UNION REFORM PROCESS IN UGANDA
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES UNION
A CASE STUDY IN NW&SC UGANDA

BY:

WERIKHE PETER CHRISTOPHER
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY
UPEU UNION
Background of Uganda Public Employees Union-UPEU

- UPEU was established in 1961 and registered with the Ministry of Labor.
- Affiliated to NOTU, PSI, & ILO in Geneva.
- Membership is drawn from Public Utility Corporations, Central and Local government.
- The Vision is to have a society in which workers and/or social groups are organized and represented, & workers interest considered.
- The Mission is to organize, democratically represent workers [Public and Informal sectors] for free expression of workers rights.
In 1995, Government adopted a policy to divest off, most Public enterprises and reform those it retains.

To date most Public enterprises including energy, communications among others have been divested, what happens to NWSC?

The general objective of the reform policy was to have NWSC operate as a commercial entity as opposed to a public service organization in order to
- Manage the water resources in Uganda
- Provide Water & sewerage services to people
- Develop Water & Sewerage services in Urban
As part of reforms, government asked NWSC to undergo a restructuring programme. Some of the key elements of this programme included:

- Formation of 3 main directorates
- Decentralization to regions functions
- Privatization of the Non-Core functions
- Creation of a Commercial Department
- Review of the Job Descriptions
- Divest NW&SC in 2000.
Approach of the process

- Govt. made changes in leadership, by appointing a new BOARD and Managing Director – Dr W.T. Muhairwe
- The QUINQUENNIAL delegates conference for the Union was held on Sept. 19th. 1999.
- The Union & Management made a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).
- The CBA provided for:
  - Staff to Voluntarily to retire from NW&SC, subject to approval of Management.
  - It had a attractive package for staff & methodologies for retirement were developed.
  - Provision of re-employment to retired staff in event of expansion
Further Initiatives to Improve Performance

In order to improve performance further, a performance Agreement was developed, under the new leadership, between NWSC & Government. The Union witnessed the process. Below are some details of the Agreement:

- Reduce staff to optimal Numbers.
- Suspend negotiation of salary increments, but adopt incentives rewards mechanisms.
- Creation of autonomous management of towns.
- Total involvement and participation of the Union.
- Maintain the hiring of services from private operators to manage the Corporation.
The Role of Union in the Reform Process

- NWSC Union worked with Management to reduce staff from 1800 to 950 staff, despite the expansion to more towns.
- Union ensured that the remaining staff were of high discipline and commitment to work.
- Union insisted that the corporation continues to hire services of retired staff, with specialized skills, as provided in the CBA.
- For continuous staff development, the union encourage staff to take on scholarships & interest free-study loans offered by the corporation.
- The union also made sure that every shop steward is a member of the Management committee at all levels.
The union agreed with Management that negotiation of staff salaries should depend on financial performance of the corporation.

Indeed as the financial position of the corporation improved, Union has attained 2 CBA`s for salary increment in addition to monthly incentive earnings that sometimes double their monthly salaries.
Impact of the Reforms

- The services of the Private operator is no longer needed.
- The corporation is now a role model for Govt. in the water sector, and its divestiture has been deferred.
- The union has recovered from loss of Membership, with Management taking the lead to sensitize staff to join the Union.
- Union from other countries [Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Ghana] are benchmarking with NWSC union on how to work best with Management.
- Staff have come to appreciate the change concept as healthy, if the corporation is to improve.
The Challenges

- Water Installation in some places doesn’t sustain 24 hrs supply, which makes it difficult for staff to meet their targets.
- Govt. has continued to add unviable urban water services to NWSC, without commensurate financial assistance, which makes it hard for union to negotiate for salary increment.
- Staff are experiencing a big work load, but with commensurate pay.
- It is sometimes hard to retain skilled staff who want to retire as a result of a good and attractive retirement scheme.
Conclusion.

- It’s a great challenge for union officials to be fully involved in decision making which affects its members, **IF, YOU STILL TOW** the traditional belief of **CONFRONTATION**
- The Japanese model is now the only way to fight Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), where the relationship between Management & the Union is able to achieve its goals Collectively.
- **UPEU appeals to PSI affiliates to consider changing from the traditional approach of confrontations to CONSENSUS while advocating for works rights.**
- **Its important for the UNION officials to up-grade their FORMAL EDUCATION.**