

# Repoa Brief



## Policy Recommendations

As a result of these findings, it is recommended that:

- Network secretariats should establish clear rules to ensure a fair balance of power and influence between different members (e.g. zonal representation in the Board).
- Effective information sharing should be a priority of all networks. Secretariats should consider the needs of small rural CSOs when packaging information.
- Civil society donors should develop network assessment criteria (e.g. involvement of member organisations in advocacy planning), and tie those criteria to funding.
- Government ministries, departments and agencies should put in place clear rules to fully involve civil society networks in policy processes and dialogue.
- The National Council of NGOs (NACONGO) should create an online forum for sharing network experiences, successes, challenges and best participation practices.

## The Instrumental versus the Symbolic: Investigating Members' Participation in Civil Society Networks in Tanzania

By Kenny Manara

### KEY MESSAGES

Participation of member organisations in CSO networks provides a conduit through which the voices of citizens can reach high-level policy dialogue and debates.

TEN/MET and TANGO are two national CSO networks that epitomise the two styles of member organisations participation, i.e. instrumental participation (TEN/MET) and symbolic participation (TANGO)

Participation of member organisations in network activities (meetings attendance, members consultation and payment of membership fees) is higher in TEN/MET (instrumental participation) than in TANGO (symbolic participation)

Payment of annual subscription fee is the major form of participation in both TANGO and TEN/MET and members' consultation is the least form of participation in both networks.

Information sharing among network members and tolerance for divergence in members' advocacy positions are good predictors of members participation in TENMET (sector network).

Information sharing among network members is a good predictor of members' participation in TANGO (cross-sector network).



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## Introduction

Civil society organisations (CSO) networks can provide a conduit through which the voices of citizens are able to reach and influence national policy dialogue and debate. But is this happening in practise? This study set out to examine how effectively and meaningfully CSO member organisations are participating in two civil society networks in Tanzania, and to assess - in turn - how effective those networks are at influencing national policies and agendas.

### Background – Types of Participation

The main incentive for CSOs to join networks is the opportunity to achieve goals that they could not achieve alone, and network governance styles are undoubtedly influenced by the perceived optimal way to do that (Liebler and Ferri, 2004). Some believe that is best done through meaningful participation, extensive consultation, goal driven agendas, as well as nuanced representation of the plurality of their members' views at high-level fora (instrumental participation). Others believe that their goals will be more quickly or easily reached by aggregating and distilling their members' views – and linking them to those pursuing similar agendas outside the network – to create one strong advocacy base and position (symbolic participation). Both have a place and a role and a value. But which is more effective? This study

sought to throw a light on that question by looking at two national CSO networks working in Tanzania that epitomised the two styles of participation, to see what could be learnt from their behaviour and effectiveness in policy advocacy.

- The Tanzania Education Network/*Mtandao wa Elimu Tanzania* (TEN/MET), which is a sectoral network pursuing programme-based advocacy, which was selected as an example of instrumental participation.
- The Tanzania Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (TANGO), which is a cross-sectoral network pursuing issue-based advocacy, which was chosen as an example of symbolic participation.

### Analysis and Findings

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which member CSOs were participating in three distinct network activities. Looking at the standard deviations (see below), it can be seen that TEN/MET scores are closest to mean, implying that its members are more likely to participate. In fact, the study found that members of TEN/MET are more likely to attend network meetings, more likely to offer their views during consultation, and more likely also to pay their membership fees.

The mean differences (see above) were confirmed by the results from Independent Samples T-Test, which show that TEN/MET members (N=60) score significantly higher than TANGO members on 'meeting attendance' (N=60) (Sig. 0,000 – T-5,092); 'members consultation' (N=60) (Sig. 0,001 – T-3,383); and 'payment of membership fees' (N=60) (Sig. 0,000 – T-22,749).

Payment of annual subscription fee was the major form of participation in both TANGO (1.98) and TEN/MET (3.92), while offering views during consultation was the least likely form of participation in both (TANGO at 1.47 and TEN/MET at 2.33).

If network members are required to pay subscription fees, they naturally expect to receive something in return for their money. However, value for money was perceived very differently by members of the two organisations, with TEN/MET members more likely to be invited to attend network meetings, to be consulted in key decision-making processes and to be supported to showcase their accomplishments and share their experiences. TANGO members felt, on the other hand, that their secretariat was weak, lacking in respect for them, and unlikely to invite them to substantial network events (for example, they were more likely to be invited to festivals than decision-making meetings).

Regression analysis shows that information sharing among network members is a strong predictor of members' participation in both TANGO and TEN/MET (Sig. 0,000 – Beta 0,592 and Sig. 0,020 – Beta 0,322 respectively). In fact, in TANGO it is a better predictor of participation than any other factor analysed by the study team (e.g. members' identities, size, locational differences, trust and tolerance, problem-solving, frictions etc.). None of the former predicts network participation in either organisation. In TEN/MET, tolerance for divergence views during advocacy

campaigns (Sig. 0,012 – Beta 0,337) is also a significant predictor of members' participation, perhaps indicating that it is a more important factor for instrumental participation than symbolic participation.

Overall, TEN/MET members believe that their network is influencing education policies. Members have been actively involved in drafting their network's advocacy plan, and are key players in high-level sectoral policy fora. TEN/MET has become a reliable ally of the government when it comes to the execution of education policy and strategies, and by properly taking the views of its members into policy dialogues, has created a real opportunity for national policy to be responsive to the needs of the country's citizens. On the contrary, TANGO members complain that the secretariat does not try and understand members' views, does not consult members when making important decisions, and has not actively brought its members together in a common cause for over a decade.

### Conclusions

The study found that TEN/MET members participate more actively and instrumentally than members from TANGO, and are having more success advocating with - and influencing - Government. TEN/MET has been able to affect educational policies despite institutional challenges, and has been acknowledged by the Government to be a trusted partner in shaping national educational policy. These results confirm Houtzager and Lavallo's theory (2009) that networks that are close to their members and open to participation are more likely to contribute to effective political representation than those that are distant and hermetic. TEN/MET's genuine and meaningful level of participation appears to have been brought about in part by good governance structures, defined roles, and effective earmarking of funding for participatory activities.

**Table 5: Participation in Network Activities: A Comparison**

	Network	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Attendance at AGM or General Assembly	TANGO	60	1.90	1.633
	TEN/MET	60	3.35	1.482
Offering views during consultation	TANGO	60	1.47	1.408
	TEN/MET	60	2.33	1.398
Payments of membership fees	TANGO	60	1.98	0.469
	TEN/MET	60	3.92	0.462

Source: Survey data