

Evaluating and Shaping Engagement on OGP

A Case Story from Tanzania



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FOR DEVELOPMENT

About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. It focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

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Web: www.makingallvoicescount.org | **Email:** info@makingallvoicescount.org | **Twitter:** [@allvoicescount](https://twitter.com/allvoicescount)





TAMASHA and Oxfam

Richard Mabala and Kefar Mbogela

Setting the scene

Tanzania joined OGP in 2011 and produced its first National Action Plan (NAP) in 2012. In the first (2012–2013) and second (2014–2016) NAPs, the government committed itself to promoting increased access to information about government operations and publish data on the prioritized sectors of health, education and water. However, among the 25 commitments of the first plan, only two have been met in full. Of these two, the commitment to publish a citizens' budget focuses only on the national budget, meaning that local budgets—where much spending occurs—remain opaque.

The second NAP (2014–2016) had five commitments: The Access to Information act, open budgets, open data, land transparency and extractive industry. Despite the evaluation of the first OGP plan, which recommended a more participatory process, the government did not prioritize citizen engagement in the second National Action Plan. CSO participation also remained limited, and the second NAP concentrated on the national level.

Thus, open government processes in Tanzania to date have been long on promises and short on implementation. Furthermore, except for a few high-profile NGOs, such as Twaweza, civil society actors have been largely apathetic or skeptical of OGP, leading to minimal involvement in the process. The president's decision to leave the OGP seems to verified these views.

Problem statement

The lack of emphasis on citizen engagement on open governance—or even on ensuring that citizens have the information and support they need to hold government officials accountable—is clear in Tanzania, where officials can often act with impunity, and disrupt or even outlaw active citizen participation.

Given this situation, our project aimed to address the lack of knowledge and understanding about OGP and open government in general, which prevents people from mobilizing around transparency and accountability at community and district level. Women and youth are less likely to be involved in government processes, especially in planning and decision-making around issues that affect them in local communities. This problem is of vital importance because Tanzanian citizens are denied information, which limits their ability to take action; therefore, they are exposed to corruption,



mismanagement of resources and exploitation. These factors in turn not only hinder development but can also cause internal conflict and unrest at the community level, as many young people are angry and bitter about their marginalization.

Our project built the existing Active Citizens model employed by Oxfam¹ and TAMASHA² in the Chukua Hatua project, in which “animators” were trained to support local engagement across the Lake Zone in Tanzania. Mbogwe District was chosen for the Making All Voices Count (MAVC) project because it has an active and recognized network of active animators promoting open government and citizen participation—that is, the Mbogwe District Animators’ Network (MBODANET)—though without any exiting links to the OGP. In contrast, the project chose Kigoma/Ujiji District, as the municipal council was already implementing an OGP sub-national pilot project that aimed to strengthen open government at local levels but without any community animators or engagement.

Our theory of change

The original theory of change was premised on the idea that the primary obstacle to change was lack of awareness about OGP and open government principles on the part of marginalized community members. Therefore, awareness-raising activities were required to enable informed participation and action, as shown below.



However, our participatory action research (PAR) showed that, even if people in the community did not know about OGP as a specific program, they knew the meaning of open governance and were aware of the need for open government in their communities and districts. Lack of open government meant village budgets and contracts were rarely shared with the people and the village assembly, which was supposed to be the

¹ www.oxfam.org.uk/tanzania

² www.tamasha.or.tz



expression of the people's will. Based on our PAR findings, we revised our basic theory of change.



Further, at least at the outset, leaders accepted in principle the need for increased accountability and transparency, which enabled us to implement a largely consensus model of increased accountability and participation leading to change.

So, after using adaptive learning to revise our approach, we aimed to address the power imbalances that exist between the political elected leaders, traditional leaders, central government authorities and ordinary citizens in relation to decision-making, and how those imbalances affect the participation of local communities, and in particular marginalized groups, such as women and youth. This was to be achieved through the actions of the follow-up committees organized following the PAR, which included women and youth.

Practicing adaption in context

Inflection points

During the project implementation, the political context in which we were working changed radically in part because of the overwhelming response to PAR by the communities with whom we worked in the Mbogwe District. PAR revealed a whole series of issues relating to national OGP priorities that were affecting these communities, and helped to bring to the surface the differences between the priorities of young and old, and women and men. Our initial plan was that the members of the groups participating in the PAR would constitute most of the participants in community feedback sessions, and that they would select a few representatives to take action on the discussed issues.

In retrospect, such a committee would have had little political legitimacy or clout, as it would have been entirely ad hoc. However, as a result of the community's enthusiasm at the opportunity to talk about governance and development in their communities, two things occurred, neither of which we initially expected: first, far more people attended the group work than anticipated, and, second, large numbers of the community attended—and



participated enthusiastically in—the feedback meeting³. In some cases, participants refused to allow leaders to leave the meeting and insisted on choosing the follow-up committees themselves, albeit in line with the original ideas of the project that the committee would include women and youth⁴.

This may seem insignificant, but it actually transformed the status of the committees and gave them “political” power and autonomy of action since they were chosen and given an action plan by a village assembly, to whom they were answerable to, rather than TAMASHA/Oxfam or the local leadership. As a result, they have been able to act more effectively on the issues outlined in the workplans.

Although the TAMASHA facilitator on the ground had informed Oxfam and TAMASHA of the changes, initially we did not fully realize the implications of the change. The project facilitator had just said that, if they wanted to choose their own committee, it was their right. However, when the TAMASHA’s executive director went on a study tour of Mbogwe for two days, the implications became clear.

Recognition of the committees

In at least two wards, the village chairs said publicly that they were grateful to the committees, which came as a surprise given that the committees had revealed the flaws in their leadership duties⁵. They welcomed such accountability to the people, which required them to be rigorous in their work. Second, although the people chose the original chairs, it was more of a political-party choice than a people’s choice, and they were aware of the gap between them and their constituents; thus, the committees helped to bridge the gap.

In another ward, the relatively new ward executive officer was surprised by the committee’s commitment and knowledge as well as their consensual way of working. He admitted to having negative views about the project, but now realized that he was wrong and promised to work with the committee to take action on the specific issue of school latrines⁶.

In addition, although the PAR was only carried out in one village in each of the 10 wards, several other villages have been inspired by the work of the People’s Committees to set up their own committees⁷.

³ Facilitator’s report on Mbogwe PAR.

⁴ PAR report.

⁵ Executive director’s follow-up report.

⁶ Executive director’s follow-up report.

⁷ Report on second district feedback workshop, Mbogwe.



Removal of obstacles

Because of the committees' work, many long-standing issues have begun to be addressed, including the lack of financial accountability. For example, in every ward, citizens complained about financial contributions—often without receipts—for development projects, such as building school latrines in Iponya Ward⁸. Through careful follow-up, the committees showed how money has been embezzled/disappeared, which led to action being taken to address this concern⁹.

Dissemination of lessons learned

Based on the learning that arose out of the People's Committees' work, TAMASHA, with Oxfam's input, have produced a comic booklet, *Majibu ya Wajibu* (see attachment one), that shows, via an illustrated story, how the committees work together and overcome obstacles from corrupt leaders. It is hoped that this booklet will be widely disseminated and act as a catalyst for other communities and districts to follow a similar process.

Reflective learning moments

Leveraging People's Committees to revive village assemblies

The village assemblies are supposed to be the final decision-makers on issues affecting their villages, but their power and importance has declined in recent years. For example, one of the members of the People's Committee in Iponya stated that leaders can manipulate the assemblies by avoiding calling them according to statutory requirements, and when they do call them, presenting agenda items as “directives from above” (i.e., higher authorities, which therefore preempted all discussion) and arranging beforehand who would ask questions and what they would ask¹⁰. As a result, many people, particularly youth, lost interest in the assemblies. due to our work, the village assemblies have regained some power, as evidenced by the high turnout at PAR feedback meetings and meetings to conclude the project¹¹.

However, it would be unwise to exaggerate the committees' effect, as they are still in the honeymoon stage, whereby they have managed to work with community leaders to address issues of concern, largely through consensus. A time will come when people whose interests are threatened will push back. This was seen in Nanda ward, where people who bought village land illegally—and which had been returned to the village subsequently—are questioning what will happen to the money they paid¹².

⁸ PAR report.

⁹ Report of final village meeting, Iponya and second District Feedback Workshop, Mbogwe.

¹⁰ Executive director's follow-up report.

¹¹ PAR report and reports of final village meetings.

¹² Feedback from the Nanda People's Committee in the executive director's follow-up report.



This is why the committees themselves were fearful of what will happen to them in future unless they are officially recognized and institutionalized. The district director has given them public support and directed that the issues raised by the committees be dealt with by local leaders, but the only real power they have comes from the village assembly, which has become more active. The primary question is whether such committees can be institutionalized as regular committees of the village assembly.

Conversely, the committees could become victims of false expectations. In Buzebizeba ward, the councilor and executive officer were both convinced that—as a result of the work of the committees with support from TAMASHA and Oxfam—they were going to get a brand-new water project (a rumor that, according to the committee members, seems to have been spread by the former executive officer)¹³.

Gender and generation

On gender and generation, all committees included women and youth, and, in at least one case, the secretary to the committee is an extremely active and articulate young man who had no official position prior to the project. The most moving moment was when a young man in the committee struggled to speak when asked about whether the committee had given greater space to youth before bursting out that in the past young people had been completely marginalized. In the ensuing debate with an old man on the committee, a former local militia leader, it became clear that the political space for young people exists in principle but is constrained by the cultural space. Thus, while some progress had been made, particularly for young men, the space for young women remains problematic¹⁴.

Following a two-day field visit to Mbogwe, which included a discussion with the animators where they coined the term “People’s Committees” rather than follow-up committees, TAMASHA and Oxfam recognized the committees’ key role in initiating changes in their communities. We are considering how they can become sustainable after the end of the project. Animators from Kigoma, together with one executive and two committee members took part in a study tour to Mbogwe to see how the committees worked, and the district authorities have been encouraged to recognize and support them¹⁵. The crucial moment will be when the committees provide feedback to their communities at the end of the project and propose follow-up actions after the project has come to an end.

¹³ Executive director’s follow-up report.

¹⁴ Executive director’s follow-up report.

¹⁵ The main aim of this exchange visit was for animators working in Kigoma (who are not as experienced as the animators in Mbogwe) to learn from their counterparts, and to help them apply those lessons to their work in Kigoma, including work that overlaps with the OGP subnational pilot in Kigoma.



Our thoughts on the adaptive learning approach

TAMASHA has a policy of continuous internal reflection and flexibility to adapt according to changed circumstances or new insights. It has, therefore, always used an adaptive learning approach and has been willing to argue for changes based on experiences in nearly all of its work. Whenever possible, every new project must start with participatory research which then informs the next steps to be taken.

However, the adaptive learning approach taken in this project has made a serious difference through the systematization of periodic reflections, particularly through the sharing of learning and experience both within and between the two partners, Oxfam and TAMASHA, and with other projects in the MAVC program. For example, the shared experiences of the Philippines programs helped us to see the importance of involving local organized civil society rather than setting up parallel ad hoc committees. We applied this insight to our own work, partially through the formation of the People's Committees (as communities also realized the importance of organized action), but also through trying more systematically to ensure women and particularly youth have organized themselves more effectively. The peer learning community's critique of our theory of change has also enabled the project to move from an "awareness raising approach" to a more political approach, which recognizes that the issue is not just awareness but the interplay between different interests and actors.

The future

The feedback sessions in Kigoma and Mbogwe showed that there is plenty of enthusiasm for continuing the project, even without further support¹⁶. Committees were asked to continue with their work by the village assemblies and agreed to do so. Other villages have followed the example of the research villages and set up their own committees¹⁷.

At the same time, some uncertainty remains. Both Kigoma and Mbogwe Councils were supportive of the People's Committees' work and agreed that they were key to the project's successes. However, in the long run, unless they become a recognized part of the structures, there is a risk that their impact will be eroded over time, and members will be exposed to potential backlash.

¹⁶ Second feedback workshops to District Councils in Mbogwe and Kigoma

¹⁷ Second feedback workshop to Mbogwe District Council



TAMASHA has always advocated for and utilized an adaptive learning approach, even if by another name. However, TAMASHA will adopt the systematic methodology used in this project by building in reflection points at key moments in the life of any project. This had mainly been at the level of the communities/groups with whom TAMASHA has been working, but in future this will be built into TAMASHA's own reflections.

The success of the People's Committees, together with advice from and the example of the Philippines project working with local CSOs has shown TAMASHA the need to institutionalize structures to ensure impact and sustainability. Ad hoc committees or the actions of individual citizens, such as peer educators or animators, are insufficient.

Oxfam in Tanzania is currently running a project in Mbogwe, Kibondo, Ngorongoro and Mtwara districts, which aims at "Enabling Improved Governance and Accountability in Tanzania through Digital Technology." The project builds on lessons learned from supporting active citizens (Chukua Hatua) and the MAVC project whereby we are enabling local community animators to engage with digital technology platforms to enhance governance accountability in their communities. The mobile technology applied in Mbogwe has been scaled out to other districts with the aim of mobilizing responsible citizens through digital tools to increase their voice, participate in dialogue with government, and strengthen their ability to hold duty bearers to account for governance and human rights issues.

Remaining questions

- How we could have involved the actors on the ground more in the process of adaptive learning? It is as if they act and we reflect, but the reflection sessions should have been built into our work with the community.
- How can we involve multiple stakeholders in the adaptive learning journey? Even between our two organizations, it was difficult to find time and space when both were available to carry out adaptive learning.
- How much extra time is needed to effectively use adaptive learning throughout implementation? Adaptive learning would have been more effective if there had been more time for implementation. As it is, from the start of the PAR to the end of the project was just five months.
- Is there a time when donors, governments and even implementing organizations will take seriously the need to have an adaptive learning process? In fact, most organizations do have an informal adaptive



learning process but it is always constrained by the need to produce visible results and show fidelity to the log frames produced at the beginning of a program. Is it possible to link the adaptive learning process to the log frames?

- Most projects generate enthusiasm and change at the outset, such as changes related to specific events. To what extent can projects address the underlying and basic factors and therefore become sustainable because of a paradigm shift in culture and behavior?