

Democratization and Public Accountability at the Grassroots in Tanzania: A Missing Link

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Abstract: Democratization processes in most developing countries like Tanzania generate concern as to the extent to which they promote public accountability at the grassroots. Although there have been various interventions to improve governance at the national and grassroots level, little is known about citizens' ability to hold accountable their village government resulting from such interventions. This article argues that despite the democratization process that started in 1992 in Tanzania, citizens at the grassroots are still structurally and politically disempowered to hold their village government accountable. This is due to poor legal provisions and regulations guiding the functioning of village government and a poor information flow between village government and citizens, the low level of civic competency, and the poor participation of citizens in the decision-making process. This article draws on data that was collected in 2010 from the Kagera region utilizing interviews, questionnaires, observation, and documentary review. The sample size of the study was 120 respondents.

Introduction

Tanzania has embarked on democratization since 1992 following the adoption of multiparty politics with the aim of improving governance at all levels. Constitutional amendments in 1992 led to the multiparty system. This was followed by Local Government Laws (Amendment) Act, 1992 (No.8), which made corresponding changes in the local government machinery so as to accommodate the multi-party system. The important changes as far as accountability at the grassroots is concerned included making of the offices of the chairpersons of the village assembly and the village council elective, subdividing the village into *vitongoji* (hamlets; sing. *kitongoji*) and making elected hamlet chairpersons members of village councils. Accordingly, it led to increased access and availability of information, which is important in enhancing democratic governance by influencing people's opinions and awareness of their rights and responsibilities towards their government. Despite the above reforms, there is a missing link between democratization initiatives and public accountability at the grassroots in Tanzania due to poor legal provisions and regulations guiding the functioning of village government, poor

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information flows between village government and citizens, a low level of civic competency, and poor participation of the citizens in the decision-making.

The article is divided into five sections: a presentation of the methodology used in data collection and analysis; conceptualizing public accountability with the aim of identifying its necessary conditions; a discussion of public accountability in Tanzania during the single party era; examining democratization processes in Tanzania since 1992 and their effect on public accountability at the grassroots level; an analysis of the data from both primary and secondary sources with the view of establishing why there is a missing link between the democratization process and public accountability in Tanzania. The article ends with the conclusion.

Methodological Issues

This article utilizes data from research that was conducted in Bukoba District of the Kagera Region. Bukoba was chosen because it is a typical rural area located on the northern periphery of the country and thus far from where major political decisions are made and implemented by the government. It is also one of the districts that have enjoyed various interventions as a pilot district—for example, the first Local Government Reform Program (LGRP) and Research and Education on Democracy in Tanzania (REDET), which aim at educating citizens about democratic values. Moreover, the district has a fairly well educated and generally politically enlightened citizenry, which could influence citizens' ability to demand accountability from their village government. The study used questionnaires, observation, and interviews to collect primary data. Data generated through questionnaire were quantitatively analyzed, and those from the interviews were qualitatively analyzed.

The selection of the four wards, one village, and four hamlets for the study was done randomly. From each ward one village was selected and from each village one hamlet was selected as the final unit of study. One of the reasons for this was to collect diverse views from citizens and their leaders. Forty household respondents were randomly selected from each hamlet, and five village government leaders from each village were selected purposively and randomly. Village government chairpersons and Village Government Executives (VEOs) were purposively selected due to their official positions that rendered them key informants; the other three members from village council were randomly selected. Also five leaders of the randomly selected registered autonomous associations were contacted for the study.

Public Accountability: Conceptual Overview

Public Accountability is defined as the social relations that involve the actor and forum, where an actor feels an obligation to explain and justify his/her conduct to some significant other or the forum.¹ Accordingly, it is viewed as an institutionalized practice of account giving.² Accountability assumes four characteristics, one being an agent or institution that is to give an account of his/her actions.³ Second, an agent should have some discretionary power over a certain domain of responsibility. Third is the right of the principal, who are citizens, to require an agent to inform and explain decisions with regard to the domain, and the fourth is the right of the principal to sanction an agent who fails to inform and justify decisions with regard to

their domain of responsibility. Public accountability is the way of being answerable or liable for one's action and/or inaction and conduct in office or position.⁴ It involves making elected and other public officials responsible to the citizens. When viewed from above it is to be noted that elected village government is an agent that is supposed to be accountable to the citizens and required to release necessary information to them on how it is doing its business. Information given by the village government to citizens should be relevant and detailed. Second, principals who are citizens should be able to sanction the village government leaders on the basis of the information given. Third, there should be institutional arrangements that create a conducive environment for the village government to feel obliged to explain its conduct. Lastly, citizens must be legally empowered to hold the village government accountable. In totality, this means that if citizens are not exposed to information then it becomes difficult for them to generate facts and the evidence necessary for demanding accountability. Moreover, if citizens are exposed to misdeeds but not enabled by laws to impose material consequences it will make accountability appear as weak, toothless and diminished.⁵ In totality, public accountability exists when power holder must justify their actions and face sanctions.

Public accountability has two dimensions: vertical accountability and horizontal accountability. Vertical accountability, the focus of this article, is divided into two: elections and societal demand for accountability. Citizens can enforce accountability for their elected village government if elections are free and fair and where voters have several qualified candidates to choose from.⁶ However, given the conditions that prevail in Tanzania and elsewhere, elections can alone be the means of enforcing accountability. For instance, state-party fusion in which the state has been acting in favor of the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) in Tanzania at the expense of the opposition political parties makes the whole process of elections unfair and uncompetitive.⁷ Similarly, weak opposition political parties guarantee that candidates contesting under the CCM umbrella are assured of victory, thus diminishing the competitiveness of the elections. For instance, in the 1994 hamlet and village elections, CCM won 97.9 percent of the contested seats. Similarly, in the 1999 neighborhood, hamlet, and village council elections, CCM won 94.7 percent of the contested seats and in the 2004 grassroots elections 97.9 percent of the contested seats.⁸ This indicates that CCM is still the dominant political party in Tanzania and demonstrates that a candidate is at least assured of winning if she/he is a member of CCM, which in turn makes such elections uncompetitive.

Table 1.1: General Scores of CCM in Neighborhood, Hamlet, and Village Council Elections

Year of elections	Percentage of seats won by CCM
1994	97.9
1999	94.6
2004	97.2

Source: Chaligha, (2008)

So from the above, it is apparent that elections alone are insufficient to enforce accountability in village government. Societal demand for accountability becomes inevitable

and important in holding village governments accountable. This in turn means demands that can be articulated without suffering state coercion against wrongful acts of the public authorities performed either individually or by means of some kind of organized or collective action with reference to those officials who occupy elected and unelected positions in village government.⁹ However, the ability of citizens to demand accountability depends among other things on their access to information from different media, their participation in decision-making, and their awareness of their rights and responsibilities, all of which enable them to become accountability seekers.¹⁰ Although Tanzania since 1992 has embarked on a democratization process that allows citizens to elect their village government leaders from different political parties, citizens are still structurally and politically disempowered to demand accountability from their village governments.

Historical Account of Public Accountability at the Grassroots in Tanzania

Public Accountability at the Grassroots in Tanzania During the Single Party Era (1965-1990s)

Elected local authorities in Tanzania were re-established in 1982 to replace the decentralization structures of 1973. This was followed by a series of local government laws, including Local Government (District Authorities) Act No. 7 of 1982 that established village governments and recognized them as the smallest unit of governance with a corporate status on mainland Tanzania. They have two organs of governance: the village assembly and the village council. The former consists of all adult members of the village and the latter of twenty-five members, including the chairman and secretary of the ruling CCM.¹¹

Although local government was re-introduced, its orientation remained firmly within the one-party system. The fusion between the party and government personnel was extended to all levels including that of the village. For instance, the village party chairperson, who was elected by the party branch conference, became chairperson of the village government. Similarly, the village secretary was a party appointee who also automatically became the secretary of the village government.¹² When viewed from this context it can be fairly argued that leaders of the village government were accountable to the party as the employer rather than to the citizens. It was difficult for the citizens to remove an unpopular village chairman or secretary unless the higher organs of the party sanctioned such a removal.¹³

Moreover, the party was responsible for the formulation of policies, which the local government like other public institutions had to implement. The party was responsible for explaining those policies and making sure that the local authorities did what was expected. Any failures or neglect by the local authorities was to be reported to the superior organs in the party hierarchy.¹⁴ This article further argues that the supervisory role which local party organs had in their relationship with local authorities made it possible for local party leaders to issue orders to local authorities at times and which were readily obeyed mainly out of fear of being reported as neglecting party directives. There was a poor performance of village government under the single party system. Such poor performance was attributed, among other things, to party supremacy that resulted in the party's dominance in decision making. Villagers just had to

implement the decisions that were arrived at by the party organs, in most cases without their consent.¹⁵

The above discussion needs our attention as far as public accountability at the grassroots is concerned. First, it means that citizens at the grassroots during this period of single party system were not involved in the formulation of policies and plans. That is, there was no participation in decision-making; citizens were just called on to implement policies made by higher organs of the party. Second, the village government like any other local authorities was accountable to the party when carrying out its day-to-day activities. This means that the supervisory role, which was supposed to be exercised by citizens over their village government, was now taken over by the party.

Democratization Processes in Tanzania since 1992 and its Effect on Public Accountability at the Grassroots

As noted above, in 1992 Tanzania amended its constitution to adopt a multi-party system in place of the single-party system that for thirty years had existed under CCM rule. The Local Government Laws (Amendment) Act, 1992 (No.8) made corresponding changes in the local government machinery to accommodate the multi-party system by making the village assembly and village council chairpersons elective office. It also subdivided villages into *vitongoji* (hamlets) with elected chairpersons who were members of the village councils. The elected village councils were to consist of fifteen to twenty-five members. *Vitongoji* and council chairpersons could be removed even before the expiry of their terms.¹⁶ These changes need our attention in order to understand the current functioning of village government, particularly the ability of citizens to demand accountability. Due to these changes citizens now elect their village chairpersons and members of the village councils. This implies that citizens hire their leaders and that village government leaders are now accountable to the citizens rather than to the party as was the case during the single party era. Similarly, citizens can remove their elected leaders before the expiry of their tenure.

Moreover, the multiparty system paved the way for more changes in terms of access and availability of information, which is very important in enhancing democratic governance by influencing people's opinions and awareness of their rights and responsibilities towards their government. Accordingly, after the adoption of political pluralism, Tanzania experienced an increased amount of print and electronic media. Tanzania now has about eighty newspapers and magazines compared with only four daily papers under the one-party system.¹⁷ In addition, the number of radio stations increased to about thirty-eight compared with only one radio station during the previous era.¹⁸ The study that was done in 2010 revealed that 81 percent of the respondents in the studied districts listened to the radio.¹⁹

Furthermore, Tanzania has experienced the emergence of various types of civil society organizations (CSOs) and intervention programs to enhance governance. For instance, by 2007 Tanzania had more than four thousand lobbying and advocacy groups that educate citizens on their rights and responsibilities through radio and television.²⁰ Moreover, intervention programs to enhance governance include Research and Education for Democracy in Tanzania (REDET), which was introduced in 1992 with the aim, among other things, of cultivating a

democratic culture that nurtures civic participation, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in governance. With this orientation, REDET has engaged in different activities and strategies throughout its pilot districts with the aim of improving governance at the grassroots. For instance, Discussion Fora (DF) constitutes one of the strategies to enhance governance. One of the specific objectives of DF is to enable the people to hold local leaders accountable through people's participation in discussing issues that affect their lives.²¹ A study by Mhina revealed good functioning of these DFs as the vehicles for advocacy and lobbying at the grassroots.²²

Another intervention to enhance governance at the grassroots is the Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP), which was initiated in 1998. Among other things, the reforms aim at improving governance in the Local Government Authorities (LGAs), establishing broad-based community awareness and participation, promoting principles of democracy and transparent and accountable local government. Since then, different interventions have been adopted to improve governance at the grassroots. For instance, there has been the introduction of Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (O&OD) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), where citizens are expected to participate in decision making from *kitongoji* to ward level before their decisions are taken to the district council. Despite the above democratization processes, citizens at the grassroots are still structurally and politically disempowered to hold their village governments accountable.

A Missing Link

Legal Provisions and Public Accountability at the Grassroots

The interventions that the government has introduced since 1992 to improve governance at the national and grassroots level have not helped citizens to hold their village governments accountable. This may be attributed to among other things legal provisions and regulations guiding the functioning of village government.

Poor legal provisions and regulations of governance at the grassroots have hindered the ability of citizens to demand accountability from their village government. Local Government Authorities (LGAs) do not exist in a vacuum, they are product of legal framework that provide for their creation and existence. The Tanzania constitution provides for the creation of public authorities in Articles 145 and 146. Likewise, the Local Government (District Authorities) Act No. 7 of 1982 Act provides for the creation of local government, more specifically District Authorities. Furthermore, village governments are established under Act No. 7 of 1982.²³ The Act provides two organs of village governance—the village council and the village assembly. The village council is the executive arm of the village assembly with elected members delegated with powers to oversee the day-to-day activities in the village and to make decisions on behalf of the village assembly. On the other hand, the village assembly is composed of all adult members of the village who are empowered to make general policies for the village through their participation.²⁴ Moreover, Article 146(1) of the Constitution provides that the purpose of having local government authorities is to transfer the power to the people, and the LGAs shall have the right to involve the people in the planning and implementation of development

programs within their respective areas and throughout the country.²⁵ As far as public accountability is concerned, village governments like any other local government authorities have corporate status. Thus they can sue or be sued in case of violating human rights or any legal provisions in their daily activities.²⁶

Section 142(1) of the Local Government Act No. 8 of 1992 provides that every member of the village council shall, unless he ceases to be a member by death/resignation, continue to hold office as a member of that council until the village assembly next meets for the election of the member council.²⁷ However, the above provision is not clear if the member has to resign at his/her own discretion or because of the pressure from the citizens due to poor performance. Moreover, it does not say what citizens can do if members of the councils are not performing to citizen expectations. Although it was indicated that the power to remove from office any village government leader who is not performing well is with the citizens, this is not supported by any legal provision in local government laws and Principal Legislation of 1999 as revised in 2000.²⁸ Such inconsistency between the two has contributed to poor accountability at the grassroots.

Another area within legal provisions and regulations of governance that have caused poor accountability at the grassroots is the dual accountability of Village Executive Officers (VEOs). The VEO is an employee of the district council and is accountable to the district council and the village council. It was provided that among the powers and responsibilities of the village council is to suggest to the District Council the removal of a VEO from office after consultation with the village assembly²⁹. This is one way of keeping VEOs accountable. However, as a matter of fact, the VEO is likely to be more accountable to his/her employer than to the village council. Since the council has only the power to suggest the removal, the extent to which the VEO is accountable to the village council is at the discretion of the district council and not the village council, which is the executive organ of the village government. For instance, one of the household respondents revealed that citizens have no power to hold accountable their VEO: "The VEO stole all the money we contributed for a secondary school building in our village, we complained, we wanted the VEO to be fired, but instead the VEO was transferred by higher organs to another village near our village."³⁰

Another area of weakness in the provisions governing village government is that which established the relationship between the village government and other organs of government in Tanzania. The village government functions under the general framework of national policy through various organs of the central government recognized by the local government laws. Act No. 14 of 1999 section 171(1) confers power on the minister responsible for local government to dissolve LGAs at all levels in the case of default. Section 172 (2) of Act No. 14 provides that where the minister is satisfied that any LGA, including a village government, has failed to comply with any written law or carried its business in a manner incompatible with any of the provisions in the local government laws or any other written law, the minister may dissolve the authority.³¹ Moreover, Act No. 6 of 1999 section 174(d) provides that one of the functions of the central government in relation to the local government is to develop policies and provide a regulatory framework to ensure that district councils lead other agencies in their jurisdiction in the proper execution and implementation of those policies.

The above provisions have implications as far as accountability at the grassroots is concerned. First, the minister has power over the authorities as he/she has can dissolve any LGA in the case of poor performance. Although this is one way of enhancing accountability in village government, it also creates the potential for the central government to interfere in the LGAs, something that weakens the power of citizens to hold their village government accountable. Second, the power given to central government by section 174(d) can make village government implement ready-made programs that originate from the central government, hence inhibiting citizen participation at the initial stages of the programs and reducing their ability to hold their village government leaders accountable during the implementation process. For instance, the project of building a community school in every ward that started in 2000 at the grassroots was initiated and imposed by the central government organs. During interviews with the citizens at the grassroots it was discovered that they are involved at the implementation stage through the compulsory contribution of money and labor. In a situation like this their ability to demand accountability from their village government can be limited, because they lack enough information about the project and therefore can hardly hold the village government accountable.

Prerequisites of Effective Accountability Regime at the Grassroots

Prerequisites for an effective grassroots accountability regime have also hindered citizens holding their village government accountable. The ability of citizens to demand accountability depends on an awareness of their rights and responsibilities, participation in decision-making and access to information about the performance of their government from their leaders.³² It was revealed through primary data gathered through interviews with household respondents and the questionnaires administered to village government leaders and autonomous associations that these prerequisites are inadequate and sometimes absent altogether.

In the case of information flow between village government and citizens the interviews revealed a poor information flow. Among the interviewed citizens, three-quarters indicated that they did not get information from their village government, while only a quarter did. During interviews, citizens complained that most of the activities undertaken by the village government were not disclosed to them, while decisions on the issues of revenues, taxation, and land allocation were minimally or not disclosed to the citizens. Most of the respondents from Izimbya B and Bulambizi hamlets, for instance, were dissatisfied with the way their village governments have been allocating and selling village land without informing them. One of the male household respondents had the view that:

Our village government has been allocating and selling the reserved village land without notifying us. They have sold the area around the village government offices and therefore we do not have more area to expand the village government office. They have also sold the whole land we used to graze our cattle and therefore we do not have the place to graze our cattle because the land now is protected by the owners, who have planted trees.³³

Although some respondents indicated that they received information, the data that was gathered from the village government leaders revealed that about 40 percent of the information given to the citizens was about developmental issues, especially on how much citizens have to contribute to school buildings in the ward; 35 percent of information provided was about peace and security in the village; and 15 percent of the information provided was about the revenue and expenditure of the village government. Suffice to mention, therefore, citizens seldom receive vital information, such as planning, budget estimates, taxation, revenue, and applications for land and its allocation. While 75 percent of them said that they do not receive information, only 15 percent of the village government leaders indicated providing information on revenue and expenditure to the citizens. In a situation like this it is practically impossible for uninformed citizens to demand accountability from their leaders due to poor access to important information.

Moreover, citizens do not participate in decision making at the grassroots. In a democratic country citizens are supposed to participate in decision making through various avenues available so as to increase their ability to hold accountable their village government.³⁴ Accordingly, where citizens participate in decision making, they know the decisions and this can make them committed to those decisions and therefore able to demand accountability if the government is acting contrary to the agreed objectives.³⁵ Citizens at the grassroots therefore have to participate in passing different decisions like budget estimates, land allocation, and taxation if they are to demand accountability.

The interview with household respondents revealed that most of the citizens at the grassroots do not participate in decision making. For instance, 70 percent of the respondents said they have never been involved in taking various decisions by the village government while 30 percent said they were involved in decision-making. Of those who said they were not involved in decision making 38.8 percent said they were not informed by the village government about the whole process of decision making, 22.5 percent could not reveal why they were not involved and 8.8 percent said they did not have power to make major decisions. The interview further revealed that citizens were involved at the implementation stage, especially when it came to development projects at the grassroots initiated by the village government. When asked whether there were projects being implemented or already implemented, the household respondents revealed that various projects had been implemented under the auspices of the village government or organized by the village government. They were involved only in implementing decisions but had not been involved in their deliberations, like providing compulsory money and in-kind contributions. This might be the result of the relationship between the village government and central government, where most of the projects imposed at the grassroots come from the central government. For instance, regarding the secondary school building project going on in every ward, 76.3 percent of household respondents who were aware of the projects being implemented or which had been implemented claimed that they were not involved at the initiation stage but rather they were told to contribute money and in kind (services and/or goods) by the village government. In a situation like this, it is not possible for the citizens to hold their leaders accountable because

they did not know exactly what had been agreed at the planning and initiation stages and had not been involved at the evaluation stage of projects already implemented.

Related to the above are inadequate avenues of participation at the grassroots. Despite the fact that the readily available avenue is the village assembly, few citizens attend it. For example, in Izimbya village there was a poor attendance at two consecutive village assemblies. At a meeting on 28 May 2008 only 246 citizens were in attendance out of 5,991 registered adult citizens in the village, and at the meeting held on 19 March 2008 there were only 186 citizens. Moreover, for even those few citizens who do attend the agenda did not provide for citizens to effectively participate in decision-making, as was revealed by the questionnaire and interview data. For example, 91.4 percent of the eighty interviewed citizens said that they had never participated in setting a meeting agenda. The agenda always originated from the village government leaders. Similarly the questionnaires which were administered to the village government leaders revealed the same thing, because all of the leaders that were involved in the study indicated that the village council prepared the agenda for the village assembly meetings, although there was no provision in the local government laws nor in the *Kiongozi cha Utawala Bora Ngazi ya Kijiji (Handbook for Good Governance at the Village Level)* directing that the village council should always be the source of the agenda of the village assembly.³⁶ This is in line with Mukandala who argues that village councils do not hold the meetings regularly, and if they do, the agendas are set administratively.³⁷ These readymade agendas could be one of the reasons why citizens do not attend the village assembly, but they also do not provide room for citizens to discuss issues that directly affect their affairs since village government leaders are likely to bring an agenda that serves their interests rather than an agenda that might challenge their power. For instance, one female household respondent had the following to say with regard to the agenda of the meeting:

If village government leaders know that a certain agenda will be harmful to their power they will not bring it until we claim it through the meetings, and the citizen who seems to demand such an agenda be brought to the meeting is subject to persecution like closing our business or denying us essential services.³⁸

This comment suggests that citizens made at least some attempts to challenge the ready made agenda from the village council although they would be persecuted by their leaders and therefore discouraged from attending village meetings.

Moreover, the village assembly, which for a long time has been considered as an avenue for citizens' participation at the grassroots, is not truly an avenue for participation as the findings revealed. This was observed through the source and type of the agenda discussed in the meeting. From the interviews and questionnaires, it seems that citizens were just told what to do by the village government officer. For instance, more than 40 percent of what was discussed during the meetings was about how much citizens should contribute for school buildings in the ward. In addition, in one of the *kitongoji* meeting, the village chairman had the following to say in the agenda: "Every adult citizen from 18 years and above will have to pay a further 10,000/= by 31st January, of 2009 as a contribution for school building in the ward." Although citizens

complained about the amount, he went on to say: "This is the resolution that has been passed already and anyone who opposes it will be punished by adding a further 5000/=."³⁹ Such complaints indicated that citizens were not happy with already made decisions or agendas; they wanted participation. Thus village government leaders need to set the agenda after consultation with citizens so as to meet the needs and interests of the citizens.

A lack of autonomous lobbying and advocacy associations or civil society organizations at the grassroots has contributed to the poor accountability. The roles of most of the autonomous associations at the grassroots do not aim at helping citizens to demand accountability at the grassroots. The interviewed citizens and the data from the questionnaires that were administered to the leaders of autonomous associations revealed that most of the associations at the grassroots level aimed at helping their members on different social occasions, for example, funerals, and weddings. For instance, 53.8 percent of the eighty household respondents belonged to autonomous associations whose aims were to help members to enhance their economic status and with social issues (funerals and weddings). In addition, of the twenty autonomous associations studied at the grassroots, 95 percent of them indicated that their main objective was to help each other and enhance their members' development. This suggests that people joined these associations in order to help each other, and not to get civic education that could help them hold their village government accountable. This in totality suggests that it will take some time before the objective of civic activities takes over as the motivating force of autonomous associations at the grassroots

What is interesting is that most of the citizens were members of autonomous associations; 53.8 percent of the household respondents were members of autonomous associations. However, the data from the questionnaires that was administered to the leaders of autonomous associations revealed that the village government did not involve autonomous associations at the grassroots during decision-making, although these associations are recognized as key players in governance in local authorities.⁴⁰ Also on the issue of their participation during decision-making by the village government, 50 percent agreed they had. But, when asked how, 30 percent of those who said yes were involved in discussing what had been decided by the village government, for example, convincing members to pay various contributions that had been the village government leaders had already agreed to, 10 percent could not answer on how they participated, and 10 percent said they participated in planning various developmental projects in the village.

Another area that has undercut the ability of citizens to hold their village government accountable is low citizen civic competency. Civic competence refers to the perceptions that individuals have about the amount of influence they can exercise over government decisions.⁴¹ It includes direct attempts to influence the government as well as other influence strategies. One of the indicators of civic competence is citizen awareness of their rights and obligations to make sure that the government is performing well, which is based on the fact that knowledge of such rights and obligations is a minimal condition a person needs to function at least as subject citizen.⁴² A person without such awareness is inherently barred from the realms of subject and citizen competence, and therefore the ability to demand accountability is expected to be low.⁴³

The eighty interviewed citizens revealed low civic competence, as 71.3 percent claimed that they did not know their rights vis-à-vis their village government. This was supported by 33 percent who also failed to answer the question that aimed at knowing if citizens perceive themselves as having any obligations in the day-to-day functioning of the village government; 13.8 percent said they did not have any obligations, while 28.8 percent said that they were responsible for paying all the contributions that village government leaders passed. Moreover, when asked about what they could do if the village government was not performing to their expectation, 51.3 percent said they could do something like going against the decisions in the meetings, reporting it to the District Commissioner and to the ward councilor. But 48.7 percent said they could not do anything since the village government was more powerful than the citizens, and so they have no rights and avenues whereby they could air their concerns. This is in line with what Jingu found in a study that revealed a lack of political competence among citizens.⁴⁴ His study indicated that citizens felt completely powerless and submissive before the government. He was trying to elicit their feelings about what they could do if the government officials made decisions that violated their basic constitutional rights.

Two observations can be made from the discussion above. First, most citizens at the grassroots have a subject culture. A citizen who is not aware of his/her rights and obligations can hardly try to use any means available to influence the village government decisions. Although 51.3 percent of eighty interviewees said they could do something in the case of poor performance of the village government, it does not necessarily mean that citizens did something because most of them were not aware of their rights and obligations. Secondly, it seems that the village government is regarded as the principal instead of being the agent; this is due to the relationship between the village government and the citizens in the day-to-day functioning of its activities. For instance, 48.7 percent who said they could not do anything in the case of poor performance by the village government claimed to be powerless and unable to go against the decisions passed by leaders who were more powerful.

Conclusion

From the above analyses it is clear that the democratization processes that started in 1992 with the aim of improving governance in the country have not helped citizens at the grassroots to hold their village government leaders accountable. Citizens are still structurally and politically disempowered due to legal provisions and regulations guiding the daily functioning of the village government, a poor flow of information between the village government and the citizens, a low level of civic competence, and the generally poor participation of citizens in the decision-making process. If the above situations are not addressed there is the danger of ending up having despotic village government leaders in Tanzania

Therefore, there is a need to improve some sections in the existing laws and regulations governing the functioning of the village government so as to increase its autonomy and power. In this regard the ongoing constitution review process that started in 2012 but has seen delays should take into account the relative autonomy of village government.⁴⁵ This should go hand in hand with a review of some of the sections in the Government Laws Principal Registration.

Thus Act No 14 of 1999 section 171(1) of the Local Government Laws Principal Registration as revised in 2000 and which confers power on the Minister of Local Government to dissolve LGAs in case of default, should be amended to include a section that state that the minister shall dissolve village government in consultation with the district council and village assembly, which are highest organs of governance whose members are representatives of citizens. Related to the above Act No 6 of 1999 section 174 (d), which provides the central government power to develop policies and regulatory frameworks that village governments have implement. The amendment needs to include a section that allows village councils to discuss and adapt policies in consultation with village assemblies in order to increase citizen ownership and ability to demand accountability in case of poor implementations by leaders. This will increase citizen participation in policy-making, which will position them well to demand accountability in case such policies and programs are ill implemented. Related to this, village executive officers (VEOs) should be employed by the district council due to their financial capacity, but the law should allow village councils to check and hold accountable VEOs in case of poor performance. Lastly, there is a need to intensify the provision of civic education to citizens and village government leaders by both state and non-state actors, especially to use the ready available autonomous associations at the grassroots level to help citizens become accountability seekers but also to make village government leaders feel obliged to provide important information in the fear of being punished by civically enlightened citizens.

Notes

- 1 Boven 2005.
- 2 Lindberg 2009.
- 3 Adeyemi et al. 2012.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Schedler 1999, p. 26.
- 6 Chaliga 2002.
- 7 Makulilo 2007.
- 8 Chaligha 2008, p. 66.
- 9 O'Donnell 1998.
- 10 Killian 2008.
- 11 Max 1991, p. 113.
- 12 Mwaikusa 1985; Ngware and Haule 1993.
- 13 Ngware and Haule (1993) conducted a study focusing on village government.
- 14 Mwaikusa 1985.
- 15 Kawemama 1999.
- 16 Shivji and Peter 2003.
- 17 Killian and Mukandala 2000.
- 18 Baregu 2001.
- 19 Killian and Mukandala conducted a study in REDET pilot districts in 2010.

20 Ndumbaro and Kiondo 2007.

21 Kilian 2008.

22 Mhina 2008.

23 URT 2000.

24 Max 1991.

25 URT 2002.

26 Nchimbi 1994.

27 URT 2000.

28 The power to remove local government leaders who are not performing well was indicated in the *Kiongozi cha Utawala Bora Ngazi ya Kijiji (Handbook for Good Governance at the Village Level)*. URT n.d.

29 Ibid.

30 The interview was conducted in November 2008 in Bukoba district.

31 URT 2000.

32 Killian 2008.

33 This was one of the respondent of Bulambizi hamlet who was responding to the question of whether they receive important information.

34 Killian 2008.

35 Ibid.

36 URT n.d.

37 Mukandala 2002.

38 Such statements featured much during the interview with household respondents.

39 This meeting was attended by the researcher; apart from having poor attendance the village chairperson also used intimidating language.

40 URT n.d.

41 Baregu 2001.

42 Gasarasi 2001.

43 Ibid.

44 Jingu 2007.

45 The government was in the process of a constitutional review, which did not proceed due to the 2015 general elections but rather ended at the stage of the Constituency Assembly. With the post-election leadership change the review process remains on the table waiting to be put to a vote by the citizenry.

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