

**Florence N. Kuteesa – Mission Oriented Leadership in the Ugandan Ministry of Finance,  
Planning and Economic Development (Budget Director)**

*“They don’t only motivate you, but you have to motivate them.”*

Florence is excited to reflect on the achievements of her former organization and jumps right in with her reasons. “I must say, among all other key factors, I think motivation is very important... motivation goes with confidence. Motivation goes with discipline. Motivation goes with integrity. Responsibility. Accepting to be accountable to whatever you do.”

Florence, now in her 60s, joined the civil service very early in her career. She remembers that time in detail; “we [were] coming from the devastating war in 1986 and the government was all dilapidated. Most of the work was being done by NGOs.” In addition to challenging circumstances and unconventional working hours, salaries were very low. She recalls that “many of my colleagues who joined the civil service resigned and secured better jobs, lucrative jobs.”

What might sound like a difficult place to start was, for Florence, “an opportunity to deal with the most important critical tool in development, in rehabilitation, in renovation: the budget.” She explains, “the public funds were being allocated to priorities, development needs of the people who were displaced, people who didn't have food. We didn't have soap. And so, to me, it was a blessing.” The work allowed Florence to contribute to curing the ills faced by her community, “I wanted to be part of that reform. I wanted to be instrumental.” It fulfilled her desire to serve the public, to be “impacting on people’s lives.”

Florence’s commitment to her organization’s mission coupled with her fidelity to detail and impact have earned her a reputation for being a straight shooter, someone who could never be influenced by unprincipled pressures. “I would not be manipulated, everyone knew that.”

Florence smiles, “I am what I am because of my mom. My mom is a midwife. She instilled all these values... which motivated me.” Among those values were meticulous organization and perfectionism, which Florence ultimately applied to her work in the ministry. “You would wash the clothes—we don't have washing machines here, we can't afford them—you put them outside the house to dry... If she found just a nappy or a collar not well washed, every item would go down in the water to be re-washed. That is why I focus on the details.” She worked such long hours, she says, that her sister would joke that she had found a secret husband; “I would say my husband is Mr. Budget.”

Florence’s motivation to serve the mission of her organization was reinforced by a work environment characterized by alignment, support, and trust from management at every level. She recalls the shared dream of better budget management as she and her staff established a new Budget Policy department. “We all had common issues of concern and we all had the same vision to streamline them.” She felt support from her team and her immediate political and technical leadership; they all enjoyed the political guidance of President Museveni. “At that time, His Excellency demonstrated commitment to reforms, and he did everything possible to support whatever could be done to achieve what he desired: macro-economic stability, infrastructure, universal primary education, and all kids going to school.”

Sometimes peers and supervisors would argue, “That cannot be done. You cannot change [what] the law says, the law spells out this.” Florence stepped up to resist these views: “we can gradually change the practice, and then the practice becomes a policy, and then later feeds into the law.”

Florence once noticed that the annual expenditures on a water program did not seem to result in access to safe drinking water for communities. “And then you’d get a different report on the bore holes being constructed from a minister, you get a different figure on access from the Permanent Secretary, you get a different figure from the technical head of the department of water, rural water. But this is not right! So, we discussed the issue with one of the donors. We requested funding for a public expenditure tracking study in the rural water.” After a brief pause, Florence’s face breaks into a smile. “It was done and was revealing!” Florence doesn’t seem bothered that it “was not well received by all of the policymakers”; for Florence what matters is what’s right, not what someone in power wants to see happen.

Later, Florence was promoted to Director of Budget in the Ministry. As a manager, Florence served by empowering her team and cultivating competence and independent thinking. She led her staff to think deeply about measures that would ensure the budget serves the needs of the public. She knew her team well and played to their strengths, managing for empowerment.

“I would constitute a working team to make sure a facilitator is there, a resourceful person is there, someone to record the discussion. You must be able to motivate them. They don’t only motivate you, but you have to motivate them.” Florence’s interest in the people on her teams helped foster an environment that was not only mission motivating but also delivered the reform objective.

Unfortunately, political commitment to the reform agenda changed, shifting in a “demoralizing” direction. Florence felt “we are not serving anymore. We initiated reforms, they were the best in the Sub-Saharan Africa. Now, I think we are retracting operations, ah, I was not interested in backsliding.” Florence felt that in the face of declining clarity and consistency in policy “Whatever you had put in place doesn't matter anymore. Then you start wondering what you are doing.”

During this period Florence remembers completing and presenting draft budgets, only to have the Cabinet ask for new initiatives to be added, regardless of alignment with national priorities and availability of funding. Sometimes supplementary budget requests made during the implementation of the budget even exceeded the total original budget. “Every day, the spending agencies would send us new requests for additional funding, beyond what Parliament had approved. It was disheartening to receive those requests without a hope for additional revenue from Uganda Revenue Authority. We were handling emergencies on a daily basis without resources.” When the requests came from “the top,” the budget department’s ability to push back was limited.

In the past, the government would “make sure that all the key departments are available during the annual budget discussions, with a clear intention to build consensus on priorities and funding.” The “sense of collaboration and shared purpose” that had been so critical to Florence’s work, was no longer to found; “the ‘we’ had reduced.”

Florence's twenty-year career in public service was fueled by her exceptional dedication, discipline, and fierce commitment to doing what is best for the future of her country and an empowering work environment. As the mission point of her organization shifted and the work environment changed accordingly, Florence ultimately decided she could no longer have the impact she sought in her post – she left the Ministry.

Florence's mission hasn't changed – she still serves the public, but not as an employee of the state. Florence continues to work with an NGO focused on women's economic empowerment and works for international organizations like the IMF and World Bank, helping other countries improve their public financial management. A public sector where people like Florence aren't supported in serving the public is one that will be less likely to retain them.