

Democratic Participation at the Grassroots Level: A Local Government Challenge in Tanzania

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Enshrined in the Tanzanian Constitution as permanent institutions, local authorities are essential means to facilitate orderly and meaningful democratic participation of people in social, political, cultural and economic related decisions affecting them at the grassroots level. In 1995, a research project was conducted in four regions in Tanzania focusing on the level, type and amount of administrative support given to farmers to improve their crops' resistance against natural disasters like plant weeds, diseases and pests. Among its major findings count the following: the organization structure of the Tanzanian Ministry of Agriculture is top-heavy which is hardly visible at the lower levels of government; local government participation to promote agriculture is almost nil; and farmers' participation in the development and promotion of agriculture has been largely confined to forms of tokenism. At present, local authorities in Tanzania have to seek more innovative ways of evoking effective grassroots participation in the planning process, although theoretically such efforts are supposed to emanate from the grassroots.

Introduction

Local authorities in Tanzania have been employed to further national development. They are very close to the masses and the central government has always sought to execute developmental policies through the instrumentalities of the local councils and councilors. Most local authorities in Tanzania are located in the rural areas, thus enabling closest contacts to exist between servants of the government and the people. This is so not only because the great bulk of the population is to be found in rural areas (now it is over 80 percent of the total population) but also because no representative local institutions exist for governmental purposes at any point higher than the district level. In Tanzania, local authorities are essential instruments of the national government for the performance of important basic services which could best be administered locally due to the local administrators' intimate

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knowledge of the needs, conditions and peculiarities of the areas concerned. In other words, local authorities in Tanzania are junior partners of the central government charged with the responsibility of taking care of the welfare of the local communities through the popularly elected representatives.

Administration at the grassroots level is expected to be a vehicle for local development. This explains why Tanzania has decided to reestablish local authorities and include them in the constitution as permanent institutions. The essence of local authorities in Tanzania from the view of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania is to facilitate the making of orderly and meaningful democratic participation of the people in social, political, cultural and economic related decisions that affect them in their own communities. Local authorities in Tanzania are a means to devolve the otherwise centralized government powers to the popular masses.

This article presents the findings of the research study conducted in four regions in Tanzania in 1995. The study focused on the level, type and amount of administrative support provided to farmers in order to improve their crops' resistance from various attacks of natural elements. The rural participatory methods were employed to collect data during the study. The paper is divided into four sections/parts. The first part is an introduction which informs the reader about the development of local authorities in Tanzania. The main focus is on the role of district authorities in the promotion of agriculture in Tanzania. The second section centers on the analysis of the interaction between the local government specifically the village governments and the central government in the improvement of plants' resistance against plant weeds, pests and diseases. The third section summarizes the process of local government participation in Tanzania and points out the role played by central governments in attenuating power and autonomy of the local authorities as people's institutions. The last section concludes with suggestions for improving local government system in Tanzania.

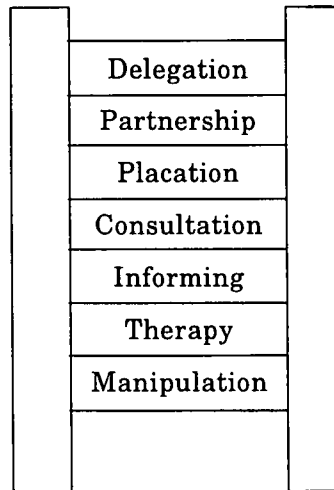
The Grassroots Participation in the Plant Protection Function

The Plant Protection function in Tanzania has been supported both by law and an international convention. Tanzania has the Plant Protection Ordinance (PPO) of 1937 which operates according to the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of 1951. The law was enacted in order to provide better provision for the prevention of the spread of diseases and destructive plants. In addition, the law empowers the officials from the Ministry of Agriculture to have some powers of inspection, control and monitoring of crops as regards the attacks caused by plant weeds, diseases and pests.

It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture to create structures and institutions suitable for plant protection. This article scrutinizes how the central government (the Ministry of Agriculture) involves local authorities in the efforts to educate and train the small-scale farmers in Tanzania.

The Ministry of Agriculture assumes the major responsibility for the protection of crops from pests, plant weeds and diseases. The Ministry's machinery is used to supervise, monitor, execute and control the agricultural development and changes in the country. The Plant Protection Division (PPD) is responsible for ensuring that there is a required level and amount of care when executing the plant protection activity. The typology formulated by Arnstein (1969) provides a tool to assess efforts which involve people and explain participation of small-scale farmers in plant protection. In Arnstein's ladder, levels of participation are divided into three sections with various methods of participation or nonparticipation listed within each section (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ladder of Farmer Participation in Plant Protection



In the Tanzanian local government system, manipulation and therapy are defined and grouped within the state of nonparticipation. People in this state are persuaded and uninvolved. Specifically, therapy pertains to issues referred to as participation which are aimed at correcting participants' behavior rather than listening to their concerns. Informing, consultation and placation are the types of participation which are called tokenism. These three stages involve citizens through the invitation of opinions, through debates and advisory roles. Partnership, delegation and citizen control involve the sharing of power and ultimately there is devolution of decisionmaking power to participants/farmers

on their respective issues. The plant protection efforts in Tanzania have not reached the desired level of devolution of the decisionmaking powers at all.

The Central Government Function

The major role of the Tanzanian Ministry of Agriculture is to promote agricultural expansion and development based on the policy of socialism and self-reliance. This goal has been outlined in the National Agricultural Policy document of 1983. It has also been envisaged that the Ministry of Agriculture will achieve national self-sufficiency in food and raise the nutrition standards of the people through the increased agricultural output. In addition, it is expected that agriculture in Tanzania would increase foreign earnings and provide the link for industrial development if new or improved methods are widely applied throughout the country.

The ability of the government to support the growing population largely depends on the success in the agricultural sector. Like other developing countries, Tanzania's agricultural sector is centered around the small-scale farmers organized in 8,000 villages. The majority of Tanzanian farmers have never been fully integrated into the country's agricultural system. Agricultural development in Tanzania is characterized by the slow process of innovation and complex interaction between physical, social, economic and political factors. The small-scale farming system is perceived to be very difficult and problematic.

The organization structure of the Ministry is seen to be top heavy. There is little visible central government presence at lower levels of the government. The Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners and Directors hold office in the headquarters of the Ministry. Their number varies from time to time. Agricultural activity has been entrusted to the Regional Agricultural and Livestock Development Officer (RALDO) and the District Agricultural and Livestock Development Officer (DALDO) in the regions and districts respectively.

District Authorities' Functions Regarding Plant Protection

The execution of the plant protection functions both at regional and district levels reflects the top heavy character of the Ministry responsible for agriculture. The rigid organization structure, its complex procedures due to overcentralization of functions and the general low productivity of government services often hinder the substantial amount of progress in the plant protection sector. The RALDO and DALDO are the key players in promoting agricultural development in the countryside.

Local government participation to promote agriculture is almost non-existent. Local administration in Tanzania has a specific trait: it was not based on popular demand but was provided by colonial powers, who managed to impose their own ideas of organization upon the existing traditional forms of tribal authority which resulted in an amalgamation of native and imported methods. Agricultural development in Tanzania is a major responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture. The RALDO and DALDO in the regions work with the local authorities but they are directly answerable to the Ministry of Agriculture. They are in fact the central government employees working under the local government environment.

Village Government

Village governments are operationally nonexistent. What are referred to as village governments in many places are actually political party branches. In practice, every village visited during the study had one or two agricultural extension workers employed by the government. The village government has no power to force the central government employees (agricultural workers) to work under their supervision. Village extension workers are under the DALDO whom they provide monthly reports about agricultural activities of the designated villages in each ward.

In fact, the village governments have never played any significant role to support plant protection services to the grassroots. The committees present in every village are mainly end-driven rather than means-driven committees. There is no agricultural production committee at the village level. Agriculture is seen as a function of the central government which should communicate directly to farmers. However, the study confirmed that there was very little central government presence at the village level. There is a Ward Secretary and few other central government employees in the village such as the school teachers, health officers and agricultural workers.

Conclusion

I am of the opinion that farmers' participation in the development and promotion of agriculture should be encouraged. The current trend does not provide any room which fosters effective participation. Manipulation, therapy and informing are the main three methods used to enhance participation in the plant protection function. The stages of consultation and placation are also forms of tokenism. Real participation should be in the form of partnership and delegation which, in our case, have not yet been reached.

The inappropriate government structure in the Ministry of Agriculture may result in delays in decisionmaking which stifle individual initiative,

dampen workers' morale and in general result in poor performance of the government business. The close scrutiny of the Ministry reveals that its structure hampers the plant protection efforts by the Plant Protection Division (PPD). The Ministry has centralized its plant protection function. Such centralization of vital sectoral services does not work in the interest of local authorities in Tanzania.

There is no dispute that local authorities are appropriate institutions to undertake agricultural development at lower levels of the government hierarchy. This can only be done if local authorities are properly organized for the task. It has been observed, for example, that the present local authorities do not provide for effective grassroots participation in the planning process although theoretically such planning is supposed to emanate from the grassroots. This implies that the basic spirit of local government as institutions for enhancing grassroots participation has not percolated adequately among the actors.

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