CENTRE for BASIC RESEARCH

Outline of Module for the Pilot Session of the Applied Research Skills Training Program for Local Government Officials

Preamble

Uganda concluded its 2021 General Elections in February 2021. New national and local leaders were elected into office. At district local government level, there is an estimated 82 percent turnover rate of elected local leaders (chairpersons and councilors). This means the new cohort of leaders include those with experience in the conduct of local government business and those who are new to local council business. In light of this reality, it is imperative that initiatives are put in place to build the capacity of local leaders to execute their legislation, oversight and service delivery functions effectively. Furthermore, all local leaders who went through an electoral process made promises to the electorate on how they would meet community expectations. In order to deliver to their electorate, the promises they made have to be, to the extent possible, translated into development policy commitments and investments articulated in the District Development Plans and Budgets, and at the same time aligned to the third National Development Plan (NDPIII), as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Budget Framework Papers.

What is the Value Addition of the Applied Research Skills Training Module for Local Governments:

The following are the key valuable additions that applied research skills bring to local leaders:

1. **Reduction of conflict among councilors during council proceedings:**
   Over the years, it has been observed that there are several tensions between local councilors and technical staff in various Local Governments. One of the reasons for these conflicts is the lack of clarity on how to handle the critical development issues in the local governments. This training will help councilors articulate their concerns in a more refined manner rooted in a nuanced appreciation of complicated research methods carefully packaged in an easy-to-comprehend format. Where necessary, local language translations of course materials will be arranged.

2. **Translate community views, issues and needs into policy issues for discussion in Local Councils:**
   This training will support politicians to understand the levels of knowledge and appreciate the skills required to translate community needs, issues and views that their voters share with them, or those that they identify in the course of executing their mandates into concrete policy issues that can be presented and defended during council sessions.

3. **Strengthen the participation of local councilors in Local Economic Development (LED) initiatives in their locality:**
   This training will support politicians and technical staff to participate more effectively in LED initiatives and programs. Customized problem identification, analysis and ranking tools will be very helpful in supporting trainees to appreciate how opportunities for their consideration can be identified at community level.

4. **Improved performance of councilors:** Over the years there have been several initiatives to assess the performance of councils and councilors, without much input in strengthening their capacities for improved performance. The skills that will be imparted will empower councilors to participate more effectively in the activities in their councils, following enhanced understanding and appreciation of the issues affecting their constituencies.

5. **Support community initiatives to mobilize human and financial resources to support their Community Action Plans (CAPs):**
   One of the critical skills that this training will provide to councilors is how to work closely with community groups to prioritize their community needs into concrete plans that allow for the participation of various actors to support community development initiatives.

6. **Help to manage community level expectations:**
   Overall the skills that will be imparted in this training sessions by the politicians will go a long way in ensuring that the roles of politicians are better understood and appreciated at community level. This will enable politicians articulate better the concerns pertinent to their constituencies in their councils, hence making them more effective as leaders at the helm of advancing the implementation of the decentralization process.

The Tools

This training is anchored in 6 simplified participatory research methods. These include:

1. **Critical Thinking Skills:**
   At the outset of these training sessions, critical thinking will be introduced. These skills support the ability to analyze information objectively and make reasoned judgment. It involves the evaluation of sources, such as data, facts, observable phenomena in community, and even research findings. Participants will be introduced to simple exercises that ground them in critical thinking. Ultimately when councilors become good critical thinkers, they can navigate and draw reasonable conclusions from diverse sets of information and data, and differentiate between useful and less useful details to solve problems or make decisions in the local councils.

2. **Visioning Tools:**
   The visioning exercises help to create a collective vision at community or parish and even at a district level that reflects the views and aspirations of residents and key stakeholders. The visioning tools can serve as foundation for community empowerment interventions, especially where the community is focusing on a specific project – for example within the context of LED. This ensures that project activities reflect local priorities. It also helps reinforce a sense of community ownership in local projects. Mobilizing a diversity of citizens and partners is necessary to ensure representation in the visioning exercise.

3. **Problem Identification and Analysis Tools:**
   Problem analysis involves identifying the overriding problems at community level and establishing the causes and effects related to that problem. A key element of this analysis will be to ensure that 'root causes', and not simply the 'proximate factors' or the symptoms of the problem are identified and subsequently addressed in Community Action Plans. A properly identified and diagnosed problem is always half-solved.

4. **Ranking and Prioritization Tools:**
   These tools help equip councilors and technical staff to organize community needs in order of priority so that the most important issues of an identified problem are addressed first. Prioritization involves organizing a group of issues over which action is required in a form of ranking that identifies the most critical, based on a criteria agreed upon by those involved in undertaking ranking. This helps us determine what should be focused on to achieve maximum productivity and accomplish more. These are critical skills that politicians need especially since they have a time-bound political lifecycle of 5 years.

5. **Community Action Planning:**
   Community Action Planning, develops the capacity of the communities to take appropriate action for their own development. It is a framework for the implementation of actions decided by the communities. Community Actions Plans are prepared by the community. The plan describes what the community wants to achieve, what activities are required during a specified time period, what resources (money, people and materials) are needed to be successful. The community action plan becomes a framework for implementing the activities that are decided by the community itself and can be used in mobilizing resources and it is a good tool for managing expectations.

6. **Skills for Policy Brief Development:**
   This will be a bonus session for those who are willing to also focus on writing. A policy brief is a document that provides a succinct explanation and analysis of a policy issue or problem, together with options and recommendations for addressing that issue or problem. The ultimate goal in developing a policy brief is to influence policy makers' decisions and it is very useful in council business.

The Piloting Process

i.   A team of experts will pilot the module in the following four districts: Kitgum, Mbarara, Tororo and Wakiso;

ii.   In each district there will be a sample of 15 councilors who will undergo a two-day training session;

iii. The sessions will be conducted through simulation exercises conducted either at community level or at the training venue;

iv.   The pilot will be carefully documented to draw lessons and identify best practices;

v.   Proposals on how to make the process simpler and more useful to the councilors will be collected;

vi.   A report of the pilot process will be produced, presented to MoLG and used to develop a comprehensive session that will be used during the Induction of Local Government Leaders.