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LOW AWARENESS AMONGST CITIZENS OF
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS

The overriding goal of the Local Government Reform (LGR) Programme is to improve public service to ordinary citizens. This reform programme appears to be one of the least known policy reforms in Tanzania. In this brief we present the results from a comprehensive citizens’ survey of the LGR. This survey was conducted recently and identifies the challenges facing the LGR with respect to enhancing community awareness and citizens’ participation.

A main component of this reform is to establish broad-based community awareness and participation. The aim is to promote the principles of democracy and a transparent and accountable government. Substantial resources have been invested in capacity building through workshops and training seminars. Our previous research found that there seems to be high awareness of the purpose of this reform among elected councillors and the staff at council headquarters, wards and villages. However, a key question is: are ordinary citizens also aware of the reform and its intentions? Such awareness is crucial for community participation and the promotion of accountable local authorities.

The survey was conducted in October 2003 and comprised of 1,260 respondents in Bagamoyo DC, Ilala MC, Iringa DC, Kilosa DC, Moshi DC and Mwanza CC. It included respondents from 42 wards, which varied in distance from the councils’ headquarters. 53% of the respondents were men and 47% were women.

How Many had Heard About the Local Government Reform Programme?

More than half of all the respondents say they have never heard about local government reform, making it the second least known government policy of those listed in the survey questionnaire (see Table 1). In contrast, 94% of the respondents have heard about HIV/AIDS control policy, and almost 90% say they have heard about anti-corruption policies.

This low degree of awareness is discouraging given that participation of the citizens is vital to enhance democratic governance. However the survey results may reflect to some extent that the government has conducted awareness campaigns on HIV/AIDS and anti-corruption for a longer period than for the local government reform campaign. Moreover, while information on HIV/AIDS and anti-corruption often is concrete and directly linked to peoples’ welfare, information on the purpose of the local government reform might be perceived by citizens to be abstract and non-tangible. It is encouraging that citizens’ awareness of health and education policies, which are both strongly linked to local government reform, is relatively high. About 80% of the respondents are aware of these policy reforms.

Table 1: Awareness of Various Government Policies
(as a percentage of the respondents)

<i>Government policy</i>	<i>Have heard of the policy - %</i>
Law and order policy	40
Local government reform	47
Rural roads policy	54
Water policy	68
Taxation policy	70
Privatisation policy	72
Poverty reduction strategy	73
Health policy	78
Education policy	79
Anti-corruption policy	88
HIV/AIDS control policy	94



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Who Knows About the Local Government Reform Programme?

Not surprisingly, awareness of the LGR is higher amongst people who are or have been actively involved in local government committees and community works, such as village governments, local councils, public works committees and school and water committees. Furthermore, the survey data shows that participation in such committees is related to the respondent’s level of education and gender.

More than 60% of the respondents who reported having heard about the LGR are men, while the majority of those who have not heard about it are women. Moreover, men are much better represented than women in all types of council and community committees (Table 2). For instance, 74% of the respondents who hold (or have held) leading positions in the council, ward or village governments are men. On school committees men dominate (64%). The picture is even gloomier with respect to the lack of gender balance among the respondents who participated in LGR training workshops. Only 23% of these participants were women. Hence, in addition to education, awareness of the LGR is correlated with gender. This indicates that a major problem for the LGR is to reach uneducated women.

Table 2: Participation in Local Governance
(as percentage of those who participate)

Participation in:		Gender	
		Male	Female
Village/ward/council leadership	Yes	74	26
Full council meetings	Yes	66	34
School committee	Yes	64	36
Water management committee	Yes	69	31
Public works project committee	Yes	71	29
Preparation of the village/ward plan	Yes	72	28
TASAF project committee	Yes	71	29
Primary co-op society/ farmers association	Yes	70	30
Agricultural/livestock extension contact group	Yes	78	22
Civic education programme	Yes	62	38
LGR training workshop	Yes	77	23

Religion does not seem to have much impact on whether the respondent has heard about the LGR or not. About 47% of both Muslims and Christians have heard about the LGR. The percentage is slightly higher for those who belong to traditional faiths, but our sample includes only few respondents in this category.

In contrast, location matters. While there are no major differences with respect to awareness of the LGR between the respondents living in rural and urban wards, distance from the council headquarter seems to matter. Awareness is relatively higher in villages and wards located near the council’s headquarters and/or in locations near a main road as compared to more distant locations. This indicates that accessibility plays an important role when disseminating information on public sector reforms.

Among the six councils studied, Mwanza CC has a much higher awareness ratio (64%) than the other councils (41% - 46%). We are not in a position to assert whether Mwanza has run more effective and efficient awareness enhancing campaigns than the other councils. However, the difference may also be due to the fact that the wards surveyed in Mwanza are located near the council’s headquarters or close to the main road leading to the town. With a possible exception of Mwanza we did not find significant differences in citizens’ awareness of the LGR between those councils that were part of the initial phase 1 of the reform (i.e. Ilala MC, Iringa DC and Mwanza CC) and those that were not (i.e. Bagamoyo DC, Kilosa DC and Moshi DC).

Policy Implications

Less than half of all the respondents in the Citizens’ Survey have heard about the LGR. This is worrying. Moreover, awareness of the reform varies significantly across the surveyed villages and wards. Our data shows that gender and the level of education are correlated with citizens’ awareness of the LGR. Awareness decreases with increasing distance from the council headquarters.

Two policy recommendations derive from these findings. Firstly, to avoid further marginalisation of people living in more remote areas, measures are required to strengthen the flow of information to them. The survey clearly shows that radio is the most effective medium of information. Of those who knew about the anti-corruption policy, which is one of the best-known policies, 71% said that radio had been their main source of information. Secondly, our data underscores the urgent need to introduce more effective measures aimed at securing women’s involvement in local government and community committees.

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