



Introduction

Public participation may be described in a broad sense as the process of approaching and engaging community members in activities such as administrative decision-making, agenda-setting, and policy formulation for the overall benefit of their societies. Public participation is seen as crucial to good governance and a constituent of democratic ideals. In Tanzania, the government's commitment to public participation is made evident in its creation of mechanisms that ensure community members or their representatives are engaged in decision-making processes. This Policy Brief outlines the importance of public participation in transparent, accountable and responsive governance, mentions the challenges faced in effecting open and successful participatory processes, and proposes several measures that authorities can take to enhance community participation in their locales.

Involving community members in governance helps improve the quality of decisions made and policies formulated by tapping into more extensive sources of information and viewpoints

Why enhance community participation?

- Involving community members in governance helps improve the quality of decisions made and policies formulated by tapping into more extensive and alternative sources of information and viewpoints which is sometimes referred to as soliciting "hidden knowledge". This is increasingly significant in more challenging and complex settings where diverse interests exist.
• Good governance requires authorities that are responsive to the needs of their communities. By incorporating the community's input in policy, planning and budgeting processes, citizen's views are being considered and hence ensuring that their expectations are being met and their priorities are being addressed.
• Increased community scrutiny in how their authorities are run enhances transparency and accountability which in turn helps to improve the overall quality of governance.
• Active public participation helps sustain the legitimacy of the decisions made. Community members are more likely to accept the decisions and to feel that they are fair more so than if they have not been involved in the decision-making process.

Active public participation helps sustain the legitimacy of the decisions made. Community members are more likely to accept the decisions and to feel that they are fair more so than if they have not been involved in the decision-making process

The above assertions can be corroborated using the Singida District Council as an example, where since participatory budgeting was introduced, the number of development projects proposed by citizens that were implemented increased; the accessibility of council staff to citizens

improved the delivery of services became more responsive; and the budget process has become more transparent.

Main trends in Tanzania

The Tanzanian Government's current commitment to participatory policy-making, planning and budgeting emanates from a policy paper of Local Government Reform of 1998 which eventually led to the formation and implementation of the Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP). This programme emphasises participatory development planning at village, ward and district levels. Based on this, to what extent is this commitment evident at lower government levels? The following highlight the

main trends:

- Although the provision of policy, planning and budgeting information to the public is now a prerequisite as part of the planning process, some Local Government Authorities abide by this requirement, limiting the extent to which citizens can engage in decision-making and hold their leaders to account. For instance, a study looking at financial transparency in the districts of Simanjiro and Dodoma Rural found that the two authorities did not provide information in a systematic, consistent and coherent manner. The study also found that Local Government Authorities do not deem transparency beyond what the Local Government Finance Act of 1982 stipulates as being essential. Following the law entails meeting only the required minimum.
• Consultation with citizens is the essence of the Tanzania Government's O&OD programme. Although there have been considerable attempts to include citizens in the planning process, this has not been consistent throughout all Local Government Authorities. Urban councils, for instance, were found to be more able in implementing bottom-up planning than their rural counterparts in a study that looked at the impact of Local government Reform on governance, finance and service delivery. The Study also found that some districts' bottom-up planning was ad hoc, with the actual planning being implemented by the council management team. These councils were also found to lack effective instruments and procedures for citizens to hold council officials to account.
• Successful involvement of citizens in the decision-making process requires an enabling environment and a willing and committed political leadership. However, according to a recent joint Government-development

Partners assessment of the 2000-2008 Local Government Reform Programme, there still lacks a shared vision and commitment towards further decentralisation to lower levels of government. Although policy indicates commitment to decentralisation, practice demonstrates reluctance of Central Government to devolve financial and human resource management to Local Governments. There has also been numerous instances of governance by directives from central level which interferes with the community participation principle.⁸

- There is a general lack of capacity in local authorities to scale up and mainstream stakeholder participation, according to the Prime Minister's Office Regional Administration and Local Government.⁹

Improving citizen engagement

In order to help build a culture of open governance it is worthwhile noting that effective policy-making, planning and budgeting cannot materialise without well-designed community participation measures. Here are some guiding principles on how to improve citizen engagement especially at lower government levels:

- There needs to be a **committed leadership** from all quarters of a government authority. Elected politicians, Local Government directors and other civil servants have to be dedicated to public access to information, work at establishing mechanisms for consultation and actively engage citizens in the development planning and budgeting processes.
- It should be clear to authorities that active involvement in decision-making and access to information are **citizens' rights** enshrined under the law. This can be reinforced through oversight mechanisms at all levels of government.
- Information provided should be accessible (i.e. in simplified formats); timely and relevant so that citizens can be better able to engage in development planning processes. Accessible, timely, and relevant information ensures that community members are clear on what is being decided, encouraging transparency and accountability.
- Public participation should take place during the **earlier stages** of the development planning process so as to allow adequate inputs from citizens and the surfacing of new concepts and proposals, increasing the chances that the decisions are effective in meeting the needs of the community. Earlier public involvement also ensures that any required changes are easier to accommodate, rather than late in the process when even minor amendments could be impracticable and costly.
- Sufficient **human, financial and technical resources** are required if information provision and active public participation in development planning are to be successful. Leaders and government staff require sufficient skills and finances to disseminate relevant information to citizens.

- Authorities have a responsibility to their citizens for the implementation of the decisions agreed with community members. There needs to be oversight, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that can scrutinise the planning process for its **transparency** as this is vital for **accountability** on the whole.
- A vibrant society which is open and inclusive requires a government that can **build the capacity** of its citizens to engage in participatory processes by raising public awareness with help from civil society organisations.

The incentive for Government

Apart from being a constituent of good governance, involving the public in policy-making, development planning and budgeting processes creates an environment whereby government authorities implement activities with the blessings of community members hence augmenting the legitimacy of their governance. This also cultivates public trust and eliminates the "us versus them" antagonism that is quite common between community members and leaders in all levels of government, and helps foster a spirit of common commitment to development causes.

Moreover, in an environment like Tanzania where there are skills shortages especially at lower government levels, authorities can benefit enormously from new ideas, information and resources that arise from public involvement in the decision-making process.

Therefore, government authorities should strive to enhance public participation in their communities and invest sufficient time, resources and commitment to building the civic capacity of their citizens to engage in policy-making, development planning and budgeting.

¹ *The Government of Tanzania, through the Local Government Reform Programme, is spearheading the O&OD methodology (Opportunities and Obstacles to Development Programme) for harmonising different participatory planning approaches and facilitating the bottom-up approach to planning and budgeting. For more information on O&OD visit the Local Government Reform Programme website: <<http://www.poralg.go.tz>>*

² Budd, M. (1999). 'The application of environmental assessment to marine development and activities in Great Britain'. *Marine Policy*, Vol. 23, No. 4-5, pp. 439-451.

³ George Matovu (2006). 'Capacity Building for Participatory Planning and Budgeting in Africa: Initiatives and Strategic Perspectives', Paper presented at the Pan African Conference of Ministers of Local Government held in Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho, from August 30th to September 1st, 2006.

⁴ For more details about planning and budgeting cycle, see PO-RALG, *Planning Guidelines for Villages and Mitaa* (2004).

⁵ *Financial Transparency in LGAs in Tanzania, Report by Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), 2005.*

⁶ *Ibid* (1)

⁷ *Local Government Reform 2002 – 2005: Summary of Research Findings on Governance, Finance and Service Delivery, Report by Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), 2006.*

⁸ *Local Government reform – Decentralisation by devolution: Joint Government – Development Partners Formulation Process for Support to Decentralisation by Devolution in Tanzania. Issue paper prepared ahead of discussions with Local Government Authorities and Regional Secretariats, November 2007.*

⁹ *Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (O&OD) - Programme Summary prepared by the Prime Minister's Office - Regional Administration and Local Government.*