

The Local Government Reform Process and Sub-District Development Management Issues in Tanzania

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1. Introduction

In June 1996, the government of Tanzania decided to restructure and down size its regional administration. Among the objectives of the reform is to make local governments more efficient and effective, particularly in service provision. Following that decision the Local Government Reform Agenda 1996 - 2000¹ was formulated. On the basis of the agenda a Local Government reform program and a budget² was set in place to guide the implementation of the reforms.

It is in the spirit of the reforms that, through liberalized economy, decentralization and privatization of service provision, the deteriorated or collapsed service delivery situation at district and community level will be improved. Within that philosophy the central as well as local government intends to reduce its involvement in direct delivery of service. Instead that role will be played by individuals, private companies, community based organizations and NGOs. In the new set up local governments are expected to manage local development in their jurisdiction through working out regulatory frameworks and coordination mechanisms within which other actors at district or sub-district (ward, village and community) level can participate in productive as well as in service delivery ventures. However a close examination of the reform program and its implementation process, shows that there has been neither a strong interest in or actions by the central government towards working out a structure and a system in which district councils can relate better with the other actors at district and sub-district levels. Emphasis has been on the local (district council) - central government relationships. Reforms at sub-district level institutions are left to take their own course or determined by requirements arising from the national level reforms.

The purpose of this paper is to outline the local government reform process and show the implications of the centrally guided reforms to the district and ward, village and community level development planning and management. One of the implications which will be discussed is the spontaneous attempts to deal with sub-district development co-ordination. The paper draws examples from Dodoma and Kilimanjaro. In the following section a brief outline of the situation before the reforms is provided, followed by the institutional issues resulting from the nature of the reform process and lastly a discussion on the key issues at sub-district level.

2. Local Level Development Planning and Management Before the Reforms

Prior to the current local government reforms, district and sub-district level development planning and management in Tanzania was a monopoly of the government institutions, including village councils, ward development committees, district councils and regional authorities and eventually the central government through respective sector ministries. As those institutions were established during the mid 1960s, within the Ujamaa policies period, where the state exercised monopoly in planning and development management at all levels, the village councils, ward development committees and the district councils operated within the same ideology. The government was the only legitimate actor in development activities including service provision. Although other non-state actors or stakeholders could participate in district council meetings, they were either invited on discretion basis or co-opted members. Their contribution to development issues at sub-district level was thus incidental if at all. Thus prior to the reforms the local level development arena was basically dominated by state institutions. Other actors were considered illegal (*walanguzi*) or at least informal. However in the early 1980s the central and local governments found themselves in economic and financial crisis and could no longer finance service provision.

3. Key features of the Local Government Reform Program

For the past fifteen years or so, the government has been pursuing reform programs from the ministerial, regional and district administration level. This paper focus on the reforms in local government particularly district councils. With respect to development management in sub-district levels, the reforms can be said to have two key features which limits development management at ward, village and community levels. These are briefly outlined in the following section.

i) Emphasis on central/local relationships

The local government reform agenda outlines seven key objectives which include:

- creation of an autonomous local government which is able to determine their own priorities and manage her resources.
- establishing a local government which is more transparent and democratic and thus enhancing its accountability to the people it is supposed to serve.
- improving the local government staffing position in terms of better trained staff who are responsible and accountable to their councils.
- Create a local government with improved capacity in resource mobilization and financial management which together will increase the level of financial resources available to the local governments.
- to facilitate and enable other agencies to provide more equitable and better quality services.

To realize these objectives particularly that of facilitating and enabling other agencies to improve service provision, requires that those other agencies have a well established working relationship with the local government. Through that working relationship the local government can thus co-ordinate its investment and those of the other agencies. However, in terms of institutional linkages the reform program seem to be more concerned with the relationship between the local and central governments and not so much with how the local councils relate with the sub-district institutions as well as the other non-state institutions which are working at community level. In my view, the way the local councils relate with central government is very important but local councils relationship with the sub-district institutions is equally important, particularly with respect to accountability of the local councils to the people they are supposed to serve.

ii) More attention given to higher level institutions than to lower levels

One of the immediate and significant outcome of the reforms is the abolishment of the district development committee which was the key executive arm in respective district councils. Its equivalent institution at regional level, the regional development committee was also abolished and replaced by the Regional Consultative Committee (RCC) which draws its legal powers from the 1997 Regional Administration Act. According to the legislation, the RCC is made up of politicians and government officials. The committee is chaired by the Regional Commissioner who is supported by the Regional Administrative Secretary. Other members are all MPs and chairmen of district councils in the region. District commissioners of all the districts in the region as well as executive directors of rural district councils and town directors of urban councils in the region are also members to the committee. By its composition the Regional Consultative Committee is a powerful institution comprising of top level decision makers (politicians and officials) at regional and district level. In my view, for the RCC to be real effective in dealing with district and sub-district level development management issues, the institutions below the RCC and their decision-making arenas have to be equally strong.

It may be further argued that, district and sub-district (ward, village and community) level issues are brought into the RCC by the district council chairmen, on the assumption that such issues have been identified and thoroughly discussed at appropriate levels and that the chairmen are articulate with the issues to the extent that they can present and defend them at RCC meetings. That assumption becomes true if decision-making institutions at the sub-district levels are strong enough and are able to identify and negotiate local issues and can make the RCC accountable to them. Unfortunately the reforms seem to give more attention to higher level institutions and less emphasis to lower level institutions. For instance the 1997 Regional Administration Act, does not provide committees similar to RCC, at district level. Instead some district level decision-makers are included in the RCC.

By having the district chairmen and MPs as representatives to the consultative committee the district council is well linked to the central government. The role of the district commissioner who is also a member of the consultative committee is among others, to ensure that central government policies are taken into account by the district council when carrying out development planning and implementation at local level. Thus the mechanism for linking the central and local government seem to be well in place.

The sub-district level institutions including village councils, village assemblies and ward development committees are supposed to be linked to the district level decision-making process through mechanism such as:

- Ward Councilors meetings at district level
 - Ward Development Committee at ward level
 - Extension services offered through the district council
 - District staff visits and attendance in village level meetings
- Planning, budgeting and reporting procedures which require village and ward development committees to contribute in district level planning.

Within these structures it is assumed that villagers are able to visit and consult district staff whenever a need arises and that district staff are also able to maintain a flow of extension services and support in agriculture, community development, livestock management, environmental management, natural resources management, etc. as and whenever required. In the following section the paper draws two examples from Dodoma and Kilimanjaro to illustrate the implications of the reform program on development management at district and sub-district levels.

4. Institutional Issues at District and Sub -district Levels .

4.1 Dodoma Rural District

Dodoma is one of the four administrative districts in Dodoma region. It covers an area of about 14000 square kilometers. Administratively the district is made up of eight divisions which are further subdivided into 48 wards. Each ward is made up of between two to five villages. In total the district accommodates about 86462 households in 124 villages.

In a recent study carried out in Dodoma³ the following institutional issues with respect to local level development planning and management were observed.

- i) In addition to the district council there are 48 ward development committees and 124 village assemblies and their respective village councils. All these draw their administrative and legal powers from the Local Government (District Authorities) Act, no. 7 of 1982.

ii) Following government notice number 176 of August 9, 1996 Haneti, Mundemu, Bahi and Kigwe trading centers were declared as townships⁴ which adds to the number of state sub-district level institutions which have to be coordinated by the District Council.

iii) The number of non-state institutions or actors contributing to the development process in the district is also growing. NGOs, Community based organizations and business entrepreneurs are, according to findings from the Dodoma study, increasing. Other institutions such as clan groups, livestock keeping groups, are also becoming more active at community level.

vi) By their nature and purpose the state and non-state institutions found in Dodoma are different in the following ways:

- perception of district and community development issues
- interests and approaches to planning and development management
- sources and levels of funding, etc.

These differences calls for an effective co-ordinating mechanism.

v) Out of the 14 NGOs studied six deal with improvement of water supply in villages within Dodoma rural district thus making water supply the most assisted sector in the district. According to an interview with the District Water Engineer, most of the water projects in Dodoma are financed by NGOs with support from CBOs in terms of village water committees who are responsible in establishing and managing village water funds. Compared to other departments in the district, the water department is the most active. Most NGOs work with the departmental staff who would otherwise be idle.

vi) After water, environmental management is the second in attracting NGOs support. A substantial number of NGOs disseminate environmental awareness education and carry out environmental conservation activities in the district.

Apart from the concentration of development activities in the water, environment and community development sectors, there is also a notable geographical concentration of NGOs activities in the central part of the district. Among the outcomes of such unbalanced resource allocation at district level is that, the northern and southern parts of Dodoma district remain poorly provided with services and thus comparatively less developed. For instance, fertile lands in Itiso and Mwitikira wards in the north and south respectively are basically underutilized. Large tracts of land which are not effectively used and government forests which are poorly managed are increasingly attracting pastoralists from other areas of Tanzania, and thus creating a potential conflict with local small holder crop cultivators and environmental degradation.

In addition to under utilization of natural resources educational facilities such as secondary schools are also lacking in the two divisions. Primary school enrollment in the northern division of Itiso is about 47 per cent where as the district average is 60 per cent of the school going age population. Such unbalanced distribution of services undermines equity and the whole question of improved service provision. A more equitable development could be enhanced if the district council was empowered in co-ordinating NGOs and CBOs investment interests and activities.

In Dodoma rural district there is very limited development interactions between the district staff, NGOs, CBOs, villagers and other community level actors. One limiting factor is the long distance from the district headquarters where most of the staff are found. One has to travel a minimum of 25 kilometers from the Dodoma municipality before coming to a village in Dodoma rural district. Transport costs is thus an important factor in ensuring linkages between district and sub-district level institutions. In addition to distance, inaccessibility due to poor road conditions coupled with a limited number of public buses and lack of council transport facilities have made the district basically unable to support local level development initiatives. The five running vehicles managed by the council are utilized by senior staff and mainly used in ad hoc operations such as revenue collection. Thus the relationship between the district is seen in terms of collection of development levy, occasional visits and public meetings by the District Commissioner, the Council Chairman and the District Executive Director.

Relationship between CBOs, NGOs, business entrepreneurs and the district council is not different from that of the district and the respective sub-district institutions. By May 1998 there were at least 17 NGOs active in development activities in Dodoma district. Prior to the liberalization and decentralization, these non-state institutions were not recognized by the government as potential contributors in development initiatives. Some operated as or under religious organizations. Currently these institutions are formally recognized in the following ways:

It is administratively required that NGOs and CBOs are registered before they can operate. At the district level the central government registers NGOs through the District Commissioners Office. In addition to registration, NGOs have to report to the District Executive Director before they carry out their projects in the district. In Dodoma, NGOs or their representatives are invited and some do attend full council meetings but only as observers despite their significant role and investment in development in the district. Some NGOs on the other hand incorporate district staff in their annual planning meetings.

Whatever the case, neither the district council nor the NGOs seem to be well informed of each others plans and activities, leave alone influencing each others decisions. The mechanism in place which include: registration, reporting and invitation for meetings do not seem to be sufficient for the district to really effectively play the role of development coordination.

In the present situation most district councils spend more than 90 per cent of their revenue for paying salaries (and in maintaining the district council institution) and less than 10 per cent for development. Sub-district level institutions, CBOs and NGOs finance and implement most of the development activities within the district. Since these are individual institutions with specific interests they require a forum in which such diverse interests, capacities, and approaches to development and plans can be related to each other and coordinated so that the actors are more organized and that the available resources are effectively and efficiently allocated and utilized, so as to avoid inequitable development like that reported from Dodoma.

Some Donors and NGOs have realized the need for a common forum and have initiated processes to create local level fora in which information on their plans and activities in a given district can be shared to improve planning and resource allocation. Likewise, in an interview with the Dodoma District Executive Director, it was clear that the district council is keen in developing a common vision which will incorporate most of the key NGOs, CBOs, and the business community in the district. This attempt is yet to become a reality.

Problems of local level co-ordination which were observed in Dodoma are also found in other districts in Tanzania and are yet to be actively addressed by the current local government reform program. Seppalla⁵, writing on local administration in Tanzania, observes that, broadly speaking, new donor approaches to development, the administrative reforms, the multiparty politics, market forces and civic organizations push towards a more active district level politics, meaning that district councils have overall mandate and legitimacy in co-ordinating other development actors. District councils are supposed to be more accountable to their electorates and should be able to assume their key role and become more active in sub-district level planning and development management.

4.2 Attempts to Co-ordinate District Development in Same District

Same district in Kilimanjaro region is among the districts which are working towards a mechanism in which different actors can meet and discuss their development plans and approaches. In order to activate and co-ordinate development in the district Same District Commissioner's Office has established a District Advisory Committee (DAC) which is made up of thirteen seats distributed as follows:

- i) Four Central and Local Government Officials including:
 - The District Commissioner
 - The District Administrative Secretary
 - The District Executive Director
 - The District Planning Officer

ii) Three Politicians

- Two elected MPs in the district
- Same District Council Chairman

iii) Three seats for representatives of NGOs working in the district and three seats for representatives of the business men in the district. In selecting the NGOs representatives, a conference involving the over 30 NGOs working in the district was organized. During the conference a joint NGO platform was formed and three people were elected to represent the NGOs in the district advisory committee.

While the basic assumption behind establishing the District Advisory Committee (DAC) is to create an institution similar to the Regional Consultative Committee at district level, the District Commissioner considers the DAC not as a government body which will then incorporate other actors in its activities, but a joint committee which can later strengthen civil society, and thus provide a better room for the government to operate in⁶. Although the DAC is still under formation its tentative list of tasks emphasize coordination and collaboration between different development actors, which reflects the spirit of a joint committee not only in terms of membership but also in terms of its working philosophy.

5. Conclusion

Drawing from the establishment of the DAC, it appears that government, NGOs, and the private sector are ready to cooperate and they see benefits rather than disadvantages in collaboration. In addition, the DAC may also occupy space in the local level institutional set up and perform an important coordination activity at district level. However, by its composition the DAC seem to be fairly strong district level institution, but not so at sub-district level. For instance it is not clear as to how are the interests of CBOs, and village councils and other village level institutions, find their way to the DAC unless they are organized through an NGO which is represented in the DAC. Again the perception of having a strong district level institution and weak sub-district institutions, reflects a spirit of centralization rather than decentralization.

Local level initiatives like the one from Same district are also supported by the Local Government Reform Program. According to the program's action plan and budget, district reforms teams shall be established in each district to take a lead in designing and implementing their own restructuring plans. Same district seem to be ahead of the reform program. That is good if the Same experience though limited can be used in other districts such as in Dodoma, and thus incorporating practical experiences in the reform process. In that way experience from below will have been used to inform the otherwise centralized reforms.

While commending the idea of encouraging district level reform teams to work out their own restructuring processes, it is worth noting that, unless equal and probably more attention and support is directed towards empowering sub-district state and non-state institutions such as CBOs, village assemblies and village councils, the so much talked about local government reforms will facilitate creation of a strong regional and district authorities and not real local level decentralization and improved planning and development management capacity at community level.

References and Notes

¹The United Republic of Tanzania, Prime Minister's Office, Local Government Reform Component, Civil Service Reform Program: *The Local Government Reform Agenda 1996 - 2000*. The Civil Service Reform Secretariat, President's Office, Dar Es Salaam, October 1996.

²United Republic of Tanzania Prime Minister's Office: *Local Government Reform Program: Action Plan and Budget for 1998/98*. The Civil Service Reform Secretariat, President's Office, Dar Es Salaam, July 1998.

³The University College of Lands and Architectural Studies, *Towards a Common Vision : Dodoma District Profile*. Draft Students Project work, August 1998.

⁴A township is an administrative status given to a trading centre in order to improve its management. Such authority which can be established through the Local Government (District Authorities) Act, no.7 of 19982 can thus committees to run the affairs of that urban centre.

⁵Seppala, P. *Tanzania Local Administration A vehicle for democratic development?* IDS, University of Helsinki, FAD Working paper 3/98, May 1998.

⁶ See a paper by Peter Kangwa (Same District Commissioner) and Rinus van Klinken (Same District Planning Advisor SNV) on : *Same District Advisory Committee Explorations and initial experiences*. for the Consultative Meeting of Experts on Local Development, Joint Action and Decentralized Cooperation in Tanzania Under the Lome Convention, Dar Es Salaam, March, 1998.