

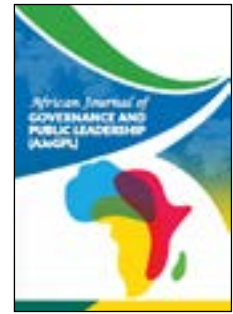
Potential challenges and solutions of improved opportunities and obstacles to development Tool in Tanzania local government authorities

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Abstract

The improved Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (O & OD) Tool in Tanzania aimed to empower citizens in the local government authorities to develop and implement their plans without interference from the central government. The improved O & OD was designed to replace the former O & OD developed in 2001. This study aimed to examine the potential challenges of the improved O & OD tool and propose mitigation options to ensure the approach will lead to the predefined goals. The study relied on secondary sources of data where relevant sources such as O & OD manuals, the guidelines, reports and publications were reviewed to generate study findings. The study found that the potential challenges of the improved O & OD tool include insufficient information sharing, central domination of local revenues, the influence of central government priorities, the unproductive relationship between bureaucrats and the communities and the limited capacity of facilitators. The proposed solutions are timely and sufficient information sharing, close supervision for revenue sources, considerations of local priorities, passive and active participation in formal meetings, the need for consensus on setting priorities in the Community and the need to capacitate more people for facilitation. The study concludes that the participation of citizens in the planning and implementation of their priorities is low despite the opportunity provided by the government through the improved O & OD tool. The study recommended improving capacity building and dissemination of information to ensure the citizens have the right information regarding the community initiatives opportunity and its benefits to the community as a whole. In addition, the community should be encouraged to initiate their priorities and be guided by the experts to implement them.

Key words: Opportunities, Obstacles, Local government authorities, Community Initiatives, Empowerment, Planning and Implementation

Introduction

Participation is a fundamental right that citizens have, as emphasized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the United Nations in 1995. In sustainable development, the fundamental principle of “leave no one behind” as the agenda of 2030 emphasizes promoting community empowerment to participate in various matters that have an impact on their lives and in their area of jurisdiction (United Nations Associations of Tanzania, 2020). Governments are obliged to respect this principle by ensuring vulnerable groups in society, like people with disabilities, youth, women and elders, are actively encouraged in various development activities.

The government of Tanzania in 2010 introduced the Improved “Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (Improved O & OD)” to promote community empowerment and ensure citizens participate in community initiatives. The Improved O&OD has been designed to replace the former O & OD tool developed in 2001 that was constrained by several shortfalls (URT, 2019). Conventional O & OD was developed in line with the Tanzania Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP) as clarified in the Decentralization by Devolution (D by D) Agenda of 1996 and subsequent Local Government Policy Paper of 1998. The decentralisation by devolution focused on encouraging a bottom-up approach to allow the participation of citizens at lower level and subnational levels (Chaligha, 2014; Chongela, et al., (2021). The community members are allowed to participate in decision-making making, which affects their welfare (Mulikuza, 2019) as guided by the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania 1977 under Articles 145 and 146 that stress transferring authority to people in the grassroots to participate in planning and implementation of development programmes.

O and OD tool has been implemented in different countries where notable achievements have been recorded. In Tanzania, the former Opportunities and Obstacles to Development tool was adopted in 2001 to ensure that citizens at the grassroots level are involved in the planning and implementation of their plans . The failure of the former O & OD tool has led to the adoption of the Improved Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (improved O & OD) in October 2019 to accelerate the implementation of D-by-D policy and strengthening the collaboration between the government and people. The trend of the past experience on citizen participation is not promising and has influenced the underperformance of local government. This was the motive for the study to examine the potential challenges of the improved O & OD tool, given that the shortfalls of the former O & OD tool were not fully addressed. The study also provides alternative mitigations to the challenges to ensure the community is empowered to initiate and implement their development plans. The rest of the paper highlights the theoretical and empirical literature review of the O & OD tool, the methods of data collection and analysis, the potential challenges and solutions of the O & OD tool as well as the conclusion and recommendations.

Literature Review

This part is organized into two parts namely; the theoretical literature review which entails the theory underpinning the study. The second part is the empirical literature review which presents studies in the same or related field to establish what has been covered by other scholars and what has not yet been captured to refine a gap which was addressed by the study.

Theoretical Review

O and OD tool has been implemented in different countries where notable achievements have been recorded to include community contribution to the local budgets, community empowerment, assets ownership and sustainable development (REPOA, 2021). For instance, Uganda adopted the same tool in the 1980s which led to great success in information sharing between the government and subordinate parts and their people who were highly involved in initiating their plan and implementation of the same (UNDP, 2005). Thus, the tool allows the bureaucrats to serve people’s interests and support the community by giving them technical advice (Kitula and David, 2016).

In Tanzania, the former Opportunities and Obstacles to Development tool was adopted in 2001 whereby the first council to implement this tool was Iringa District Council, followed by Bagamoyo District Council, Ilala Municipal Council and Moshi District Council. The tool was geared to ensure that citizens at the grassroots level are involved in the planning and implementation of their plans in their local areas (Malipula, 2022). The O & OD tool promotes participation as a process where people are involved in various matters which affect them, like planning, decision making, mobilization of resources and implementation of various programmes and projects which contribute to their welfare (Swai, 2016). The former O & OD tool requires the government to support the development programmes at the grassroots level (Wegrich, 2019). However, the tool proved a failure due to several reasons, including the overdependence on the central government, participation fatigue, lack of ownership and low commitment to use local resources and community efforts to development issues (Wegrich, 2019; Rugeiyawu, 2021; Malipula, 2022).

The failure of the former O & OD tool has led to the adoption of the Improved Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (improved O & OD) in October 2019 where the Local Government Training Institute (Hombolo) was mandated to provide training to all local government authorities in Tanzania and other stakeholders (Rugeiyawu, 2021). Improved O & OD is the most effective and efficient methodology for all Local Government Authorities (LGAs) to accelerate the implementation of D-by-D policy aimed at providing better service to people (URT, 2019). Improved O & OD is the methodology to strengthen LGAs' capacity to grasp the reality in villages/Mitaa and design community development projects based on reflection of the reality of people in each LGA and initiate the alternative sources of funds to implement their plans. People are the main actors in development, and the government is a supporter of their development (URT, 2019).

Decentralisation theory guided the study. Wallace Oates in 1972 developed the "Decentralisation Theorem" which states that, "for a public good- the consumption of which is defined over geographical subsets of the total population. This involves the transfer of powers and resources, including the transfer of fiscal, human and physical, and responsibilities from central government to local government authorities. The decentralisation policy paper of 1998 in Tanzania strengthened community participation in development projects where the community is empowered to participate in all stages of decision making including the construction of classrooms, health centres and roads. The decentralisation theory is relevant in this work under the improved O & OD that the community is required to be the main initiator of the project and participate fully in the decision-making of the project. However, the abuse of power among local government officials and low citizen participation have been among the critiques. Decentralisation by devolution is beyond the transfer of powers to initiate and implement, but also the transfer of decision-making autonomy (Yoon & Swai, 2024). Under the decentralisation by devolution community is empowered to make their decision-making about their areas of jurisdiction. This is in line with the spirit of Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, who emphasized that people cannot be developed, but they can develop by themselves" (Nyerere, 1967; Häussler, 2017). This has emphasized strengthening the collaboration between the government and people to empower citizens at the grassroots to make more self-help efforts to overcome their challenges. The trend of the past experience on citizen participation is not promising, as found by Mnarana, (2010); Kitula and David, (2016); Swai, (2016); Mbezi and Magali, (2019); URT, (2019); Wegrich, (2019); Rugeiyawu, (2021); Chongela, (2021), and Malipula, (2022) who investigated on the participation of the people in various development activities.

Empirical Review

The study by REPOA (2010) indicates that the implementation of O and OD tool in the selected councils has a different experience with shared common features. One of the striking experiences is that the local plans were not effectively rationalised by the community; instead, they focused on central government priorities, and the turnout of the citizens to participate in development activities was very low. In addition, various weaknesses of the former O & OD, as identified in URT (2010), include low participation of people at the grassroots level and lack of fiscal autonomy among local government authorities to finance various socio-economic activities taking place in their areas of jurisdiction. These weaknesses are likely to persist during the implementation of the improved O & OD if strong measures are not taken. This was a case in Uganda where decentralisation has achieved a limited success in service delivery in education and health sectors where citizen participation contributed to such success (Muriisa, (2008). Decentralisation by devolution which is in this operationalized through the O & OD tool has more potential of improving service delivery if the challenges related to human and financial resources are addressed. Delli and Wutich (2017) found that community participation is a major factor in the successful implementation of water projects. If the community participates in initiating the project, it provides community-wide effort to own and sustained the project.

Some scholars, such as Swai, (2016); REPOA (2021) and Mwakasangula (2023) found that community power and influence are key elements embedded in the governance circle. The results indicated that the success of the development projects in local government authorities was attributed to the fact that the citizens were involved from the initial stage of decision-making to the implementation stage. Other studies, such as Malipula (2022), Chongela (2021) and Rugeiyawu (2021) found the factors that have hindered community engagement including a lack of awareness among members of the community, poor means of communication and information sharing, little knowledge of their roles and responsibilities, limited capacity among health facility governing committees and insufficient funds to support various development activities. The effective implementation of an improved O & OD tool needs the active participation of the people from the planning stage to the implementation and evaluation stages.

Methodology of the study

The study used secondary sources of data where relevant documents were acquired and systematically reviewed to gather information on Opportunities and Obstacles to Development. The inclusion criteria of the study considered the documents relating to the former O and OD tool and also the improved O and OD tool based on their contents. Documents reviewed include the O & OD manuals, the guidelines, reports and publications related to O & OD and decentralization by devolution. Reports on the Study on the O & OD Planning Process” conducted in 2008 and the report on “Planning in Local Government Authorities in Tanzania: Bottom-up Meets Top-down” by REPOA in 2010 were also reviewed. The documents were retrieved through the Google search engines using keywords including opportunities and obstacles in development, decentralisation and devolution, citizen participation and citizen priorities.

Data Analysis

The documents were reviewed based on their content. The themes emerging from all documents were combined based on the requirement of this study and the analysis involved three steps. The first step was to review the whole text to understand the content, and the impression gained from the text was noted down to support interpretation. The second step was to organize and group the data according to codes, and the third step was to interpret identified themes by attaching meaning and significance. All similar themes were merged, and the conclusion was drawn from the analysis. To ensure the study adhered to professional codes of conduct, all documents reviewed in this study were acknowledged and cited.

The Results and Discussion of Findings

This section seeks to answer the question 'What are the potential challenges of the improved O & OD approach? and what are the mitigation options available to ensure the improved O & OD leads to the empowerment of the community to identify their priorities, plan and implement the same using the local resources? The study was informed by various reports, policies and guidelines on the O & OD tool. Content analysis of the documents was performed to understand the potential challenges and the mitigation strategies. Apart from the challenges, the review has found potential achievements of O and OD including the aspect of proximity as clarified in the next sections of this paper.

Insufficient Information Sharing

Information sharing is very important for the development of any organization. Through information people become aware of what is going on. The improved O & OD tool is likely to become weak because the data revealed that, there is insufficient information sharing between local officials and community members where horizontal and vertical information sharing is important to have a common understanding. It is not clear to the community what resources they have and what their capabilities are to bring development in their areas of jurisdiction. This findings conquer with the findings from Mnarana (2010); Mulikuza *et al.*, (2019) who found that, community members and other stakeholders were not aware of what is going on in the society without this, stakeholders are not able to reach common goals. In the current situation, horizontal information sharing at the community level appears to be insufficient, particularly between community leaders and community members. Vertical information sharing between LGAs and communities is also weak limiting the smooth implementation of the approach.

Transferred of Revenue Sources to Central Government

The improved O&OD tool to function as planned requires resources, and the revenue collection was supposed to be done by the local government authorities themselves. The fiscal muscles help local government authorities to initiate different plans due to the amount of revenue collected. Unfortunately, the data found that, there is low revenue collection among local government, where the situation of the revenue collection in local government is not as expected. While the local government is required through the improved O & OD tool to initiate their plans and implement the same, potential sources of the revenue are transferred to the central government where previously, local government authorities were able to collect property tax themselves. The current experience shows that the central agency intervened where they collect tax through the Tanzania Revenue Agency (TRA). The findings conquer with the data from URT (2019); Malangalila (2019) where centralization of the major sources of the revenue led to under collection of revenues in local government authorities which is linked to underdevelopment in

most of the local government. If the tax is collected by the central government, then how can the local government work with the community to implement their plans? This is one of the potential challenges that should be addressed to allow smooth implementation of the improved O & OD in Tanzania.

The Influence of Central Government Priorities

The data indicate that the central priorities guide what to be done in local government authorities and this infringe the freedom of the local authorities to exercise their power in their areas of jurisdictions. Sometimes, the national priority not fit in each of the authorities for instance, in 2021 the national priority was to focus on classroom construction and fee-free education, which in some areas led to duplication of efforts and the introduction of double sessions in some schools to accommodate the increased enrollment as copying strategies to ensure implementation of the policy. This happened because the local government were required to abide with the central priorities and not otherwise, the fund which was directed had terms and conditions on how to use too, this portrays that the local government authorities have limited authority to plan according to their priorities and implement their plans. The practices show that the central government guides what is to be done in local government. The study from Rugeiyawu (2021); Mbezi and Magali (2019) recommended that, the local governments should take into account the national priorities, and their decisions should be in line with the central plans; if the local government does not comply with the national priority, their plans may not be supported as expected. Therefore, this reveal that, the implementation of improved O & OD tool may be too theoretical and that may not bring local empowerment in the Tanzania context as expected.

Unproductive Relationship between Bureaucrats and the Communities

The findings revealed that, the relationship between bureaucrats and community members in local government authorities is weak. Cooperation between the bureaucrats and the community is highly needed to guide the community in identifying the exact opportunity and the analysis of the constraints to development. The improved O & OD tool expect experts like teachers, livestock-keeping officers, nurses, and doctors in their areas, identifying the opportunities and obstacles available in the certain locality, unfortunately, the data revealed that, no productive relationship among those experts and community members. The engagement of special groups such as people with disabilities, elders, youth and women is highly emphasized to promote a sense of ownership and the fundamental principle of leaving no one behind. Furthermore, the study of Chongela (2021); Kamugisha (2023); Swai, *et al.*, (2023) found a discrepancy between community members and bureaucrats who are technical experts in local areas. The participation of these experts in the identification of priorities, resources and obstacles was found to be limited and led to the underdevelopment of the local government authorities.

Low Attendance to Formal Meeting

Participation of people in statutory meetings is important for discussing different matters related to their community, including priorities among the many choices. The community members ought to attend formal meetings so as to provide their views, ideas and suggestions on what they wish should be included in their plans. The findings showed low participation of the community members in formal meetings of the local government authorities. It is through meeting where the citizens discuss their welfare and participate in the decision making which further increase the possibility of successful implementation of the priorities. Youth and experts are potential community groups to bring about development through participation in meetings, but they reluctant to attend the statutory meeting, most of them claiming to be occupied by other issues.

A unique case was found in Bigwa and Lukuyu wards in Morogoro region where the community members participated effectively in meetings regarding the water project in their wards (Swai, 2016). The study further indicate that water project was successful given the support (manpower and financial) received from the citizens. The studies by Wegrich (2019); Mbezi and Magali (2019) and Uruno (2023) indicated scenarios where the citizens are not aware of the projects that are implemented in their community the reasons being they were not part of the meeting that initiated, discussed and approved the projects. For ownership of projects in the local area and sustainability citizen attendance in formal meetings is of a must for the effective implementation of the improved O & OD tool.

Mismatch of Priorities in the Community

The community is formed by different groups, such as youth and old people, men and women, people with disabilities and these groups may have different priorities. The findings showed a mismatch of priorities from these groups and thus requires a discussion to reach a common understanding to ensure the priorities are supported by all groups in the community. For example, depending on the circumstances, youth priorities are quite different from the priority of old group in the community likewise the women priorities seem to be different from that of men and therefore complicate the decision making. Having many priorities in the community is good, but may results into the delay in making decision and conflicts between the community members if not guided properly. A study by Swai *et al* (2023) presented a scenario where variation in priorities between the councillors on where to construct the council headquarter building at Msalala District Council have not only delayed the decision making but also affected the implementation of the project and misuse of public resources. The differences in interest were also found by Ako (2017); Rugeiyawu (2021) that while women were interested in the acquisition of loans to increase their capital in business activities, youth were interested in roads and people with disabilities were interested in dispensary. In addition, the mismatch of priorities between leaders and the community members were found by Wegrich (2019) where the leaders have their priorities based on the election manifesto while the citizens have other priorities. These scenarios and experiences are the potential challenges and likely to affect the implementation of the improved O & OD in development.

Personal Ambition of the Leaders

The findings revealed that, there is high personal ambition of local leaders especially the councilors and village or Mtaa chairpersons in their local areas. The leaders take on board their personal interest than the issues brought by the citizen who they are supposed to represent. The development of the local government authorities depends on the creativity and commitment of the leaders towards community development. A leader is expected to lead the initiation of priorities at the community level and ensure the priority of the community is supported, included in the plan and implemented. If the leaders have different priorities then the likelihood of these leaders to supporting the citizen priorities to reach community ambition is low. The study by Swai *et al*. (2023) present the incidences which suggest the leaders were pushed by their personal ambition which later results into conflicts between themselves and affected the decision making. The study by Mseti and Mwakasangula (2018) recommended commitment among local leaders to ensuring the implementation of projects initiated by the citizens in their areas is done and further contributes to successful implementation of the Improved O & OD in development.

Insufficient Capacity of Facilitators

Implementing the improved O & OD in the country requires a huge and competent facilitation team to support and monitor the initiation of priorities, planning and discussions, and the implementation of the priorities. Since the introduction of the improved O & OD tool only one institution in Tanzania – The Local Government Institute (Hombolo) has been mandated officially to provide capacity building on the improved O & OD tool. The institute is mandated to build capacity for about 186 local government authorities in Tanzania which is nearly to impossible. Apart from the number of facilitators at the Institute, the capacity of the facilitators to support the complete Improved O & OD tool processes is also questionable. This was also highlighted by Kitula and David (2016) who insisted on the creativeness of facilitators to ensure the available resources are utilized to bring development to LGAs and to overcome various obstacles. This was also highlighted by Malipula (2022) who indicated the insufficient capacity of facilitators as one of the weaknesses in improved O & OD development tool. Given the number of the LGA to be supported and the number of facilitators and their capacity it may take more than two years to effectively support the LGA to become independent on implementing the improved O and OD tool for the development among local government authorities.

Lack of Commitment to Support Development Projects

The findings show that few community members are committed to participating in the implementation of the project. It was emphasized that, any community-initiated project should be supported by the community in terms of manpower and funds to ensure it is implemented as planned. The contribution of citizens and their commitment to participate in the project ensured the successful implementation of the project and empower the community. If the community members are well organized and empowered, they are likely to contribute their money and vice versa. There is a need for awareness creation to community members to ensure they understand the reasons for their participation and supporting the implementation of the projects initiated in their locality. The study by Mnaranara (2010) present a different case scenario where the community members agreed to contribute money to support the construction of classrooms and later on some community members refused to fulfil their commitment despite the fact that they participated in the decisions. The improved O & OD tool requires full support from the community and if this is not practical then the possibilities of successful implementation of the tool is low.

The Alternative Strategies for Improving O and OD tool

Although the improved O and OD tool seems to be a myth and not realistic due to various potential challenges, as discussed in the previous section, the tool is still relevant. Various strategies have been proposed to materialize the improved O & OD to development tool, as clarified in this section.

Timely and Sufficient Information Sharing

There is no drought that information is power. For the improved O & OD tool to be realized in local government authorities, information sharing is key. The information should be shared timely with the local officials, local leaders, community members and other stakeholders. If the community is well informed on the issues related to their welfare particularly development issues it increases the ownership and gained support during the implementation of the decisions. The information should be shared horizontally or vertically to ensure each individual in the community is well informed. It is through meeting where the citizens including youth, elders, women and people with disabilities and their leaders discuss various issues and therefore meetings should be among the ways to disseminate information. The study of Mulikuza

et al., (2019) support the awareness creation to community members and other stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of the improved O & OD tool.

Close Supervision for Revenue Sources

The need to supervise the sources of revenue collections in the respective areas is highly recognized and encouraged. The implementation of the improved O & OD tool requires enough resources and this is datamined by the revenue collection in the local government authorities. Revenue collection is a major financing local revenues that play a significant role in supporting local operations and providing social and economic services to the people. Local Government Authorities are responsible for providing services to their people and their success requires resources, in this case financial resource which is the most critical resource. Although some of the sources of revenue such as property tax have been transferred to the central government still the local government authorities can diversify their sources of income to ensure they collect enough revenue to support the implementation of local priorities and plans. The fiscal autonomy increases the confidence of the local government to initiate their plans and implement the same without a fear.

Considerations of Local Priorities

It is true that the national government influences the priorities to be implemented in local government authorities. The findings suggest that, the local governments should take into account their own local priorities. The national priorities may not fit into the priorities of the local authorities. For instance, in 2021 the national priority was on the fee-free education policy, which in some areas led to duplication of efforts and the introduction of double sessions in some schools to accommodate the increased enrollment as a coping strategy. Through the improved O and OD tool, the community members including marginalised groups collaborate in initiating their plans and implementing the same.

Productive Relationship between Bureaucrats and the Communities

The findings emphasize the strong relationship between bureaucrats and community members in local government authorities in development to improve the O and OD and strengthen local government authorities. The relationship between bureaucrats and community members is highly needed to provide technical advice in identifying the opportunity and the analysis of the constraints to development. If there is a discrepancy between community members and bureaucrats who are technical experts, the implementation of the improved O&OD tool may not be completed as expected. The bureaucrats in local government have technical expertise important to support local community members to fully engage in the improved O & OD to bring positive changes in their areas of jurisdiction.

Participation to Formal Meetings

Meeting constitute one of the tools for decision making in local government authorities. The emphasize to ensure citizens participate in various statutory meetings is highly noted. It is through meetings where people's views and concerns are tabled, discussed and decided. It is the requirement of the bylaws that a certain number of people must be reached for the statutory meetings to proceed. It is the role of the local government to ensure all procedures for the meeting are adhered and the citizens are well informed about the meeting. The study of Ndikwiki (2017); Charles, & Adlyne (2019) highlighted the usefulness of community participation in meetings for smooth implementation of development projects.

Setting Priorities in the Community

The community is formed by different groups, such as youth, women, people with disabilities and old people who are likely to have different priorities. To improve the functionality of O and OD tool it is very important to harmonize the priorities. The unsettled disparities of the priorities may result into difficulties when it comes to implementation. A consensus among the groups should be key to ensure the implementation of the decisions made in the community. The differences including the political party ideologies should not be entertained to ensure the decisions on the priorities benefit the entire community.

Capacitate Facilitation Team

The findings showed that the implementation of the improved O & OD tool in the country requires a huge and competent facilitation team to support and monitor the initiation of priorities, preparation of plans, guiding the discussions and implementation of the priorities. There is a need of other training institutions with capacities in the improved O & OD be considered and recognized as a key facilitator. Joining efforts among the training institutions and the government in this case the President Office Regional Administration and Local Government cannot be avoided to ensure all LGA receive the expected support to ensure the improved O & OD tool is implemented as planned and bring the intended results.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Participation of community members in the planning and implementation of the improved O & OD tool as a comprehensive participatory planning process is not satisfactory. The implementation of the Improved O & OD tool is likely to be affected by the insufficient information sharing, limited revenue collection at the local level, the influence of central government, the unproductive relationship between bureaucrats and the communities, insufficient capacity of facilitators and lack of commitment to support development projects. If these potential challenges are not addressed, they may affect the implementation of the improved O & OD tool as planned. The study recommends empowering the local government to ensure they have economic muscles to finance their development activities without depending on the central government. Resource mobilization and utilization in implementing the priorities of the citizens is key to the successful implementation of the improved O & OD tool. The central and political interference to local priorities should be minimized while building a productive relationship between the bureaucrats, facilitators, stakeholders and the community to ensure local priorities are realized. Sufficient and timely sharing of information to local officials and communities allows the community to understand their roles in the improved O & OD tool and effectively participate in the implementation of the same. Enough, committed and capable facilitators to support and monitor the Improved O & OD tool processes and ensure community empowerment and ownership of the tool for their development.

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