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Participation for local development

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Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

Since the independence of Tanzania in 1961, decentralisation has been one of the strategies used to ensure quality delivery of social services. The main focus is involvement of local people, to create a sense of ownership that will make the implementation of local development programmes easier. The underlying assumption is that involving the local people will enhance sustainable development.

This ideology is the core element of the Local Government Reform Programme. This reform is guided by the principle of Decentralisation by Devolution. According to the Policy Paper on Local Government Reform (1998)

> 'the general objective of the reform is to transform local government organisations into organs that are autonomous, strong and effective, democratically governed, deriving legitimacy from services to the people, fostering participatory development, reflecting local demands and conditions and conducting activities with transparency and accountability.'

The Decentralisation by Devolution is the reaction to earlier attempts to create institutional arrangements that would enhance sustainable development. In the past the efforts were hindered by the desire to retain central oversight and control (see for example Mukandala, 2004). This structure had little success, based on these experiences; this research intends to establish the extent to which the local government reform has made participation for development a reality. The central question of this research is therefore:

To what extent do the government institutional arrangements in Tanzania facilitate or impede participation for local development and what improvements can be made?

This chapter provides an answer to this question. First, the next section will explore the properties of participation in local development and the requirements that have to be met. The following section then answers the question of whether or not the bottom-up planning process fulfils these requirements and therefore contributes to development. Then the causes of failure of the bottom-up planning process are discussed. This chapter ends with some recommendations aimed at enhancing participation in local development.

Participation for local development

Active community participation is attained through self mobilisation. Sometimes this mobilisation involves staff and leaders in the lower local government structures (village or ward level). More often, this form of participation is a result of pressing local needs. This kind of participation often attracts the local people who take part in the process as it addresses their actual preferences. Local people are also more likely to demand information about progress and therefore enhance the downward accountability.

While participation of the local people for local development has been the government's objective, on the other hand, development partners such as NGOs have been playing a crucial role in enhancing participation. More often the development partners work directly with communities and they have been successful in facilitating participation and local development.

The empirical research provides examples in which participation resulted in development. Ngerengere Primary School, Mlimani Primary School and Kingorwila Dispensary are three examples of active communities that were able to define collective interests, to decide upon the course of action and to improve the facilities. In the case of Ngerengere Primary School, for instance, community members decided to start development of the school using their own local resources (contribution). Their efforts and commitment in the process attracted World Vision Tanzania (WVT) who stepped in and provided financial support. In return, community members became more motivated to contribute and to closely supervise the expenditure of money gained from WVT.

A similar experience was seen in the case of Mlimani Primary School. In Mlimani Primary School the school committee shared the school needs with people around school catchment area. Some of them were parents of pupils studying in the school and the people selected from among community members to be the 'school guardians'. One of the guardians took the matter seriously and managed to secure external funds from donors. According to the school committee, the funds motivated community members to contribute more towards the development of the school. Community members were also concerned about administration of the funds and from time to time they demanded a progress report.

In Kingorwila Dispensary the initiative came from outside, from a civilian who became interested in the condition of the dispensary because of the location of a nearby highway. She applied for external financial support. This support provoked an active community that contributed themselves. Also, community members supervised the fund and development activities so closely to ensure that the funds were efficiently used. For example, according to the Dispensary In-charge, sometimes when the construction

activities stopped, the community members went immediately to the in-charge to ask why. If the construction stopped because of issues that were within the capacity of community members to solve, community members immediately organised themselves and fixed the problem. Sometime, technicians were called through phones to immediately attend to their working station.

These examples show that there are some requirements that have to be fulfilled to encourage local participation. First of all, people are more motivated if the money is being spent in a transparent manner and the management of the development project can be held accountable. As such, community members need to have: confidence that the process will positively impact their common interests; controls over resources and; powers to hold leaders and officials who do not perform their duties, accountable for collective interests.

Does the bottom-up planning process facilitate participation?

One could regard the examples in the previous section as real participation for local development. This is the participation Nyerere had in mind in his statement in the first chapter of this study: local communities have to take their fate into their own hands and that will facilitate development of the social services.

However, this participation is not similar to that of the bottom-up planning process. After all, based on the empirical research in this study, one could conclude that local communities do not take the bottom-up planning process very seriously. Local people are not aware of the content of their respective village or ward plan. They also do not use the plan or refer to it in later contacts with the district council. In general, participation in the bottom-up planning process is poor.

The fact that the district council does not take into account the result of this planning process (the village and ward plans) does not contribute to possible success either. Quite often it is not possible to trace the basis of the decisions made by the district council from local plans. In fact, there are no clear links between the content of the local plan and that of the respective district plan. If there are links, then this has occurred because of vaguely stated wishes. It is then, almost by coincidence that the district council decides according to the wishes expressed by the local people. In general the planning process is not used to bring the local needs to the attention of the district council and the decisions of the district council are taken without considering the wishes of the local people.

On the one hand, we see that local communities are willing and able to participate, to contribute and to develop their local facilities. Sometimes there are local initiatives, which bring external support that ultimately enhances participation. These two factors seem to have a reciprocal effect. This is because, on the other hand the external financial support promotes participation since it provides the local people with an opportunity for more control and often target on the preferences or pressing local needs. This could be seen as a virtuous circle that enhances development.

In contrast, on the other hand we see that the bottom-up planning process is apparently not able to capture this willingness of the local people. People are not participating, as they know that it does not pay off. This could be regarded as a vicious circle:

people are not participating, the district council ignores the outcome of the process, and people are even less motivated to participate. Therefore the question is what are the main differences between the failing bottom-up planning process and the successes of the situations in which development occurs due to external financial sources?

The failures of the bottom-up planning process

There are many factors that can be identified and that hamper the success of the bottom-up planning process. Some factors are related to the properties of the bottom-up planning process itself. This results in the vicious circle mentioned before. Other factors are related to the existing relationships between the district council and the management of the facilities and the relationships between the central government and the local government authorities.

The vicious circle of the bottom-up planning process
Local people do not seem to consider the bottom-up planning process and in particular the O&OD methodology as a tool for local development. This is indicated by the fact that they do not participate in the planning process and when they participate, they do not seem to take the process very seriously. This is illustrated by the fact that community members do not make follow up of their plans or even remember the content of the plan in relation to their development preferences. One of the reasons is that the local people recognise that they have little room to express their actual needs. Furthermore, there is no confidence that the process will have returns and that if they address their needs, the district council will support the attempt to solve the problems.

The lack of participation results in local plans that are vague and insignificant. These plans are actually written by facilitators who are the employees of the district council. The facilitators are trained by district council officials and are more tuned to the preferences of the district council than those of the local communities. Sometimes this has led to significant differences between the real preferences the local people have and the content of the local plans. In most cases the pressing development preferences as pointed out by members of the facilities' committee are not reflected in the local plans. This shows that not only did the local people did not participate or were taken seriously in the process, but also that they were not asked what choices to make. It appears that sometimes local people formally participate in the planning process only to impress the local government officials and leaders and not because they feel concern about the process.

How serious the members of the community take the development of local plans contributes to how vague and insignificant they are. The vague and insignificant plans make it easier for the district council to decide according to its own priorities and make decisions that are not reflecting the actual needs of the local people. This practice reinforces the lack of confidence that the local communities have in the bottom-up planning process. After all, the process does not result in significant support for the development of their communities. Even when the district council does support the local needs, the support is considered low or moderate. The support is not tailored to the wishes expressed through the bottom-up planning process. Instead, they are directed to

local issues that are not pressing at all. For example, in Tawa Health Centre the pressing needs, according to the facility committee members, are the buildings for Mother and Child health services and minor surgery; however the district council support was directed to maintenance and restoration. In the health centre committee's opinion, even maintenance and restoration was only done because of the 'Uhuru Torch Race' (see chapter 9). Otherwise, it is likely that such activities would have not been implemented.

The poor participation, insignificant plans, disregard of the local wishes at district council and poor support from the district council reinforces the lack of willingness to participate in the bottom-up planning process: the vicious circle is complete.

External factors: administrative ties between district and facilities
Besides the vicious circle of the bottom-up planning process, there are some external factors that make it difficult to enhance participation for local development. First of all, the officials at the district council appear to act mainly on their own opinions rather than on the basis of the wishes expressed by the local communities through the bottom-up planning process. The officials at the district council rely on their own knowledge of the local situation and information collected through other parallel mechanisms to bottom-up planning process.

The existence of administrative reporting and other planning processes enables council officials to collect the information they need when they prepare the district plan. The district receives lots of information through the facility plans and reporting system. After all, every facility has to make its own facility plan. And besides that plan the administrative head of the facility, sometimes in collaboration with the facility committee, is required to prepare and submit quarterly reports to the district council. The information collected through these methods enables the council officials to have knowledge about the local situation and sources of information for preparation of district plan.

These planning processes and reports parallel to the bottom-up planning process undermine the use of the village or ward plan as basis for preparation of the district plan. In fact there is no indication that village or ward plans are used as the basis of information for preparation of district plan. According to descriptions of each case and subsequent analysis, the district plans are developed on the basis of the information collected through the alternative mechanisms. Village or ward plans are hardly mentioned at district level as a useful source of information for planning. Actually, it is hard to find a copy of a village or ward plan at education and health departments. In some of the cases the copies of these plans were hardly ever found in the planning departments further indicating that they are not at all used. More often, the copies are found in boxes, which appear to not be in use, and sometimes it took several days to find a copy.

The parallel mechanisms of data collection are contradictory to bottom-up planning process that focuses on mass participation. After all, the parallel mechanisms are less participatory as they only involve people in the lower local government administrative structures. For instance, while the village and ward plans involve all community members for the preparation and approval of the plans, the primary facilities' plans and reports are developed by facilities' committees and approved by the village council.

External factors: ties between the local government and the central government
Other factors that make it hard to break the vicious circle are due to strong central government involvement in the decision-making process. The central government limits the discretion of the LGAs financially as the LGAs depend on the central government transfers for more than 90% of their budgets. Most of these transfers are conditional grants and are associated with guidelines, directives and sometimes instructions. Such instruments are more detailed and provide directives on how such funds should be allocated and spent. It leaves no room for local discretion. As a result, local governments have become merely implementers of national and sectoral development programmes. There is no innovation or creativity in these programmes. Most of development interventions contained in the district plan are routine with no indication of progressive development.

For instance, some of the funds from the central government are earmarked for specific areas. As such, the type of activities to be included in the district plans must fall under the earmarked categories. Since the planning process involves an intense scrutiny by staff in the central government structure that runs parallel to the local government structure, the staff in LGAs are obliged to comply with guidelines and other central directives in order to avoid the risk of their plans not being be approved. In this way, the LGAs are forced to adhere to the central wishes since they have limited choice for exit (Hirschman 1970). Therefore, the local preferences are only taken into account if they comply with the national priorities.

Limitation is further exacerbated by upward looking LGA staff and leaders. Their efforts are aimed more towards ensuring that the national priorities are taken into account in the development of district plans. Local preferences are only passively taken into account. In fact, they are only taken into account when they commensurate with the national wishes.

The existing ties between local and central government only compounds the problem of local government staff following orders from the central government rather than local preferences. Ministries are yet to devolve their staff to local government. The senior local government staff is managed from the central level and sometimes assigned duties from their mother ministries parallel the role assigned through the Prime Minister's Office Regional Administration and Local Government (PMO-RALG). Decisions on appointments, promotions and transfers of the most senior officials in local government are made at the central level. Also, their salaries are received directly from the central government. This, of course, seriously undermines the accountability that local government staff has to local communities as there is more of an incentive for the local government staff to concern themselves with central government wishes. The system also subjects the local government staff to a fear of being fired, demoted or transferred to remote areas, which is often perceived by government staff as punishment.

The main conclusion is that there is still resistance at the national level to surrender powers to the local level. Van Dijk (2008: 165) came to similar conclusions in his research on the impact of decentralisation on poverty in Tanzania. Van Dijk concluded that this it is the usual fear of national level politicians and bureaucrats of their loss of influence if national ministries are no longer fully in command.

Recommendations

The main conclusion is that the institutional arrangements in Tanzania are not facilitating decentralisation and participation of the people for local development. Instead there are indications that the current use of the bottom-up planning process is hampering any local initiatives. The contributing factors to such failure are non-adherence to the policies on Local Government Reform and inadequate reforms. Accordingly, the local government system requires more improvement if participation for local development is to be realised. The improvement can be divided into two areas: those that only require commitment in the implementation of the policies and; those that require further reforms.

Adhere to the local government reforms policies
This study shows that, in practice the local government reform policies are not adhered to. There is a divergence between policy theories and practices. Such divergence has led to little local government autonomy and poor empowerment of the local people. To bridge the gap between policy theory and the practices some specific changes in the use of the bottom-up planning process are needed.

- Give the local people opportunity to make their own choices without influence from either the central government or the district council.

Local people should be encouraged and mobilised to identify their local needs and develop a local strategy to address them. The lower local government structures such as village government or *mtaa* are best placed to perform these roles. This is helped by the fact that the leaders in these lower local government structures are often community members in the respective localities. Because of this, they have a good understanding of community members as well as local problems.

However, the role of the district council remains crucial. The lower local government structures might have no capacity in terms of low skilled and knowledgeable personnel to carry out the process efficiently. In this regard, staff at the district council are required to provide technical advice on governance especially in the area of financial management. Alternatively, and for the purpose of avoiding the central priorities, the council officials carry on using the process from the external agents (NGOs), which are more effective, as indicated in the cases of Mlimani Primary School and Ngerengere Primary School.

- Let the local people develop strategies to implement their local needs. In other words, avoid strategies imposed from above, which might not be honoured by the local people.

It is likely that local people will support the strategy where they developed themselves. The role of local leaders, especially in the lower local government structure, should be to encourage local people to address their local problems. This might require technical support from either the district council or technical institutions like higher education institutions. As noticed in Nyerere's statement the role of external agents is important in

proving technical support, giving new skills and providing material support. The support from the district council should facilitate the local initiative.

- Strengthen the downward accountability mechanisms.

There is a deeply entrenched belief at district council level that LGAs or the lower local government's structures have no capacity to manage resources efficiently and/or develop sound plans. In fact, this is like blaming the victim instead of the perpetrator. The LGAs are responsible for ensuring that lower local governments' structures are able to perform their roles effectively and efficiently. Besides, some evidence shows that given the opportunity to plan and control resources, local people are effective and efficient in governing their local affairs (see for example a case of Mlimani Primary School and Ngerengere Primary School). To change the attitude, local people need some powers to hold the local government officials accountable.

- Honour as much as possible the local wishes by basing decision making at council level on the local plan.

District plans should clearly reflect local development preferences expressed through the bottom-up planning process. Currently, there are no clear links between the contents of village or ward plans and that of the respective district plan. To give the local plans meaning, the preferences in the village or ward plan should be among the main priorities of district plans.

- Harmonise the reporting system.

The current bottom-up planning process is undermined by parallel mechanisms of planning and reporting. These parallel mechanisms have made the local plans develop making the Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (O&OD) methodology less meaningful to both community members and district council staff. The parallel methods are not participatory and therefore contradict with the overall philosophy of Decentralisation by Devolution, which focuses on enhancing participation for local development.

Since the O&OD methodology is multi-sectoral mechanism, it is of crucial importance that other planning processes and systems for reporting are integrated into the bottom-up planning process. By doing so, local plans will provide a basis for the development of district plans as there will not be alternative means to obtain the local information.

- Reduce strings attached to the budgetary allocation system to give the LGAs financial autonomy.

Currently, the Local Government Authorities (LGAs) are overwhelmed with detailed central guidelines, directives and sometimes instructions. This seems to limit the discretion LGAs have over their resources and therefore, creates an inability to respond to actual local wishes. As a result, the LGAs have simply become the implementers of national priorities and sectoral programmes. For this reason, it is important that the LGAs are given financial autonomy so that they have more discretion over resources to respond to actual local wishes.

However, the central government is required to provide technical support and budgetary oversight. An effective budgetary oversight mechanism is crucial in this regard to ensure that spending of public funds by LGAs has value for money.

- Let the LGAs have adequate control over own staff. In other words, the LGAs should have power to recruit their own staff and plan for their career development.

If the Local Government Authorities (LGAs) are to be accountable to the local people, the existing ties to the central government institutions should be removed. LGAs should be empowered to employ the local government staff. This should include management of employment issues such as salaries, promotion and transfers. LGAs should also be able to enforce disciplinary mechanisms upon their own staff.

The current practice shows that local government staff is still answerable to their mother ministries. According to the policy documents, ministries sometimes directly assign the respective local government staff to perform certain duties without proper coordination from the Prime Ministers Office Regional Administration and Local Government (PMO-RALG). This situation does not only violate the principle of accountability to one's boss but also undermines the downward accountability of the local government staff. As a result, local government staff remains at a crossroads and are therefore ineffective. Hence, it is important that separating the local government staff from their respective ministries and institutions should involve strengthening coordination between the PMO-RALG and other ministries. This means that the requests made by other central ministries/institutions to LGAs should be channelled through the PMO-RALG.

Improvements that transcend the local government reform policy

Even if the reform policy is effectively implemented, it is doubtful as to whether or not there will be meaningful participation. The district council is located far from the communities and sometimes has limited information about the real needs of the communities. Yet the bottom-up planning has to follow some steps including decisions at the council, before the local plan is granted. This situation can still remove the feeling ownership of the local plan by the local people.

On the other hand, it is quite likely that central government staff will continue to interfere with LGAs in an attempt to retain control. In this regard, the following recommendations transcend the current scope of the reform policy to include some changes that, in view of this research, will help to address the two problems.

- Extend devolution to the lowest structures of government.

The current local government reform puts emphasis on decentralising some government powers and responsibilities to LGAs. In the context of Tanzania, the LGAs are still far from community members. The lowest local government structures that are quite close to local people are village governments and *mtaa*. These structures are not recognised as potential centres for empowerment of the local people. Most of the local decisions and management of resources are done at the district council level. It is almost as if these structures do not exist. In fact, one could argue that the reform has created 'centralised

institutions in the theoretical decentralised system since the LGAs do not want to share or transfers powers and responsibilities to the lower local government structures.

If participation and empowerment of the local people is to be realised, the local government reform should focus on transferring powers and resources to the lowest local government structure i.e village and *mtaa*. These structures should be the functioning centres of the local government. They should be strengthened to have adequate capacity to execute their role effectively and efficiently. This includes manning local government with skilled and knowledgeable staff, and well equipped offices. However, effective mechanisms for both downward accountability and upward accountability are important. Local people should be able take actions when the public roles are not well performed or the public monies are embezzled. In the same vein, the district council should be able to ensure technical efficiency in the utilisation of public monies.

- Harmonise the local government structure and the central government structure into one government structure.

The current link between the two structures undermines democracy and proper functioning of the Local Government Authorities by creating a single structure with clear roles, a common sense of government in the field will evolve. Currently, the central government staff are upward looking and through their oversight and influence have caused the local government staff to be upward looking as well, they are not downward looking as is envisaged in local government reform. Local government staff are currently responsive to central wishes and not to local wishes as is expected.

In general, this study demonstrates that there are good intentions involving local people as important actors for local development. However, it will not be easy to achieve those goals. It involves challenges which require learning by doing, adjustments and sometimes building new bridges. In this regard, these recommendations contribute towards strengthening the government institutional arrangements as a means to facilitate participation for local development.