

## Holding local government to account in Tanzania through a performance index

Research update, October 2016

In 2014, the University of Mzumbe, in partnership with the Foundation for Civil Society and INTRAC, launched a three-year research project to explore the viability and value of creating a local governance performance index at the district level in Tanzania.<sup>1</sup> This research is funded by the UK Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Department for International Development (DFID).

This research wants to know:

How might such an index be used to encourage local governments to prioritise the needs of the poorest and most excluded?

Can such an index be used by citizens to demand accountability from local leaders and civil servants?

### Digging deep

Since 1999 the Tanzanian government has been actively pursuing an incremental strategy of what is referred to as Decentralisation by Devolution (DbyD), devolving responsibility for service delivery areas to local government. The government has also put in place numerous policies and programmes to improve governance at local and national levels. Donors have funded many initiatives over the past 20 years aimed at improving accountability and citizen participation. The existing literature, however, demonstrates that many of these initiatives have fallen far short of their objectives.

The local government system in Tanzania has a bewildering array of layers, often running in parallel, often over-lapping, and sometimes officially defunct yet still operational in practice. In addition, there are sector-specific structures that connect to local government structures, but tangentially, such as health insurance committees and justice systems. Initiatives aimed at strengthening local government or tackling accountability from the local to national often focus on the district level. Yet the district sits above many layers of official local institutions down to the village or street. These are often physically far removed from district administrations.

We therefore decided to go deep rather than broad in our research. Led by a Tanzanian team, the research has the advantage of being unencumbered by tight timeframes or intervention-driven research questions. We have been able to spend time unpacking the nuances of the rules in theory, the rules in practice and popular perspectives in line with our theoretical framework (see Overview). We wanted to hear from citizens at all levels, starting from popular perspectives of performance and development.

### Selecting our research sites

We selected two districts for our research: Mvomero (near Morogoro in central/eastern Tanzania) and Kigoma-Ujiji (western Tanzania). Each district comprises around 18 wards. Within each district we chose one division; within that division we chose four wards, and within each ward one village or street was selected to represent different geographic, social and economic contexts. This ‘trench’ approach allowed us to dig right down through the layers of administration.

<sup>1</sup> See the Overview. ODI joined the research as a partner in 2015



We chose these two districts to offer a contrasting picture from economic, geographic, social and political perspectives. Mvomero is rural, but not so isolated from centres of power; it is economically diverse and of mixed religion; on the pragmatic side, the University of Mzumbe is located here, rendering the field sites relatively accessible. Kigoma-Ujiji is urban, in the far west of Tanzania, with diverse identities from being a border region, political power lies with the opposition party, and it is predominately Muslim.

The ethnographic approach allowed rich stories and detail to be unearthed through qualitative methods. The trade-off is that we cover only two ‘trenches’ across a vast country. Covering more districts or more areas within each district might have given us more comparative data, as would choosing a mix of sites, including ones covered by other governance projects, such as through Policy Forum or the AcT programme. However, too broad an approach would have given a less rich picture. Our explorations of literature and methods used in other governance initiatives suggested that rich depth was a valuable contribution that we could make.

## Following the trail from the bottom up through participatory research

Following preliminary scoping exercises, the first stage of the field research (March 2015 to December 2015) involved **ethnographic research** at the village level to explore what local administration looks like in practice, and to explore popular perceptions of local government performance. We mapped the field sites, through visits to public and private institutions and business enterprises, as well as through interviews with individuals, those in administrative and political positions, those with economic or religious status, and those involved in organisations or associations. This was followed by **interviews** with elected representatives and officials at the district levels, as well as civil society organisations active in the district.

The data from these activities were analysed to draw out preliminary lists for each district of questions and issues around service delivery at the district level. This list was then used to inform a second stage of research (January to April 2016). A **survey** was undertaken of citizens in the village/street sites, completed with local research assistants who identified respondents through purposive sampling.

### **Citizen survey:**

Mvomero: 192 respondents from four villages (Vijiji)

Kigoma Municipal: 190 respondents from four streets (mitaa)

### **Workshops:**

Mvomero: 23 participants

Kigoma Municipal: 25 participants

The citizen survey fed into **participatory workshops** at the district level that brought together: district officials from departments such as health, water, agriculture, infrastructure and education; district councillors; and representatives of civil society organisations active in the district. Many of these had been interviewed in the first phase of the research. Participants debated the roles and responsibilities of local government actors; and explored the lists of issues as a basis for designing performance indicators.

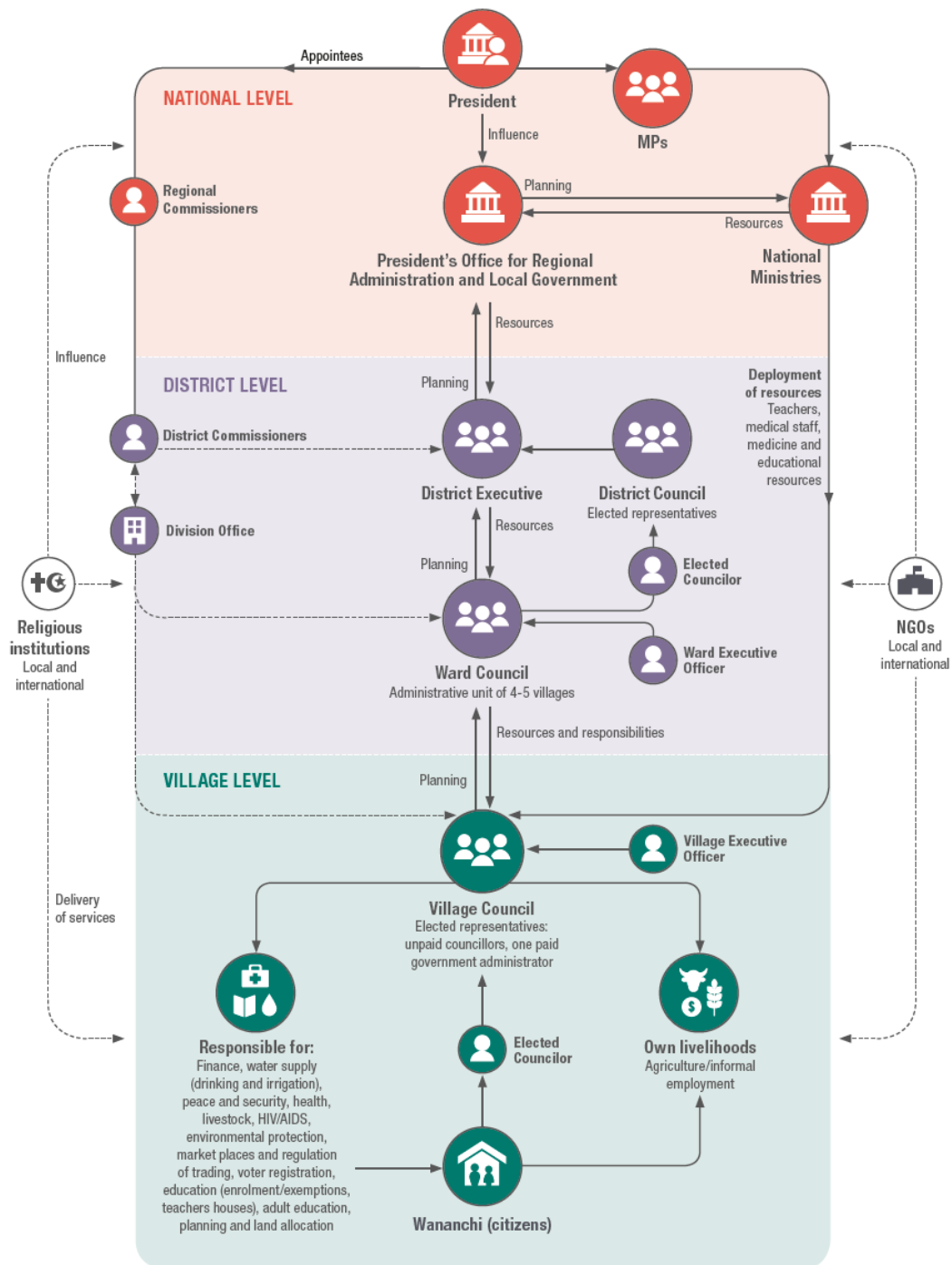
We have now begun to follow the trail to the national level, engaging in discussions with ministries, political representatives, social funds, and civil society organisations and associations.

## Early findings

We are at the very preliminary stages of analysing the wealth of rich data that have emerged from these exercises. As we move into the next stages of the research we will delve deeper into a few issues that beginning to stand out:

**Decentralisation in practice:** The figure below represents an attempt to capture the complexity of lines of responsibility and service delivery in Tanzania. It shows a central column with planning being driven from the village/street level through the citizens (wanachi) and their elected representatives. Plans are consolidated and sent upwards through the ward and district executives to the President’s Office for Regional Administration and Local Government. This office co-ordinates with the President and relevant national ministries back down the chain. In addition to this the President appoints Regional and District Commissioners. In addition to this, religious institutions and NGOs play a significant role in service

delivery at the local level, and in shaping policy at the national level. This results in multiple lines of accountability within local governance systems.



**Confusion about roles and responsibilities:** In both areas we are finding elected representatives, officials and stakeholders are unclear about their own roles and responsibilities, as well as those of others within the various tiers of local government. We find confusion over criteria for selection and a lack of accessible information to help individuals understand their roles.

**Pressure at the village/street level:** At the village/street level, service-delivery and citizen representation functions appear blurred. Most officials and representatives are voluntary yet fulfil a large number of functions across health, education, social services, justice and security, environment and livelihoods.

**Limited information-sharing on policies:** Many officials and representatives appear to have limited access to a regular supply of information on national-level policies that affect their work at the local level.

### Taking Action 1

We are exploring with national-level actors whether information texts are available that explain roles and responsibilities in local government. If we can identify such texts we will seek to make them available in our pilot sites. If they are not, we will explore whether we can develop and disseminate such information in collaboration with others.

**Civil society as intermediaries or part of the system:** The research and workshop discussions raised questions about the role of civil society organisations in the delivery of services within the districts. This in turn raises questions about whether civil society organisations are an integral part of the performance of the district, or whether they are independent actors who should be holding local government to account.

**Performance tracking at what level:** Our initial thinking was that the performance index would focus on performance of district-level officials and representatives. However, we may need to consider also performance at village and street level, as well as at national level, for example performance of the elected Member of Parliament for the area.

**Building trust:** In both districts the research process has been welcomed as providing an opportunity for different stakeholders to come together. The workshops often began with blame being cast around the table, but ended with comprehension of different perspectives and the beginnings of collaboration around developing a long list of possible performance indicators. In the process participants seemed to begin to overcome some of their political sensitivities and to build trust.

### Taking Action 2

At the end of the workshops, the participants in each district decided to form a platform composed of different stakeholders to take forward the research.

**Avoiding overlap and building parallel systems:** As we work our way upwards to the national level we learn more about accountability initiatives being implemented in other districts in Tanzania. Regular exchange with other actors will allow us to cross-check our findings.

**What does this tell us?** Fundamentally we first have to establish what different actors can realistically be held responsible for, before we can assess their performance in any meaningful way which in turn would lead to a change in accountability practices at the local level.

## Next steps in designing a performance index

Our methodology (see Overview) proposed that we bring together the emerging perspectives to see whether there was enough common ground to agree on a series of viable and meaningful indicators from which a performance index could be designed and piloted. This work began in the district-level workshops; we will now undertake further analysis and interaction to establish a meaningful process through which performance can be tracked and measured.

Crucially, if this is to be both useful and sustainable, then local actors have to take ownership of the design and implementation in a way that is transparent and fosters mutual accountability among stakeholders. This contrasts with a methodology where an index is designed by external actors, or is a tool by means of which one actor holds another to account. The methodology for developing the index is therefore through participatory action research, with a balanced mix of stakeholders actively involved in the process. The academic team will play a facilitating and analytical role.

We will continuously explore the prospects for sustainability of this initiative beyond the life-time of the funded research project *if* it shows the potential to work and bring about substantive change for the lives of poor and excluded citizens. Two trends that we will continuously track and engage with as we enter the final year of our project are:

- Policy developments in Tanzania in local government, including assessments of DbyD which is being scrutinised by government now.
- Donor-funded social accountability and governance initiatives, which are being implemented by non-governmental organisations and their networks in selected districts across the country and are constantly evolving.

### Want to know more?

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