



Citizen Participation and Local Governance in Tanzania

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Local Government Reform (LGR) in Tanzania, among other things, envisaged local governments whose leadership is chosen through free and fair elections, and local governments that “facilitate the participation of the people in deciding on matters affecting their lives, planning and executing their development programmes, and foster partnerships with civic groups”.¹ Meaningful governance at the local level cannot be imagined without effective citizen participation.

This brief focuses on citizen participation as a key to democratic local governance, as informed by a recent citizen survey. It also compares results from some of the recent citizen surveys with those from previous surveys, to discern whether or not there has been any improvement in citizen participation between 2003 and 2013.

The survey data was collected in 2013, involving a total of 1,680 respondents from Bagamoyo District Council, Ilala Municipal Council, Iringa District Council, Kilosa District Council, Moshi District Council, and Mwanza City Council. Gender parity was observed among the respondents, 841 (50.1 per cent) of whom were men and 839 (49.9 per cent) were women.

Active Citizen Participation in Local Governance

Active participation in local governance is necessary for improving a citizen’s quality of life. Participation is manifested by the citizen’s active role in governance structures (village/ neighbourhood (*mtaa*) assembly meetings), active involvement in public service committees (water management committees, school committees, etc.), and active involvement in preparing village/ neighbourhood and ward plans.

There has been a 6 percentage point increase in village leadership/ward councillor involvement, from 17 per cent in 2003 to 23 per cent in 2006. However, this declined to 22.3 per cent in 2013. Participation in council meetings rose from 24 per cent in 2003 to 28 per cent in 2006, but fell to 22 per cent in 2013. Participation in school committees also rose from 28 per cent in 2003 to 36 per cent in 2006 but also declined to 15 per cent in 2013; this represents a 13 percentage point slide in citizen participation in

¹ United Republic of Tanzania, Local Government Reform Programme Policy Paper on Local Government Reform. Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government. Dar es Salaam, October, 1998: 6–7.

this vital public service. Participation in water management committees also improved from 13 per cent in 2003 to 23 per cent in 2006, but similarly declined to 9.5 per cent in 2013, an overall fall of 3.5 percentage points. Finally, participation in village planning improved from 20 per cent in 2003 to 35 per cent in 2006, but it also fell to 16.1 per cent in 2013.

As discerned from Table 1 below, citizen participation in governance affairs was less than satisfactory in 2013, as it was in 2003. This is a policy concern, and a challenge will be to identify how to mitigate the low participation of citizens in matters that have serious consequences for their welfare.

compared to 13.4 per cent men. Of those who answered in the negative, 41.3 percent were women compared to 36.7 percent men. A policy strategy to encourage the participation of women in village/neighbourhood meetings is imperative. It appears that citizens with lower levels of education are keener to attend village assembly meetings compared with the village/neighbourhood elites. Results from the 2013 Citizen Survey indicate that out of the 22 per cent who said they attended such meetings, those with no education and education up to primary level were the majority (16.2 per cent), compared to only 4.3 per cent of villagers with secondary education and a paltry 1.5 per cent of villagers with post-secondary education.

Table 1: Direct Citizen Participation in Local Governance Affairs

Participation in:	Total % in 2003	Total % in 2006	Total % in 2013	Percentage point change 2003–2013
Village leadership/ward councillor	17	23	22.3	+5.3
Council meetings	24	28	22	-2
School committee	28	36	15	-13
Water management committee	13	23	9.5	-3.5
Public works project committee	9	19	9.7	+7
Preparation of the village/ward plan	20	35	16.1	-3.9
TASAF project committee	1.9	14	6.3	+4.4
Primary cooperative society/ farmers' association	9	12	11.8	+2.8
Agricultural/livestock extension contact group	2.9	6	6.4	+3.5

Source: REPOA Citizen Surveys 2003, 2006, & 2013

Who Participates in Local Governance Affairs?

Crucial decisions are made at the village/neighbourhood council meetings. Attendance at such meetings is thus of utmost importance for effective local governance. When asked “Whether you or your household members participate in full council meetings”, only 22 per cent of the respondents said they attended such meetings. The remainder, 78 per cent, never attended such meetings. Of the 22 per cent who attended, only 8.6 per cent were women

This is another policy concern: how to get the village/mtaa elite involved in the governance of their localities.

School committees are dominated by younger men with lower levels of education. The 2013 citizen survey reveals that only 15 per cent of those surveyed participated in school committees. Of the 15 per cent involved in school committees, women constituted 6.5 per cent compared to 8.5 per cent men. Senior citizens are the least involved in school committees, with the 2013

citizen survey indicating that only 2.6 per cent of people aged over 60 years were involved in school committees, compared with 5.8 per cent in the age range 18 to 39 years and 6.6 per cent in the age range 40 to 59 years.

The village/neighbourhood elite also tend to shun participation in school committees. The 2013 Citizen Survey indicates that out of the 15 per cent who said they were involved in school committees, 9.8 per cent had no formal education or had only primary level education. Only 4.2 per cent said they had secondary education and 1 per cent reported having a post-secondary or some sort of vocational education.

The majority (83.9 per cent) in the 2013 Citizen Survey said they were not involved in preparing village/ward plans. Only 16.1 per cent said they were involved in preparing village plans, of whom 5.9 percent were women, compared to 10.2 per cent men. Given the importance of such local level plans in the well-being of all the people in the locality, the low levels of citizen involvement and the lack of gender parity are additional policy concerns. Policy attention should likewise focus on how to get more people, women in particular, involved in planning their welfare.

It is also worrisome that the village elite are not involved in planning village programmes. Results from the 2013 Citizen Survey indicate that out of the 16.1 per cent who confirmed their participation in preparing village/ward plans, only 1 per cent had post-secondary education and 3.8 per cent had secondary level education, while

11.3 per cent were only educated up to primary level. Planning requires expertise; therefore getting the elite involved is a policy challenge.

Of all the local governance activities, involvement is lowest in the Constituency Development Catalyst Fund Committee (CDCFC). Only 1.6 per cent of the respondents in the 2013 Citizen Survey said they were involved, compared to 98.4 per cent who answered in the negative. Furthermore, women were the least involved in the CDCFC e.g. only 0.3 percent compared to 1.3% men. These funds are controlled by the constituency Member of Parliament who is also an ex-officio councillor. The possibility of misusing the Constituency Development Fund is greater when the majority of the people are not involved in deciding which programmes should be funded. Women are likely to benefit the least from such funds when they are not involved.

Indirect Citizen Participation: Voting in Local Government Elections

Data from the 2006 Citizen Survey indicates that 91 per cent of those surveyed said they had voted, compared to 83 per cent in 2003. Results from the 2013 Citizen Survey show that 78.2 per cent said they voted, but 21.8 per cent said they did not vote. It should be noted that there has been a 4.8 percentage point decline in voter turnout when 2010 data is compared with 2003 data, and a slide of 12.8 points when 2010 data is compared with 2006 data, as indicated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Participation in Ward Councillor, Village/Neighbourhood, and Hamlet Elections

	2003	2006	2013
Citizens saying they voted in last ward councillor elections	84%	84%	86.8%
Citizens saying they voted in last village and neighbourhood elections	83%	91%	78.2%

Source: REPOA Citizen Surveys 2003, 2006, & 2013

Out of the 78.2 per cent who said they voted in the last local government elections in 2009, more men (40.9 per cent) than women (37.3 per cent) turned out to vote. The 2013 Citizen Survey does indicate that there was more enthusiasm for general elections than for local government elections. For example, 86.8 per cent said they voted in the last general elections compared to 84 per cent who said they voted in the 2003 and

2006 Citizen Surveys, a significant improvement in electoral participation. Out of the 84 per cent who said they voted in the last general elections (presidential, parliamentary, and councillor elections), again more men (44.8 per cent) than women (42.0 per cent) said they voted. Low voter turnout is a policy challenge, where policy should focus on how to encourage more people to vote, especially at the local government elections.

Policy Implications

The 2013 Citizen Survey indicates that direct participation in local governance affairs is dominated by men. Men appear to be more active in committees and take a more active role by attending village/neighbourhood meetings and raising issues (speaking). This may be exacerbated by the fact that men are likely to get more satisfactory answers to questions asked in the assembly meetings than women. Another policy challenge is that the local elite and the elders tend to take a lower profile in local governance than the youth and people with primary education and lower. There is a need to design policies that will encourage women, the elite, and the local elders to take a more active role in local governance affairs.

Electoral participation is also facing the same challenges. Electoral politics are apparently still dominated by men, younger people, and the less educated. Participation becomes less meaningful and less effective without the participation of these less active groups.



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