Planning in Local Government Authorities in Tanzania: Bottom-up Meets Top-down

By Odd-Helge Fjeldstad, Lucas Katera and Erasto Ngalewa

This brief examines the experience of four councils in Tanzania in implementing Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (O&OD), a bottom-up participatory planning methodology for local development. The study found little evidence to date that the approach has increased local autonomy in prioritising, planning and budgeting of development activities. Interactions and consultations between local communities and council management teams were limited, bottom-up community plans were typically viewed as wish lists by council officials, and local priorities were largely set by the central government. However, given the current low level of development in Tanzania and the general lack of basic economic and social services, a strong role for central government in local planning may still be required to achieve adequate provision of services to all communities. Planning frameworks, therefore, need to better reflect this reality otherwise the credibility of community participation in development planning may be undermined.

Introduction

The local government reform process in Tanzania aims to ensure that citizens at the grassroots level are involved in the planning and implementation of development programmes in their local areas. Through participatory planning and budgeting, the reforms envisage that development programmes will be relevant to local needs and engender a sense of ownership to facilitate implementation. Propelled by the decentralisation of responsibility and financial resources for delivering public services from central government to local government authorities (LGAs), the Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (O&OD) planning approach was initiated in 2002. This methodology was expected to promote transparency and accountability in community development through the introduction of participatory processes to identify and prioritise community needs. By the end of 2009, the government has rolled out the O&OD planning framework in 105 of the 132 LGAs in Tanzania.

To assess progress in implementation of O&OD approach, council, ward and village officials were interviewed in four councils – Bagamoyo District Council, Ilala Municipal Council, Iringa District Council and Moshi District Council – about their experience of using O&OD. The key research question examined was whether the O&OD approach had increased local autonomy with respect to local development priority setting, planning and budgeting.
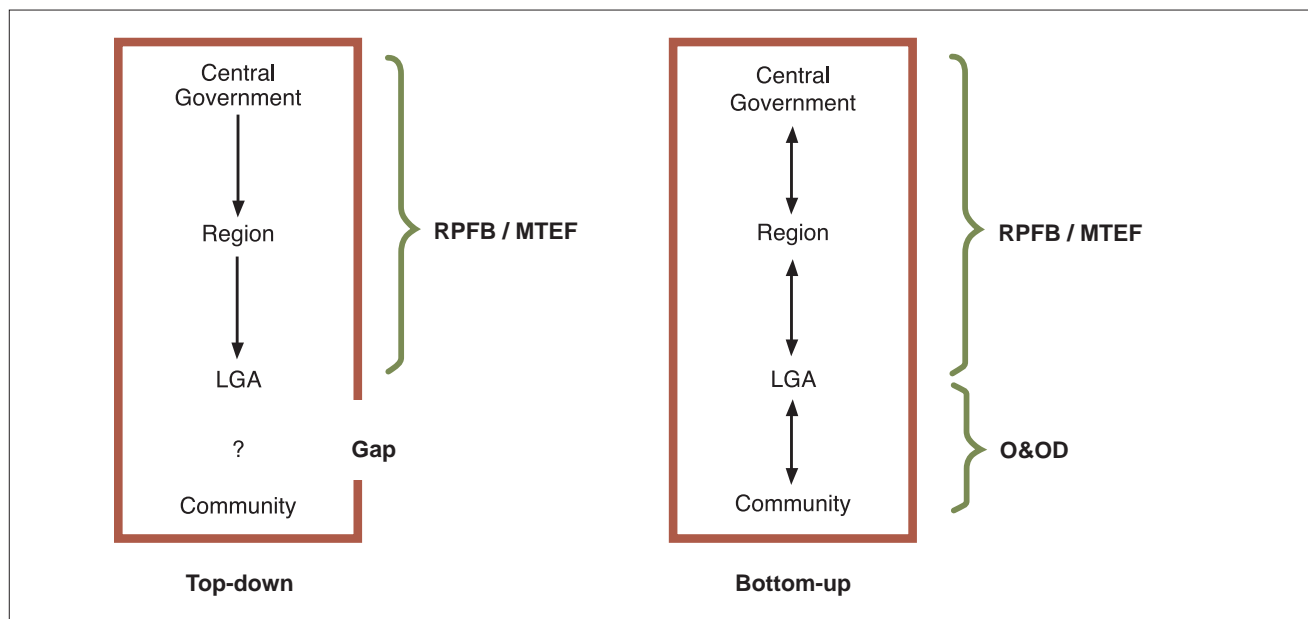
O&OD Participatory Planning in Theory

According to the National Framework on Participatory Planning and Budgeting, O&OD planning is an instrument for facilitating 'bottom-up' participatory development.[1] The O&OD methodology provides guiding principles for participatory planning and budgeting in LGAs by describing the legal framework, roles and responsibilities of government institutions at different governance levels (including district, ward and village/mtaa[2] levels). As illustrated in Figure 1, the former 'top-down' planning system did not provide room for effective community participation, i.e. in villages and mitaa. O&OD aims to fill this gap. In addition, this methodology aims to harmonise different participatory approaches used for specific projects and by different donors into a more comprehensive bottom-up approach to planning.

The O&OD approach is consistent with key national development documents, including the Tanzania Development Vision (TDV) 2025 and the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (MKUKUTA), and has been designed to:

- Guide communities in identifying available resources to overcome obstacles and foster the spirit of self-reliance;

- Enlighten community members of their own resources and how best to use them for self-reliance;

- Employ participatory tools and facilitate identification of sources of income and expenditure;

- Enable the community to identify logical frameworks and priorities;

- Lead to a comprehensive plan rather than an action plan; and

- Allow for interaction between bureaucrats and communities as well as between the different governmental levels.

Figure 1: Planning Approaches

Source: Adapted from Prime Minister's Office-Regional and Local Government (PMO-RALG), 2007a
Notes: RPFB = Rolling Plan and Forward Budget; MTEF = Medium-term Expenditure Framework

---

1   Cooksey and Kikula (2005) provide an informative overview of local government planning systems in Tanzania and the changing approaches over time.
2   The mtaa (plural mitaa) is the lowest unit of government in urban areas in Tanzania. Each urban ward is divided into mitaa or neighbourhoods consisting of a number of households, which the urban council may determine.

Developing Plans and Budgets

Development of the three-year community plan, i.e. the village plan for rural councils and the ward plan for urban councils, is outlined in the O&OD Handbook (PMO-RALG, 2007b). The planning process is usually scheduled to be carried out over a period of twelve days as described in Table 1. It has four main steps:

i.   Sensitisation of councillors and the council management team (CMT);

ii. Capacity building of LGA and ward officers to become council facilitators (CFs) and ward facilitators (WFs);

iii. A community planning process (CPP) facilitated by CFs and WFs; and

iv. Integration of community plans into the LGA plan (PMO-RALG, 2008).

The uniqueness of the O&OD planning approach also lies in its continuity during implementation of the three-year rolling plan. The review, monitoring, evaluation and updating of the plan on an annual basis ensures that the three-year plan is a living and evolving document.

By allowing communities to prioritise local development objectives it is expected that this will motivate them to own the outcomes of their decisions. Further, the O&OD methodology is expected to promote 'effective and efficient' allocation of the Local Government Capital Development Grant (LGCDG). According to the *Planning Guidelines for Villages and Mitaa,* O&OD is an 'essential methodology to identify community needs for which the LGCDG is disbursed' (PMO-RALG, 2004).[3]

Table 1: Development of the Three-year Rolling Plan

Day	Rural	Urban
One	Social preparation[4] and secondary data collection	
Two	Social preparation and secondary data collection	
Three	Extraordinary village assembly to launch O&OD; formation of focus group (FG), selection of map drawers and community resource persons, and primary data collection	Zonal/*mtaa* meeting to launch O&OD; formation of focus group, selection of map drawers and community resource persons, and primary data collection
Four	Primary data collection and use of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools	
Five	Focus group discussions (FGDs) on TDV 2025's first principal objective: 'high quality of livelihood'. Topics: food self sufficiency and food security, universal primary education, gender equality and access to primary health	
Six	Further FGDs on TDV 2025's 'high quality of livelihood'. Topics: access to reproductive health, infant and maternal mortality rates, access to safe water, life expectancy and abject poverty	
Seven	FGD on TDV 2025's second and third principal objectives: 'good governance' and 'rule of law'	
Eight	FG to prepare draft community plan	FG to prepare draft ward plan
Nine	Village council prioritises all specific objectives and drafts three-year community plan	Zonal/mtaa meetings to discuss and comment on the draft ward plan
Ten	Ward Development Committee (WDC) meeting provides technical advice on the draft plan	Focus group under Ward Executive Officer (WEO) incorporates comments from *mtaa* meeting into draft ward plan
Eleven	Extraordinary village assembly to receive and approve community plans	WDC to prioritise all specific objectives, prepare and endorse the three-year ward plan
Twelve	Preparation of simple format by sector at ward level.	

Source: The Opportunities and Obstacles to Development: A community participatory planning methodology (PMO-RALG, 2007b)

---

[3]   See the Guidelines for more details about the planning and budgeting cycle.
[4]   A process of inculcating understanding of the participatory planning process at the community level. It involves creating awareness of the roles and responsibilities of all actors in the process so as to achieve effective outcomes in local planning and implementation.

O&OD in Practice: Experience from Case Councils

O&OD planning was adopted in Iringa and Bagamoyo District Councils in 2002, followed by Ilala Municipal Council in 2005 and Moshi DC in 2006. A close follow-up on experiences in implementation of the methodology revealed variations in the way O&OD planning was applied across different communities in the case councils. Nevertheless, implementation in all of the councils shared several common features:

i. Delays were experienced in receiving guidelines and budget ceilings;

ii. Needs and activities in local plans were not effectively rationalised/prioritised by communities, and tended rather to be 'lists of wishes'

iii. Central government priorities determined community decisions;

iv. Interaction between council staff and communities was limited; and

v. Regional and central government bureaucrats ultimately held decision-making power over local plans.

Each issue is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Delays in receiving guidelines and budget ceilings

In theory, September is the month when national planning and budgeting guidelines are supposed to be issued for the next fiscal year.[5] These guidelines review the performance of the previous financial year and recapitulate sector policies and areas which are in accordance with the overarching priorities of MKUKUTA and Vision 2025. The guidelines are prepared by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) with close involvement of PMO-RALG. Along with the national guidelines, PMO-RALG also issues planning and budgeting guidelines for LGAs. The guidelines from PMO-RALG are circulated to all LGAs informing them to start planning and budgeting.[6] The LGAs are supposed to translate the LGA guidelines into simple language and forward them to village councils and ward development committees within their jurisdictions.

In practice, the national guidelines and budget ceilings are not received until late in the process. For fiscal years 2008/09 and 2009/10, LGAs received the budget ceilings in March/April. Consequently, to initiate the planning process, some LGAs used indicative budget figures from the previous fiscal year and directed officials at lower levels, i.e. ward and village executive officers (VEOs), in September to prepare plans for the next fiscal year on that basis. This approach, however, was not uniformly applied across all LGAs. In Iringa DC, for example, the VEOs interviewed explained that neither the villages nor the wards received indicative budget figures from the council. Therefore, villages prepared plans according to their needs without any reference to budgets.

A list of wishes

In theory, bottom-up planning begins with preparation of community plans, namely, village development plans (VDPs) in rural local government authorities and ward development plans (WDPs) in urban LGAs, based on priorities identified by citizens. To ensure that the views of all social groups are reflected in the plan, community members are expected to be organised in groups based on gender, age and social status. In addition, primary data to inform the plan must be collected by community members themselves using participatory tools. The draft plan is then presented to the village council for prioritisation and budgeting before presentation to the WDC for technical advice and final submission to the village assembly for approval as stipulated by the law.

---

5   See PMO-RALG, 2004. The fiscal year runs from 1 July to 30 June.

6   From FY 2009/10 only one set of guidelines is issued covering both the central government and LGAs.

The practice, however, may be different. For example, the current study found that in Kibebe village, one of the 119 villages of Iringa DC, the preparation of community plans began at the sub-village level where planning issues were raised through a series of meetings. There are seven sub-villages (*vitongoji*) in Kibebe, and the population in each sub-village population was divided into three groups (the elderly, women, and youth) and planning meetings were held for each of these groups. Proposals emanating from sub-village planning meetings were presented to a sub-village committee meeting. This five-person committee was tasked to discuss the proposed sub-village proposals with representatives from the three population groups. Thereafter the plans were forwarded to the village council which consists of the village chairperson, the village executive officer, the heads of the sub-villages plus 15 elected members. In total, 25 members make up the village council and at least one-third of the members are women. The village council was tasked with collating, scrutinising and rationalising the list of projects/activities which were thereafter submitted to WDC as village plans. The council staff interviewed, however, described the plans submitted by villages as 'lists of wishes'.

Central government priorities determine community decisions

The concept of O&OD planning is based on the understanding that communities have different needs and resources. This implies that priorities will differ by community unless interventions are imposed from outside. Evidence from case councils, however, present a different picture. Generally, communities have tended to produce the same list of priorities, which also happen to coincide with central government priorities. This 'coincidence' in prioritisation happens because, given limited resources, communities are 'forced' to drop locally preferred proposals in favour of central government priorities, such as education, health, water and roads.

The VEOs and village chairpersons interviewed felt that the lists of priorities from villages is influenced by the amounts the villagers are required to contribute to individual projects. Citizens' willingness to support specific proposals is related to the extra financial burden such local projects will impose on them. The lower the contribution, the more likely the project will be prioritised. Similar adjustments in priorities have been observed in other programmes and projects. TASAF projects during the past two years, for instance, have concentrated on classrooms, followed by health, water and roads. Although resource constraints in communities are real, the high coincidence of local and central planning priorities suggest the existence of strong external intervention. As one TASAF coordinator remarked:

Education has been the main priority because villagers have been pressured by the government to build more classrooms and thus villagers feel that they can unload the burden of their required contributions onto TASAF.

Lack of interactions between council bureaucrats and communities

Upon receiving the proposals from communities, the council's planning office is responsible for producing a draft consolidated community plan, as well as tentative recurrent and development budget proposals. These are then discussed by the heads of sector departments within the council to ensure that proposals are technically feasible and in accordance with sector plans before they are integrated into the overall council plan. In theory, further consultations with communities are expected to take place when reviewing and revising the plans. In practice, however, this step marks the end of the 'participatory planning process'. After receiving the proposals from communities the council planning team rarely consults residents owing to the time required and high costs of such consultations. As long as some form of participatory process has already taken place

and can be documented, the 'real' budgeting and planning can now start. The council staff interviewed considered that further consultations would be irrelevant given that the priorities set by the central government which are communicated through directives to LGAs are binding.

Decisive role of the bureaucrats

As described above, community plans are submitted to the council management team for screening and prioritisation. In theory the plans are based on community priorities, but in practice they accord with central government directives. Screening also assesses the budget implications of the plans. According to council planning officers interviewed, project proposals which are not in accordance with national priorities will automatically end up low on the council priority list. When asked whether this practice is consistent with a bottom-up planning approach, one senior planning officer answered: *'Yes, because the national government knows best what the communities need.'*

Compiled plan and budget proposals are then submitted to the various standing committees of the council[7] for further review and political input. Experience has shown that discussions in the council committees mainly focus on the locations of projects since such decisions are critical for the re-election of existing councillors. Thereafter the proposals are submitted to the council's finance committee for approval, sometime in January or February. The finance committee is made up of heads of the various standing committees and other elected councillors.

Before endorsement of the plan and budget by the full council, the draft plan and budget must be submitted to the Regional Administrative Secretariat (RAS) for consultation whether the plan is in accordance with national priorities and policies. Finally, the MoFEA may suggest amendments to the approved plan and budget, usually in consultation with the council's executives without consulting councillors.

---

[7]   This political decision-making body is equivalent to Parliament at council level.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Despite the good intentions of O&OD, the evidence from LGAs indicates that the methodology does not work as documented. Interactions and consultations between local communities and the council management team are limited, bottom-up community plans are commonly seen as wish lists by councils, and local priorities are in practice set by the central government. Nevertheless, the planning framework allows for local politicians and bureaucrats to influence the location of public projects towards communities of their choice, which may promote geographical equity in service provision as well as political interests.

Limited implementation of O&OD has consequently reduced the powers of communities to influence resource allocation in their local areas. The bulk of funds that LGAs receive and spend are fiscal transfers from the central government, most of which is earmarked for specific purposes. Even the Local Government Capital Development Grant (LGCDG), which was specifically designed to provide non-earmarked development funding, is largely spent on projects prioritised by the central government. This is reflected in the consolidated LGA plans which, almost uniformly across the country, reflect central government priorities.

While the objectives of participatory planning as embodied in O&OD may be laudable, the study found little evidence that the methodology has provided a basis for community participation in planning and budgeting. This conclusion is in line with findings reported by Cooksey and Kikula (2005). In theory, the O&OD approach is supposed to underpin bottom-up planning by LGAs but in reality the rule of the game is still top-down. From a practical policy perspective this may make sense. Given the current low level of development at community level in Tanzania, and the general lack of basic economic and social services such education, health, water and roads, a strong role for the central government in local government planning and implementation may be required to achieve adequate provision of services to all communities. The absence of central government intervention may lead to high inequalities across communities in the provision of basic services, as well as the spreading of resources thinly across many local projects that produce limited social and economic gains. This reality ought to be reflected in planning frameworks. Otherwise the credibility of community participation in planning may be undermined.

References

Cooksey, B. & Kikula, I. (2005). *When bottom-up meets top-down: The limits of local participation in local government planning in Tanzania.* REPOA Special Paper 17. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers.

Prime Minister's Office – Regional and Local Government (PMO-RALG). (2004). *Planning guidelines for villages and mitaa.*

PMO-RALG. (2007a). *Historical perspective on participatory planning in Tanzania.* Available at http://www.pmoralg.go.tz/lgrp/otherdocu.php

PMO-RALG. (2007b). *Opportunities and Obstacles to Development: A community participatory planning methodology.* (Handbook).

PMO-RALG. (2008). *The study on improvements of opportunities and obstacles to development planning process.* Final report, March 2008. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

President's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG). (2002). *National Framework on Participatory Planning and Budgeting.*