

**ASSESSING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE LOCAL DECISION MAKING
PROCESS EXPERIENCES FROM TABORA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL IN TANZANIA**

ANNA PETER LINJE,
ASSISTANT LECTURER,
TANZANIA PUBLIC SERVICE COLLEGE,
TABORA CAMPUS,
P.O.BOX 329 TABORA-TANZANIA (EAST AFRICA).
EMAIL ADDRESS: linjeanna@yahoo.com
CELL PHONE NO: +255754825008 OR +255714737302

ABSTRACT

This study examined citizen participation in local decision making process at Tabora municipal council as one of the Tanzanians local governments. In this respect the study sought to establish whether citizens in the selected municipality influence the local development decisions as emphasized by national and local laws. A structured questionnaire, interview and documentary review were the data collection methods used in the study.

The findings of this study include that there is insufficient participatory and inactive citizen influence in decision making process in the municipality. Considering nature of involvement this study has concluded that, the municipal has good policies gearing at ensuring citizens are involved in decision making process although there is poor implementation.

The study concludes with a set of recommendations for successful citizen participation in decision making. Main among these recommendations is that capacity building programmes and flexible protocol that reflect the main principle of participatory process.

KEY WORDS: ASSESSING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCESS.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Citizen Participation is quite high on the development agenda of the World Bank [WB], International Monetary Fund [IMF] and donor agencies, in such a way that development assistance is tied to citizen participation and adherence to democratic ideals by the recipient nations. Also, the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] pay a great deal of attention to the local political process, for example, goal number three (indicator 3.3) emphasizes on the participation of women in the top leadership positions (Poverty & Economic Policy Research Network, 2010). In Tanzania the National Constitution (1977), refers to the promotion of democratic ideals which include an emphasis on CP in decision making. Specifically, articles 145 and 146 confer powers to local citizens to exercise their voice in terms of participating in the local decision making process. The key argument in this regard is that local development policy is most likely to be relevant and responsive to the needs of the people if it is based on the priorities for services and wants expressed by the people themselves.

This paper therefore, examines citizen participation in the local decision making process in Tabora Municipal Council as one of the local government in Tanzania. The paper is organized into three parts; part one provides the conceptual meaning and rationale for citizen participation, part two assesses citizen participation in the decision making processes and finally the paper provides a way forward and conclusion.

1.2 PART ONE CONCEPTUAL MEANING AND RATIONALE FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Citizen participation as a concept of development means getting the general public involved in taking decisions that affect their well-being. It seeks to give local people the responsibility to manage their own affairs, especially with regard to planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development projects and programmes. Creighton (2005) argues that public participation is the process by which public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into the governmental and corporate decision-making. The World Bank (1995) defines participation as a process through which stakeholders' influence and share control over development initiatives, the decisions and resources which affect them.

1.2.1 Rationale of citizen participation

The available literature refers to many positive uses of citizen participation. Some of the virtues of citizen participation include the following:

- First, citizen participation leads 'communities' to understand that they must take responsibility for their development instead of the government (Mawi, 2000).
- Second, citizen participation plays a significant role in the Local Economic Development [LED] strategies. Since there is consultation with a variety of actors, there is a synergy of ideas that can

produce better informed decision-making regarding the services to be provided. According to Beyer, A. & Claire, P., & Sharma, A. (2003), participation can be used to interpret citizens' demands and produce a better match between project outputs and local wants.

- With citizen participation, the policies formulated might be more realistically grounded in citizen preferences; As such, the public might be more sympathetic evaluators of the tough decisions that government administrators have to make, also, the improved support from the public might create a less divisive, combative populace to govern and regulate (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).
- Moreover, CP planning establishes an apparently governable relation between the government and the governed (Green, 2008).
- Citizen participation is seen as a technology for behavior change. Rather than depending on mainstream knowledge, participation enables authorities to tap local knowledge, process it and apply it (Beyer *et al*, 2003).

In conclusion, ideally, citizen participation produces many positive outcomes including strengthening and enhancing a democratic system. Dahl, (1971) adds that indeed when people participate in the decision making process they are likely to own the development process and therefore contribute willingly to achieving the intended outcomes.

2.0 PART TWO: ASSESSING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

This section presents and discusses the data collected with the view to assessing the degree to which citizens participate in the local development decision making process. The assessment of citizen participation in decision making examined two variables: First, citizen empowerment and the second variable is the ability of citizens to influence the local development decisions. The analysis and discussion with regard to these two variables are presented below.

2.1 Citizen empowerment

This study argues that citizens can effectively participate in the local decision making if they have been empowered to participate. To assess citizen empowerment, the analysis examined the following indicators: Provision of civic education, provision of public information and political mobilization of the local citizens to participate in the decision making process.

2.1.1 Provision of civic education

Literature, for example Devas (2002), refers to the significance of civic education as empowering the local citizens to effectively participate in the local decision making process. Consequently, this study assessed the degree to which the case study municipal council provided civic education that the local citizens could use to engage constructively in the local decision making process.

First, interviewed municipal officials acknowledged the significance of civic education for citizen participation in the local decision making process. Clarifying this point, one of the interviewees said *“unless people know their responsibilities, you cannot expect them to see/reason for participation.*

Second, interviewees argued that the municipal council provided civic education to its local residents by means of councilors, ward executive officers, and mtaa executive officers. The officers also referred to the use of drama and local meetings among other means to provide public education on civic responsibilities and rights. The respondents did not indicate the existence of cooperation with civic society organizations to provide civic education. To clarify the above claims, a highly municipal official stated that councilors and leaders at the sub council levels were closer to people and therefore they did use this capital to educate the local residents on their civic responsibilities and rights. However, solid evidence to confirm the above claim was not provided. When asked whether the council could do more to educate the local residents, the interviewees argued that they could do so if they had enough resources to carry out public lectures and seminars.

2.1.2 Provision of public information

With regard to the provision of public information (financial, implementation of local development projects and expenditures) the respondents were more upbeat and in fact bragged that the municipal council always kept its local population informed via posting information on notice boards and local radio. The respondents also stated that they were provided information at the ward office. Indeed, observation data revealed presences of various pieces of public information at the municipal notice boards including information provided by councilors. Indeed, one of the councilors asked: *How can I be a trusted councilor if I do not help the council to educate and pass over vital information to my voters?* The positive assessment by councilors and WEOs is not surprising. These are leaders who will always wish to be seen as actively serving the people and also blameless.

2.1.3 Political mobilization of the local citizens to participate in the decision making process

Literature, for, example Tandler (1997) and Tetty (2006) suggest that people can only engage in the local political process if they are mobilized and encouraged to actually stand up and express and defend their priorities for development. Indeed, some studies, for example, Crook & Manor, (1998), have provided evidence that people are likely to influence the local decision making process if they are supported and mobilized to act. Thus, this study examined the degree to which local citizens were politically mobilized to engage in the local decision making process.

Interview with municipal officials showed that the municipal council was not keen on mobilizing the people politically. Interviewed officials claimed that it was the responsibility of other actors notably the civil society organizations including political parties to organize and mobilize the people politically. Interviews with councilors and WEOs did not reveal the existence of political mobilization of the citizens by the municipal authority, not even by civil society organizations.

This finding is consistent with the suggestion in literature (Davey, 1983) that governments are not likely to engage in political mobilization of the citizens to emphasize their demands or hold the government accountable. Indeed, the old adage states that nobody sweeps her/his own feet using an

iron broom. Experiences across countries show that governments both central and local are only likely to engage in political mobilization, that means votes for them.

2.2 Ability of citizens to influence the local development decisions

The second variable examined was the ability of citizens to influence the local development decisions. To assess the ability of citizens to influence the local development decisions the study examined the following indicators: Public awareness of their civic rights and responsibilities, Citizens willingness to participate, optimized by their attendance to, and active participation in the local political meetings and citizens own assessment of their involvement in the local decision making

2.2.1 Public awareness of their civic rights and responsibilities

Possession of knowledge and good understanding of civic rights and responsibility has critical impact in its implementation. In order to understand this factor the respondents were interrogated to obtain their views whether they were familiar with their rights and responsibilities with regard to citizen participation in the local decision making by means of questionnaire.

The responses indicated that 54% of the respondents were not familiar while 46% said that they were aware with their right and responsibilities in the local decision making process. They argued that they are poorly motivated to attend in the local meetings, they were not provided with information and public training programmes with regard to citizen participation. It was further noted from the responses that most of the low council officials did not know and implement some of the civic rights in the development process.

Moreover, the investigation was made through interview with one of the head of department who noted that education on civil rights and responsibilities has not reached majority of citizens of the case study council. He further went on arguing the Municipal Council is too large for a few human resource officers to extend education to all its citizens, majority of whom are wide dispersed in the wards, given the nature of their economic activities, limited time and financial resources to carry out regular seminars for capacity building among citizens and even Municipal officials in the case council.

2.2.2 Citizens willingness to participate, optimized by attendance to, and active participation in the local political meetings.

The research finding indicated that in most cases the citizens were not actively involved in the decision making process. 79 (72%) of the respondents replied that there were not involved while 31 (28%) of the respondents agreed that they were involved in the decision making process.

Furthermore, the respondents who agreed were asked how they were involved in the process of decision making at the local level. About 40% of the respondents were of the opinion that local citizens were effectively involved in different ways in the local decision making process. 20 respondents (18%) said they normally participate by giving their opinions, 11 of them (10%) said

that normally they participate through giving instructions, 43 (39%) did participate by clarifying issues, 21 (19%) did participate by giving priorities and 15 (15%) did participate by ranking and voting for preferences. The response from one of the interviewee noted that it was the councilors and municipal officials who determined the objectives and passed to the council and some of the respondents argued that they were involved through clarifying issues with regard to development at the local level.

This result indicated that the participatory implied in the Municipality was not abided by as required by the Legislations which govern the implementation of this bottom up approach to the local decision making introduced by the government of Tanzania in 2004. According to Rogoff, (1990) the O&OD approach requires participants to engage with the process and to be willing to have a personal input, in the whole process of development. Also Mbwambo (2004), provided that citizen participation requires all citizens and their local authorities to develop their objectives based on council strategic planning process. It is apparent that effective citizen participation in the local development process is requisite for understanding the direction, available resources and different social economic circumstances in the area.

Even in the study by Rabe (2012) at the Wami Dakawa village, where villagers were somewhat optimistic about their role in influencing development outcomes, respondents mentioned that it is difficult to motivate people to participate in development activities. *“Few meetings are held and only few people are willing to attend”*

The study findings suggest that the participatory decision making process is not a priority as the responses indicated that citizens were not effectively involved in determining what, how and when the goals to be achieved in the municipality. One of the possible reasons for this result is that the participatory culture was yet to uproot the top-down decision making process.

2.2.3 Citizens own assessment of their involvement in the local decision making

The respondents were asked by means of questionnaires to assess their degree of the involvement in the local decision making process. Of the 110 respondents only 23 (22%) replied that they were actively involved. While, the majority of the informants (82 equal to 78%) showed that they were poorly involved themselves in the decision making process. They asserted that they were aware of their rights, and responsibilities but due to number of factors like nature of economic activities, social cultural differences made them to poorly involve in the decision making process. With this result it became evident that citizen participation in decision making process was not effectively.

3.0 PART THREE: RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are put forward with a view to provide inputs that the case study council and even other municipal councils in Tanzania may use to improve effective citizen participation in the local decision making process.

3.1 Citizen empowerment and continuous capacity building

Effective citizen participation in the local decision making process needs substantial knowledge and information on the part of citizens and municipal officials. Therefore, the municipal authority in collaboration with civil society actors should continue civic education to enable the local citizens grasp their civic responsibilities including their role in the local development process. Civic education with regard to citizen participation may help to eliminate skepticism noted from the respondents and in turn solicit loyalty of local citizens in the implementation of development projects in the municipal council.

Also, continuous capacity building to council officials at the local levels should be taken regularly to make sure that all staff and elected councils understand and are capable to undertake necessary processes with regard to citizen participation on the implementation of development project at the local level. This can be achieved through regular seminars and other forms of training. Armed with requisite knowledge, council officials would likely facilitate effective citizen participation in the local development decision making process.

3.2 Improve Municipal accountability and credibility to the local citizens

Based on the study findings, the municipal council needs to improve its public accountability in term of provision of usable and timely information on implementation of development projects and expenditure for this builds the public trust and willingness to engage in the local development. Also the Municipal Authorities should respect and include in to the local development agenda the priorities for services expressed by local residents.

Moreover, the Municipal Council should improved service delivery in the public service and ultimately alleviating poverty. This should be based on more realistic work plans and targets linked to realistic budgets to make the plans implementable in the municipality. This may help to build the public trust and willingness to engage in the local development.

3.3 Effective leadership and commitment

Effective leadership leads to higher quality and efficient delivery of goods and social services. It is a tool for cohesiveness and provides a sense of direction and vision to individuals and work groups. For effective citizen participation in the local decision making process good leadership traits are vital to convince the citizens on the potential of citizen participation. The council management team should play a great deal of role to supervise the process of O&OD implementation.

3.4 Citizens involvement

The realization of individuals' and municipal goals may be enhanced by citizens participation because once one knows what, how, why and when to achieve, one is likely to be motivated to strive for the accomplishment of the goal. As argued by Jyothi and Venkatesh, (2010), citizens

possess the requisite unique and essential information necessary for development of the municipal at large. The involvement of the citizens in this process is of vital importance to make them aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities which might result in high performance to individuals and the Municipal Council at large. To enhance effective citizens involvement, the socio-economic and political differences of the citizens should be kept aside when people are engaging in the participatory decision making process. The facilitator should reconcile the contrasting ideologies among the participants. The participants who regard themselves as superior to others should be moderated. Again, participants who feel inferior to others should be empowered so that they gain confidence. Citizens need to play their civic role by giving advice, attending and affectively participate in local decision making and contribute to local development.

4.0 Conclusion

Based on the discussion and analysis, the study results showed that the decision making process in Tanzanians local governments is influenced by the municipal officials. The findings of the study showed that the citizens are moderately involved and sometimes poorly informed about public issues. In other words, citizens did not effectively participate in the decision making process. The level of participation remained largely passive with local officials taking upper hand or centre stage in decision making. Decisions that are reached do not come from the grass-root level but citizens are simply told what to do by their leaders.

REFERENCES

- Beyer, A., Claire, P., & Sharma, A. (2003). *The Role of Participation and Partnerships in*
- Creighton, J.L. (2005). *The Public Participation Handbook: Making Better Decisions through Citizen Involvement*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Crook, R., & Manor, J., (1998). *Democracy and decentralization in South Asia and West Africa. Participation accountability and performance*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Dahl, R.A. (1971). *Polyrch: participation and opposition*. New Haven and London: Yale
- Devas, N. (2003). *Local government decision-making: Citizen participation and local accountability: Examples of good (and bad) practices in Kenya*. IDD: University of Birgmingham.

- Green, M. (2008). *Rethinking chronic poverty, durable poverty and destitution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- International Development Center (2006). *Study on improvements of Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (O & OD) planning process*. Progress Report. Dar es Salaam: JICA.
- International Journal of Social Research
- Irvin, R.S. & Stansbury, J. (2004). Citizen Participation in Decision Making: Is it Worth the Effort? *Public Administration Review*, 64 (1), pp.55-65.
- Mawi, A. M. S. (2000). Community participation in malaria control. A lasting solution to the spread of malaria in this millennium. 19th Annual Scientific Conference of the Tanzanian Public Health Association. Public Health Focus in Tanzania in the New Millennium, Moshi, Tanzania.
- Mbwambo, J. S. (2004). *Does decentralization have a positive impact on the use of natural resources?* Term paper for international doctoral studies program; center for development research: University of Bonn.
- Rabé, P. & Kamanzi, A. (2012). Power analysis: A study of participation at the local in Tanzania. ASC working paper 105; African Studies Centre Leiden: The Netherlands.
- Rogoff, B. (1990) *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. Oxford:Oxford University Press.
- Tendler, J. (1997). *Good Government in the Tropics*, Johns Hopkins Studies in
- Tetty B. M. (2006). *An assessment of challenges facing participatory planning in Tanzania; the case of marginalized group in Ilala District*. Dar-es salaam: University of Dar-es salaam.
- United Republic of Tanzania (1982). The Local Government (District Authority) Act N0. 7 of 1982 revised 2000.
- United Republic of Tanzania (1982). The Local Government (Urban Authority) Act N0. 8 of 1982 revised 2000.

United Republic of Tanzania (1999). The Local Government Miscellaneous Ammendments Act No. 6 of 1999.

United Republic of Tanzania (2000). The local government reform programme: Restructuring manual. Dar es Salaam. PO-RALG.

United Republic of Tanzania,(2013). Tabora Municipal profile, Tabora.

World Bank (1995). *World Bank Participation Sourcebook*. Environment Department Papers: Washington, DC: World Bank