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Seizing and Stretching Participatory Space: Civil Society Participation in Tanzania's Policy Processes

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Seizing and Stretching Participatory Space: Civil Society Participation in Tanzania's Policy Processes¹

Hermine Engel

Abstract

This paper takes as its starting point the perspective that civil society participation in governance—particularly policy processes such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and related policy developments—largely takes on a mere consultative rather than a transformative role when initiated and driven by government or donors. In order to understand attempts at changing this situation, the paper explores the experiences and strategies of civil society organisations specifically linked to the Policy Forum network in Tanzania in its objective to transform the consultative engagement to a more meaningful re-politicised participatory engagement. The emerging factors and key findings indicate that the following aspects require considerable attention: (1) engagement in both invited and autonomous spaces to avoid co-optation; (2) strategic coalitions to avoid situations of dominance and control; (3) representation informed by political responsibility; (4) front-stage local engagement with back-stage international support; and (5) linking the macro and micro policy considerations within larger political processes. These factors point to an increasing awareness and strategic negotiation of the dynamics affecting civil society participation in policy processes. Furthermore, they indicate that these dynamics need to be continually assessed and evaluated within the changing political landscape so that civil society is able to position itself more effectively to influence policy towards transforming the structural conditions which perpetuate poverty.

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¹ This working paper is based on the author's research paper written in compliance with the requirements for obtaining the degree of Masters of Arts in Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies, finalized in December 2006.

INTRODUCTION

A number of studies² indicate that as a result of the mainstreaming of the participation phenomenon in the donor and government sectors, participation in policy processes has largely been reduced to consultation to serve certain dominant interests. This paper presents the key findings of a research study exploring the strategies of civil society organisations (CSOs) to ensure more meaningful participatory engagement in influencing policy decisions and implementation towards poverty reduction and securing citizen rights.³

The findings elaborated on in this paper are drawn from the case study research conducted in August 2006 focusing on the role of a civil society umbrella body—the Policy Forum (PF)—in the Tanzanian Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and subsequent related policy processes.⁴ The paper elaborates on five themes which emerged from the analysis of the perceptions and experiences of the various actors, and of the theoretical debates in relation to the factors affecting civil society participation in Tanzania's policy processes.

BACKGROUND

Tanzania was considered eligible for debt relief in 1999 under the World Bank and IMF's Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. To qualify for debt cancellation, the preparation of the PRSP was required as a conditionality, emphasising participation of a broad range of stakeholders—including civil society actors—with the goal of national ownership. The PRSP process, has received criticism because of its 'de-politicised mode of technocratic governance'. Recent studies regard the PRSP process as 'a limited and shortsighted approach to Tanzania's development options' (Gould and Ojanen 2003: 7).

The Policy Forum (PF) engagement with the PRSP processes was based on the view that 'there is now more room for civil society to make a difference than there used to be' (Gould and Ojanen 2003: 7). Established in 2002 by a group of CSOs involved in advocacy, the PF has its roots in the identified need for a more effective civil society approach to policy engagement after the first meeting in Tanzania to include civil society participation in the PRSP process.⁵ Its engagement is located in three policy processes seen as critical to human rights and development: the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), the Public Expenditure Review (PER) focusing on equitable resource allocation in the budget, and Local Government Reforms (LGR) towards improving bottom-up decentralisation (Policy Forum 2003: 5-6).

² See for example, the collection of articles in Hickey and Mohan (2004) and also in Cooke and Kothari (2001).

³ This research study occurred as a result of academic-practitioner cooperation between the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) and HIVOS (a Dutch donor organization) and focused on the work of a HIVOS partner in Tanzania, The Policy Forum. This internship experience in turn provided the empirical basis for the final research paper submitted in partial fulfillment of an MA Degree in Development Studies obtained at the ISS in December 2006.

⁴ The research study fieldwork was conducted in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in August 2006 and involved direct interviews with 19 persons, who represented member organisations of The Policy Forum and the government and donor sectors involved in the PRSP processes

⁵ The Consultative Group Meeting (2001); the CGM is an annual public grant meeting, where donors, government and CS sectors meet to assess and agree on a working framework for the next year.

The PF is regarded as a ‘strategic engagement’ to enhance policy advocacy capacity, which is necessary since many CSOs have largely been involved in service delivery, while demand for participation in policy processes is increasing at a rapid pace (Hakikazi 2002: 8). The key objective is to ‘[build] on the collective and individual experiences to date to create a more systematic approach to policy engagement’ (ibid.). Underlying this objective and reflecting the transformative understanding of participation is the view put forward by the PF that ‘this [objective] will help to avoid the reactive, one-off method of participation that has come to be expected of civil society by the government and donors’ (Hakikazi 2002: 8). At the time of the research, the PF counted 94 members including NGOs, research organizations and NGO networks. Of those 94 members, 77 were Tanzanian organizations and 17 were international organizations operating in Tanzania.

PF respondents engaged in this study expressed the general sense that participation needed to be more meaningful than mere consultation and that it had to include a focus on decision-making power towards transformative possibilities. Through the PF, organisations attempted and considered various strategies towards this end. These strategies reveal a number of key issues problematised by differing perceptions and experiences as the participatory space is negotiated and manipulated. Five key emerging thematic issues were identified in the study: co-optation, coordination, representation, international vs local dynamics, and engagement in larger political processes.

CO-OPTATION—‘BEING PARTICIPATED’

In civil society’s attempts to influence government policy, different levels of engagement are pursued depending on the organisation’s intention and ability to influence government policy. Houtzager’s (2003) reasoning regarding the different levels of engagement is useful in exploring the perceptions and experiences of the ways in which CSOs in Tanzania have negotiated and debated entry into the participatory space. According to Houtzager,

[one] of the central questions among actors ... in civil society is how, and what kind of autonomy organizations of the poor should develop from political parties, elite groups, and agents of the state. There are those who advocate strong forms of autonomy (to avoid cooptation, goal displacement, and worse), others who favour engagement while maintaining relative autonomy, and then those who support entry into stable alliances. (Houtzager 2003: 92)

A key fear among civil society organisations in participating in the government-initiated space is that of co-optation as indicated by civil society practitioners interviewed: ‘some people will say you are bought by government when you are sitting there’, and further qualified by the view that ‘the frustration lies in trying to put your point across but decisions are taken in your presence so you are seen as part of those making and supporting the decision’.⁶

These views can be related to the notion that the government’s interest in civil society participation is merely to show that civil society has sanctioned decisions taken by virtue of its presence at the meeting, thus fulfilling the donor conditionality. Reports of ‘being participated’ were expressed in cases where decisions between government and donors

⁶ Direct interviews with Policy Forum representatives, August 2006.

were already agreed upon before the actual participatory meetings to which representatives of civil society were invited. The presence of civil society members is thus perceived as mere ‘window dressing’ to meet the donor conditionality and to keep the various stakeholders happy.

According to all respondents, participation is recognised on paper but not practised in reality due to the challenges presented both by government and civil society itself. The challenge for civil society participation from a donor perspective is perceived to be related to the status quo in Tanzania which is a result of its historical, cultural and social background which gives much respect and power to those in authority, as is also reflected in government where there is the tradition of not questioning authority.

On the part of civil society, respondents echoed the view that the influence or impact of NGOs on government has just begun to make itself felt, and that much more work needs to be done in terms of capacity-building in the areas of policy, data analysis and research. Strengthening the capacity of CSOs is seen as a step towards a more constructive form of advocacy which is preferable to simply complaining and lamenting about government policy.

With the realisation that the government-invited space made room for ‘just participation without much meaning’, the PF’s existence became geared towards making its own participation more meaningful through ensuring access to information for all, getting people to think about government choices and resource allocation. Its role is seen as providing a critical voice to the proceedings and issues under discussion. The PF felt it important to continuously engage in the processes in a more systematic and consistent way, in order to increase its understanding of and effective participation in the government-invited space. It was agreed that it should be ready (and even anticipate) to participate when accepting the call for participation in the government-initiated space. Hence it was decided to make strategic selective decisions as to what to engage in, and to what extent, in relation to its capacity and expertise.

Examples of the PF’s successes include the much acclaimed position paper commenting on each of the priority sectors of the PRSP (NGO Policy Forum 2002). Also during the annual Poverty Policy week, civil society participants’ views—through the conduit of the PF—were taken on board. Open discussion with government was seen as instrumental in making sure that it institutionalised a participation framework in each technical working group with four to five spaces secured for civil society as equal members. It has also negotiated to get its views included in the Joint Assistance Strategy (JAS) document (to coordinate and harmonise aid flows), which now includes a section on participation and its implementation. In addition it is dialoguing with donors about how to make civil society stronger, including discussions on funding needs and priorities.

While the Policy Forum has, as a network of organizations, participated directly in the government-initiated participatory spaces, member organisations (affiliates) have also had the freedom to engage in alternative strategies to influence government policy.⁷ For

⁷ While these different engagements may seem contradictory, it relates to the value of the type of loose coordination the Policy Forum network practices, a point we explore in more detail in the next section on strategic coalitions and coordination.

instance, some affiliates also came up with their own complementary parallel engagement strategies to build the capacity of their staff and members, and the broader community to improve their abilities to participate in the government-initiated spaces and to engage in policy development in general. Other affiliates, however, opted for minimal direct engagement with government after years of dealing with negative experiences of co-optation. These organisations have reported that they have instead engaged in pursuing independent analysis and the more populist work of building human capacity. Their advice is that civil society does not have to ‘play the [participatory] game by the rules of government’, instead they should find different routes not entirely dictated by government to influence policy.

For civil society then to manipulate or use the participatory space effectively, it needs to ‘be informed of where boundaries of truthful engagement are and where co-optation starts’ as one respondent of the Policy Forum emphasised. In this discussion PF members were cautioned that if participation is squarely within the government-initiated space, then it will be difficult to challenge decisions put forward and thus civil society ‘representatives’ may be coerced into agreement. But respondents (notably the PF chairperson at the time) also felt that ‘if there is a chance to participate then it helps because when they call you to participate it shows they trust you and will thus [be willing to] listen’. On the other hand, the alternative put forward is for civil society to create its own agenda independently of the government, but the possibility is that ‘if you are outside, they will not take you seriously’. The strategy advised is a ‘50/50 participation strategy so that when there is no chance of being listened to, the option remains to go outside of that space to create self-initiated participatory spaces’ where civil society can develop its own agenda and effective response to policy matters under discussion through advocacy and capacity building.

These views indicate different levels of engagement: direct, minimal, and strong autonomy, depending on the level of policy influence desired and deemed attainable. To some extent they echo Houtzager’s argument that ‘[if] an actor’s goal is to influence policy, rather than self-provisioning, then the strong autonomy position is the least tenable’ (Houtzager 2003: 92). He argues that the ability for CSOs working on behalf of the poor to influence policy is enhanced by ‘alliances with reformist elements within the state’ but also warns that entering into such alliances ‘inevitably surrenders some degree of autonomy’ (ibid.). In the experiences of CSOs raised above, entering the invited space has led to experiences of co-optation by pressure to affirm decisions already taken. This is particularly evident when civil society has not been effectively prepared for such an engagement due to limited capacity, often seen as engineered by government procedures and prior agreements between government and donors. When CSOs have been able to challenge decisions taken, they have also been sidelined by government which in future invites more agreeable representatives to participate in government-initiated spaces. These experiences have largely steered CSOs in this study (such as PF members) to opt for minimal engagement, while at the same time creating alternative, more autonomous spaces to influence policy decisions more effectively. Seemingly then, their decisions are informed by an engagement where they are able to ‘[play] the system as best [they] can’ to ‘influence and enlarge [their] “room for manoeuvre” through particular strategies’ (Webster and Engberg-Pedersen 2002: 19).

STRATEGIC COALITIONS VS COORDINATION

One of the key strategies noted among members of the civil society sector is that of building strategic coalitions to strengthen civil society's strategic positioning aimed at having a greater impact on policy decisions. Yet strategic coalitions are understood in different ways across sectors; for some it entails more formal coordination and for others less formal networking coalitions.

For the most part, Tanzanian civil society is said to lack the necessary coordination to effectively participate in policy processes. This view, more often taken by government and donor sectors, is based on the claim that there is a lack of a central coordinating unit, and thus government uses the excuse that it is not sure of who to invite to participatory forums to represent civil society.

Within the PF coalition there are also those supporting the view that a more coordinated civil society would present a stronger force to be reckoned with. Such coordination would counter government's strategic excuse of an uncoordinated civil society presenting problems in selecting who should fill the participatory space which civil society is to occupy. The potential strength of coordination would make civil society an effective medium for sending a stronger message to government spaces, whereby civil society could have a greater influence in shaping the policy agenda. Those who hold this view see the need for a strong leadership to prevent government from being able to divide civil society, and from taking action against single organisations as it tends to do in the sidelining (and silencing) of organisations and individual 'representatives' with whom it is in conflict.

Donors to a large extent also seem to have a preference for supporting coordination attempts among civil society. The establishment of coordinating bodies is seen to have the potential of better understanding civil society needs, and nurturing the development of expertise, and thus has the advantage of contributing more effectively to the development process.

More critical voices from leading members within the civil society sector claim that donor and government sectors emphasise coordination because it allows them to exercise greater control over civil society activities through the coordinating body, under the guise or open intention of better understanding civil society views. A strong correlation is seen here between coordination and control, which conveniently produces the conditions to facilitate manipulation and co-optation in the desired directions or interests of those in power. An example cited is the EU's attempt at coordinating the formation of a non-state actors' (NSA) coordinating body established in 2005 to incorporate NGOs, media, trade unions and the private sector. This attempt was met with conflicting and skeptical views about donor and government-driven coordinating initiatives. This was exacerbated by the actions of the newly formed NSA task team which created even more skepticism as it was seen to operate outside of its mandate in accepting participatory invitations from government sectors sidelining the more established but less comfortable, more critical PF members through this replacement. This situation has had a negative effect on the way in which the task team—and more broadly, this coordination attempt—is being viewed from the civil society sector. Coordination can thus have a negative effect, depending on who steers the attempt, with what means, and whose interests are served.

The NSA example aside, coordination is also seen as involving too much compromise for civil society for the purpose of fitting into a neat package which government can easily deal with. The broad umbrella of ‘civil society’ under which diverse groups and organisations are to be categorised, coordinated and represented is seen as a virtually impossible scenario in that civil society cannot be contained in one neat coordinated package to speak with a single unified voice on issues in the policy arena. This also echoes the views expressed in Howell and Pearce, who criticise the ‘homogenizing and harmonizing visions of civil society within the mainstream ... [informing] a rejection or skepticism toward the mainstream’s stress on consensus rather than conflict and on influence rather than power’ (Howell and Pearce 2001: 33). Perhaps then, as suggested in some of the interviews and further reinforced by Howell and Pearce (2001), civil society may be a stronger force, maintaining its critical edge, when less tightly coordinated. This would imply a strategy which values diversity for the necessary open and honest debate to grapple with issues with due diligence and to find different alliances to best meet the desired objectives.

Such a strategy may lie in the current forms of ‘loose’ coalitions and networking arrangements in terms of issue-based coalitions and multi-networking flows. Presenting more fluid, permeable structures, organisations can express their diverse views along issue-based sectoral linkages as well as forms of engagement where it can best find support and unified expression where and when necessary. The PF is structured in such a way that it is an umbrella for different networks desiring to associate in different ways best suited to meet their objectives within the broader goal of transforming the structural conditions which perpetuate poverty. Such strategic coalitions are seen to provide the necessary ‘room for maneuver’ as expressed in the view that ‘the PF’s way of strategic linkages is better because civil society is stronger when it is more diverse’.

REPRESENTATION

The arguments put forward for a better coordinated civil society are also said to be linked to the issue of representation. Government and donor sectors have indicated that it is difficult to decide who to invite to represent the civil society sector because the sector is not centrally and hence not strongly coordinated in their view. Both government and donors, and also some within the civil society sector, favour stronger coordination to facilitate the selection process as to which organisation and/or individuals to invite to represent the civil society sector according to the limited number of spaces available. Often critical civil society views are silenced or sidelined on the basis of what government sees and uses as ‘their lack of representivity’.

This issue also does not (completely) escape the somewhat looser coordination structures of umbrella bodies and various sector coalitions. For most of the interviewees within these groups and those called upon to fill the civil society space at government-initiated participatory meetings, representation involves attending a meeting with a clear mandate from their constituencies as to what views to put forward and what decisions to take, as well as to provide regular feedback to their constituencies. Such an understanding is supported by the view expressed in an interview that ‘if we in the NGO community stand on a platform we need to be clear on who we claim to be and on whose behalf we claim to speak.’

However, a number of problems face the issue of actual representation as it is commonly understood—i.e., speaking for a constituency after consultation with a clear mandate and feedback. Respondents point to the fact that Tanzania is a large country with a limited and limiting infrastructure to reach the widely dispersed constituencies. Besides being widely dispersed, ‘representative participation’ is therefore considered difficult since there is also a large number of CSOs: there are over 4000 registered NGOs. The limited time factor also does not allow for the form of representation described above since there is often not enough time between receiving notice, documentation and effective in-depth consultation. These practical problems are further complicated by limited financial resources to communicate with the various constituencies effectively.

Others also argue that it is difficult to try to find a representative voice because they are uncertain as to who they are to speak on behalf of. This is related to the definitional problem of ‘civil society’ especially in the Tanzanian case, where this is not clearly demarcated and varies among ministries and even among members of the ‘civil society’ sector itself. It is even more problematic when this is used as an excuse on the part of government not to invite civil society participation.

Besides the practical and definitional problems raised above, respondents (such as a former PF chairperson) presented the concern about representation as follows:

Although it is a genuine attempt, it can become romanticised at the policy level which is abstract and fast-moving and doesn’t have the practice of deep consultation. Therefore it is not realistic to expect real representation ... The more important test lies in what you are bringing to the table—what research or data is used ... What is important is the credibility of the evidence ... don’t say you are speaking on behalf of this particular constituency—you should be evaluated on the strength of your [own] analysis of the issues.⁸

Here the credibility of the evidence put forward to support a certain view as well as the underlying values and ethics of those working on behalf of the poor, vulnerable and marginalised sectors are seen as particularly significant in enhancing an actor’s legitimacy to influence policy. In this sense the notion of ‘political responsibility’ put forward by Jordan and van Tuijl (2000) seems to support the view that what is crucial is the *message* underscored by a value-driven, ethical motivation. ‘Political responsibility’ is seen to encompass and underlie the values on which notions of representativity, legitimacy and accountability are carried forward. Too often, as the PF coordinator pointed out, even when practical attempts are made to secure full consultation to reach consensus, the result may be ‘something so watered-down to please as many views as possible and to make everyone feel represented’.

The PF, often called upon to represent the views of civil society, has realistically (and also ideologically) tried to face this issue of representativity. Initially it was easy for government in terms of the PRS review to approach the PF to represent civil society since it was seen as pulling together a number of key organisations, as fairly well organised and well versed in policy matters. Yet the PF coordinator pointed out that it ‘represents’ approximately only 90 organisations, and therefore does not claim to represent civil society in its entirety.

⁸ Direct interview with former Policy Forum chairperson, August 2006.

Attempts are made to seek input from a cross-section of the sector but realistically the entire sector cannot be reached. In response to government's call for PF representation, acknowledging that it speaks on behalf of civil society *when convenient*, PF said it cannot be 'gate-keeping' because many organisations do not necessarily agree with everything put forward by the PF. Instead, it has strategically agreed to help spread information to other major networks and engage in capacity building for people to more effectively be involved in policy matters. It also continues to put its views forward and to enter into debate as the PF, and in most cases, as smaller coalitions or single organisations within its framework. It sees itself as 'many voices among many others' which in effect presents a more realistic picture than the idealistic picture of representation put forward with civil society speaking with one neat unified (but diluted) voice which government sectors would seem to prefer rather than deal with a range of often conflicting voices.

INTERNATIONAL VS LOCAL DYNAMICS

The strong presence of international organisations in Tanzania has also been highlighted by some respondents interviewed,⁹ as a factor impacting on civil society participation. It is useful to explore this dynamic by looking at the four different stages in the development relations and operations of international NGOs as put forward by Simbi and Thom:

There once was a time when many northern NGOs ran development projects by themselves, employing staff in country, or using expatriates to oversee work. A second stage emerged when a number of northern NGOs ... moved to a "partnership model" in which local organizations applied to northern NGOs to carry out development projects ... Since the mid-1990s, this model has evolved into a third stage in which northern NGOs no longer simply provide funds, but must now also be seen to add value and build capacity ... Implementation by proxy appears to be emerging as the fourth stage in this progression ... [where] the northern NGO defines the parameters of the relationship, assesses the African NGO, and has comprehensive management structures in place to ensure compliance. (Simbi and Thom 2000: 213-15)

Interestingly, in Tanzania the first stage is still very much in practice although the other stages seem to exist at the same time. At all the stages the presence of and interaction with international organisations are linked in various degrees to power differences, with unequal relationships often resulting in disempowerment and ineffectiveness on the part of local organisations.

According to respondents interviewed, the dynamics between international and local organisations in Tanzania's participatory spaces, both at the level of government- and civil society-created spaces, are seen to be linked to resources and capacity which international organisations are said to have the advantage over in terms of control of allocation.¹⁰ Thus at one level, government seems to be more responsive to international organisations (INGOs), for instance, in terms of access to information and taking their views into

⁹ Based on information obtained from direct interviews with members of the PF, other civil society organisations, donor organisations, and government officials.

¹⁰ The observations and views discussed in this paragraph were indicated by respondents from both local and international organisations, although local organisations tended to have stronger views in favour of less direct international involvement.

account, since government more often views INGOs as donors or, if not, then as more closely linked to donors. The strong international influence coupled with the large numbers of INGOs operating within Tanzania results in tension which undermines the work of local organisations described by Sarah Michael (2004: 88) as ‘a crowding out’ of local work. Local organisations are often seen as less capable of doing the work when INGOs with greater capacity come to do the same work. Less support is then provided for local organisations, thus reinforcing the cycle of resource poverty among local organisations. Instead, international organisations should rather be strengthening the capacity of local organisations with INGOs serving as resource organisations, as indicated by a representative of a local organisation:

There is a lot of tension between local and international organisations because a lot of them come to do the same work which local NGOs do but they win because they have the money. Then it looks like local NGOs are not doing anything and then less support is given to local NGOs ... International NGOs are taking up space and responsibility of local NGOs. If they are true partners they would strengthen local ones so they can do better.¹¹

From this perspective, local organisations are seen to be competing with resident INGOs for participatory space and resources. Local organisations are seen to perceive INGOs as a threat. A donor perspective attributes this perception to ‘local organisations not [being] mature enough to see international organisations as complementing their work and therefore the competitive tension plays itself out.’ However, this particular donor representative also pointed to the problem of INGOs being ‘ignorant of the subtleties of Tanzania’s social and political dynamics’ and thus contributing to the problem by not being sensitive to these dynamics and overlooking them.

To further complicate matters, government has also on occasion used the local versus international representation card to its advantage. For instance, one organisation had an ‘international’ member serving on one of the government-instituted technical committees but when this individual presented a conflicting position, the representation on the committee was limited to local Tanzanian organisations (and, by implication, local individuals). Government in this instance was seen to have ‘played the international card to get the dissident voice out by conveniently and arbitrarily changing the rules.’ The respondent involved viewed this as an instance which made clear ‘how unclear the rules of the [participatory] game are.’

A more positive strategy put forward is that local and international organisations have to collaborate in the sense of ‘teaming up to use the best base of resources’ to learn from and act upon. As a strategy, the PF has attempted to broaden representation by also bringing in diverse groups from different geographical areas to cover a wider range of the interests of the people. In addition, to counter this potentially problematic dynamic of being dominated by international organisations, it consciously applies ‘self-evaluation to ensure that there is a limited number of international members on the executive committee as well as within its membership base’ so that it is not seen as an international body but ‘Tanzanian led and inspired’. In this way it attempts to consciously guard the balance between local and international participation with the aim of ensuring effective policy engagement.

¹¹ Direct interview with representative of a local organization in Tanzania, August 2006.

In contrast to the resident INGOs, also noted by Michael (2004: 79), is ‘the very strong relationships that many Tanzanian NGOs have developed with non-operational northern NGOs resident abroad¹²—relationships local NGOs see as key factors in their success and survival’. The interviewees in this study made a similar point by referring to the flexible support provided by some donor NGOs abroad which has contributed to their abilities to operate successfully within the policy arena. Yet, as experiences in the PF indicate, the ‘partnership’ relationship—increasingly showing signs of ‘implementation by proxy’—is also not without problems. Showing an awareness of the latest trends, the PF has decided to engage in a fundraising strategy based on maintaining independence and also to avoid stringent time-consuming reporting procedures as a particular feature of the ‘implementation by proxy’ stage. As a result, they have had to turn away some potential donors displaying behaviour typical of this stage.

The main difference noted between locally active, resident international organisations and non-resident northern NGOs is the emphasis the latter places on providing resource support to strengthen local capacity rather than crowding out local work. The current reality is that there are many international NGOs operating locally in Tanzania resulting in experiences and views that this diminishes the role local organisations can play in Tanzania’s development process. Some respondents have pointed out that teaming up between local and international CSOs is regarded as the better way to operate. Teaming up, however, requires the sensitivity to focus on strengthening the capacity of local organisations and local community members, so that it contributes to the related goal of a less externally-dependent Tanzania. This sensitivity is required to enable building more equitable relations between local and international organisations if local civil society organisations are to be in a better position to take more responsibility for Tanzania’s development.¹³

ENGAGING IN LARGER POLITICAL PROCESSES

In terms of the content of participatory engagement, respondents felt that there seems to be a stronger focus on narrowly tackling immediate local issues on the grassroots level, without necessarily and vigorously linking these to larger political processes which are often limited to those in political power (also extending beyond the national sphere). Termed by Tendler for instance, as ‘micro-ization’, it is regarded as ‘distracting or diverting attention from social policy problems that require more aggregative solutions’ (cited in Gould 2005: 50).

One such issue highlighted was the macroeconomic stabilisation programme—which is one of the three pillars of the PRS, along with poverty reduction and participation. A

¹² ‘Non-operational northern NGOs resident abroad’ refers to NGOs that are not locally active in terms of direct project work, in the sense that they partner local organisations by providing resource support, either in the form of funding (as donor organisations), information linkages and capacity development support, etc.

¹³ The issue of ‘equitable relations’ requires more explanation which cannot be adequately dealt with in the scope of this paper, but for purposes of understanding, the interviews conducted for this study and the literature consulted suggest that it relates to and depends on, among others, access to resources, participatory opportunities and invitations extended by government, partnership dynamics between local and international organisations, access to capacity development opportunities, influence and power, and cooperation.

pertinent question posed by a CS actor was whether the participation of civil society, which was now strongly encouraged by government and donors, also involved ‘more consultation on macroeconomic stabilisation’. Various reports have pointed to the fact that to reach the HIPC decision point, the government had to agree to a new funding agreement with the IMF for a three-year period, known as the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility. This agreement is described as ‘encompassing nearly three dozen non-negotiable conditions pertaining to the government’s economic and fiscal policies’ (Gould 2005: 25). These strict macroeconomic policy conditionalities thus form the basis for new lending—itsself necessitated by macroeconomic reform policies. The PF’s acclaimed input paper at the 2002 Consultative Group Meeting takes as its starting point a focus on macro-micro linkages. It emphasises that

... the poor, in particular the rural poor, seem not to have benefited from a decade and a half of pro-market reform and enhanced macro-economic stability ... [and hence] ... the arguments that macro-economic stabilization is a precondition for growth, that liberalization promoted growth, and that growth benefits the poor are not supported by the evidence. (NGO Policy Forum 2002: 1)

The PF goes further to challenge the government by asking ‘What are the opportunities to publicly debate these issues in the interest of promoting pro-poor development?’ (NGO Policy Forum 2002: 2). So while some CSOs may have been taken on as equal partners in some instances, ‘they remain excluded from these core areas of debate [the macroeconomic framework and future debt sustainability] beyond participation in the PER process’ (Evans 2003: 265). While key advocacy organisations within the PF have taken the macroeconomic concerns on board in their individual capacities and spaces, the political will of government—also seen as constrained by donor conditionalities—does not leave much room for effective engagement on macroeconomic policy and its linkages to the micro policy discussions.

Since the government/donor-initiated space (the invited space)¹⁴ then leaves little room for thorough engagement with the larger political issues, it becomes necessary for civil society to create its own spaces (the claimed, self-created space) for deeper and perhaps more robust larger political engagement. Therefore, besides voicing their concerns within the invited participatory spaces, some organisations have also opted for alternative self-created spaces to influence policy more effectively by coming together independently as civil society organisations to determine alternative strategies. These strategies include more independent alternative policy analysis and critique, presenting alternatives to government-led policy decisions, working through the media, independent monitoring of policy processes including implementation, as well as raising awareness in communities around citizenship rights in policy development. A key strategy is that of strengthening civil society linkages, and also nurturing social movement activity¹⁵ and direct citizen engagement.¹⁶ The

¹⁴ Here I draw on Gaventa’s (2003) work which provides a useful distinction between the various socio-political spaces and their related power dynamics. He distinguishes between invited spaces (official ‘top-down’ government initiatives) and claimed or self-created spaces (more spontaneous, independent, ‘bottom-up’ civil society initiatives).

¹⁵ Gould’s analysis of the Tanzanian situation is that there are increasingly systematic attempts on the part of government (and certain donor agencies) to act against actors and associations with social movement potential in order to gain consensus for a specific development path rather than encourage genuine debate on Tanzania’s development options (Gould 2005: 63).

PF itself has seen the necessity for a shift in its operations as reflected in the 2006 Annual Plan:

... we will gradually shift towards more independent analysis and monitoring of policy developments that is not exclusively linked to our participation in government-led policy processes. Although we will still continue to seek strategic and selective engagement with key policy initiatives, this will no longer be the primary focus of our activities. (Policy Forum 2006: 4)

Thus, as the respondents point out, for civil society to organise and mobilise to engage at the level of the larger political processes, policy engagement cannot be limited to the invited space or limited to completely autonomous spaces.

CONCLUSION

This paper has emphasised the following positions in relation to civil society participation in policy processes: engaging in both invited and autonomous spaces to avoid co-optation; forming strategic coalitions to avoid situations of dominance and control; informing representation by political responsibility; front-stage local engagement with back-stage international support; and linking the macro and micro policy considerations within larger political processes. Within the often fast-paced changing conditions, civil society actors need to remain aware and alert to these changes. Effective responses require a level of flexibility in terms of particular positions taken at any given moment to ensure that the particular goals which are informed by a focus on poverty eradication and citizen rights are effectively worked towards. This requires an ability to seize and stretch the participatory spaces made available by government and to create alternative spaces of engagement to influence policy processes and development choices to a greater extent. The Policy Forum as a network coalition has demonstrated such an awareness and alertness to adapt its focus, engagement and organisational structure to suit the changing conditions over time by constantly re-assessing and evaluating its own effectiveness in policy engagement. Such continuous critical assessment is necessary to ensure that participation is not limited to the level of consultation, but that it is re-politicised to effect the necessary structural changes to transform situations which create and perpetuate conditions of poverty.

¹⁶ The emphasis on direct citizen engagement was put forward by the former Policy Forum chairperson, particularly highlighting that ‘deep social change requires political engagement which in turn requires a politicised citizen engagement since social change will come not when policy changes occur but when citizens are aware and informed and able to engage.’

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Appendix: List of Interviews

- Bangser, M., Director, Women's Dignity Project, 22 August 2006.
- Kipobota, C., Head of Human Rights Monitoring Programme, Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC), 2 August, 2.30pm, LHRC Offices).
- Kajege, C., Coordinator, TCDD (Tanzania Coalition for Debt and Development), 23 August 2006.
- Kathemba, Director of NGOs, Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children, 10 August 2006.
- Kijo-Bisimba, H., Chairperson, Policy Forum and Director, LHRC, 23 August 2006.
- Kiria, I., Executive Director, Youth Action Volunteers (YAV), 15 August 2006.
- Kwame, F., Country Programme Manager, OXFAM GB Tanzania, 10 August 2006.
- Magongo, J., Researcher, Civil Society Programme, REPOA, 3 August 2006.
- Mbilinyi, M., Head of Programme :Activism, Lobbying and Advocacy (ALA) Programme, TGNP (Tanzania Gender Networking Programme), 9 August 2006.

- Mshighati, J.R., Programme Coordinator: Right to be Heard, OXFAM GB Tanzania, 10 August 2006.
- Mugizi, G., Secretariat Coordinator, Policy Forum, 31 July & 23 August 2006.
- Mushi, A., Policy and Advocacy Programme Officer, TANGO, 16 August 2006.
- Rajani, R. Executive Director, HakiElimu, 7 August 2006.
- Sagday, Senior Economist / Programme Officer, Ministry of Planning, Economy and Empowerment, Poverty Eradication Division, 17 August 2006.
- Saunderson, L., Governance Advisor, Prime Minister's Office, Local Government Reform Programme, 16 August 2006
- Shaba, M., Chairperson, NSA Taskforce Group – EU Initiative, 18 August 2006.
- Tukai, R., Research Coordinator, CSO's Programme, REPOA, 3 August 2006.
- Ulanga, J., Executive Director, Foundation for Civil Society, 8 August 2006.
- Veller, I., Governance Section, EC Delegation, EU – Tanzania, 24 August 2006.

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