

A study of Local Government in Africa through Participatory Action Research (PAR)

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Abstract

Tanzania has crafted one of the most creative models of local governments in the world with the potential to improve the lives of marginalized communities. As such, the author used Participatory Action Research (PAR) in an attempt to improve the model and for its strengths in empowering communities. The author collaborated with 120 community representatives, as co-researchers, from across four selected local government councils in Tanzania to examine the role of local governments in delivering public services to marginalized smallholder farmers. The exercise was enriched through the interaction with 128 local government officials. Overall, although the Tanzanian local government model has the potential to improve lives, there is a need to focus on increasing its efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public services. The current focus aiming at creating more units of local government increases operational expenses. Increased operational expenses hinder the ability of the local governments to deliver agricultural extension and other public services. Moreover, the findings imply that although local governments need to be awarded some autonomy, they ought to continue working with the central government for the common good of the entire nation. Finally, this study serves as evidence that PAR can help build participatory local government structures on a sustainable basis. The local governments need to be more participatory through the creation of participatory social structures. Those can pave way for the full realization of the potential of the Tanzanian model of local government. The gender perspective has to be incorporated in local

governance because the findings highlight that women are disproportionately affected by the failure of the local governments in the provision of public services. The article uniquely seeks to contribute to the African political literature as well as literature highlighting the role of PAR through fostering both co-learning with local co-researchers as well as transformative dialogue among researchers, local governments, and local communities.

Keywords: action research, African studies, local government, agricultural extension, gender, Tanzania

Background

Studies on local governments suggest a need for reforms on the management of such units (see Warremn ,1986; Max, 1991; Brans, 1992; Watt, 2006; Faguet, 2009; Booth, 2011; Kim, 2018). Globally, there are some shortfalls that make local government structures fail to adequately provide public services in line with the needs and aspirations of local communities. Although autonomous local governments can improve the wellbeing of their citizen through, widening the individual's opportunities, increasing administrative, and economic efficiency (Erlingsson & Ödalen, 2013), reducing poverty (Boex and Martinez-Vazquez, 2006), increasing democratic control and accountability (Wollmann, 2004), and improving efficiency and equity in service distribution (Kubal, 2006), the opponents are of opinion that local governments have failed to provide public services effectively and efficiently. Ebinger, Grohs and Reiter (2011) point out that local government tend to favor special interest groups and the local executives, not marginalized people. Similar views are shared by Kessy and McCourt (2010) who argue that the autonomy of local governments may serve the interest of the ruling elites and well-off people as opposed to those of the general public. In the same vein, the literature suggests that although Tanzania has crafted one of the most creative models of local government, it has not attained efficiency and effectiveness (shortly to be defined) in the provision of public services (Boex and Martinez-Vazquez, 2006;

Graham, 2008; Max, 1991; Kessy and McCourt, 2010; Jiménez and Pérez-Foguet, 2010; Pedersen, 2012; Hulst et al, 2015).

Overall, the Tanzanian government has been establishing new local governments in an attempt to build an effective and efficient local government system to deliver public services (see Article 5 (2) of the Local Government Act of 1982 and the Local Government Laws Act No. 6 of 1999). Even though, Madaha (2012, 2018) has highlighted the presence of a well-established ruling regime at the local and central government levels, which tends to ignore some of the pertinent needs of marginalized people in Tanzania. Using Tanzania as a case study, some other studies on local government, highlight similar concerns (see Boex and Martinez-Vazquez, 2006; Eckert, 2007; Graham, 2008; Jiménez and Pérez-Foguet, 2010). However, the mentioned studies have not focused on an in-depth participatory action study, involving local community members as co-researchers. Participatory action is needed to have a thorough understanding of how local government can increase efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of public services and associated challenges.

Here, effectiveness refers to an outcome or output of an effort emanating from accomplishing its intended objective (Ridley and Simon, 1938:21) or achieving its specific desired end (Barnard, 1938:60). Efficiency refers to the optimum relationship between input and output (Anthony, 1965:28) that is measured by the ratio of the effects obtained to the maximum effects possible with the available resources (Ridley and Simon: 1938:23). That is, efficiency is the process of making the best use of available resources to attain effectiveness. According to Røge and Lennon (2018:3), efficiency implies that, “the more units of output obtained from a given input, the more efficient the process.” In this regard, efficiency is a process and effectiveness is an outcome. Ideally, the two phenomena are entwined with each other.

Along these lines, the objective of the study was to conduct a participatory exploration of the role of local governments and associated gender implications in delivering effective and efficient agricultural services to marginalized smallholder farmers and propose bottom up solutions to existing challenges. The specific question is how do the existing structural challenges hinder local governments from providing reliable, effective, and efficient public services in the agricultural sector? The ancillary objective of the study was to empower local communities for them to participate in the decentralization process through Participatory Action Research effectively and efficiently. In this way, the study is qualitative aimed at exploring decentralization and associated challenges within a Tanzanian context. Although quantitative studies focus on specific set of variables, qualitative studies focus on a major issue or a central phenomenon (see Creswell, 2013). That is, the study is exploratory aimed at investigating social life. It is also descriptive geared at describing social life (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

In this context, the study has used Participatory Action Research. There has never been a similar documented attempt in the past, at least within the Tanzanian context. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), Participatory Action Research allows co-researchers (the participants) to collaboratively explore together to attain right and appropriate knowledge that is required to take appropriate action at the local level. Specifically, the author facilitated the Participatory Action Research exercise with local communities, as co-researchers, to help them learn about the challenges associated with accessing public services in the agriculture sector and take action to rectify some of the challenges. Foster and Glass (2017) are of opinion that engaging impacted communities as co-researchers in all phases of the research process can yield more reasonable findings and more responsive and equitable policy solutions. The article goes beyond

the usual practice of Participatory Action Research on co-learning (see Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Bradbury, 2010) to one fostering both co-learning and transformative dialogue (see Cerecer et al, 2013; Kemmis *et al*, 2014) between local governments and local communities. The article further shows the emancipatory role of Participatory Action Research by giving voice to marginalized people through creation of community based social structures to sustain the outcomes (see Friedman et al, 2018).

Under the mentioned context, the article has focused on marginalized people who predominantly rely on agriculture for their livelihood. Those are the majority in many of the Sub-Saharan African countries including Tanzania. Jafry and Sulaiman (2013:433) acknowledge that climate change and a shifting global economy have made some of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities to rely on agriculture as their main source of food and as a means of livelihoods and generating income.

With regards to the provision of public services in the sector also known as agricultural extension services, the article has adopted a definition by Laurent *et al* (2007:9) who state that agricultural extension services refers to relations that bring into play a service provider (such as government and private firm) and a beneficiary (a farmer), for the purpose of transforming the state of a medium that does not belong to the service provider. An example of a medium includes the farm enterprise, its production tools, its territory and its work collective. Wings of local governments in Tanzania that are responsible for overseeing the provision of agricultural extension services at the local government level are agricultural departments are the “District Agriculture Irrigation and Cooperative Office” and the “District Livestock and Fisheries.” Those provide the services to people in their jurisdictions.

Theoretical framework

The major theory informing the article is the theory of decentralization. Local

governments are social structures that operationalize the decentralization process. The promise of the theory of decentralization is that, the devolution of power to the people at the local level, makes local governments more accountable and fosters community participation. Grindle (2009) points out that decentralization leads to better governance and deeper democracy because the process enables local communities to participate in their development and hold public officials more accountable for their actions. The argument stems from the classic political philosophy (see Grindle, 2009; Pedersen, 2012; Hulst et al, 2015) and Smith's (1985) work on the decentralization. Despite the many benefits of decentralisation, the critics, as shared by Kessy and McCourt (2010), are of opinion that decentralization is in fact recentralization in disguise because central governments continue to maintain the control of Local Governments.

The analysis of the findings also drew important insights from the Gender and Development (GAD) Theory. GAD theory, a strand of socialist feminism, synthesizes differences, which enable alternative class, gender, sexual, and racial ways of being among men and women (Biewener, 2006; Brenner, 2014). GAD synthesizes the oppression of women and men by capitalism and patriarchy and calls for inclusive movements by the oppressed to transform power relations in favor of a more just society (Mohanty, 2002; Biewener, 2006). Further, GAD synthesizes the shortcomings of neoliberalism by clearly highlighting the marginalization of women in such contexts (Madaha, 2014b, 2018). GAD, as shared by Connelly *et al*, (2000:62), synthesizes issues of, "materialist political economy" such as neoliberalism, "and the radical-feminist issues of patriarchy and patriarchal ideology" to highlight that (pg. 62), men's and "women's status in society is deeply affected by their material conditions of life and by their position in the national, regional, and global economies that women [and men] are deeply affected by the nature of patriarchal power in their societies at the national,

community, and household levels. The accepted norms and values of societies define women's and men's roles and duties in a particular society. GAD pays special attention on the relationships between women and men, not on women alone. Gender relations determine women's position in society, not as immutable reflections of the natural order but as socially constructed patterns of behaviour. A gender sensitive action research tends to overcome social exclusion based on gender or other forms of oppression by giving marginalised women and men voice in research (Connelly *et al*, 2000; Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) with the local people

Unlike conventional studies on local governments, this article employed PAR to empower the local communities as much as possible. Research on decentralization, falls into single country qualitative work and cross countries quantitative work. In this regard, a single country qualitative study involves the use of a small sample whereas cross countries quantitative study involves the use of a large sample (see Faguet, 2009). Qualitative research relies primarily on descriptive and qualitative evidence. Although the study has taken a qualitative path in line with the study objective, the emphasis was on empowering the marginalized groups to take action on identified challenges of local governments.

Within the mentioned milieu, the local communities participated, as co-researchers, in the identification of local challenges as well as propose solutions to such challenges. The author selected four local government councils in Tanzania including Mbeya District Council (DC), Morogoro District Council (DC), Kishapu district council, and Kasulu Town Council (TC). The local governments were selected because

they had some organized community groups that could participate in the study as co-researchers.

Given the large geographical area of the mentioned districts, the author purposively selected one Administrative Ward from each of the councils for the PAR exercise. The wards which were selected include Itewe, Mngazi, and Bunambiyu located at Mbeya, Morogoro, and Kishapu district councils respectively as well as Nyansha ward located at Kasulu Town Council. The criteria, which guided the selection of the wards include: a) the presence of organized economic groups of low-income people who are active and with demonstrated spirit of volunteerism in their communities. A substantial number of the community members were willing to participate in the PAR exercise. According to McIntyre (2008) PAR requires the active participation of researchers and participants in the co-construction of knowledge; b) the presence of community members with interest in addressing local challenges at their respective ward. PAR is about helping local communities address their local challenges (see Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014); c) the marginalization of the ward in terms of absence of reliable social services, persistence of Gender Based Violence (GBV), oppressive traditions, and social calamities. The groups at the ward were organized in an endeavor to address challenges related to good governance, accountability, and access to quality social services and economic opportunities. Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) state that action researchers tend to work with marginalized populations, as co-researchers, to analyze inequalities and oppression within society in an attempt to overcome them; d) the final criteria was absence of vibrant and active Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that operate at the ward actively and effectively. The goal was to make use of PAR to enable the local communities create vibrant and active CSOs (see Kemmis et al, 2014).

The study uniquely merged PAR and a Triple A techniques. The Triple A process involves cycles of joint Assessment (A), Analysis (A), and Action (A) to identify context specific communal challenges and associated action as solutions to the challenges. In this context, the community members were systematically empowered to conduct an assessment of their challenges, analyze such challenges, and take action to address the challenges. The empowering part of the study is that the community members acquired skills on conducting PAR systematically. They also managed to address some challenges. Urban (2003) highlights that Triple A process is based on premise that community members constantly engage in some sort of Assessment (A), Analysis (A) and Action (A) as they address challenges. According to Urban (2003), the Triple A process simply means “learning-by-doing” or “self-evaluation.” The process is also in line with PAR (see Reason, and Bradbury, 2008; Kemmis et al, 2014). In line with the Triple A framework, the PAR exercise involved developing the capabilities of the co-researchers to assess (A) and analyze (A) a situation to make informed decisions for action (A), and to learn from the results of the action (A). If Triple A process takes place successfully (as it was the case in this study), the capacity of community members to address their problems increases. The details on the process are provided in the following paragraphs.

Thirty local community members (30) from each of the selected ward participated in the PAR exercise as co-researchers. That led to a total of 120 PAR co-researchers. PAR researchers are required to step down from their authoritative and expert role. And instead, they use their knowledge and skills to facilitate the PAR exercise. That is, a PAR researcher either becomes a co-researcher or a traditional researcher collaborating with actors within their social setting to understand and transform it (see Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). The co-researchers jointly

examined the community challenges of their communities and arrived at compromises. The compromises were recorded as findings for the study. The community members had an opportunity to interview local government officials on the identified findings to seek further clarifications. The clarifications were also recorded. Approximately 83 % of all PAR participants at each of the selected four wards (i.e. 25 community members) were women. The priority was given to women because they were more marginalized and provided agricultural labor force across the four districts. The PAR sessions lasted for 21 days at each of the selected four wards.

The PAR exercise involved in-depth interviews of the experienced members of the local communities (*3 men and 3 women from each of the ward. The experienced members were among the 120 local co-researchers*), community mapping, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The PAR exercise also involved feedback sessions with local government officials. In-depth interviews were conducted to enable the author to effectively facilitate the FGDs and feedback sessions with the co-researchers. The PAR was also complimented with key informant interviews of local government officials. Five local government officials from each of the district served as key informants. The FGDs were further facilitated through PAR techniques including community mapping, power walk, workload analysis, Venn diagrams, historical line and storytelling. The community members had limited skills in the mentioned PAR techniques. For that reason, the author trained them on PAR techniques before they engaged in the exercise. The training enabled to serve as co-researchers in the PAR exercise.

The PAR exercise was stopped upon the attainment of the saturation point (i.e. the point whereby there was no new information being identified). Data saturation is a qualitative data collection technique originating from grounded theory, referring to a practice of collecting qualitative data until when there is no newer information obtained

(see Charmaz, 2006). Upon the attainment of the saturation point, the author and co-researchers engaged in feedback sessions targeting local government officials. Past research shows that feedback sessions are useful in helping stakeholders in a PAR study arrive at a consensus. Feedback sessions were useful at the city of Cincinnati that managed to reform police-community relations in favor of the black community in the US history (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Rotham (2014) is of opinion that feedback sessions among different stakeholders lead to dynamism, creativity and growth enabling the attainment of community empowerment.

The first step in the preparation of the feedback sessions, involved the participation of the community representatives in training sessions on presentation skills. The sessions were facilitated by the author. The skills were essential for them to be able to present the raised challenges to local government officials. The community representatives received training in the preparation of songs, poems, role plays, speech and displaying of handmade posters. According to George (2014) arts-based activities help generate different and deeper insights into an issue. The second step, involved rehearsing for the presentation. The author gave useful feedback to the community representatives that enabled them to improve their presentation skills. The third step, involved travelling to local government officials at the ward level to present the raised issues. The PAR participants then travelled to district capitals to present the findings to district local government officials. There were 128 local government officials who participated in the feedback sessions (16 officials at each of the four wards and 16 district officials at each of the four district capitals). Plenary discussions followed the presentations whereby government officials responded to the various issues raised during presentations. Likewise, the officials had an opportunity to ask some questions on the raised issues for clarity. The third step was useful in the attainment of consensus

among all participants on the way forward. The fourth step involved making commitments to address the raised issues. Overall, apart from the attainment of consensus on the way forward, the feedback exercises enabled the author and community representatives to get some clarifications on the gathered findings. The community representatives were also empowered and managed to present issues raised during the PAR exercise to the local government officials. Although the PAR exercise produced many qualitative data, content analysis was used to analyze the data in line with the study objective. Literature on content analysis is readily available (see Drisko and Moschi, 2015).

Overall, the author presents findings on the views of the community members and local government officials who participated in the PAR exercise. Further, the views of the community members provided tips for collecting additional data from other sources in relation to the study objectives. The additional data and scholarly discussion only serve to complement the views of the community members. The next section covers the actual PAR findings on the challenges experienced by local governments in the delivery of public services to marginalized people.

Local governments and the delivery of services to marginalized people

The section presents participatory findings on the challenges experienced by local governments in the efficient and effective delivery of public services to marginalized smallholder farmers in the selected districts. Overall, the findings indicate Tanzania has managed to create an innovative model of local government capable of improving the delivery of social services to the public. The model needs to be strengthened through improving efficiency and effectiveness of such structures. However, the central government continues to engage in the creations of new local government councils in an

attempt to improve and increase services to citizens as opposed to improving efficiency and effectiveness of existing local governments. A unique explanation of the finding is that the government relies on the market to fund the local government. However, past research highlight that the market is not a silver bullet solution to the provision of public services at the local level. The reliance on the market disproportionately affects marginalized people (see Harvey, 2005, 2011, 2014; Madaha 2014 a&b; Madaha, 2018). There is vast literature highlighting the role of the market in disempowering women too (see Brenner, 2014; Madaha, 2014b; Miles, 1998; Mohanty, 2002; Ng, 2016). A unique explanation of the finding is that poorly implemented decentralization process can further reinforce gender oppression.

One explanation of the finding is that the local governments would have been successful in the delivery of social services, if the focus was on improving efficiency and effectiveness of existing structures as well as on ensuring gender mainstreaming. The findings revealed that the creation of new local government increases operational expenses. Increased operational expenses resulted into underfunding of local governments. Consequently, the local governments have not managed to provide reliable, efficient, and effective public services as per the needs and aspirations of local communities. Some past research indicates that underfunding of the local government seriously interferes with their ability to deliver public services (see Jiménez and Pérez-Foguet, 2010). The disadvantaged position of women makes them rely on public services (Madaha, 2014b; Miles, 1998; Mohanty, 2002; and Ng, 2016). In this context, women and other marginalized people are disproportionately affected.

The findings imply that the decentralization does not always accommodate the local context (Kjellberg 1988) in absence of a focus on efficiency and effectiveness of local government structure. The findings further contradict those of Warremn (1986)

who argues that a central government, with the power to coordinate activities of the local government, is a necessity for the attainment of good performance in the delivery of public services. The findings of the study has showcased that the Tanzanian Central Government, with a lot of coordinating power, is the main reason for the poor performance of local governments. That is, the central government has decentralized but without devolution of powers to local governments and communities. The finding is consistent with another past research on the Tanzanian decentralization model (see Hulst et al, 2015). The following paragraphs present additional explanations on the key challenges as revealed by the study

First, the findings show that the local governments have failed to ensure the rule of law leading to grave cases of GBV in their jurisdictions. An explanation of the finding is that the previously mentioned challenges have weakened the capacity of the institutions to ensure the rule of law. Tanzanian women are major producers in the agriculture sector (Tripp *et al*, 2009; Madaha, 2018). In that regard, GBV severely interferes with agricultural production. Women from across the four districts are oftentimes involved in overwhelming farming activities. A key informant at Bunambiyu ward said:

“...No one cares whenever women get killed. They are also subjected to GBV, if they return home late due farming exercise (Martha, Butuyu group chairperson, Bunambiyu ward, March, 2018).

Based on the findings women who oppose oppressive systems are subjected to the worst form of GBV including death. Consistence with past research, the present study highlights that the presence of patriarchal culture severely affects women (see Mohanty, 2002; Jafry and Sulaiman, 2013; Madaha 2012, 2014 a&b; Tripp *et al*, 2009). Women across the remaining districts also loose ownership of their properties because of similar challenges. The finding is in line with past research (see Tripp *et al*, 2009). For instance,

a husband in Morogoro district refused to live in a house that was built by his wife. A widow with four children had her properties seized by her late husband's male relatives. Whenever men die, women and children are subjected to the worst form of patriarchal exploitation as shared by one of the community representatives:

"...a husband of one of the ladies in our village passed away. The lady had children. However, all of the wealth that she acquired with her deceased husband was taken by her husband's male relatives." (Swalehe Kapilima, community member, Mngazi ward, 15 March, 2018)

An important explanation of the finding is that although Tanzania has created a legal framework at the local government level to ensure gender equality, the influence of patriarchal culture remains strong. This finding, however, is in contrast with a study by Medie (2013) showcasing that poor implementation of anti-GBV laws as the sole reason for escalating levels of GBV in African states. The influence of culture is also supported by past research that found GBV is perpetrated on women because of institutionalized and systemic social inequalities between men and women (see Khan, 2016). The finding implies that the government and other stakeholders need to address institutionalized and systemic social inequalities between men and women to pave way for the effective and efficient implementation of decentralization.

The findings provide further insights into why patriarchal culture hinders agricultural production. One of the community representatives said:

"Although women produce major labor force in agricultural production, they lack support from their male spouses. For instance, men do not go to their farms. Instead, they spend their time at town centers. Besides, women who engage in such demanding manual labor, are not allowed to take bath for the whole day to ensure their husbands that they are not seeing other men. There is belief that a woman, who frequently takes bath, does so to seduce other men."

Consequently, they spend up to two days washing faces and private parts only. Finally, children neglect their right to education by neglecting going to school to assist their mothers in the farm (Eve Mayu, Secretary Maendeleo group, Bunambiyu ward, Kishapu, 22 March, 2018).

The situation is reflected across the selected districts. Women and children are the ones who spend much time in the farm as men engage in luxurious activities. Based on the findings of this research and past research (see Carvalho and Schia, 2011), patriarchy needs to be addressed for women to fully participate in developmental interventions. The findings imply that patriarchy hinders the decentralization process.

The situation at Nyansha ward in Kasulu town council is somewhat unique due to the presence of refugees from Burundi. Some Tanzanian women have been raped and robbed of their personal belongings. Some men have been raped too. The situation is summarized by one of the community representatives:

“...many women have been raped in the farm by Burundian refugees. Although the incidences have been reported, there are no legal measures that have been taken against the perpetrators. The rapists rob other belongings such as phones, bicycles and food. Men are also frequently being raped but they do not report such incidences to protect their manhood”. (E. Ntumi, Community Representative, Nyansha ward, Kasulu 17th March 2018).

An important explanation of the finding is that the local governments are also incapable of dealing with disaster situations. Based on this research and past research, disaster and emergency situations affect women are disproportionately (see Enarson, and Chakrabarti, 2009; Hilhorst *et al*, 2018). The findings imply that there is a need to increase efficiency and effectiveness of local governments through gender mainstreaming to make them protect the welfare of marginalized populations.

Overall, the findings imply that the weaknesses of the local governments allow only those with adequate capital to benefit. Although GBV is a major obstacle

for the provision of public services, decentralization within the market economy context ignores gender mainstreaming. That is, decentralization is blind to a major obstacle that inflicts half of the people it seeks to serve. This is tantamount to introducing a policy that offers free gas for people to get to work when half of the population does not even own a car. An important explanation of the finding is that insights from GAD are important because they call for alternative class, gender, sexual, and racial ways of being among men and women (Biewener, 2006; Brenner, 2014). GAD, a strand of socialist feminism, calls for inclusive movements by the oppressed to transform power relations in favour of a more just society (Mohanty, 2002; Biewener, 2006). GAD synthesizes the shortcomings of neoliberalism by clearly highlighting the marginalization of women in such contexts (Madaha, 2014b, 2018). The findings are in line with those shared by Kessy and McCourt (2010) who argue that local governments tend to serve the interest of the well-off people as opposed to those of the marginalized people. Similar views are also shared by Ebinger, Grohs and Reiter (2011).

Second, the findings from across the selected district councils highlighted that the local government authorities are aware of the community challenges presented to them. However, there was a general consensus across all councils that they receive inadequate funds from the Central government to boost the effective and efficient provision of public service for agricultural development in their respective jurisdictions. The challenge incapacitates the ability of such authorities to provide agricultural extension services to the marginalized local communities and smallholder farmers in particular. The findings suggest that adequate funding from the Central Government is an important necessity to increase efficiency and effectiveness local governments in the provision of public services. The finding is consistent with past research that highlights

underfunding of local government affects their performance (see Jiménez and Pérez-Foguet, 2010; Madaha, 2020).

One of the community representatives summarized a consensus that reflects a situation from across all selected councils:

“Agricultural inputs are often times not available whenever they are needed. Consequently, the farmers fail to apply the required inputs at the time when they are required to do so. Failure to access such inputs on time, affects production severely. Moreover, business people engage in an illegal practice of delaying the sale of agricultural inputs in an attempt to escalate prices and earn more profits”

(Steve Phile, Community Representative, 10th March 2018. Tembela village, Mbeya district)

The above statement implies that the local government often delays the provision of key agricultural inputs to the local communities. The tendency affects agricultural production heavily. Further, although the government sets some prices for the agricultural implements sold by the private sector to make them affordable to the marginalized smallholder farmers, some businessmen ignore the set prices. They instead charge high prices to gain illegal profits. Further, FGDs highlighted that insecticides supplied to the peasants are of poor quality. Subsequently, the peasants end up purchasing large quantities of functionless fake insecticides in an attempt to kill harmful insects. The practice increases operational expenses. FGDs from across the councils further highlighted that agricultural inputs are unevenly distributed because the private suppliers, assigned the task of supplying subsidized agricultural implements, tend to favor wealthier farmers as opposed to targeted poor farmers. One of the community representatives summarized a consensus observed across all four councils in the study area:

“Agricultural inputs are given to the powerful and rich farmers because they can bribe for such services. As a result, marginalized smallholder farmers experience delay in gaining access to such inputs. The delay leads to very poor harvest”. (Edi Sos, Community Representative, 17th March, 2018, Nyansha ward, Kasuluu TC)

Overall, the local governments have failed to ensure marginalized farmers access subsidized agricultural implement as planned. The local government officials from across the four district councils were in agreement with the mentioned challenges. One explanation of the finding is that the underfunding of the local governments has incapacitated their abilities to deal with negative forces of free market. The finding is consistent with past research which showcases that the free market weakens social structures of the poor and leads to the marginalization of such populations. In such circumstances, women are disproportionately affected (see Warnecke, 2006; Harvey, 2005, 2011, 2014; Madaha 2014a).

Third, the study findings suggest that local governments face some structural challenges that hinder them from providing reliable, efficient, and effective agricultural services. The local governments, among other things, lack reliable agricultural market structures for smallholder farmers subjecting them to middlemen's exploitation. The prices set by the middlemen cannot offset agricultural operational expenses incurred by the farmers. The local government has not set up mechanisms to ensure fair participation in the market by all. For instance, the middlemen temper with weighing scales whenever they purchase agricultural produce. The local governments have not been able to avoid such practices. Summarizing the situation from across the local councils, one of the community representatives said:

“...The measurements used by the middlemen to purchase cereals from the smallholder farmers are unfair. They take more cereals than the standards set by the government. However, we do not have a choice because there is no reliable market for our produce. The exploitative practice entraps smallholder farmers and their offspring into extreme poverty” (Juma Namo, Community Representative, 10th April 2018, Tembela village, Mbeya district)

Another community representative said:

“...the middlemen from other regions oftentimes purchase our agricultural produce using weighing buckets which are relatively bigger than the standard ones. For instance, the middlemen use ‘24 liters’ buckets for weighing cereals as opposed to using 20 liter-buckets. The only justification for their exploitative behavior is that they incur losses whenever they transport cereals to the market. Specifically, they claim that the road networks in our villages are very poor (Luc Evo, community representative, Mngazi ward 16th March, 2018).

The statement implies smallholder farmers including women at the study area are disproportionately affected within the neoliberal market economy as it is the case elsewhere (see Harvey, 2005, 2011, 2014; Madaha 2014 a&b). Some of the smallholder farmers sell their agricultural produce at open public places subjecting such products to poor hygiene. Poor hygiene lowers the price of the products. The situation is also worsened by the presence of poor road infrastructure. The majority of the roads are not passable during rainy season. As a result, the farmers cannot transport their harvest to nearby market towns. The challenges enhance further marginalization of the poor farmers including marginalized women.

One of the explanations of the findings is that the Tanzanian model of decentralization enables the government to be aware of the challenges that local populations face. However, there is a need to strengthen such institutions to make them capable of addressing the local challenges. That is, the conventional efforts geared at creating many small units of local government in Tanzania cannot increase efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of public services. Sharpe (1988) correctly argues that service efficiency can be attained through the creation of larger administrative units to obtain maximum benefits and savings from economies of scale in the management and cost control. In this respect, the country needs to take a different root. It can even consider amalgamation of the local government to increase efficiency (see also Leemans, 1970; Brans, 1992). The findings also suggest that the central government

should strengthen the structures of the local government to ensure fair participation of all in the market.

Fourth, the decentralization fails to empower marginalized farming communities because local governments have not managed to ensure fair access, control and ownership of land for agricultural production by all people. Although, women spend more time in the farms and in other income generating activities at the household, men remain key decision makers on household property. The finding is consistent with past research highlighting the disempowerment of women through patriarchal practices and neoliberalism (Mile, 1998; Mohanty, 2002; Tripp et al, 2009; Madaha, 2014a; Ng, 2016). The situation across the four districts is summarized by the views of the following two key informants:

“...Women cannot own land because the owner and controller of land is the husband. As such, my wife can own my properties including land, if I die and upon approval of my male relatives. However, she cannot own such land, if I am still alive” (P. Bushashe, Community Representative, Nyansha ward, Kasulu TC, 17th March, 2018)

“...I used to fight my husband frequently. He later on decided to burn my clothes and threw away all of the household food into a pit latrine. He also destroyed the latrine and water tap. He later on sold the house without my consent and abandoned me with all of our seven children...” (Happi Oma, Community Representative, Nyansha ward, Kasulu TC, 21th March 2018).

Further, husbands from across the study area can decide to sell agricultural products without their wives' consent. The findings from across the four councils are further summarized by one of the community representatives:

“...My husband always sells agricultural products without my consent. I do not attempt to stop him because I can be beaten severely”. (Happi Oma, Community Member, Mngazi ward, Morogoro, 21th March 2018)

Women cannot use land for collateral, if they need loans without the approval of men. Although some women own land, men often times use such land as collateral without

the consent of the women. The dominance of the patriarchal culture across the study area is further highlighted by the following statement:

“...Men often times are elected to participate in decision making bodies because women have no such capabilities. Some women hold membership in such positions through non-electoral special seat arrangements. They cannot win in an election. Our tribe socializes men to be decision makers. On the contrary, women are socialized to serve as obedient implementers of men’s decisions” (Leo Kapa, Community Representative, Nyansa ward, Kasulu, 17th March 2018).

The situation becomes worse whenever men decide to marry more than one wife. If that happens, a husband takes a portion of the first wife’s land and gives it to the second or third wife without the first wife’s consent. There are occasions where husbands take women’s earnings forcefully and spend them lavishly. The occasions may happen in households without food and money to pay school fees for the children. The findings are in line with past research at other locations in Tanzania and other developing countries (see Mohanty, 2002; Enarson, and Chakrabarti, 2009; Madaha 2012, 2014 a&b, 2018; Medie, 2013). The findings suggest that if women have to participate in the decentralisation process, they have to own land and other resources.

Finally, the local governments have been endowed with the responsibility of offering training on basic agronomic and other life skills to the peasants in their jurisdictions. However, they hardly offer such training. Jabbar and Zaza (2015) are of opinion that training can enhance confidence and self-esteem, improve occupational business, and entrepreneurship skills, generate income; and create hope and opportunities for the trainees. Dhlamini (2015) argues that governments and other development agencies cannot attain any progress without empowering communities through training. The findings from across the four district council highlight limited provision of training and other social services. The challenge happening across all district councils is best summarized by one of the community representatives:

“Although agriculture is the major economic activity for the majority of the Tanzanian population living in rural areas, they lack important agronomic skills. Government agricultural extension officers do not allocate enough time to visit us during the agricultural season. For instance, the majority of smallholder farmers in Nyansha ward grow crops such as maize, beans, cassava, sweet potatoes, banana and vegetables. However, they lack modern skills to improve production of such crops. On the contrary the well-off farmers are the ones who can pay for agricultural extension services. Subsequently, they are the ones who manage to improve agricultural production in their farms. The extension officers spend much of their time in urban and semi-urban areas enabling urban farmers to disproportionately benefit from such services” (Cole M. Luho, community member, Nyansha ward 17th March 2018).

The findings support those of Boex (2003) who has demonstrated that central government officials divide public resources across local government units in favor of the wealthy and urban communities. The findings also support those of Warnecke (2006), Harvey (2005, 2011, 2014), and Madaha (2014a) who argue that the reliance on the market economic model has failed to stimulate efficient allocation of resources as advocated by neoliberal proponents. Further, the findings suggest that marginalized women who engage in agriculture do suffer from neoliberal forces disproportionately.

Some scholars (see Crook and Sverrisson 1999; Prud’homme 1995; and Samoff 1990) are of opinion that local governments in developing countries lack technical, human, and financial resources to produce reasonably public services in line with local demands. Based on the findings of the study, the local governments do have the technical and human resources but they lack financial resources to offer reliable services to the public. The findings further contradict those of Boex and Martinez-Vazquez (2006) who are of opinion that the presence of local government automatically reduces poverty. The findings suggest that one needs to improve efficiency and effectiveness of local government structures for them to provide reliable services to the public. Gender mainstreaming should also be an important ingredient towards that end. Local government also need to increase democratic control and accountability as advocated by Wollmann (2004). Finally, the findings of this study contradict those of

Watt (2006) who argues that local governments provide local public goods in line with local tastes and preferences. The findings suggest some reforms to enable the local governments to provide services in line with local preferences.

Outcomes of the PAR exercise

Apart from providing some useful qualitative findings, PAR exercise generates immediate outcomes in the interest of the community. Overall, the interaction of the co-researchers with the local government officials highlighted a general consensus that the community members need to collaborate with the local governments through initiating development interventions themselves. The government would then complement such efforts. Although improved collaboration between local governments and community members is likely to bear some fruits (see Pedersen, 2012), the findings indicate that there is a need to improve the efficient and effectiveness of local governments to improve their performance in the provision of social services.

Second, the PAR exercise managed to spark an immediate action on community development issues at one of the local councils. Kasulu TC authorities started to renovate a roadway on 21st March 2018. The intervention would not have been possible before the PAR exercise. This serves as evidence that action research can spark change in favor of local communities (see Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014).

Third, the PAR exercise increased the ability of community members from across the selected wards to speak out (Kemmis *et al*, 2014). The most successful part of the PAR exercise was the establishment of unique forms of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that were labeled as Knowledge Centers (KCs) in this article. The following few paragraphs will focus on the KCs.

All community members who received training on PAR techniques and participated in the PAR exercise as co-researchers became members of the KCs at each of the selected wards. The KCs were established to serve as platforms for the marginalized communities to make use of the PAR techniques and tools to identify and address local challenges using locally available resources. The major aim of the PAR was to sustain the study's interventions. The members of the KCs became change agents who offered capacity building training, legal aid, first aid to victims of GBV, and information for sparking change in their communities. They continue to conduct open forums, mobilize groups to advocate for people's rights, hold government and other key stakeholders accountable, and finally collaborate with journalists at local and national level to give voice to the voiceless. Again the findings suggest that PAR can bring about changes in line with the interests of local communities (see Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014).

The author collaborated with the PAR participants at each ward to form guidelines for the establishment of the KCs. Using a series of PAR techniques such as role-plays, group discussion and presentation, plenary discussions, the participants were engaged in discussing the concept of KC, its purpose, structure, categories of leadership, and characteristics of good leaders; and responsibilities of leaders. The PAR participants from across each of the four wards participated in the creation of criteria for membership. The participants were given an opportunity to choose partners that they would like to work with to facilitate the establishment of a thriving sustainable KC. The exercise was concluded with an election of leaders and steering committees. Apart from other criteria, it was a requirement that women hold more leadership positions than men. The author made the special arrangement to give more voice to women. A chairperson was supposed to be a woman. The names of the knowledge centers, which were established, are Bunambiyu No: 8 Tuamuke Group (Bunambiyu ward, Kishapu

DC); HWASHA, (Itewe ward, Mbeya DC a Safwa word that meant it is morning); *Sauti Ya Upendo* (Mngazi ward, Morogoro DC); and Nyansha Community Centre (Nyansha ward, Kasulu TC). The author has been monitoring the progress of the KCs; they remain active until when the paper was submitted for publication.

The findings imply that community organizing through KCs can empower marginalized communities by enabling them to access locally available resources. The findings are consistent with similar past research in the United States highlighting the role of community organizing in empowering the have-nots (see Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014; Foster and Glass, 2017). Coghlan and Brydon-Miller highlight that community organizing played an instrumental role in the Civil Rights Movement. Ella Baker received some credits for organizing people in the movement. In this regard, the community members in Tanzania need to organize to shape the local governments in their favor.

Conclusion

Indeed, Tanzania has crafted one of the most creative models of local government that has attracted the attention of scholars from across the world. Although the model has the potential to improve the lives of marginalized communities, there is a need to focus on increasing its efficiency and effectiveness. The current focus aimed at creating more units of local government, increases operational expenses. High operational expenses hinder the ability of the local governments to deliver agricultural extension and other public services. Further, the government needs to go beyond the formation of new local government units by creating an atmosphere that encourages the formation of community Knowledge Centers (KCs). Community organizing, through KCs, is essential in helping the local governments address some of the challenges. In turn, KCs can help mobilize community members to address some of the challenges. This study

serves as evidence that PAR is useful in community organizing at the local level. Community organizing can also pave way for the full realization of the potential of the Tanzanian model of local government.

The study further suggests a need for larger semi-autonomous local governments incorporating a mix of the two local government models as highlighted in the theory of the welfare state by Kjellberg (1985). According to Kjellberg (1985), the two models of local government are an autonomous model and an integration model. The autonomous model is based on the liberal ideology. The model proposes a context whereby the local governments remain autonomous from the central government. According to this view, the central government only monitors the activities of the autonomous local authorities. On the contrary, the integration model emphasizes that the central and local governments should work together as partners while accommodating adjustments in line with a local context (Kjellberg 1988). The findings of the study suggest a mix of the two models. That is, local governments need to be awarded some autonomy but they ought to continue working with the central government for the common good of the entire nation.

Concerning the effects of neoliberalism on marginalized people, insights from social economic theory are useful. Social economic theory synthesizes relations within the neoliberal context. Tanzania, as it is the case elsewhere, has adopted neoliberalism that calls for a decentralized government and the liberalization of the market (see Harvey, 2005, 2011, 2014; Madaha 2014 a&b). The proponents of neoliberalism are of opinion that liberalized markets stimulate a more efficient allocation of resources that leads to higher economic growth. That has not been the case in Tanzania. The opponents support the view that neoliberalism leads to further marginalization of weaker populations (Warnecke, 2006; Harvey, 2005, 2011, 2014; Madaha 2014a). The

findings of the study support the view. In this regard, social economists have proposed social economic theory as an alternative doctrine to neoliberalism. A classical but relevant view by Say (1803) correctly warns against measures that undermine political, social, cultural and spiritual components of any society. All of the components need to be in tandem with one another for any society to thrive. There is a need to reinstate the social dimensions of the economic life, investigate the relationships and dynamics between the economy and society, and discuss the conditions and institutions requisite for a good and sustainable society as well as a just and efficient economy (Christoforou, 2018).

O'Boyle (1996) challenges the dominant orthodox economic view that every economic agent is strictly an individual being, self-interest alone drives economic behaviour and the common good is served through the invisible hand of the market. Instead, social economic theory calls on the radical project of flourishing differences, which enable alternative class, gender, sexual, and racial ways of being (Biewener, 2006). In other words, social economic theory calls for a balance between empowered societies and governance structures. In this regard, gender aspect becomes important.

This suggests that, the gender perspective has to be incorporated in local governance because the findings highlight that women are disproportionately affected by the failure of the local governments in the effective and efficient provision of public services. In turn, the failure lead to disproportionate suffering of marginalized women from patriarchy and neoliberalism. The article contributes to the African studies literature as well as the literature focusing on the usefulness of Action Research to initiate community driven changes at local government level.

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