UNDP, NPA policy dialogues generate ideas to inform Uganda’s 3rd National Development Plan

- Draft plan to be submitted to cabinet next month (September 2019)

By Michael Mubangizi (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP))

The breakfast policy series on the formulation of Uganda’s third National Development Plan ended on a top notch with a spirited discussion examining possible funding options to generate the much-needed resources to implement national priorities identified in the plan.

Participants from government, United Nations agencies, development partners, the academia, civil society and the private sector observed that government requires substantial investments in critical sectors such as health and education, environmental protection, infrastructure, clean and affordable energy, rural development, peace and security, mainstream cross-cutting issues and actions to tackle climate change. To achieve these development aspirations, speakers suggested that Uganda needs to develop appropriate financing strategies, minimize wastage, and be more efficient across all government ministries, departments and agencies.

Under the theme, “Towards Integrated Financing of the NDPIII”, the fifth and final dialogue held on Thursday August 15th, 2019 built on the success of the earlier policy series that focused on; Human Capital Development, Enhancing Value Addition for Inclusive Growth in Uganda, Good governance and Mainstreaming Cross-cutting Issues respectively.

Following the conclusion of the policy dialogues and other consultations, a draft third National Development Plan is being finalized by the National Planning Authority (NPA) drafting team and will be submitted to cabinet next month (September 2019) to guide the Budget Strategy for the financial year 2020/21.

Speaking during the final breakfast policy series, Mr. El-Khidir Daloum, the Acting UN Resident Coordinator, noted that while Uganda has made strides in implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), challenges remain in the areas of reducing poverty, sustainable urbanization, affordable and clean energy, good governance and effective partnerships. “The third National Development Plan should identify high-impact interventions with appropriate financing to accelerate progress towards achieving the goals,” Mr. El-Khidir Daloum who is also the World Food Programme (WFP) Country Director, said.

He added that Uganda needs policy and institutional reforms to create an enabling environment for effective resource mobilization and investments. “Such fiscal reforms should be equitable in nature and should benefit those who are at risk of getting ‘left behind’.”

Effective utilization of resources

Mr. Daloum also underscored the need for effective utilization of resources and accountability. “We need to strengthen systems to guarantee value for money and rationalize the use of existing financial resources so that we can fully optimize such resources.” Other participants suggested need to adopt a holistic financing framework which allows innovative and domestic financing in view of declining Official Development Assistance (ODA).
These suggestions resonate with proposals generated during the earlier breakfast policy series calling for formulation of an appropriate planning, financing and implementation framework for the new plan.

On his part, Dr. Joseph Muvawala, the NPA Executive Director called for strengthening of the planning culture.

“For so long, we have used the budget as the plan; we need to go to the basics and use the plan as the basis for the budget,” Dr. Muvawala said.

**Realignment of government priorities**

Other participants called for realignment of government priorities across ministries, departments and agencies at the planning, implementation and resource allocation levels.

This has been a problem in the past. For instance, Dr. Tom Okurut, the Executive Director of National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), said that NEMA’s previous calls for a review of the taxation regime to exempt gas cylinders to reduce demand for wood fuel which exerts pressure on natural resources like forests and subsequently stem the effects of climate change, have not been heeded.

A discussion on financing was key because findings of mid-term review of the second National Development Plan showed that implementation was in part hampered by funding constraints.

The funding options for the NDPIII suggested during the discussions include; effective development cooperation, macroeconomic stability, domestic revenue mobilization, domestic and external borrowing and aligning of civil society organisations’ budgets to the national plans and local governments’ priorities.

Others are; use of infrastructural bonds, development of secondary market infrastructure, effective use of pension funds, effective use of public-private partnerships and productive use of remittances for development.

Commenting on emerging issues from the policy dialogues, Ms. Elsie Attafuah, the UNDP Resident Representative pointed to the need for NDPIII to be people centered and improve coordination processes to avoid duplication of functions, “What is also emerging is a need for prioritization. We cannot do everything. We need to focus on a few things and do them properly. There is also need to rationalize the available resources and strengthen implementation capacities at all levels.”

**Draft plan to be submitted to cabinet**

Uganda’s current second National Development Plan (NDPII) expires at the end of June 2020 and the third National Development Plan (NDPIII) should be in place by September 2019 to guide the Budget Strategy for the financial year 2020/21. The topics discussed at the series comprised key thematic areas agreed upon with the NPA. An outcome document for each meeting was prepared and submitted to NPA for consideration.

According to Prof. Pamela Mbabazi, the Chairperson NPA, a draft third National Development Plan will be submitted to cabinet next month (September 2019.) This will be followed by additional consultations including a high-level forum to further input the new plan.
“This and subsequent consultations we shall undertake will provide the much-needed space particularly to our development partners to inform the NDPIII sector plans as well as sector and strategic plans and programmes,” Prof. Mbabazi said.

**UN’s Delivering as One demonstrated**

With one UN voice, through Delivering as One (DaO) approach, the breakfast meetings featured top experts including more than a dozen heads of UN agencies in Uganda. These included Mr. Alain Sibenaler (UNFPA Country Representative of Uganda) and Dr. Antonio Querido (FAO Representative) who were among the panelists for the first and second series. Speakers and discussants comprised not only officials from UN agencies but also partners drawn from other Development Partners such as the World Bank, to help shape and support the strategic direction of the next national development plan.