



Holding local government to account

Can a performance index provide meaningful accountability?

Research overview, July 2015

One powerful political idea is the following: **if you give people a voice then they will be able to hold leaders to account and put pressure on them to take decisions that will improve public services and reduce poverty.** This research starts with this idea. We want to know how (and whether) an index based on local research data and shared amongst citizens could put pressure on local politicians and civil servants to perform better in Tanzania.

Introduction

In 2012 the former director of the Foundation for Civil Society (FCS) in Tanzania, John Ulanga, posed the question: *can a local governance performance index stimulate greater public engagement in holding local leaders and institutions to account for their performance in delivering services and reducing poverty?*

This three year research (2014-7) by the University of Mzumbe, in partnership with FCS and INTRAC, is exploring the viability and value of creating such an index at the district level in Tanzania.

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**

A tool to improve accountability

Our starting point is a critical one. Recent analysis casts doubt on whether a good governance agenda can be replicated in a way that is meaningful in different contexts, and whether it leads to effective poverty reduction.¹ A recent book by Maia Green² also challenges the ability of civil society to hold local authorities to account in Tanzania.





As researchers and civil society organisations we must respond to these criticisms.

¹ Booth, D. (2012) Development as a Collective Action Problem: Addressing the real challenges of African Governance, Synthesis Report of the African Power and Politics Programme. Available at <http://www.institutions-africa.org/filestream/20121024-appp-synthesis-report-development-as-a-collective-action-problem-> last accessed 17th June 2015

² Green, M. (2014) The Development State: Aid, Culture & Civil Society in Tanzania, James Currey

Measuring governance in Tanzania

There are already a number of initiatives to understand and improve accountability between state and citizen in Tanzania:

 <p>Twaweza is an East African NGO with country programmes in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya focused on government accountability and for citizens to take action to ask for change. A good example of their work is the <i>Uwezo</i> programme, which monitors education outcomes³.</p>	 <p>Policy Forum is a member-led network of NGOs, again working on citizen voice, local governance and oversight of public money. Policy Forum (through partners HakiKazi, REPOA and TGNP) has produced a guide to Public Expenditure Tracking for citizens in English and Kiswahili.</p>
 <p>Act Accountability in Tanzania Programme</p> <p>Accountability in Tanzania is a £30 million DFID funded programme, delivered by KPMG. It seeks to build the capacity of local partners to work across the interface of the good governance agenda and the citizen-led monitoring of public service planning, budgets and implementation⁴.</p>	 <p>The Local Governance Barometer, piloted in Tanzania by Plan International, uses an iterative and reflective process whereby stakeholders discuss markers of local governance and assess how it is changing.</p>

For the most part these initiatives focus on the capacity of civil society actors to drive a process of monitoring the plans and spending of government. They are based on assumptions concerning the potential connection between citizen voice and improved governance - but also highlight that the connection is complex. The provision of information is insufficient to mobilise citizens to take action, and there are tensions around agreeing indicators and verifying data.

This research is trying to address some of the gaps in these initiatives, namely:

- They do not set out to address the possibility of measuring and comparing **performance at the local level**.
- They do not appear to **differentiate outcomes** for those who may be totally excluded from accessing services through chronic poverty.
- They do not fully **recognise the politics of resource allocation** and of talking about performance.

Our research takes place in a context where the Tanzanian government has launched the Big Results Now (BRN) initiative. Aware of internal and external disappointment with slender percentage reductions in poverty, BRN looks for targeted and rapid moves to address areas such as education performance and agricultural transformation. It is too early to assess the outcomes of BRN but this is an important agenda for our research to consider. The Tanzanian government has also proposed a new Statistics Bill that will control the use and creation of statistical information in Tanzania. There is concern that the Government may use the act to manage criticism of their lack of progress on many aspects of reducing poverty⁵.

³ The programme claims that classroom learning outcomes in all three countries are very poor (see the 2011 report on Tanzania - http://twaweza.org/uploads/files/ALA_UWEZO.pdf). The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training appears to struggle with the findings and questions the methodology of the study (<http://www.twaweza.org/uploads/files/Monitoringbrief3-Uwezo140514ty+rc+vl.pdf>).

⁴ <http://www.accountability.or.tz/>

⁵ <http://www.twaweza.org/go/stats-act-analysis>

Perceptions and Performance: theory and practice

For many years it has been suggested that good governance is a key component of development. It is often seen to include things such as control of corruption, participation and accountability in decision-making, how government regulates public and private services, the rule and application of laws, amongst many others.

The idea of good governance has and continues to be very powerful in development and aid organisations, despite being a very slippery concept to measure. Several governance indices have been created at the international level in order to rank nation states, including the World Bank Governance Indicators and the Ibrahim Governance Index - yet most indices rely on the *perceptions* of citizens on issues. A perception is only a proxy and cannot be treated as a direct measure of a vague and context specific practice.

How can we make meaningful judgements about how local government officials and politicians are performing? To what extent is local government bringing development to communities and what should this development look like? What should local government officials and politicians be held accountable for, and what should their performance be judged against?



We might assume that government actors should be held accountable for what they have formal responsibility to deliver according to national decentralisation laws - what we call Rules in Theory. However, what a local official or administrator actually does or is able to do can diverge from the reality on the ground. Likewise citizens often use a mix of formal and informal or parallel institutions to engage with local authorities or to make their voices heard on local issues - what we call What Actually Happens.

Preliminary scoping dialogues with administrative officers and NGOs at the district level revealed very different expectations of what local political and administrative actors should be doing. This presents a fundamental problem for a performance index: **each individual has a different perspective on what effective performance would look like** - what we call What People Think Should Happen.

In thinking about local governance performance, we have to recognise the fundamental and messy inter-relationships and potential conflicts between these three ideas (Figure 1).

It is also likely that performance needs to be defined in an extremely context-specific way, reflecting the economic, social, environmental and political issues of a given village or urban area.

Is it possible to design a performance index that makes sense across these different expectations and understandings; and across different population groups within a given locality? Or must we first identify what it is that is expected of local government systems and what they can realistically deliver?

We need to ask these questions to a wide range of citizens, especially those who have not benefited from Tanzania's healthy economic growth rates, as well as those excluded by social norms and bureaucracy.

The Research Process

Phase 1: Dialogues from the bottom-up (April - October 2015)

Recognising the existing literature, challenges and initiatives on local governance performance in Tanzania, this research proposes that we have to start from popular perspectives of performance and development, rather than the *Rules in Theory*. We need to start with teasing out what different groups would expect good performance to look like.

We need to understand what actually happens in local government and in the relationships of individual citizens with local government, with the aim of understanding who has the power to make change happen.

Research will be carried out from the bottom up, following power relations upwards from the Village level through to the Wards, District and National level. We will start with 4 villages in the districts of Mvomero and Kigoma Rural, using an ethnographic approach to map:

- Power
- Institutional configurations and evolution
- Actor types, roles and linkages
- Distribution of people, livelihoods and resources
- Stories of change
- Expectations of local government
- Ideas and perceptions of what development is and where it comes from

Phase 2: From dialogues to an index? (October 2015 - October 2016)

When we put those perspectives together we will establish whether there is enough common ground between these perspectives to identify viable and meaningful performance indicators.

- If this is possible, we will **design and pilot a performance index**. Local authorities and civil society will be actively involved in the design and implementation using action research. This will enable local actors to negotiate and shape the content of the index. We are interested in how power and practice will shape the decisions that are made on how performance and development should be assessed.
- If this is *not* possible, then a further **process of dialogue** that brings actors together to discuss their divergent ideas about performance and development may be necessary.

We remain open to the idea that we may not be able to produce an index that is generalizable beyond very local contexts. What may emerge is more of a process of dialogue that reflects on the politics of governance in Tanzania and that may be able to explain why poverty reduction remains elusive and ever more unequal.

This would be a challenging finding for those with a tendency to quantify and generalise; and it is a conclusion which will not be reached without broader exploration of the empirical evidence gathered in the field.

Want to know more?

Throughout the research we will produce short blogs and updates, and share the key emerging findings with a wide range of actors with an interest in this topic in Tanzania, East Africa and beyond.

For more information, please contact Dr Andrew Mushi at Dar Campus College, Mzumbe University, Tanzania. Email: amushi@mzumbe.ac.tz Mobile: +255 788 000 025