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RESEARCH ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT PLANNING IN TANZANIA THE LIMITS TO LOCAL PARTICIPATION

BRIEF 3

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District planning combines district-based, participatory and national planning processes. This brief and accompanying report explore the views and experiences of local government staff of this 'hybrid' planning model. The brief also summarises the financial, administrative, and political constraints to participatory planning, and by implication the resulting constraints upon Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as a means of 'democratising' the district planning process.

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Tanzanian local governments use both "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches to planning. In the conventional top-down planning approach, the District Planning Officer compiles an annual district plan based on development priorities identified by the various heads of departments of the local authority. In contrast, the participatory "bottom-up" planning approach encourages the identification, prioritisation and implementation of development activities by local communities, facilitated by district and other government staff.

In practice, development activities implemented at the district and village levels are strongly influenced by national sector policies and all programmes, and by the presence of governmental and non-government organisations' development projects in their area. While using this mixed approach can result in competing demands for resources, in reality this approach does take into account factors outside of the local government's area of control, such as government policy and resource constraints.

From 1999 to 2002 REPOA conducted a training programme for local government staff involved in district development planning. The objective of the

training was to mainstream poverty concerns in district level planning in order to address issues of sustainable development. REPOA later commissioned a tracer study of the training programme, and a questionnaire was sent to the 106 trainees. Those surveyed were District Planning Officers, heads of departments and other staff in district councils who contributed to the development of their district's plan.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE PLANNERS

Nearly half the respondents said they used participatory planning approaches in preparing the district plan, and a similar number said they used a mix of 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' methods.

Basic education and healthcare were the most successfully implemented components of the district plan, followed by roads; while the water, agriculture, livestock and natural resources components were generally not successfully implemented (Table 1). Findings showed that the more successfully implemented components were those that formed part of central government programmes, implemented in parallel with, or as part of, district plans.

Table 1: Implementation Performance of the District Plan

Component of the District Plan	More Successfully Implemented %	Less Successfully Implemented %
Basic Education	96	4
Healthcare	89	11
Roads	63	37
Water Supply	48	52
Agriculture/Livestock	36	64
Natural Resources	31	69

When respondents were asked what determined which components of their district plan were successfully implemented, they frequently gave the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) and the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) as examples of successful programmes. Both of these programmes emphasise community participation in the planning process. These and other national initiatives do not typically originate in ‘bottom-up’ planning processes, but do make use of these processes for defining activities and implementation. It should be noted that the availability of resources (financial, human, training, etc) is key to the successful implementation of the plan. As the financial resources (which support other required resources) come predominantly from central government or donor agencies, this does influence the direction and focus of the district plan.

CONSTRAINTS TO PARTICIPATORY DISTRICT PLANNING

Findings indicated that PRA could not address all the factors influencing the planning process. The planners surveyed were quite clear on the constraints facing them when it came to the exercise of their planning functions, these were factors largely outside of their control. Inadequate finance was frequently mentioned as a reason for the non-implementation of planned activities. The capacity to set and finance priority investments was, and continues to be, undermined by the weak resource base at the district level compared to that of the central level; the parallel structures set up by donor agencies and NGOs, and the practice of political patronage at all levels.

Respondents were asked what other constraints inhibited successful district planning. Their responses are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Non-Financial Constraints to District Planning

Constraint	Number	%
Human Resources	34	23
Motivation and Management	29	20
Transport/Communications/Materials	28	19
Politics/Governance /Corruption	19	13
Community Constraints	19	13
Other, including Economic Constraints	17	12
Total	146	100

Note: Open-ended question; maximum of three responses

The tracer study confirmed that Local Government Authorities (LGAs) were generally understaffed. Many staff were under qualified or lacked incentives, and many worked only part of the time. Transport was generally only used by very senior officials for official trips, usually outside of the district. There was a lack of data and the existing data was generally unreliable. Computers and other work tools were lacking. A number of the respondents also mentioned corruption and politics as factors undermining the planning function.

LGAs were found to be more responsive to the region and to central ministries, donors and international NGOs, than to the villages in their area. Half a dozen overlapping national reform initiatives and programmes impinged on LGAs, stretching capacity and creating ad hoc priorities and confusion.

From an administrative perspective the fact that there are many villages, (over 10,000 on the Tanzania Mainland), and wards in the average district means that it is difficult for each LGA to handle ‘bottom-up’ planning effectively. The number of villages and wards each LGA is responsible for can result in overstretched resources (human, communications, etc) when trying to implement the PRA approach.

These findings support the view that district-level planning is a relatively weak resource allocation mechanism. As a consequence of these constraints the majority of respondents reported that they did not exercise their planning function effectively (Table 3).

Table 3: Do Planners Exercise their Planning Functions Effectively?

	Frequency	%
“I exercise my planning functions effectively”	8	16
Other factors undermine the planning functions	43	84
Total	51	100

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRO-POOR DISTRICT PLANNING

- The current policy thrust in favour of participatory district planning does not address the underlying constraints.
- Participatory planning at the community level has the potential of providing the basis for district development planning. PRA may be seen to be expensive and time-consuming (refer to the tracer study report) but the spin-off effects of the process include the enhancement of ownership of the programmes and their outcomes, therefore providing a higher chance of sustainability.
- Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) /PRA techniques can be employed to generate local awareness of how community resources, both human and financial, can be used to solve community problems. In this limited scenario there is no expectation that external resources will be forthcoming.
- To contribute to poverty reduction within a ‘decentralised’ local government system, political and administrative institutions need to be much more responsive to local realities and needs. Financially, the major social investments channeled through district councils result from central government/donor agency sponsored initiatives. Some of these projects may not address those issues identified as priorities under the participatory planning approach by the respective Local Government Authority and lower administrative levels.
- The relationship between Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) based participatory planning and

budgeting of resources (financial, human, etc) at the village/community level - and overall district planning and budgeting, needs to be addressed.

- Effective participatory planning presupposes effective devolution of power. For decentralised planning to be effective, there must be a commitment from the central government, coupled with actions devolving responsibilities to the local authorities. This means elected local governments enjoying certain autonomy and being accountable to the local populace for the use of resources. Such an approach could be linked to a governance agenda, where empowerment means that communities know their roles, responsibilities and rights. Ultimately, devolved local government goes together with democratisation, a plural society, and a viable civil society.
- Village plans must be based on village resources if the plans are not to be frustrated in implementation. Implementation requires a strong financial base of the local authorities; but local level finances are limited. Taxes, cesses and levies in the different strata of local government should be rationalised and harmonised.
- PRA can raise expectations that villagers and communities have more voice in planning and budgeting than previously. This creates the risk that citizens’ expectations may be frustrated at the implementation stage. If the objective is to improve “LGA accountability and transparency in development planning and management” then publishing indicative budgets for ward/village spending and communicating council decisions to the citizens are crucial.

This brief is a summary of the tracer study published by REPOA as Special Paper 17:

*“When bottom-up meets top-down:
The limits of local participation in local
government planning in Tanzania”*

by Brian Cooksey and Idris Kikula

This report can be obtained from REPOA, or can be downloaded from REPOA's website: www.repoa.or.tz

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