



SEMA

# SEMA Trend Report

*How can we deliver quality services with local government offices in Uganda?*

May 2020

## Introduction

SEMA has been collecting citizen feedback since 2018 with the aim of assisting public institutions to improve their services using a citizen based approach. The feedback data collected is presented monthly in actionable one-pager reports to the relevant public offices. These reports are given to- and discussed with the heads of these local offices, with the purpose to inform them how they can improve the services at the institution and receive more positive feedback from citizens the next month.

However, citizens rarely see the results of the feedback that was collected from them. Our monthly reports, although distributed monthly, are not published online in order to build trust. SEMA's reports are not always put on notice boards by the offices, yet, many concerns and recommendations keep on being repeated by citizens. In some cases, public servants are not able to change their station's performance due to lack of resources and bureaucratic processes. Although we continue to value the confidential relationship we have with public institutions where we measure, we also want to inform citizens, civil society groups and public servants at other government entities of the trends that we see in our data. This is the first trend report in a series of reports where we aim to highlight feedback trends related to particular institutions, public services or themes.

This report focuses on the main trends we saw in citizen feedback collected at Wakiso and Mukono municipal offices between September 2019 and March 2020. We measured in particular at three municipality offices in Mukono and at four municipality offices in Wakiso district, including Nansana and Kira. Our team of trained data collectors were distributed to interview citizens visiting these public offices throughout these months, and we stationed feedback devices at 4 of the 7 public offices we were working with. The offices received a total of 25 monthly reports showing the findings of each month of citizen feedback collected. SEMA held regular interviews with civil servants working at the municipalities to find out how they have been reacting to these reports and the feedback presented.



**6,630**  
**citizens were**  
**interviewed**

*Conducted by trained data collectors who are positioned in shifts at the exits of municipality offices and interact with citizens who have just accessed the services.*



## The importance of local government service delivery



The local government, is a system responsible for the decentralization and administration of public services to citizens throughout the country at the district level. This is achieved through city, municipal, divisions and councils in urban settings. Most urban communities outside of Kampala are dependent on these services. They provide citizens with essential day-to-day services, including registration services for births, deaths, IDs and businesses, physical planning permits for building structures and taxes. According to data from the UN's Gridded Population of the World dataset (2019), the population of Mukono district counts 1,200,000 people and Wakiso district 1,900,000 people.

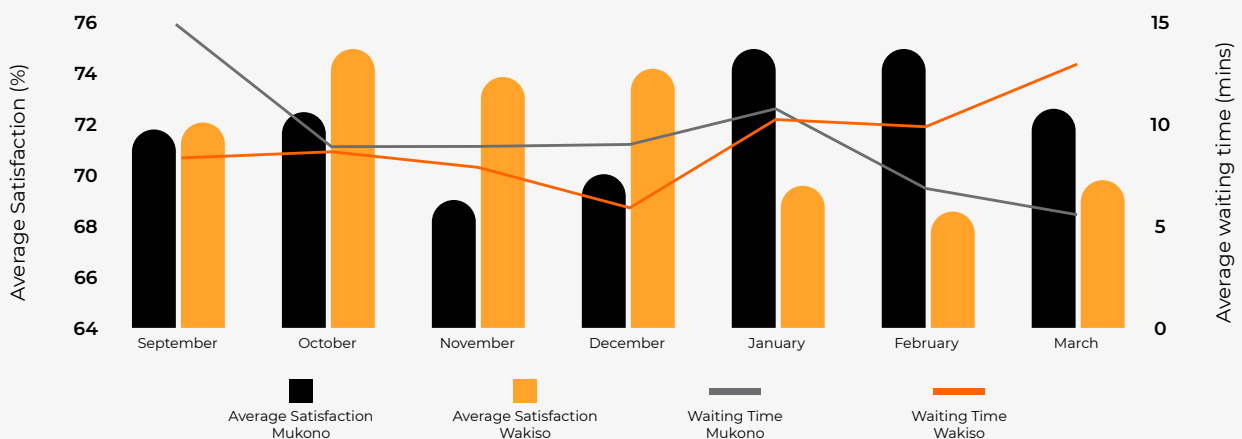
## The voice of the citizens in visiting municipal offices: four lessons

### Sudden service delivery changes directly impact on citizen satisfaction and service quality.

When looking at trends in citizen feedback at local municipalities, we notice that average satisfaction at the two municipalities is generally quite equal, usually somewhere between 65% and 75%. Over time, the average citizen satisfaction with services in Wakiso was higher than that of services in Mukono during the months of September to December, but with the start of the new year the average citizen satisfaction with services in Wakiso drop, while they increase for Mukono. Looking at waiting times, the same effect exists: Mukono waiting times decrease, while Wakiso waiting times increase. *What could be a reason for such an effect?*

Engaging with public officers from the two districts, we found that at the beginning of the year 2020, a new system of assessment and tax payment was implemented across the local government offices. Within Mukono district, community sensitization was done to ensure that citizens understood the way the new system operated, something that was not effectively done in Wakiso district. In addition to this, the new system was not fully stable in some of the offices in Wakiso district, an issue that was not present in the Mukono district offices. Over time, this instability led Wakiso district offices to be rated lower over time. Introducing a new technical system at a municipality can directly impact on citizen satisfaction rates, which should be closely monitored to make sure the system has the desired effect on service delivery.

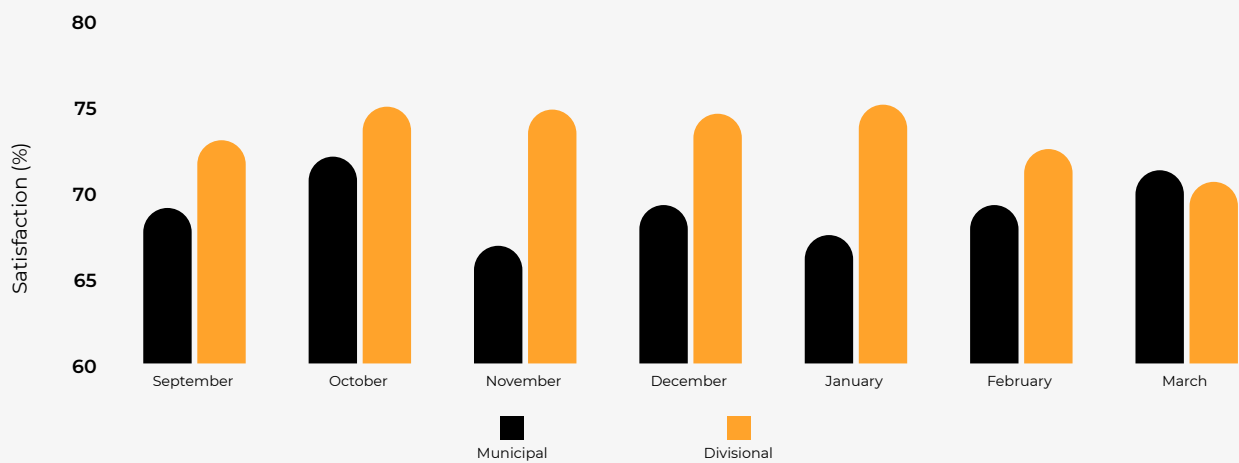
Average citizen satisfaction and waiting times in Mukono and Wakiso districts



## Generally speaking, divisional offices get better rated than municipal offices.

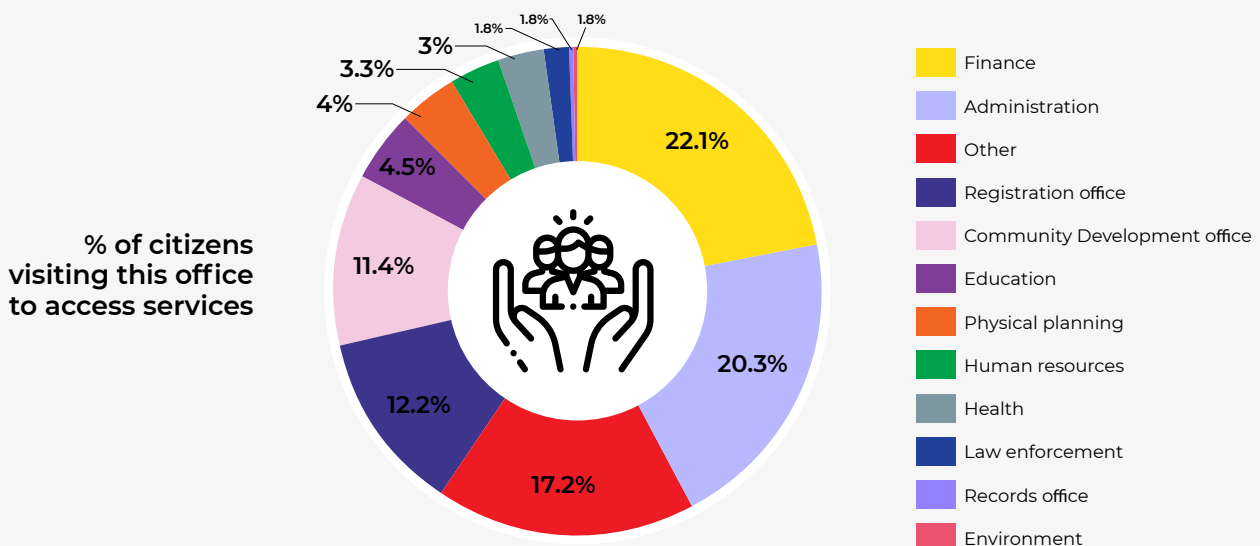
Looking further at the trends, we find that citizens who visited the divisional offices consistently reported higher satisfaction averages than those who visited municipal offices for services. Although the same services are provided at each of these type of offices, and waiting times seem to be similar for both types of offices, municipality offices tend to be bigger and have more 'political' personnel such as the Mayor's office. An explanation for this could be that community services are more often accessed at divisional offices, and higher rated. At the same time, law enforcement issues are more often dealt with at municipal offices, which hold the lowest levels of satisfaction among all office types and are also the lowest rated in terms of friendliness of staff.

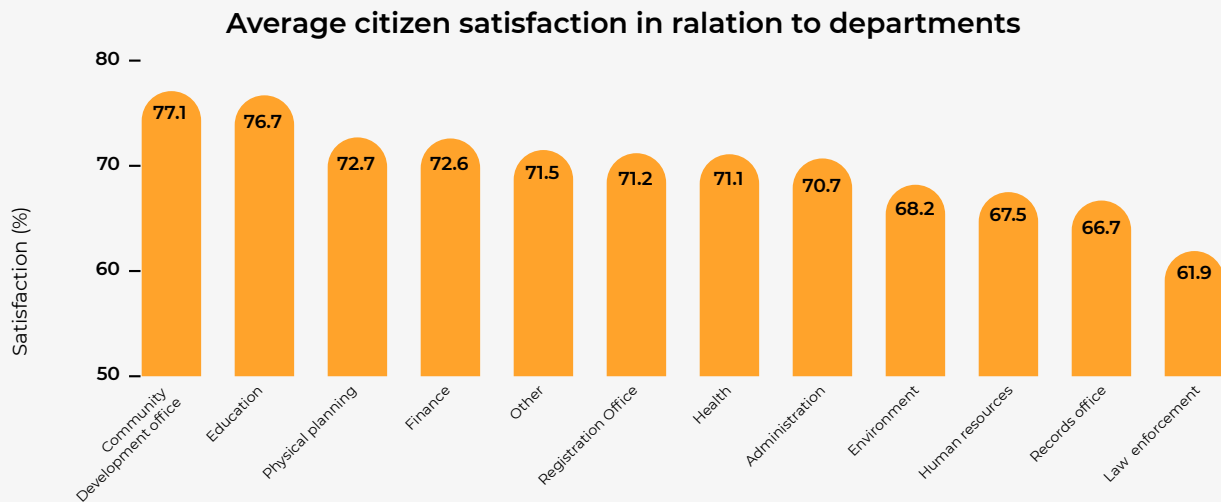
**Average citizen satisfaction in relation to the size of the office  
(Municipal and Divisional offices)**



## Citizens come for finance and admin, but are most satisfied with community services.

The majority of the citizens who visited the local government offices did so to receive services from the finance department or administrative offices. Think of citizens who want to get an assessment of their business, pay their taxes or talk to the town clerk for advice or signature on a letter. However, it turns out that citizens visiting community development and educational offices (services related to domestic violence and child enrollment at schools) are generally most satisfied, and those dealing with law enforcement are least satisfied.





### Friendliness of staff, waiting time and being sent around from office to office have a significant impact on service quality and satisfaction.

When we run a regression analysis on our data, we see that a few elements seem to be helpful in predicting whether a service at a local government office will be rated positively by citizens. In particular, when staff is friendly, this can lead to the highest increase in satisfaction for a public service. However, a longer waiting time will almost always lead to a decrease in satisfaction, which is the same for those citizens who are sent around from office to office to solve their matter. So, when local governments want to increase their performance, they should make sure their staff is trained in client care, they work on time and efficiently and it is clear to citizens which office they should go to be helped.

Coefficients:	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
(Intercept: Satisfaction)	15.00290	3.34166	4.490	7.67e-06 ***
Waiting_time	-0.14976	0.03033	-4.937	8.79e-07 ***
Friendly_staff Yes	23.31876	2.89546	8.054	1.60e-15 ***
Excessive_runaround Yes	-12.92689	1.86355	-6.937	5.90e-12 ***
Gender Male	1.16447	0.95644	1.217	0.2236
Approximate.age Over 50	2.77616	1.86016	1.492	0.1358
Approximate.age Under 30	1.90626	1.03445	1.843	0.0656

## Recommendations by citizens: address absenteeism and make processes more clear

The most recurring concerns that were raised by the citizens who visited municipality offices in Wakiso and Mukono related to (but were not limited to) the time management of public officers and complicated systems of getting required services.

Many citizens who felt that public officers were bad at time management, also often complained of finding no one in the desired office to assist them or having to wait for very long for the civil servant to show up. Relatedly, such citizens raised that public officers were found unreliable, as they expected that the public officers would be in their offices to provide the necessary services during working hours, but were many times disappointed to see that this was not the case. Public officers should try to delegate their duties in the event of leaving their offices during working hours, so that citizens visiting the institution do not miss out on the services while the public officers are carrying out field activities.

There were many citizens who felt that they did not understand the processes of getting certain services from the public institutions, and therefore concluded that the system was complicated. This was especially raised by citizens visiting the finance department in relation to tax assessments. It's recommended that public officers should explain processes around tax assessment, to avoid citizens from being sent around to different offices. In addition, it was recommended that local offices develop a system of payments for services directly at the municipal offices, so that the citizens do not have to move around to banks to finalize their processes at local government.

*"The staff member that I came to meet was not in office yet he is the one that set the appointment. This has been happening for three days and I have been told to come back tomorrow" - Citizen*

*"We should be informed about the right procedures governing different offices"- citizen*

## The voice of the public officer: we can't change 'the system'

The quality of public services being delivered at local government offices can be affected by different factors that may or may not be controllable by the public officers. For example, public officers often informed SEMA of their inability to control factors like the layout of the offices (a better waiting area) and the complicated procedures towards getting services, as this was something that could only be changed from the budget and at the national Government level. In response to absenteeism, public officers were especially vocal about the nature of their work requiring them to leave their desks. They stated that they could not delegate much of their assigned work as they were not allowed to by the system. Moreover, they were many times understaffed and therefore had to find ways of serving the most citizens that they could.

They however agreed that in instances where they did have the control to change the situation, like with matters concerning the interpersonal interactions with citizens, they (the public officers) would work to ensure that the citizens felt valued whenever they visited the office and that the environment was found clean and friendly.

## Best practices in improving public service

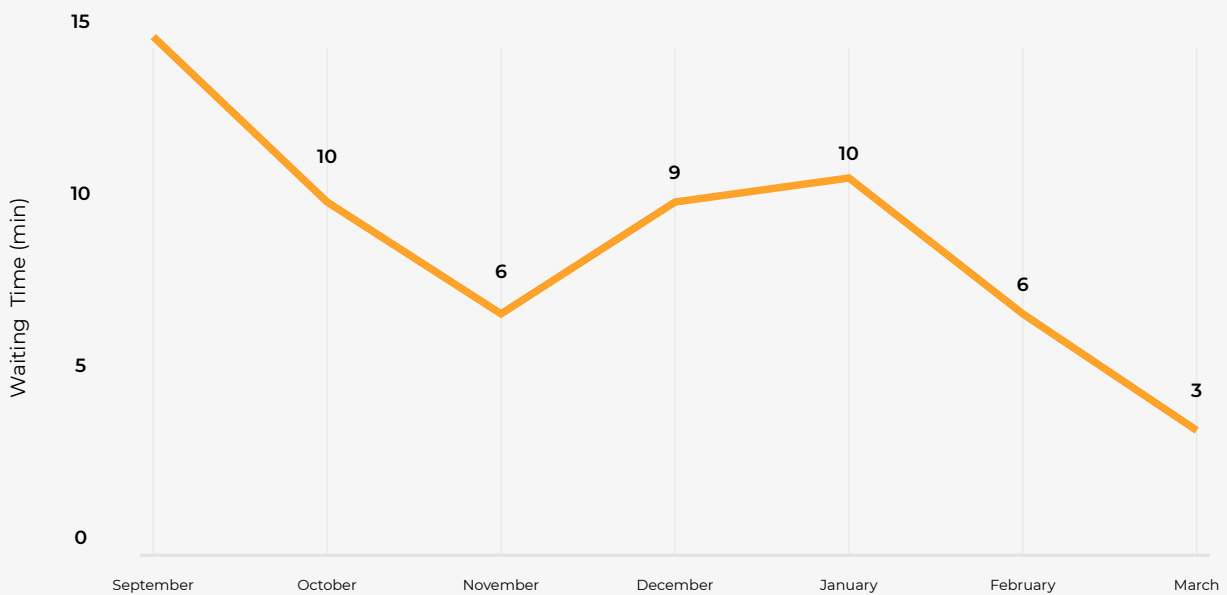
Public officers from Mukono and Wakiso local government offices were generally receptive to SEMA, valuing the citizen feedback that was presented to them and felt that should SEMA remain in their system, the model would be well received with time.

While Wakiso government offices were more hesitant to take on recommendations made, the offices in Mukono were noticeably outstanding in their reaction to monthly citizen feedback reports. All the public offices that we worked with in the region used the monthly citizen feedback reports in meetings, pinned the reports to their notice boards so that citizens could see their results, and were keen on addressing the citizens' concern raised on the report. In one case, we saw the average waiting time of a public office reduce steadily from 15 minutes to 3 minutes within seven months. This was after the head of the institution noted from the monthly reports that citizens were concerned about the amount of time that they had to wait before being assisted.

Following this initial decline, aside from the months of December and January when a new system was introduced, the office maintained a low average citizen waiting time.

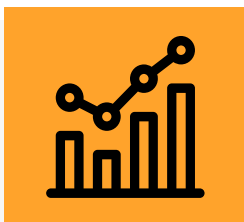
*“We shall work hand-in-hand with the tax department when the lock down has been lifted to tell people about taxes when they come for tax assessment” - the town clerk at a division office*

**Average waiting time at Mukono municipality public office**



## Conclusions

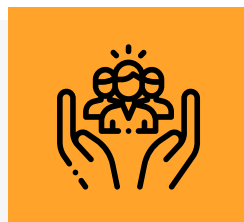
Citizens rely on local governments to get access to quality public services, and in return, pay for them through taxes. Looking at how over 15000 citizens evaluated services provided by local governments in Wakiso and Mukono, we see that many citizens do not (yet) get the services they are expecting, and that public servants struggle with knowing how and what to improve. Analysing the feedback of citizens, we see four main trends:



Service quality is highly impacted by sudden changes in the service delivery system or process



Divisional offices receive better ratings than municipality offices



Citizens most often seek financial services, but are more satisfied with community services



Friendliness of staff, waiting time and being sent around from office to office have a significant impact on service quality and satisfaction

Although complex tax- and financial processes may be hard to change for local government institutions, timely and friendly guidance can have a huge effect on how citizens rate those services. In particular, waiting time and absenteeism are often raised as concerns by citizens and directly influence the quality of services provided. These issues can easily be addressed by the local staff and management of government offices. Breaking down difficult processes, being friendly to citizens visiting an office, and serving them timely can make a local government institution stand out in the eyes of its community.



Do you have any questions about this report or want to learn more about SEMA? Contact us via [info@talkosema.org](mailto:info@talkosema.org), visit [www.talkosema.org](http://www.talkosema.org) or follow us on social media @talkosema