

Supporting communities to speak out

Public expenditure tracking in Tanzania

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How does a population renowned for its tolerance and acceptance of authority learn to demand accountability from its leaders? Can autocratic leaders redefine themselves as public servants? An interesting social experiment is underway in Tanzania.

The efficient delivery of public services is an important factor in poverty reduction. However, in Tanzania, a history of economic centralisation and a concentration of political power in the hands of a one-party government have helped to entrench a culture of acceptance and powerlessness at the local level.



Follow the money

A public expenditure tracking initiative known as Fuatilia Pesa (?Follow the money?) provides a practical mechanism to help reverse this situation. The programme aims to support the implementation of the ongoing Local Government Reform Programme, which oversees the devolution of decision-making to regional and district levels.

The Fuatilia Pesa programme is developing the capacity of Tanzanian civil society organisations (CSOs) that empower communities to enforce their right to information and to use it to demand greater accountability. Three national organisations are involved in implementing the programme: Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), Hakikazi Catalyst, and the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP). The programme is coordinated by the Policy Forum, a coalition of CSOs that is working to strengthen NGO involvement in policy processes including local governance.



The programme has developed a training manual on approaches to accessing information, monitoring local government budgets and tracking public expenditures.

Encouraging start

In 2006, more than 700 representatives of civil society organisations, district officials, elected councillors and journalists completed the action-oriented training courses organised under the auspices of the Fuatilia Pesa programme.

Feedback on exactly how many civil society organisations are using the training they acquired to stimulate communities to track public expenditures and lobby for government accountability at the district level is so far mostly anecdotal. It is estimated that 25-30 leading NGOs are currently implementing the tracking model in approximately 40 districts. The Policy Forum will undertake an evaluation of the first phase before the end of 2007.

Achieving broader change

The Fuatilia Pesa programme aims to hold public officials accountable through a collaborative rather than a confrontational approach. By engaging all levels of the local government hierarchy in a constructive dialogue, the programme hopes to bring about gradual change in the prevailing norms on public accountability.

However, the reluctance of local governments to provide access to information remains a key hindrance. As the initiator of the Local Government Reform Programme, the central government has endorsed the role of the Fuatilia Pesa initiative in contributing to improved governance. Nevertheless, a lot still needs to be done to demonstrate the positive results that can be achieved locally and the resulting benefits for everyone involved.

The training workshops for district officials and NGOs stress the importance of accessible, transparent and timely information. In the initial stages this information is likely to remain available in nationally aggregated forms, which reduces its usefulness at the community level. Ultimately, the newly introduced local government information systems will provide detailed district budgets for, and disbursements to, individual communities and development activities.

The next stage of the Fuatilia Pesa programme has already begun. It entails the development of a national network to share experiences and information in the area of public expenditure tracking and monitoring of service delivery. The network will soon be coordinated by the Policy Forum. It is still early days, but the first steps have been taken towards the creation of a more open society in which citizens realise that "Yes, we can ask questions".

Links

[Hakikazi Catalyst, Tanzania](#)

[Research on Poverty Alleviation \(REPOA\).](#)

[Tanzania Gender Networking Programme \(TGNP\).](#)

[Policy Forum.](#)

[Trocaire.](#)

[Oxfam Ireland.](#)

Further reading

K. de Graaf (2005)

[*Public Expenditure Tracking at District level in Tanzania.*](#) SNV Tanzania.