Working paper

04. 4

Sharing Experiences in Lower Level Governance

SNV
1. Introduction
This paper describes the presentations and the discussions of a workshop jointly organised by SNV Tanzania Northern Portfolio and the Northern Zone Reform Team of the Local Government Reform Programme. The workshop was aimed at sharing experiences in Lower Level Governance and was attended by a wide range of stakeholders from government, NGOs and knowledge institutions. Recent research efforts were presented in order to share experiences and to gain further insights. Major challenges in governance at sub-council levels included: lack of statutory meetings; little feedback from higher levels; weak institutional linkages; poor record keeping and information dissemination; and lack of transparent financial management.

Suggestions for improvements were given in the areas of: recruitment and training; emphasis on lower levels; collaboration with non-state actors; and demand driven governance. The main outcomes of the workshop were: 1) Lower level governance should be put on the agenda of all stakeholders from government and civil society, including the donor community, 2) There is a need for increased collaboration and joint partnerships between government and civil society.

2. Background
Through the Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP), decentralisation to district level has been vigorously pursued in Tanzania. Although capacities are still limited and the process as yet incomplete, a significant shift in governance responsibilities has taken place from the centre to the district level.

For the local authorities to live up to their enhanced role, democratisation and participation processes at lower levels need to be deepened.

Recent studies have shown serious challenges in the performance of lower level governments. The table below clearly shows that village governments rarely conduct meetings as required. For example, in Arusha Municipality, village councils only conducted 26% of the required statutory meetings.

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<th>Meetings held as % of required held in Arusha Region (Jan-March '04)</th>
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<td><strong>District</strong></td>
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<td>Arusha Municipality</td>
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<td>Monduli</td>
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<td>Arumeru</td>
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<td>Karatu</td>
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<td>Ngorongoro</td>
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<td><strong>Arusha Region</strong></td>
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1 Netherlands Development Organization. For more information visit www.snvtanzania.org or contact PO Box 3941, Dar es Salaam or by email at svfo@snvtanzania.org or snvtanzania@snv.or.tz
2 One of the participants questioned the use of the term ‘lower level governance’ and asked ‘lower to whom’? The Kiswahili term describes it better: “Ngazi ya Msingi”, which translates to “basic level”. The village level reforms are fundamental because that is where the direct interaction between the government and citizens takes place.
In these circumstances, crucial questions that need answering are:

- How can meetings be held regularly as required?
- How can meetings be more participatory?
- How can Ward Development Committees (WDC) be more inclusive of Faith Organisations, NGOs and the private sector?

To contribute to this debate, the Northern Zone Reform Team (ZRT) of the Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP) and the Portfolio Team North (PTN) of SNV Tanzania organised a joint reflection workshop. LGRP and SNV PTN have engaged in a partnership based on complementarity; with the LGRP focusing on performance indicators and guidelines and SNV on the quality of the development process. The partnership will facilitate lessons to be developed for horizontal and vertical sharing.

2.1 Participants
The workshop was attended by a wide range of stakeholders. The 32 participants came from district councils, national and local NGOs and representatives from the private sector. The NGO sector was represented by organisations such as HakiKazi, HakiElimu, PAMOJA and Pact Tanzania. The private sector was represented by the TCCIA Arusha, while the representatives from the districts came mainly from Arusha Region. Advisors from both SNV Tanzania and zonal reform teams of the LGRP also participated.

2.2 Presentations
In the workshop recent research efforts and development initiatives were presented as inputs for sharing experiences and learning:

1. Research on decentralisation within Kondoa District. – W. van Nes, SNV District Management Adviser, Kondoa
2. The experiences of Ward Planning (mpango kata) in Kilimanjaro Region – P. Kangwa, PAMOJA, Moshi
3. Improving democratic governance at sub-council level in Tanzania (based on experiences from Magu, Misungwi, Morogoro and Arumeru) - Dr F. Lerise, UCLAS and Professor S. Ngware, University of Dar es Salaam
4. Building capacities of local governments in Manyara Region in order to instil good governance - B. Rutahindirwa, ZRT Coordinator, Arusha

3. Findings
The LGRP is implemented under the conviction that governance is key to ensuring sustainable development. Principles of governance include:

- **Participation:** People’s participation in government activities, implying that statutory meetings are being held and people know their rights and responsibilities.

- **Accountability:** New central-local relations are created based on rule of law, negotiations, exchange of information and sharing of roles and responsibilities. In the end, the government is answerable to the people.

- **Transparency in financial management and information dissemination:** Leaders exercise care in using public funds, financial records are properly kept and accessible to the public and grass roots are able to understand budgets.

- **Democratic rule:** People elect and hold their councils responsible.

_HakiElimu Working Paper Series 2004_
Although councils and sub-council authorities have undergone reforms for the past seven years, many of these principles are not practised at ward and village levels. The main concerns highlighted by the studies are as follows:

3.1 Statutory meetings
Studies presented indicated that meetings at sub-council level are rarely held. In the villages studied in Kondoa the frequency of meetings varied from none at all to twelve times a year. The few meetings that are held are often not properly managed. There is poor participation and low attendance, and minutes are often not kept. For ward development committees (WDCs), similar problems emerged. Meetings appear to be held more often as compared to (sub)village levels, but are also usually characterised by late arrivals and low attendance.

Several explanations were highlighted. In the Manyara presentation, the shift to the multiparty system, whereby village chairmen were no longer paid monthly salaries, was mentioned. This was said to have decreased enthusiasm. Village executive officers often do not get salaries paid by the council, which has decreased motivation, and meetings are simply not called. In this respect, limited education and ‘ignorance’ (among both villagers and leaders) play an important role in making people fail to appreciate the value of attending meetings.

It also appeared that leaders do not call meetings because they do not feel sufficiently confident to satisfactorily respond to questions from villagers. This applies more to village assembly and sub-village (vitongoji) levels than WDC and village council meetings. Moreover, there is lack of financial support for organising and running meetings at lower levels. In some areas in Manyara region people are reluctant to call or attend meetings because of long distances and risks along the way.

Interestingly, as observed in Magu and Misungwi, other types of community meetings addressing specific issues (e.g. water, education) are held successfully. A reason for this difference may be the feeling that often nothing of tangible value comes out of the general government meetings, except for ‘receiving orders from above’.

3.2 Accountability
Feedback to the ward or village leaders from the district council is rarely provided. Once minutes are received it is ‘the end of business’. This is likely to contribute to non-implementation of decisions. For example the Kondoa-case showed that 15 to 80% of the Village Council decisions and 30 to 50% of WDC decisions were not being implemented. This is due to lack of follow-up by members and civil servants, the reluctance of villagers to participate or contribute, and lack of proper preparation.

PAMOJA’s experiences with mpango kata (ward level planning) show similar challenges. The process attempts to stimulate bottom-up planning, starting at kitongoji level, where priorities are being set. The village assembly then compiles all sub-village priorities, before they are further consolidated at the WDC level. One of the challenges mentioned was ‘false hope of getting funds from the government’, meaning that most plans are not adequately funded. Apparently, grass roost priorities are eventually not incorporated in the plans. This is an indication of the lack of a culture of accountability from the top to the bottom, alongside a lack of expertise, at lower levels, in lobbying and advocacy to higher levels.

3.3 Institutional linkages
In Kondoa, the lack of follow-up to decisions made at the meetings has led to bad relations between elected leaders and government officials at lower and council levels. Another reason cited was that the manner in which village executive officers are elected locally compromises their independent and leads to their failure to serve as change agents. There seems to be a...
general lack of communication between the council, ward and villages. Very few council staff visit wards and villages on a routine basis, often only making such trips when a senior government official visits. In the Manyara study, it was pointed out that there is too little back-up support from higher levels. Councillors tend not to visit villages to hold meetings and inform people of their rights.

Because of limited interaction most councillors have limited knowledge about plans and activities of other stakeholders, such as NGOs. In turn these stakeholders often do not receive good information about council plans and budgets. In the mpango kata, non-state actors were part of the process, due to the involvement of the District Advisory Committee (a platform with representatives from NGO, to Private Sector and government). In this case collaboration with non-state actors was seen as a positive feature. Despite this, the expected comprehensive local development plans are yet to be achieved.

3.4 Record keeping and information dissemination

As day-to-day records are rarely found in villages, it is difficult to assess access to information for villagers. Furthermore, basic documents, including various laws and regulations, tend to be in English. Guiding documents, when available, are often not made accessible by leaders.

The culture of referring to existing government rules and regulations in the course of everyday functioning of governance does not appear to be practised. For example, villagers in Morogoro were surprised to learn that it is unlawful for a WDC or village chairperson not to call for statutory meetings. It seems there is little understanding of the role of the WDC, since 88% of the villagers interviewed in Kondoa could not even express an opinion on the functioning of that committee.

Simple ways of raising awareness and disseminating information are practiced in a few communities. These include provision of airtime on local radio stations, as is the case in Magu, or publishing information on village notice boards.

The lack of availability, at village level, to databases leads to a situation whereby decisions are made without being well informed, and progress cannot be systematically tracked. In this context informed consensus around a common purpose can also be difficult to achieve.

3.5 Financial management

Independence at sub-council level would likely be enhanced if sufficient resources were to be channelled to those levels. But funds available are very small. For example, the Kondoa wards did not even maintain a financial administration because they did not receive any funds. Village councils maintained some financial records but, particularly after the abolition of local ‘nuisance’ taxes, the amounts to be administered are fairly small. According to respondents, running a WDC requires Tsh 0.75 to 1.5 million per year; and for a Village Council, Tsh 0.25 to 1.2 million per year.

Many village governments receive funds from council or central government but do not display basic information on incomes and expenditures. In addition, the capacity of district councils to scrutinise village financial reports is limited. Village accounts are submitted to councils late, and further delays occur during the approval process. In turn, village leaders’ ability to mobilise funds is limited because financial reports are not approved. It also does not seem to be clear which department at the council is responsible for village accounts.

With the above examples, it is clear that people are yet to be adequately empowered to fully participate in political processes in their communities. As a result, the everyday practice of
democracy and accountability is weak and the quality of service delivery has not improved to desired levels.

4. Discussions
From the recommendations of the studies and discussions the following issues emerged:

4.1 Recruitment and training
Recruitment of skilled staff and training, including civic education, were cited in all presentations. This concerns all staff at lower levels. Training should be conducted in a ‘learning by doing’ manner and not merely through classroom training. Human resource management is to be improved by regular transfers and the better supervision of civil servants and leaders. Incentives for staff who work in hardship areas should also be considered in order to attract competent people.

The Zonal Reform Team has undertaken a number of activities geared at building capacities at lower level such as training government staff and political leaders; providing basic legislation and materials on good governance; and councillors’ training on their educative role towards their constituencies. Successes have already been achieved. In Hanang and Babati, the people’s participation principle is gaining ground for statutory meetings. Transparency has started to be practiced by village councils when tabling financial reports and it now takes less time to fill vacant political leader positions.

4.2 Emphasis on lower levels
It is recommended that more emphasis be put on lower levels, especially sub-villages, where distances are not an issue for people to meet. One should be careful not to blame the ‘victims’, but to look at the causes and effects. An example was given about a village in Simanjiro where the only five people who can read and write are mistrusted by others. Because of this situation, capable people are often not interested in contesting for village positions, meaning that less capable people are elected.

When putting emphasis on lower levels, some changes are required at council levels to make them more receptive to the lower levels. Councils should not fall into the same trap as ministries that continue to exhibit top-down approaches and are reluctant to let go of power. Lessons from the reform at district level should be applied to lower levels. Strengthening the sub-council levels should go hand-in-hand with the allocation of sufficient funds.

Reforms are able to bring about change. Examples that were highlighted include the following:

- In Arumeru, the District Council has allocated Tshs 100,000 to each ward for operational expenses. This has significantly increased interest and motivation at ward level, and contributed to the feeling that the ward level is appreciated.
- In Hanang District, a number of villagers have called their leadership to account, after participating in a training session on the operations of the village government. This has often resulted in new elections and a change of leadership.
- Moshi Rural District has, over the years, been allocating significant funding for projects (particularly road works), which were identified at ward level. This has enabled people operating at ward level to be motivated and committed.

4.3 Collaboration with non-state actors
In the discussions, the following question was posed: ‘How can genuine partnerships and independence in lower level governance among stakeholders be promoted?’. Participants in the
workshop acknowledged the need for collaboration between government and civil society and enhancement of non-state actors at lower levels.

A good example, mentioned by HakiElimu, was of a civil society initiative where public forums were organised to stimulate discussions on education in Serengeti, Ukerewe and Misungwi wards. Through these forums, awareness was created and information disseminated to reinvigorate the functioning of local government institutions.

For horizontal relationships to be effective, some degree of trust and transparency between the partners is required. In equal partnerships it is not necessary for all parties to be equally strong as long as the principle of ‘complementarity instead of competition’ is adhered to. There should be room for the stronger ones to nurture the less strong. Equality in strength is not a pre-condition and diversity should be allowed, as long as there is some compatibility in vision and values. However, striving for partnerships in democracy should not mean the lack of challenge, and civil society capability to hold governments to account was seen to be essential.

4.4 Demand driven governance

Local participation demands a planned and effective civic competence that is inherent in democratic governance. However, in practice there is still a tendency to wait for ‘supply from above’, instead of people deciding for themselves what to do, and demanding support from higher levels.

The LGRP should promote demand driven accountability by providing a framework adaptable to sub-council level. The framework should facilitate sub-council processes (rather than simply issue instructions.) Flexibility needs to be a key feature and local determinations. For instance, meetings are required twelve times a year, but, in Maasai communities for example, it may make more sense to hold meetings following their seasons. It was also suggested that traditional leaders be more effectively utilised in grass roots matters, including to internalise participatory planning, using local knowledge to gain credibility in society.

5. Key Lessons

The workshop did not aims to construct resolutions, but was meant for thoughtful sharing, reflection and learning. An overall conclusion was that despite serious challenges there are many good practices in the country; but that transformation of mindsets takes time. Two key lessons from the workshop were:

1. There is a need to put lower level governance on the agenda of government and other development actors, including NGOs and the donor community.

2. There is a need for increased collaboration between government and civil society, for increased stakeholders’ participation, at all levels, and for joint partnerships between government and development partners.
HakiElimu

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