt to divorce Social Administrators from mainstream societal arrangements aimed at causing societal transformation and development is a futile one. This is due to the fact that social administrators have historically been instrumental in working with governments around the world to ensure that societal needs at different levels are addressed to propel development. Societal transformation requires concerted efforts and this is exactly why governments have to embrace the role played Social Administrators in societal development. The researcher employed a purely critical qualitative approach in which desk research methodology was relied upon. As such secondary data was used and this data was obtained mainly from scholarly and published research articles surrounding Social administration, Social welfare, and other crucial published reports, with matters of the role of social administrators in societal transformation in Uganda today under scrutiny in which even the challenges incapacitating the social administrators from playing their roles well were also analyzed. Critical content analysis was employed in examining the roles of social administrators in Uganda and also the challenges that they face. Validity and reliability were guaranteed by paying much attention to critical conceptual clarity and interpretative rigor. In this paper I reviewed the genesis, the roles of Social Administrators, the challenges that hamper the activities the discipline of Social Administration drawing substantiations from the Ugandan experience. Connectedly, based on literature review, I further concluded that transforming the society is a holistic process which should be done involving all the relevant stakeholders at different levels especially in the community as this would be in position cause for ownership of all projects that could be set up to help the people improve their conditions of living. I also came up with some recommendations which included; the central government should strengthen the monitoring and evaluation department, integrating technology into mainstream societal development projects, continuously empowering local people and embracing the sustainable development strategies.

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KURJ
ISSN 2790-1394

pp. 89 - 96
Vol 2. Issue 4.
Sept 2024

Keywords: Social Administration, Societal Transformation, Social Administrators, Uganda

Introduction

Governments in the developing world have been puzzled by issues of individual, and community transformation especially on the African continent, a continent which has suffered quite a number of challenges for instance poverty, Ignorance, diseases, uncalled for civil wars all of which have served to undermine the matters of development from the grass root to the National levels (Moscona, 2019,

pp.5-11). Social administrators are a critical group of people who have for long been instrumental in helping governments around the world to effect community transformational programmes as the case was with Britain after the Second World War (Offer, 2006, p.8).

The genesis of the pivotal role of social administrators in community development and transformation can be traced from the Titmuss tradition which called for individual and community welfare together with emphasizing the need for a welfare state. The Titmuss tradition meant that governments had to work with a group of people called social administrators who would be immersed in communities, interact with all individuals to ensure that, the set government programmes and projects benefited them (Vizard, 2006, pp. 4-5).

In Uganda, the advent of social administrators and their pivotal role in community development can be traced from coming of colonialists who shaped the whole concept of modern day social administration (Mulumba et al., 2021, Pg.1). These through their initiatives established schools which were meant to train the social administrators and also equip them with the relevant skills which would enable them to work together with the community people and later be in position to report to the colonial government in line with whether the people were resistant or collaborative in that domain (Mugumbate & Bohwasi, 2021, pp. 1-3). This trend was considered crucial to the extent that even after independence, the next governments continued to embrace the roles of social administrators which makes them very crucial today.

This paper discusses the role of social administrators in Uganda today, the challenges that are hampering individual and community progress even when the central and local governments have taken it upon themselves to continuously employ these social administrators to help them in monitoring, implementation and evaluation of development projects. The paper ends with making serious recommendations to all the relevant stake holders concerning what needs to be given more attention if set goals in tandem with individual and community developments are to be achieved. The conclusion is lastly therein availed.

Methodology

The researcher employed a purely critical qualitative approach in which desk research methodology was relied upon. As such secondary data was used and this data was obtained mainly from scholarly and published research articles surrounding Social administration, Social welfare, and other crucial published reports, with matters of the role of social administrators in societal transformation in Uganda today under scrutiny in which even the challenges incapacitating the social administrators from playing their roles well were also analyzed. Critical content analysis was employed in examining the roles of social administrators in Uganda and also the challenges that they face. Validity and reliability were guaranteed by paying much attention to critical conceptual clarity and interpretative rigor.

Conceptualization of the Discipline of Social Administration

Social administration, as a field, has been defined by several scholars over the years. One notable definition comes from Martin, who defined social administration as the management of resources to achieve social goals (Martin, 1979, pp. 1-2).

Similarly, Richard Titmuss, a prominent figure in the field, defined social administration as the operation of agencies charged with planning, managing, and delivering social services (Titmuss, 1974, p. 2).

Another significant perspective comes from Dews, who described social administration as the analysis and evaluation of the organization, policies, and practices of agencies involved in social welfare (Dews, 1970).

Donnison (1961, p. 3) defines social administration "*as the study of development, structure and practice of social services.*"

Forder (1974, p.3) defines "*Social administration is concerned with the study of the welfare system, and particularly the government sponsored social services.*"

The role of Social Administrators in societal transformation in Uganda today

Social administrators play a crucial role in societal transformation by overseeing the planning, organization, and delivery of social services aimed at addressing the diverse needs of individuals and communities. In Uganda, where various social, economic, and political challenges persist, the role of social administrators becomes paramount in driving positive change and promoting social development. This section explores the significant contributions of social administrators to societal transformation in Uganda today, drawing on scholarly literature and empirical evidence.

Addressing Social Inequalities and Poverty

Social administrators in Uganda are tasked with developing and implementing policies and programs aimed at reducing social inequalities and alleviating poverty. According to Muhumuza (2019), Uganda faces significant socio-economic disparities, with a large portion of the population living below the poverty line. Social administrators play a vital role in designing targeted interventions, such as social protection programs, livelihood support initiatives, and community development projects, to uplift marginalized populations and improve their quality of life.

Promoting Access to Education and Healthcare

Education and healthcare are fundamental pillars of societal development. Social administrators work to ensure equitable access to quality education and healthcare services for all Ugandans, irrespective of their socio-economic status or geographical location. Through the implementation of educational and healthcare policies, as well as the establishment of schools, hospitals, and health centers, social administrators contribute to improving literacy rates, promoting health outcomes, and enhancing human capital development (Okello, 2017).

Strengthening Social Cohesion and Community Development

Social administrators play a critical role in fostering social cohesion and community development by promoting participatory approaches to development and facilitating community engagement and empowerment. By working closely with local communities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders, social administrators facilitate the identification of community needs, mobilize resources, and support the implementation of community-driven development initiatives aimed at enhancing social capital and fostering sustainable development (Kanyinga *et al.*, 2016, p.14).

Enhancing Governance and Accountability

Effective governance and accountability are essential for achieving sustainable development outcomes. Social administrators play a key role in promoting good governance practices, transparency, and accountability in the management of public resources and service delivery. Through the enforcement of laws and regulations, the establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and the promotion of citizen participation and oversight, social administrators contribute to enhancing the efficiency, effectiveness, and integrity of public administration systems in Uganda (Tumushabe & Ruhindi, 2020, pp.253-269).

Advocating for Social Justice and Human Rights

Social administrators serve as advocates for social justice, human rights, and inclusive development. They work to address systemic inequalities, discrimination, and injustices that hinder progress and perpetuate social exclusion. By promoting policies and programs that uphold the rights and dignity of all individuals, including women, children, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups, social administrators contribute to building a more just, inclusive, and equitable society in Uganda (Bakunda & Naluwairo, 2018).

Reporting

Social administrators like the community development officers, principal community development officers, parish chiefs among others are supposed to report to the central government detailedly about how the planned and ongoing government projects meant to develop and transform individuals and communities within their areas of jurisdiction are moving (Skidmore, 1983). This helps the central government devise mechanisms of ensuring improvement and providing solutions where notable challenges have been detected.

Community sensitization and mobilization

Individuals and communities are supposed to be made aware about what could be transpiring in terms of the government projects and programmes that meant to help in improving their social welfare. Social administrators are meant to be at the centre of this game by mobilizing people and educating them about what the central and local governments have planned or are planning for them and how best they can be part of the government arrangements (Slavin, 1978, p.22).

Community empowerment

Social administrators are supposed to help in empowering the community people. This empowerment can mainly be twofold that is to say, making people aware of their human rights and informing them about the relevant stakeholders that can further help them in ensuring that their human rights are respected and projected and that even the marginalized groups have to be taken care of (Williams, 2016, pp.15-17). Secondly, social administrators are supposed to help in training the local people to equip them with the relevant skills that can make them fit to be part of government plans and programmes that are meant to strategically position Uganda for instance, the community development officers were charged with training the youths about what the youth livelihood programme was, what they had to do to join and make other related aspects in that direction (Forder, 1966, p.40).

Mediators of individual, intra-community and inter-community conflicts

Conflicts stifle development at individual, community, National and international levels. Since development requires concerted efforts, social administrators are meant to help mediate some conflicts with in their areas of jurisdiction in order to ensure unity of purpose which levels background for working together that eventually propels development (Forder,1966, p.35).

Challenges facing the efficacy of Social Administrators in Uganda

Political Interference and Instability

There has been continuous confusion and mixing up of politics with administration both at the National and local government administrative levels in Uganda (Kakumba, 2008, Pg.2-4). This mix up has seen quite a lot of unnecessary fights and delays in the implementation of government projects by social administrators and to make matters worse, in some cases money in some local government has been taken back to the consolidated fund due to failure of the political and technical wings to agree on what needs to be done in order to address the challenges people are facing in the communities. Political interference and instability also pose significant challenges to social administrators in Uganda. Political patronage and partisan interests often influence decision-making processes and resource allocations, leading to inefficiencies and inequalities in the distribution of social services. Moreover, frequent changes in government policies and leadership can disrupt continuity and coherence in social welfare programs. A case in point is the impact of political unrest on social service delivery during periods of political transition, as observed by (Kagumire,2016).

Corruption, bribery and embezzlement and misuse of public funds

Most projects that are mean to help in community transformation have been frustrated by excessive corruption and embezzlement of public funds (Kakumba, 2008, pp.2-4). To make matters worse, even the projects where the local community people are supposed to benefit freely, instances of social administrators requiring bribes from the local people have been part of the norm as the case was with the National Agricultural Advisory services (NAADS). This has been instrumental in worsening the poverty situation especially in rural communities in Uganda for decades (Inspectorate of Government, 2023, pp.1-4).

Inadequate monitoring and evaluation

Social administrators are supposed to be at the helm of monitoring and evaluating government projects from initial to the final stages and be in position to report to government about the progress of these projects, the challenges that they are facing among other crucial aspects. However, these individuals are rarely in communities where they are employed to work and the situation is made worse by the fact that the central government does not take the overall supervision of the individuals especially in local governments seriously. This has challenged the government plan to transform rural communities by ensuring the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders (Inspectorate of Government, 2023, pp.1-4).

Limited budgets for implementation of activities, tasks and projects run by social administrators

Navigating through the troubles that the world economies faced due to global pandemic which was dubbed Covid-19 was not an easy process. Economies had to be shut in order to reduce the spread of the virus. Infact most developing economies Uganda inclusive are still grappling with the challenges left by pandemic in form of paying loans that they took from the World Bank and the international monetary fund which loans were given with some interest that governments were supposed to pay (Dean, 2009). The process of debt servicing has left governments in the developing world with limited budget to implement more projects that are supposed to contribute to community transformation and development (Wagana, 2016a). This has left social administrators with not much to do for the people they were employed to serve.

Climate change and its other negative effects

Strengthening communities to ensure resilience has become a matter of concern. As the population grows in Uganda, a lot of pressure has been pushed on to the environment reflected in unauthorized settlement in gazzetted forest, swamp reclamation and many other related activities (World Metrological Organization, 2023). These have been at the helm of worsening the climate change situation which has been reflected in increased heat, drought conditions. These drought conditions have further worsened the issue of food security which has frustrated the activities of the social administrators. A close evaluation of NAADS activities portrayed that some of the improved crop varieties which the government was giving the local through the NAADS coordinators with hope that these would be planted and they would improve food security were being eaten by the beneficiaries before planting attributing it to famine cause by climate instability in Uganda (Africa Growth Initiative, 2013).

Weak Institutional Capacity and Human Resource Constraints

Another significant challenge is the weak institutional capacity and human resource constraints within social service agencies in Uganda. Many social administrators lack the necessary training, skills, and expertise to effectively manage and deliver social services. Additionally, high staff turnover rates and understaffing further exacerbate the problem. A case study by Namuyingo et al., (2019, p.5) highlighted the difficulties faced by social workers in Uganda due to limited training opportunities and insufficient staffing levels.

Inadequate Infrastructure and Service Delivery Mechanisms

Infrastructure deficiencies and inadequate service delivery mechanisms pose significant challenges to social administrators in Uganda. Limited access to basic amenities, such as clean water, sanitation facilities, and healthcare services, hinders the delivery of social services to remote and underserved communities. For instance, a study by Atuhaire et al., (2020) identified infrastructure deficits as a major barrier to the effective delivery of education and healthcare services in rural areas of Uganda.

Conclusions

Transforming the society is a holistic process which should be done involving all the relevant stakeholders in the community as this would be in position to cause for ownership of all projects that could be set up to help the people to improve their conditions of living. However, transformation should be a

product of the participatory approach which would imply that all the groups of the local people that is to say the women, the youths, people with disabilities (PWDs) are given the opportunity to be part of societal establishments that are aimed at propelling community led development. This would ensure ownership of the established projects which would further serve as a basis for ensuring sustainability of the established community projects.

Recommendations

The central government should strengthen the monitoring and evaluation department as this would compel local governments to implement community projects for example under the parish development model while following the National development plan and other relevant documents. This would be instrumental in propelling accountability for the financial resources that the central government has always channeled to the local governments to effect programmes and projects that are meant to transform communities.

There is need to continuously empower the local people to enable them to gain the confidence to demand for the required accountability from the social administrators that are employed by the central government of Uganda at various levels to help it implement its programmes and projects especially at the grass root as this would help to reduce the too much corruption and uncalled for embezzlement of funds that are meant to contribute to societal transformation.

Social Administrators should be in position to embrace sustainable development strategies in all their engagements with community people as this would help to reduce the effects of climate change through ensuring resilient communities.

There is need for social administrators to tap on the opportunities that technology advancement has been in position to come with and be in position to painstakingly integrate technology where necessary to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability in all societal establishments.

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