Bureaucratic insulation vs accountability: interventions to improve service delivery in Kampala

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Abstract:

Service delivery in places such as Kampala, Uganda, are marred by inefficiency, corruption, and negligence. Research suggests that a lack of resources and capacity are primary factors in driving poor service delivery. However, once resource and capacity constraints have been addressed, there is an ongoing debate on how service delivery can be further improved. One argument suggests that bureaucratic insulation – in other words, autonomy – is fundamental to improving government services. This is because government officials, once insulated from influences of corruption (either top-down from politicians, or bottom-up from citizens), are enabled to act in the most effective way. The other argument, driven by principal-agent theories, suggests that increasing accountability to political leaders and citizens ensures that government officials act in the most effective way. This paper sheds light on this debate by examining whether accountability interventions can improve service delivery in settings which do not have bureaucratic insulation. I examine this qualitatively by analysing a citizen feedback initiative conducted by an NGO, SEMA, in Kampala. The analysis shows that interventions designed to improve accountability can in fact play an important role in improving service delivery. It does so by establishing incentives for government officials to perform better, while also creating an evidence base so officials can lobby for more resources. However, such interventions on their own are ultimately unable to tackle systemic forms of corruption, which may be sewn into the fabric of government institutions and everyday life.

1. Introduction

According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "the delivery of government services throughout Uganda has long been imperilled by a lack of accountability, cumbersome systems, and corruption. In short: governments are not providing their communities with the basic services they need" (USAID, 2016). The three most prominent causes of poor service delivery are: weak capacity of staff (Nannyonjo and Okot, 2013), under-resourcing of government offices (Muriisa, 2008), and inefficient allocation of existing resources (Mitchinson, 2003). However, once resource and capacity constraints have been addressed, an ongoing academic debate emerges on how service delivery can be further improved.

On the one hand, it is argued that bureaucratic insulation – in other words, the autonomy of government officials – is fundamental to improving government performance (Jimenez, 2020; Mueller, 2015; Hearn, 2001). This is because insulation from top-down donor pressure, political influence, and short-term, populist demands of voters, allows government officials to rely on expert knowledge and professional norms to deliver the highest quality services to citizens. On the other hand, it is argued that greater accountability is needed because, without accountability to citizens, government officials will resort to self-interest (Dewatripont et al., 1999; Kluvers and Tippett, 2010; Ananyev, 2020).

This paper aims to shed light on this debate by qualitatively addressing the research question: can accountability interventions improve service delivery in places that do not have an insulated bureaucracy? I do so by examining a citizen feedback intervention in Kampala, Uganda that is being conducted by an NGO, SEMA. SEMA promotes accountability of government offices to citizens by surveying citizens on their experiences of service delivery. This information is then anonymised, aggregated, and presented back to government offices in the form of a monthly report. Through this, the accountability of government officials is improved, while the level of bureaucratic insulation remains constant.

The paper draws on three rounds of semi-structured interviews over five years. Using three sets of interviews in this way enables me to both triangulate across different sets of informants and investigate the impact of the programme over time. It has also allowed me to conduct research in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. I interviewed 42 citizens in 2016 about their experiences with service delivery in Kampala, then, following the establishment of SEMA's intervention in 2018, I analyse survey responses of citizens, government officials, and SEMA volunteers (responsible for collecting feedback) in 2020[1]. Finally, I conducted virtual key informant interviews with core SEMA staff members in 2021. This paper is, to the best of the author's knowledge, the first attempt to explore the impact of accountability mechanisms in Kampala.

The case of Kampala is particularly interesting. Kampala, and Uganda more broadly, has witnessed a decline in the quality of service delivery over the past two decades (Nangoli et al., 2015). This has taken place in a context where government offices, both national and local, lack bureaucratic insulation. For example, the Kampala Capital City Authority's executive director is appointed by the Ugandan President. This lack of insulation has led to a culture of corruption being normalised in government offices (Bainomugisha, 2015). As a result, SEMA's work in Kampala is a case study on whether accountability interventions can promote service delivery in a setting that lacks bureaucratic insulation.

The results demonstrate that increasing accountability is a promising way of improving service delivery in places with limited bureaucratic insulation.

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[1] Given the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020, surveys of citizens and SEMA feedback collectors were conducted in Kampala by a third party, Busara. Additionally, interviews in 2021 were remotely conducted by the author.

This intervention works because it is a tool that motivates officials to provide better services, while also acting as a mechanism to quantify performance and track improvements to it. However, I find that citizen feedback is best suited to addressing certain barriers to service delivery that stem from the absence of an incentive structure. The most prominent of these is the lack of motivation of Kampala's government officials. It can also indirectly empower certain government offices to lobby for more resources and training for staff. However, larger structural problems (e.g. a culture of corruption) must be addressed together with other means – such as bureaucratic insulation.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature debating the importance of accountability measures versus bureaucratic insulation measures in improving service delivery. Section 3 discusses the context of service delivery in Kampala and provides an overview of this paper's method, section 4 presents the results of the qualitative analysis, while section 5 concludes.

2. Improving service delivery: accountability vs bureaucratic insulation

Well-functioning government agencies are fundamental to improving service delivery, and in promoting development, economic growth and well-being (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Chanda and Putterman, 2005; Evans et al., 2017). There is broad consensus that two of the most powerful ways of improving service delivery are by addressing resource constraints (Oates, 1972; Bovaird and Loffler, 2002; Khemani, 2001) and capacity constraints (Watson and Yohannes, 2005; Grindle and Hilderbrand, 1995) – particularly in the case of developing countries. These take the form of increasing funding to government offices, as well as improving education and training for government officials.

However, once resource and technical capacity constraints have been addressed, a debate opens up over the best methods of further improving service delivery. One school of thought argues that government offices need to be further insulated from sources of corruption (either top down from politicians, or bottom-up from citizens). On the other hand, a different school of thought argues that increasing accountability to political leaders and citizens is the best way of ensuring that government officials provide services in the most effective way.

Countries, such as Uganda, have entrenched elements of clientelism and patronage (Green, 2010). This culture of clientelism and patronage is driven by authoritarian rulers - Yoweri Museveni in the case of Uganda – who systematically ensure that all arms of government and power are firmly within the control of the president, the president's ethnic group, as well as the ruling party (Tripp, 2010). Clientelism and patronage has therefore permeated ethnic groups. And as a result, voting patterns in these contexts are influenced by ethnic group associations (Kramon, 2019), while there is an expectation that jobs will be handed out to members of the same tribe or family connections rather than on merit or technical capacity (Findley et al., 2017).

One school of thought believes that the solution to protecting government offices

In other words, with insulation, government officials are free to choose the best methods of service delivery without pressure from short-term political interests, special interest groups, or citizens who may attempt to bribe officials for preferential treatment. Jimenez (2020), in analysing financial reports from local governments in the United States, finds that a lack of bureaucratic insulation incentivises governments to adopt policies solely because they are popular with voters (e.g. tax cuts and higher government spending). This subsequently leads to budgetary imbalances and long-run fiscal issues. However, when there is adequate bureaucratic insulation, experts are able to draw on their expertise to choose policies that result in the best outcomes for citizens. Similarly, Nistotskaya and Cingolani (2016), undertake a cross-country analysis of 135 countries using the University of Gothenburg's Quality of Government survey. They find that countries which have more bureaucratic insulation from day-to-day oversight of politicians, tend to implement more effective regulation, as well as experience higher levels of entrepreneurship. These studies, however, do not pay enough attention to the African context where capacity levels of government staff may be lower than those in more developed countries. In other words, if bureaucratic insulation takes place in contexts with lower technical capacity, this could negatively impact service delivery. However, to address these concerns, Rasul and Rogger (2016), analyse 4,700 engineering projects in Kenya – a country which has less technical capacity amongst government officials than in the United States. Despite having lower technical capacity, the findings appear consistent. They determine that increasing the autonomy of bureaucrats is positively associated with project completion rates. Meanwhile both monitoring practices and interventions designed to incentivise the performance of bureaucrats were both negatively associated with project completion rates. As a result, this school of thought's argument is that bureaucratic insulation leads to better quality service delivery both in developed and less-developed contexts.

Conversely, another school of thought has emerged which states that, in order to improve service delivery, accountability mechanisms[2] need to be introduced so bureaucrats act in the most effective way possible. In other words, greater access to citizens and political masters would improve service delivery. This thinking stems from the work of Tullock (1965:32), who argues that every government official "will only carry out assigned tasks if this proves the best way of attaining his [sic] own ends, and will make every effort to change the tasks so as to make them more in keeping with these objectives". Similarly, Downs (1967), builds on this by arguing that "every official is significantly motivated by his [sic] own self-interest even when acting in a purely official capacity". Finally, Niskanen (1971) came up with the concept of the 'bureaucratic utility function', whereby government officials weigh their decisions based on salary, the prerequisites of office, public reputation, power, patronage, the output of an office, ease of making changes and ease of managing an office. In other words, these theories suggest that without adequate accountability mechanisms and with too much bureaucratic insulation, officials will not act in the best interests of citizens.

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[2] *Drawing on Boven's (2007) work, accountability is defined as the requirement for government officials to have their conduct scrutinised, and an obligation for them to justify their conduct.*

top-down political pressures, and bottom-up influences from citizens. The main argument is that bureaucratic insulation allows officials to pursue preferences and formulate the most effective way of delivering services completely independently (Schneider, 1993). This is because, they argue, bureaucrats fundamentally act out of self-interest. According to Schultz (2003), these issues are compounded because government officials are far less accountable than politicians. They typically cannot be removed from office due to changes in voters' behaviour. Such theories argue that accountability interventions are the best way of improving service delivery.

Accountability mechanisms have most often been explained through principal-agent theories. For example, elected representatives or citizens act as 'principals' – they either set policies or vote for policies. These policies are then administered by 'agents' – i.e. the bureaucrats, whose role revolves around policy implementation (Olsen, 2015). Agents can be adequately supervised when there is transparency around the performance of government offices and officials (Minelli and Ruffini, 2018). The core argument is that, through accountability interventions, citizens and elected representatives are able to monitor bureaucrats – holding them to account. This prevents them from acting in self-interested ways. Moreover, when the performance of government offices is publicised, this also creates a sense of competition between offices who are interested in performing better to 'beat' other offices. In this sense, accountability measures can simultaneously facilitate a form of self-regulation through this 'competition effect' (Dijkman and Kenagh, 2021).

Based on these theories, there have been a handful of accountability interventions in the form of citizen feedback mechanisms conducted over the past two decades. Gaventa and Barrett (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of 100 studies focused on citizen feedback initiatives and found mixed results. On the one hand, citizen feedback could lead to greater access to services and resources (Ho et al., 2015), greater protection of legal rights (Björkman & Svensson, 2009) and enhanced state responsiveness and accountability (Callen and Hasanain; 2011). However, on the other hand, citizen feedback programs could also lead to a denial of state services (Mahmud, 2010); social economic and political reprisals (Osaghae, 2010), or violence or coercive government responses (Mohanty, 2010). As a result, the literature is far from clear on whether accountability mechanisms, in the form of citizen feedback initiatives, are truly able to improve service delivery – particularly in places like Kampala which do not possess bureaucratic insulation.

To summarise, once controlling for factors such as resource constraints and technical capacity constraints, the academic literature is divided on how best to improve service delivery. Moreover, the empirical evidence for accountability interventions (in the form of citizen feedback mechanisms) similarly appears to be divided. As a result, this paper aims to bring greater clarity to whether accountability interventions can be a useful method of improving service delivery in a context characterised by limited bureaucratic insulation.

3. Context and Method

3.1 Overview of SEMA's citizen feedback intervention

For the purpose of this paper, 'service delivery' captures services that are administered by both the national government, as well as local governments in Greater Kampala, such as the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), Mukono District local government, Wakiso District local government and Jinja District local government. The main services assessed in this paper are local police stations (administered by the national government), and local health centres (administered by local government).

The intervention analysed is a form of citizen feedback that has been facilitated by an NGO, SEMA, in Greater Kampala. SEMA records citizens' feedback on their experiences with local government officials. They do this by mobilising volunteers to conduct on-site interviews with citizens. Their volunteer data collectors are located at the exits of local government offices. Upon leaving the office, citizens are asked about their experiences, wait time, and overall satisfaction. Volunteers are trained in survey collection methods – for example ensuring leading questions are avoided and to read body language of respondents.

Information gathered through the surveys and devices is aggregated into a monthly one-page report, which is delivered to the head of each local government office. The report provides a grade, shows performance compared to the previous month, compares the office to other offices, and explains where an office performed well and where it needs to improve. The report is deliberately written in an easy-to-understand manner so that officials who did not finish a secondary school degree are able to interpret it (SEMA, 2020). In order to build trust with government officials, SEMA does not publish these reports. Additionally, at the end of the year, a local government office of the year is announced to further incentivise better performance.

The program's hypothesis is that if citizen feedback is presented to government offices regularly and in an easy-to-understand format, this will increase accountability, and incentivise service delivery improvements while simultaneously providing a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the quality of services over time. Since launching in March 2018, SEMA has obtained over 50,000 survey responses (SEMA, 2019). SEMA's citizen feedback was conducted at 18 government offices in Kampala.

3.2 Methodology

The paper draws on three rounds of semi-structured interviews over five years. As such, this enables me to both triangulate across different sets of informants and to investigate the impact of the intervention over time. In doing so, the paper draws on the hermeneutic tools of 'thematic analysis' to identify the impact of SEMA's accountability interventions on service delivery in Greater Kampala.

Three rounds of interviews were conducted. The first in June-July 2016 to understand the level of service delivery and the impacts it was having on citizens and businesses; the second set of interviews were, given the COVID-19 pandemic, conducted by a third-party, Busara, in-person between August-September 2020; while the third set of interviews involved virtually interviewing key informants who worked for SEMA in January 2021. No respondent was interviewed more than once. I provide further details below.

3.2.1 Interviews in 2016

In 2016, I conducted 42 semi-structured interviews with citizens on their interactions with government officials. In addition, I conducted a number of elite key informant interviews: two with Kampala local government (KCCA) officials, one from the Ugandan central government (Uganda Investment Authority), and one from the Buganda Kingdom (Buganda Land Board). The interviews were conducted in English by the author, along with two Ugandan research assistants from Makerere University.[3] The author's status as an outsider may have potentially limited the desireof individuals to share their experiences openly, however this may have been mitigated by the presence of Ugandan counterparts. There was an initial concern that three interviewers could intimidate respondents, however it appeared not to be an issue with over 90% of respondents eager to continue discussing issues after our allotted time and questionnaire had been exhausted.

To gain trust and build rapport, interviewees were called prior to the interviews, whereby the purpose of the questionnaire was explained. Upon the interviewers' arrival, respondents were presented with a letter that reiterated the purpose of the study. Recordings were not taken given the sensitivity of the questions asked. Respondents were contacted given their frequent interaction with government offices. They were then asked to provide further contacts. A snowball selection of interviewees was therefore used in the sampling strategy.

3.2.2 Interviews from 2020

The second source is a set of interviews conducted in 2020 by the Busara Centre for Behavioural Economics, who performed an evaluation of SEMA's program in Kampala. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the associated travel restrictions, I was unable to conduct in-person interviews. As a result, I undertook secondary analysis of Busara's survey responses. Busara's objective was to explore perceptions of the citizen feedback intervention, and its effectiveness in helping improve public service delivery.

40 in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion were conducted in total. This involved 20 interviews with citizens, 10 interviews with government officials, 10 interviews with SEMA volunteers and one focus group discussion with nine volunteers, and 12 public officers. All citizens interviewed had been those who had visited government offices where SEMA operates.

Likewise, government officials comprised of municipal council workers, police station staff and health centre staff to capture variations across different types of local government offices that work with SEMA.

In-depth interview questions were open ended and exploratory. This ensured respondents were not asked any leading questions that would bias results. Interviews were conducted by Ugandan interviewers in English and audio was recorded with the consent of respondents. Interviewers captured information on responses, but also observational information such as body language and tone of voice. This information was included in transcriptions.

3.2.3 Interviews from 2021

Finally, to triangulate the results from 2020, I conducted five in-depth interviews with key-informants from SEMA. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted remotely through videoconferencing. Moreover, due to issues with internet connectivity in Uganda following the 2021 presidential elections, two interviews were conducted without video. Interviews were semi-structured and conducted in English with a range of staff including senior managers and training staff.

Given the sample sizes used in this study, the analysis does not claim to conclusively measure the full impact of citizen feedback on all citizens of Kampala. This would require significantly more resources, coupled with quantitative data that can be disaggregated to control for various factors such as distance of respondents' homes to government offices and their socio-economic status (which cannot be addressed with a small sample). Instead, this paper's more modest aim is to provide new empirical analysis on whether accountability interventions can improve service delivery in context characterised by limited bureaucratic insulation.

4. Empirical Analysis

### 4.1 The state of service delivery in Kampala

Service delivery in Kampala, prior to 2018 (the first year of SEMA's intervention) was widely reported by respondents to be poor, while bureaucratic insulation was virtually non-existent. Uganda is characterised by a dominant, authoritarian political party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), which controls the government apparatus. NRM and its leader, President Yoweri Museveni, have been in power since 1986. The President not only possesses the authority to nominate heads of national government agencies, but also the leaders of local government institutions, such as the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA). As such, government offices are seen to respond to the political wills of the autocracy. In other words, in settings such as Uganda, which are characterised by lower levels of electoral accountability, the lack of bureaucratic insulation heightens concerns about politicians interfering in the running of the bureaucracy (Martin and Raffler, 2021).

This in turn disseminates a culture of political interference throughout the government apparatus. With this context in mind, respondents in 2016 identified three main issues related to service delivery: corruption, unmotivated staff, and resource constraints.

Respondents viewed corruption as something of a cultural norm within Ugandan governments. As one respondent stated, "there is systemic corruption from top to bottom which is making service provision hard" (Key Informant Interview #8, 2016). In this context of poor bureaucratic insulation, one government official admitted that they experience "political interference in the way we perform our tasks" (Key Informant Interview #3, 2016). These findings are widespread. For instance, Nangoli et al. (2015), conducted a survey with 250 respondents in Kampala during 2014. They found that corruption and nepotism within governments was ubiquitous. Another respondent, who works for KCCA, stated that 70% of all court cases are related to land disputes, most of which involve corruption among government officials (Key Informant Interview #5, 2016). These findings are further triangulated in analysing survey responses from Afrobarometer – a large sample survey of the perceptions of African citizens – on citizens' perceptions of corruption. Citizens' mean perception of the quality of the police (administered by the national government), deteriorated over the same period (see Figure 1 - 100 is highest level of police quality, 1 is poor level of police quality).

Figure 1: Perceptions of Police Quality in Kampala

95% confidence intervals
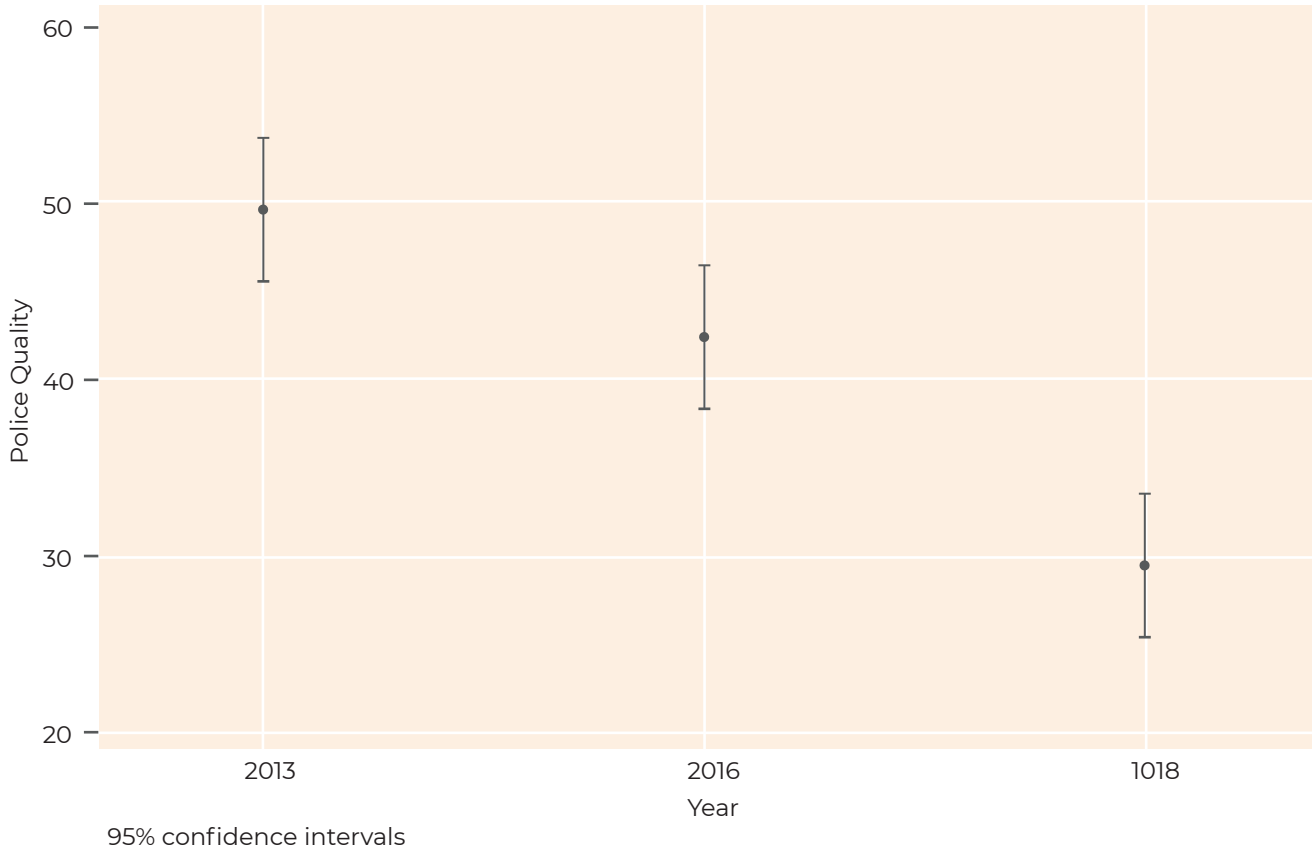
One of the most widely reported issues with service delivery, however, related to unmotivated staff. Almost all citizens discussed experiences at government offices where they were either ignored by staff, or where staff had come into work late, taken long lunch breaks, or left work early. One respondent stated "time management is a big issue. You come to an office and its 9am and staff are having breakfast. But there is a very long line waiting" (Interview #12, 2016). Another citizen stated that "some [officials] are rude before they even know what you want. They treat you like you're not important." (Interview #7, 2016). Part of the reason for this behaviour is that officials are not incentivised to provide better services – particularly in terms of financial compensation. They do the bare minimum required to keep their job[4]. One key informant – a local government official – stated that if officials were better compensated, their attitude to work would change:

"if you looked at the benefits to the staff like recruitment benefits like if you give a person medical insurance, promotional opportunities, holiday packages the person will really be happy and will definitely change attitude towards service delivery" (Key Informant Interview #5, 2016).

While it may seem obvious that officials would argue for better pay for themselves, numerous reports demonstrate the stark inequities of compensation for Ugandan government officials. For instance, the Ugandan Equal Opportunities Commission found in 2015 that in some agencies the highest paid employee received 50 times more than the lowest paid employee (EOC, 2016). By 2017, this figure had grown to the highest paid government employees receiving 277 times the lowest employees (East African, 2017). This growing civil servant wage inequality, and the broader issues of inadequate incentives for officials, therefore culminates in a lack of motivation to improve their performance (Key Informant Interview #7, 2016).

Third is the ongoing issue of inadequate resourcing for government offices. For instance, local governments in Uganda receive the majority of their funds through direct transfers from the central government. The Ugandan Auditor-General (Office of the Auditor General, 2016), found that the allocation of conditional grants to local governments is not in line with the formula agreed upon by the central government's Local Government Finance Commission, or that which is enshrined in Article 193 of the Constitution. As a result, local governments have not received the expected increases in transfers to match the rising cost of delivering services. This was an issue raised by a number of informants. One stated:

"Funds are not enough. Sometimes we want to do something but we are limited with budget. If development partners don't come in its [services are] stopped. ...Look at the hospitals. If we had enough funds, the hospitals here would be having an ambulance." (Key Informant Interview #1, 2016).

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[4] *A key informant (Informant #2, 2021) described how it is difficult for government officials to lose their job due to bad performance: "Government employees do not easily lose their jobs. It takes like a big corruption scandal or a big case like murder for someone to be sacked. Even then the person temporarily resigns until they are proved guilty...Basically these guys are never really under pressure to lose their jobs. All their contracts are permanent until they either die or commit a grave offence against the law."*

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There is a relationship between corruption and inadequate funding. There have been reports that, while funding is allocated to government offices and local governments, this funding ends up becoming lost. For example, in 2018, despite the central government increasing funding for road infrastructure development, the quality of roads deteriorated. This was reportedly due to widespread corruption in local governments (Bainomugisha et al., 2020).

Inadequate resourcing also plays a significant role in entrenching human capital constraints. Most of the respondents I spoke with who worked for government described their desire to have opportunities to receive training and to develop their skills. However, resources have not been adequately freed up to promote capacity building programs. One key informant stated:

"Maybe I could be performing badly because of lack of capacity but if I can be given an opportunity to train to perform better; that would help us on various issues." (Key Informant Interview 3).

These findings are not new. The lack of technical capacity in service delivery has been widely studied in the realm of Uganda's health system (Nannyonjo and Okot, 2013; and Akin et al., 2005), rural development projects (Nsingo and Kakmba, 2008); environmental policy (Turyahabwe et al., 2006); and procurement planning (Basheka, 2008).

In summary, prior to 2018, there appeared to be three primary reasons why service delivery was deteriorating in Kampala: corruption, disenfranchisement of government officials, and inadequate resources. These issues take place within a government architecture that has a clear lack of bureaucratic insulation. The next sub-section examines how accountability mechanisms can impact service delivery in the context of Kampala's environment of limited bureaucratic insulation.

4.2 SEMA's Citizen Feedback Accountability Intervention

Contrary to the belief that bureaucratic insulation is the key to improving service delivery (once controlling for funding and capacity), SEMA conducted an in-depth accountability intervention by collecting feedback on citizens' experiences with government offices. This feedback was given back to government officials in the form of monthly progress reports. A key informant from SEMA stated that, prior to 2018, "the incentive structure didn't exist in the [Ugandan] public sector system" (Interview #4, 2021). Hence, accountability, through the form of citizen feedback, can establish incentives for government officials to improve the quality of the service they provide. This section examines whether, in the context of limited bureaucratic insulation, accountability interventions were able to address the aforementioned factors that impede service delivery in Kampala.

Corruption, as discussed previously, is sewn within the fabric of Uganda's governmental architecture. As one police officer stated: "there is systematic corruption from top to bottom, which is making service provision hard" (Interview #7, 2020). Corruption in Kampala comes from three places: (1) a normalised expectation of clientelism and nepotism – as a key informant from SEMA explained, "it starts early on in the smallest places...you're expected to give a job to someone because you're related" (Interview #1, 2021), (2) top-down political interventions – a police officer described how "there is political interference in the way we perform our tasks" (Interview #1, 2020), or (3) bottom-up – e.g. citizens who want to cut a queue at an office, or want a favourable outcome may offer bribes to officials. From this, there appear to be two root causes of corruption – culture, and low compensation of government officials.

These issues related to corruption are structural. As such, the results of SEMA's accountability intervention have been mixed with regards to addressing corruption. Given the pervasive nature of corruption, the full extent of corruption cannot be adequately measured solely through citizen feedback. This is because corruption can take place behind the scenes and at higher levels, without citizens directly experiencing it (e.g. from top-down political pressures) (Interview #2, 2021). A key informant from SEMA therefore thought that bureaucratic insulation would be helpful in shielding government officials from being influenced by the culture of corruption. This is because, "if people say it's alright to take a bribe because everyone's doing it and nobody's saying anything about it, then you start doing the same" (Interview #4, 2021). Nevertheless, accountability interventions have had some impact. In one example, a local police chief had utilised citizen feedback from SEMA's intervention to fire police officers who were accused of corruption. However, the problem is that:

"those corrupt officers [who were fired from an office, still] remain in the system. Then one way or another, during rotations, they come back to other departments where they can access citizens and ask for money again." (Interview #1, 2021).

In other words, while this intervention may address corruption in one office, when a corrupt official is re-assigned to a different office, this ends up re-distributing corruption rather than eradicating it.

With regards to the second root cause of corruption, key informants described how government officials would accept bribes and participate in corruption because their salaries are so low (Interviews #1, 3, 5, 7 & 8; 2020). As one police officer stated, "money is a factor" that leads to corrupt behaviour within police stations (Interview #5, 2020). In these instances, while accountability interventions can provide certain incentives to promote less-corrupt behaviour and slowly change culture over time, it does not directly address the other root cause of the problem – the need for better pay and conditions for staff. As a result, accountability mechanisms on their own are unlikely to make long-term improvements in corruption within service delivery in Kampala.

The second service delivery issue raised by respondents in 2016 was related to government officials being unmotivated to help citizens. In 2020, numerous citizens similarly discussed experiences where government officials would ignore whoever came into their office or would take long breaks throughout the day while people were lining up to be served (Interviews 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 19, 22, 24, 25 and 26; 2020). This points to a broader underlying problem within the Ugandan civil service: the lack of an incentive structure. Officials do not get compensated adequately, and similarly complain about the lack of a defined career trajectory with ongoing promotion opportunities (Interview #7, 2020). However, aside from inadequate wages, there is a significant lack of non-financial incentives to drive performance.

Bureaucratic insulation interventions – i.e. simply shielding officials from perverse incentives that come either top-down (from higher ranking officials), or bottom-up (from citizens) – are not able to manufacture incentives where incentives are largely absent (Mueller, 2015). However, in bureaucratic systems where there are adequate incentives (e.g. financial compensation or promotion opportunities) which incentivise and reward technical performance, bureaucratic insulation can be an effective tool to mitigate perverse incentives and improve service delivery (Jiminez, 2020). Given Uganda lacks such an incentive structure, bureaucratic insulation is unlikely to address the motivation of officials.

Creating incentives has been the primary achievement of SEMA's citizen feedback intervention. SEMA has managed to create incentives in two ways: first, by facilitating feedback of citizens on the performance of officials, and second by creating a sense of competition to drive performance improvements.

In terms of facilitating feedback, SEMA's monthly report provides information on the performance of individual government officials (based on the assessments gathered from citizens).

This feedback quantifies performance, while also providing a useful benchmark. As a result, officials (and their managers) can track whether the service they provide to citizens is improving or deteriorating each month. Government respondents described how they are incentivised to act because they do not want their managers to see that their performance is declining (Interviews #1, 2, 3 & 5; 2020). Moreover, government officials stated that they also looked forward to seeing the positive pieces of feedback they receive from citizens. As one official described:

"Both sides encourage us. When there is a declined performance, we have to work hard to see that that image is improved. When there is a good performance, it also motivates us to continue performing. So either way pushes us" (Interview #3, 2020).

This feeling was echoed by another key informant who was enthusiastic that "these reports give credit where it is due" (Interview #1, 2020).

In relation to creating a sense of competition, SEMA's monthly reports rank the performance of various areas within a government office (e.g. finance or HR), while also ranking the performance of a government office in relation to other government offices in the neighbourhood. One key informant called this ranking feature a "motivating structure" for them (Interview #5, 2020), and this was further heightened by 'winners' being recognised for good performance through awards. This aligns with some of the literature in behavioural psychology which emphasises the need for a rewards framework in order to incentivise performance improvements in organisations (see Cappa et al., 2020; and Vandevijvere et al., 2019).

Taken together, the facilitation of feedback and the competition framework, has been responsible for motivating staff – filling the vacuum of inadequate incentives for performance. A key informant from SEMA stated that:

"We've been most successful at changing the culture at the local office…staff are laughing more often when they see you as a client, they're showing basic friendliness, because they feel like someone is actually watching them and they're going to be rated at the end of the month…as a result we've been able to influence civil services at a very local level to service their clients in a better way." (Interview #4, 2021).

These findings were confirmed by another SEMA staff member who said:

"We've been very successful at changing the mentality of public officers. It gets to the point where public officers get a sense of ownership over their work…Now they understand that their job directly impacts citizens."

The final service delivery issue which respondents raised in 2016 related to inadequate resourcing of government offices. Inadequate resourcing has had three main effects: low pay for government officials, a lack of training to improve technical capacity, and under-funded services. These have respectively led to unmotivated staff, staff lacking key competencies, and citizens who are denied access to basic services.

The literature on bureaucratic insulation is not clear on whether further insulation can allow officials to obtain further resources when required. On the one hand, bureaucratic insulation could lead to more efficiency gains as bureaucrats are free to provide services in the most efficient way possible (Schneider, 1993; Jimenez, 2019). As a result, this may mitigate the need to ask for further resources. However, on the other hand, in many developing countries, efficiency gains are unlikely to alleviate the need for further resources (Robinson, 2007). In other words, potential efficiency gains are not likely to offset the degree of under-funding. Accountability mechanisms on the other hand, appear to have more promising results with addressing resource constraints – particularly in the long term.

Under-resourcing is a structural issue with service delivery, which makes it difficult to be addressed by accountability mechanisms in the short-term. One key informant from SEMA described an incident where:

"One of the complaints [at a small police station] was that the suspects who were arrested were not getting food. So that meant the police force were not providing the suspects with lunch, some tea, or some water or anything... So when we raised that complaint we told them [the manager of the local police station that] suspects are hungry all the time. They told us that they're not in position to offer them food. So they asked us to raise it to headquarters... We raised the issue to police headquarters. The police headquarters said they don't have a budget to provide food for small police offices located in the communities...because the money they get from the Ministry of Finance isn't enough to provide food...So most of the managers really do what can be done within their office...but sometimes they're not able to do some of these things, especially if something needs money. These are things they're not addressing." (Interview #2, 2021)

As such, it is evident these types of citizen-feedback accountability mechanisms are more impactful in situations where the manager of an office can address resource-constraints directly. When resources are constrained by factors outside of the manager's immediate control, it becomes more challenging to enact change.

However, there have been some cases where citizen feedback reports were used by government officials as evidence to lobby headquarters for further resources. For example, there have been instances where offices have obtained SEMA reports describing how citizens would get lost in their building, or that citizens were having issues accessing official forms and documents. Using these reports, officials were able to lobby headquarters for funding to procure navigation signs for buildings, and purchase printers to print the respective documents (Interview #3, 2021).

Similarly, officials have been able to use SEMA reports to address technical capacity constraints. Through reading SEMA reports, government headquarters have begun to understand the extent to which citizen-facing staff lack adequate training in customer service and client care. As a result, they are now considering providing more tailored training programs to address these issues (Interview #4, 2021).

So while SEMA is unable to directly influence the level of resourcing provided to government offices, their reports help offices build their case and lobby for improvements. This process takes time, but the results are beginning to unfold after three years of their intervention. As a key informant from SEMA said, "we've now had a few cases where we've had an effect [in helping offices lobby for more resources]" (Interview #4, 2021).

Finally, while accountability mechanisms in the form of SEMA's citizen feedback intervention has contributed to improving service delivery, there is a degree of endogeneity. This is because SEMA requires managers of government offices to consent to SEMA volunteers collecting feedback from citizens. As a result, the offices that consent to SEMA's presence, are typically run by those who are most dedicated to improving service delivery. In other words, the efficacy of SEMA's intervention is influenced by the desire of managers to enact change.

As a result, citizen feedback initiatives like SEMA, need to cultivate 'champions' within government offices. Champions – in other words, reformers – play a role in lobbying managers and other staff members to try out their accountability intervention (Busara, 2020). However, one of the biggest challenges these champions face is that some officials and many citizens are sceptical that service delivery can actually be improved. One key informant from SEMA mentioned that "many citizens say, 'dream on, things are never going to change'... [as] most citizens are rather negative about the government ever changing" (Interview #4, 2021). Hence the onus lies on these government 'champions' and organisations like SEMA to shift the attitude of people into believing that service delivery can in fact improve.

Table 1: Citizen Feedback Scores

Office Number	First Satisfaction Score	Date of First Survey	Last Satisfaction Score	Date of Last Survey	Difference
1	3.25926	Apr-18	3.83333	Feb-20	0.57407
2	3.89431	Sep-19	3.58333	Feb-20	-0.31098
3	2.93182	Aug-18	3.39815	Jan-20	0.46633
4	2.90909	May-18	3.36723	May-19	0.45814
5	3.1	Aug-18	3.28704	May-19	0.18704
6	3.0625	Mar-18	3.43165	May-19	0.36915
7	3.09032	May-18	3.86957	Jan-20	0.77925
8	3.94211	Sep-19	3.03066	Jan-20	-0.91145
9	3.81065	Sep-19	3.54745	Jan-20	-0.2632
10	3.98148	Sep-19	3.81818	Feb-20	-0.1633
11	3.74694	Sep-19	3.9	Feb-20	0.15306
12	3.91667	Nov-19	3.91753	Jan-20	0.00086
13	3.87879	Sep-19	3.97222	Jan-20	0.09343
14	4.01571	Oct-19	3.97802	Jan-20	-0.03769
15	2.94904	Mar-18	3.68421	Feb-20	0.73517
16	3.15584	Mar-18	3.40336	Jan-20	0.24752

The raw citizen feedback data for all offices (Table 1) indicates that 69% of offices experienced an improvement in citizen feedback between the first and last month of the intervention (author's aggregation of data from SEMA's citizen feedback surveys, 2021)[5]. Moreover, 75% of offices saw an improvement in service delivery within the first 12 months of the intervention (ibid.). While these findings suggest that most offices improved their delivery of services through the intervention, this data is purely descriptive and causality cannot be directly assigned from these numbers. However, when triangulating these figures with the aforementioned responses from government officials during the 2020 interviews, the evidence suggests that cultural change has been possible through accountability mechanisms – though this was not an overnight process. This cultural change means that citizens and government officials alike are beginning to realise that local service delivery can indeed be improved. This, in turn, may lead to further improvements in service delivery in the future.

In summary, while further research is required in this area, accountability interventions in contexts characterised by both poor bureaucratic insulation and inadequate incentive structures for government officials, appear to be a promising way of driving improvements in service delivery. Much of this is spurred by the creation of new, non-financial incentives that were previously missing in Kampala's governmental architecture. However, some of the problems in service delivery are systemic – such as inadequate government funding of local offices, and a pervasive culture of corruption, clientelism and patronage.

Accountability mechanisms on their own are unlikely to be able to address some of the root causes of corruption – at least in the short-term, however in the medium to long term they can play an important role in driving cultural change, and may equip local officials with the necessary information to lobby for additional resources.

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to qualitatively study the impact of accountability interventions on service delivery in a context characterised by poor service delivery: Kampala. In doing so, I sought to shed light on the academic debate that exists on what the best methods of promoting service delivery are (once controlling for resource and capacity constraints): either increasing bureaucratic insulation or improving accountability measures. The research used SEMA's citizen feedback intervention in Kampala as a case study. Confirming some of the key insights from the accountability literature (Ho et al., 2015; Björkman & Svensson, 2009 and Callen and Hasanain; 2011), results demonstrate that accountability interventions are most effective in creating non-financial incentives to motivate staff to improve the quality of services they deliver. This is particularly important in a context like Kampala that has an evident lack of incentives to encourage the performance of government officials. The analysis found that SEMA's incentives appear to drive cultural change in

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[5] *This is the raw data collected by SEMA volunteers who asked citizens to quantify how satisfied they were upon being served at a government office. See section 3.1 for more information.*

the attitude of government officials, while also playing a role in addressing some of the structural problems of poor service delivery such as inadequate funding and technical capacity. This works by providing an evidence base that government officials can draw on to lobby for more resources. The analysis finds that while bureaucratic insulation would help shield officials from top-down and bottom-up influences of corruption, without establishing incentives for service delivery, bureaucratic insulation on its own would not be effective in a context like Kampala.

While the analysis highlights the importance of citizen feedback mechanisms in improving service delivery, it cannot be solely relied upon to effectively address all structural problems. This is because citizen feedback only gathers feedback on citizens' direct experiences with government officials. However not all factors that deteriorate service delivery may take place in front of citizens. For instance, corruption can occur in the higher levels of government where citizens cannot not directly witness it. Thus citizen feedback is unable to capture the full range of issues that impact service delivery. The analysis also finds that many citizens are sceptical that services can be improved after having witnessed decades of poor service delivery. If individuals cannot be convinced that change is possible, citizens will be reluctant to provide their feedback, while government officials may be unwilling to experiment with the intervention. This is a core barrier that needs to be overcome. However, with the steady cultural change SEMA's intervention appears to have on service delivery, these impacts may culminate in a broader understanding that positive change in service delivery is not only possible, but that it is currently taking place.

The policy takeaway from this analysis is that, in contexts that lack adequate incentive structures for government officials, accountability interventions may be the first step that is required to improve service delivery.

However, in order to adequately address some of the root causes of corruption, bureaucratic insulation could be a promising next step. This is because once bureaucrats are incentivised to perform better (through accountability measures), they then need to be shielded from perverse incentives – for example top-down pressures to cave into political interference, clientelism, or corruption.

Nevertheless, given the sample sizes of respondents in this study, this analysis cannot conclusively measure the full impact of citizen feedback on all citizens in Kampala. Thus, further research could be conducted to understand whether citizen feedback measures can improve service delivery in more remote areas, or to better understand whether service delivery is being improved for citizens who cannot physically visit government offices (e.g. due to disabilities). Moreover, the external validity of citizen feedback could not be measured as this analysis was focussed solely on Kampala. Therefore, further studies could be conducted to examine the impact of such interventions in other regions and countries both in East Africa, and the African context more broadly. It is only then that we will be able to develop a much more holistic understanding of whether accountability mechanisms or bureaucratic insulation is better suited to improving service delivery.

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