RECORDS MANAGEMENT PRACTICE IN LOWER LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN TANZANIA: FADING OUT THE NASCENT TRAJECTORIES OF PARTICIPATORY PLANNING?

Rukia M. Pazi
School of Public Administration and Management, Mzumbe University, Tanzania

Cliford J. Ringo
School of Public Administration and Management, Mzumbe University, Tanzania


ABSTRACT
Tanzania is moving towards the more participatory planning approach within the framework of decentralization policy principally known as Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP). The movement is the reaction towards the malfunction of the Top-Down Approach to catapult community participation to development. In this regards, participatory planning is viewed as an effective mechanism to empower and capacitate local community to participate in priorities identification which in turn leads to the adoption of a project that reflects community’s needs. The triumph of participatory planning partly depends on the availability of the reliable records and also sharing of these records. For that reason, records management has been argued to be critical in the process of participatory planning in all levels from priority identification to implementation. A glance on records management practice in the lower levels of local authorities leaves a lot to be desired. This paper reviews literature on records management and participatory planning. It then gives a snapshot of some practical cases of what is transpiring in the lower local authorities of Tanzania as far as records management is concerned and its probable effects on the whole process of participatory planning. The paper concludes that blemished records management is fading out the nascent trajectories of participatory planning.

Key Words: Records management, participatory planning, lower local authorities
**Introduction**

Ever since her independence in 1961, Tanzania espoused democratic government in which participatory planning was fundamental. In this course, community has been valued as core to development. This is justified by Julius Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania when he posited that:

> Development is the participation of the people in mutual learning experience involving themselves, their local resources, external change agent and outside resources. People cannot be developed but they can only develop themselves by participating in activities which affect their being. People are not developed when they are herded like animals into new venture. (Nyerere, 1968).

Nyerere’s idea was later propped up by the introduction of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania in 1977. The local government authorities (LGAs) was established and secured constitutional backup. The essence of establishing LGAs is to facilitate transfer of authority to the people. In this sense, local government authorities have the right and power to participate and to involve local people in planning and implementation of development projects within their jurisdictions. In moving forward the commitment, the government of the United Republic of Tanzania through its ongoing Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP) Phase II devised participatory planning approach named Opportunity and Obstacles to Development (O & OD) in 2002 (PMO-RALG, 2009). This is a multi-sectoral initiative which has been approved to be used national wide to promote community initiatives.

The development of Participatory planning approach was in line with the government ambition to devolve power to the people as proclaimed by the constitution. The government envisaged to bring back the spirit of self reliance, local resources mobilization, transparency and accountability where communities participate in planning, decision making, implementation and ownership of their development initiatives (O & OD Training Manual, 2007). Furthermore, it meant to accelerate the achievement of national goals in Tanzania Development Vision (TDV) 2025 (PMO-RALG, 2009).

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1 The articles number 145 and 146 of the constitution provide for the establishment of local government authorities in Tanzania

2 Constitution of United Republic of Tanzania, 1977
During the planning process sub-goals in the TVD became of the setting specific objectives under which planning items are identified such as opportunities, obstacles, intervention, costs etc (Mwakipole & Rusimbi, n.d). The approach is said to take two forms: First is where people use participatory tools and come up with the priorities based on pre-determined intervention. Second is where people take the lead and decision making in planning process.

Participatory planning and records management are interdependent. Records facilitate communication among the participants therefore the functionality of participatory approach relies much on records management. During planning process the provision of information is of paramount importance to the participants to enhance mutual understanding thus, information about the planning process, rules, procedures, policies, reports, and decisions is very essential. In this regards, the approach can hardly succeed without proper, reliable and readily available records or information. In recognizing the primacy of records, the government of Tanzania enacted The Records and Management Act of 2002 and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy which was approved in 2003 to ensure that adequate records are captured, created and managed.

Another attempt to propel forward the initiative was the inception of Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP) Phase II to promote e-government in 2008. This was due to the realization of the need to integrate the design of ICT systems so that are capable of managing, protecting and providing reliable information over the time. Despite of the great hunch to titivate records management systems in Tanzania, experience shows that records are pitifully managed in local government authorities (Mollel, 2010; Fjeldstad et al, 2011). This paper therefore reviews the literature on participatory planning and records management and attempt to show their interrelationship. Furthermore, it documents some practical cases of what is transpiring in the lower local authorities of Tanzania as far as records management is concerned and its probable effects on the whole process of participatory planning. The paper employed the secondary data analysis.

**Participatory planning**

**Participatory planning defined**

There has been a mounting interest, particularly in the last two decades, on both the theoretical and practical aspects of participatory approaches. Much of the interest has been spawn by the anticipated value of these approaches in dealing with troubles of social deprivation and poverty alleviation. The approaches also have been boosted by interest in the processes of
democratization and good governance in a fast changing globe (Rafkin et al, 2000). Before we define participatory planning, we first define participation.

Sanoff (2000:13) defines participation as the direct public involvement in decision-making processes. He added that participation in its broadest sense means to sensitize people and thus increase the receptivity and ability of people to respond to development programme, as well as to encourage local initiatives. Oakley (1989 in Rafkins et al, 2000:14) argues that participation involves organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups or movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.

Oakley (1989 in Rafkins et al, 2000) identifies three types of participation. The first is minimal participation in which participation is limited in scope and focused on a particular objective. Oakley noted that this type has little influence on the development process. The second is substantive participation where beneficiaries have some inputs determining priorities and contributing to activities and receive benefits but have no role in decision-making. The scope of participation is externally controlled. The third is structural participation in which the people play an active and direct role in project development. As Implied by its designation, there is a shift in power and decision-making which allows a greater role for the community with support of external people.

Engagement of community in planning is of primary importance to the development of that particular community. The World Bank (1966 in Rifkin & Kangere: 40) outlines some reasons for community participation as follows:

1. Local people have a great amount of experience and insight into what works, what does not work and why.
2. Involving local people in planning projects can increase their commitment to the project.
3. Involving local people can help them to develop technical and managerial skills and thereby increase their opportunities for employment.
4. Involving local people help to increase the resources available for the programme.
5. Involving local people is a way to bring about ‘social learning’ for both planners and beneficiaries. ‘Social learning’ means the development of partnerships between professionals and local people, in which, each group learns from the other

Participatory planning is viewed as a set of processes through which varied groups and interests engage together in reaching for a consensus on a plan and its implementation (McCracken, n.d).
McCracken (n.d) further argues that participatory planning is culturally aware and sensitive to differences in power, and seeks to ensure that these do not pre-determine outcomes. The diverse parties need to exchange information to explore areas of common ground and compromise and to find ways of reducing the extent and intensity of disagreements so that no party should lose out entirely. According to McCracken (n.d) the primary objectives of participatory development planning are to give people a say in the development decisions that may affect them and to ensure that development interventions are appropriate to the needs and preferences of the population that they are intended to benefit.

**How participatory planning is undertaken in Tanzania**

Participatory planning approach is a patchwork process as it involves different government levels during the planning process (PMO-RALG, 2008). The grassroots level (village and mtaa3) formulates the wishes preferences then the wishes are transformed into ward plans which are ultimately brought to the council level and consolidated as council plans. The council plan is forwarded to the regional level and then ministerial level for scrutiny and ultimately to the parliament for approval (PMO-RALG, 2009). Therefore the entire planning process, from the development of the village or mtaa plans to the ward plans, consolidation of these plans into council plan and finally decision-making at the national level encompasses six different institutions on three layers of administration (Mollel, 2010). The village and ward which are regarded as a grassroots level, whereas the regional, ministerial and parliamentary levels are the central government levels. The council is the intermediate level and is the highest decision-making body within the Local Government Authorities (LGAs). Moreover, it functions as an intermediary between the local wishes and the national policies and guidelines.

**Records Management**

**Records management defined**

Records management is defined by Makinen & Henttonen (2011) as the field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including the process for capturing and maintaining evidence of the information about organization activities. It also entails all record keeping requirements and

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3 *Mtaa* is analogous to village. Administratively, it is the lowest level of urban local government authorities in Tanzania.
policies that allow organization to establish and maintain control over information flow and administrative operation (State Library and Archives Florida, 2009).

A record is a recorded evidence of an activity that is, of an action undertaken by an individual or a work of group in the course of their business which results in a definable outcome (Shepherd, 2006). It can also be information that are received, created and maintained as evidence by an organization or person in pursuance of legal obligation. Thus, records may be a chart, a video recording, a report in a hard or soft copy (electronic copy).

**Records management at local level and the way it influences participatory planning**

Records management plays a pivotal role in providing the precedents as well as policies and procedures of what is ought to be done and how (Shepherd, 2006). Thus, policies and procedures provide a proliferation merits during the process because it helps the participants to know their responsibility and roles within the predefined limits. It is clearly known that participatory planning approach is a hotchpotch process as it involves different levels of the government beginning from village and ward (grassroots level), Council (intermediate level), then to the regional, ministerial and parliament (central level) (Mollel, 2010). In order to have a crispy interaction among three levels for reciprocative cooperation their roles and responsibilities are ought to be defined. Additionally, policies and procedures helps to provide an internal control framework that participants will rely upon to attain the intended objective. For example, the policies and procedure will stipulate how participatory planning is supposed to be carried out, who are to be involved in the planning process, the criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of plan in subsequent plans, financing as well as the approving process. Nevertheless, these policies and procedures will normally be kept as records in paper form or electronic records.

Shepherd (2006) argues that records management in participatory planning help to support accountability. In attaining goal congruence each participant need to strive to fulfill its obligation. Therefore records act as evidence towards participants’ accountability as it clearly stipulate who is supposed to do what? Who is accountable to whom? And what ought to be achieved and what have been achieved. For example, at village level, villagers are obliged to identify priorities which are combined together to generate a plan draft (O & OD training manual, 2007). Then the plan draft has to be presented to the village council where the council is required to undertake prioritization and budgeting and then submit to the Ward Development Committee (WDC) for technical advises (Fjeldstad et al, 2010). Afterwards the draft plan is submitted to the council management which its main task is to screen, prioritize and assess the implication of a plan. The draft is then brought forward to the council financial committee for
approval but before authorization, plan and budget has to be submitted to the Regional Administrative Secretariats (RAS) for consultation whether the plan is in accordance with national priorities (Fjeldstad et al, 2010). Finally, the draft plan is taken to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) who may suggest the amendments to the approved plan and budget and subsequently returned to the council. A draft plan is supposed to be returned back to the ward level whereby the Ward Executive Officer is required to provide feedback to the villagers so that they become assertive on the couple of priorities which has been accepted so that to start preparing for implementation (PMO-RALG, 2008). Therefore records serve as the evidence of decision and actions taken under the operationalization of the participatory planning.

It provides evidence of activity undertaken for financial allocation. Records serve as evidence for financial support so as the implementation to be carried out. For instance under participatory planning, for a project to be financially supported the draft plan has to be readily available for authentication as it has to be firstly presented to the village council for budgeting, then Ward Development Committee (WDC) for technical matters which later is submitted to the village assembly for approval (Fjeldstad et al, 2010). Further, the draft plan is taken to the council management for screening and assessing for the implication of the plan. It is further taken to the Regional Administrative secretariats for consultation and establishing whether the draft plan is in accordance with the national priorities (ibid). Lastly brought to the MoFEA for suggestion on amendments to the approved plan where necessary, after that council finance committee approves the budget for the implementation to be carried out.

Some experiences of records management at local levels in Tanzania: Is there any hope for the nascent trajectories of participatory planning?

Records have been managed poorly and in many cases vital records have been missing in the lower levels of local government authorities in Tanzania. A study conducted by Mollel (2010) in six villages and mitaa in Morogoro region affirms this. Mollel (2010) reveals that 74% of lower level local government leaders interviewed have not seen the village/mitaa development plans whereas only 26% have seen it as indicated in table 1 below.

It is interesting that village and mitaa leaders are the one vested with the task of overseeing development projects at the local level, but are pretty oblivion of the would be roadmap (village plans). Mollel (2010) report that one of the reasons given for not been able to access the plans includes being absent during planning as some had not assumed the offices. The questions which arise here are: For the leader to be aware of the village or mitaa development plan, is it necessary that he/she must be the office bearer during the particular planning time? Why didn’t the office
bearers preserve (example by filing) the plan documents immediately after planning to facilitate access by their successors and other interested persons? These questions may raise suspicion that either records management is the practice which is not understood by lower local leaders or there are no control and accountability systems to ensure proper functioning of lower level offices and that the government has not given due respect to the lower local government authorities’ offices.

We are strongly convinced by Mukandala (2004) and Shivji & Peter (1999) that lower local governments have been the bygone in the process of reforming the local government given the fact that the reforms are the one championing installation of systems and processes for enhancing local participation and service delivery. For instance, Mukandala (2004:2) strongly argues that, Local Government Reforms Programme (LGRP) focus overwhelmingly at the district level and that levels below the district seldom feature in the reforms. Moreover, Shivji and Peter (1999 in Mukandala, 2004) conclude that the sub-district level has not been integrated in the LGRP nor conceived as an integral part of the reform programme. Yilmaz & Venugopal (2010) are arguing in the same line where they point out that, Village assembly, Mitaa and Vitongoji are yet to be strengthened to play strong role in local governance. Yilmaz & Venugopal’s argument attest absence of some governance ingredients in the lower level such as capacity and autonomy as again testified by Mollel (2010). Capacity would entail inter alia, ability to run offices and manage records diligently.

Literally speaking, offices have procedures and for these offices to be able to operate smoothly they must manage records. Prudently managed records are apt to facilitate communication. This is vital as people will always be informed of what is transpiring. Lack of the important documents like village/mitaa development plans is a sign post that records are not well managed in the lower levels of local government authorities. In more magnified analysis, the government has less concern on the matter.

In another development, Mollel (2010) reports that ward plans and even council plans are not sent to people at lower levels for them to be able to see what has transpired in higher levels and to be informed to what extent lower level plans have been taken onboard by the subsequent planning levels. Lack of information on the village/mitaa plan as well as ward and council plan may have three impacts: First, difficult or impossibility of implementing own plans. Second, lack of information on what priorities have been incorporated in the ward or council plans. Third, difficulty in making follow ups to higher levels on for instance inputs like funds and equipment which may be required from higher levels of authority.

4 Neighbourhoods
Looking at the participatory planning process, we are convinced that these three basic aspects undergird the entire process of participatory planning. For instance, in the initial planning process, it would be ideal to be acquainted with the antecedent plans to be able to ascertain what was implemented and what was left and possible reasons there to. In that case, it is possible to determine whether some priorities would stem from the previous plan(s) or rather would constitute completely new venture. Plan document is a roadmap; it will assist in avoiding duplication of plans. On the other side, plan document guarantee veracity in the implementation of the plan.

Villages, mitaas, vitongoji are administrative units of government which deserves to have well managed records to facilitate referencing and easy communication. To the contrary, these facilities are only available in the council level. By so doing they are also going contrary to the UN Guidelines which among others requires records and information be maintained and in principle made publicly available not only to increase the efficiency of local authorities but also to make it possible for citizens to enjoy their full rights and to ensure their participation in local decision-making.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The paper has reviewed the literature on participatory planning and records management and hence thrown a light on their relationships. It has further elucidated that the triumph of participatory planning depends among other things on the availability of records which would assist not only in coming up with the new plan but also implementation of the plans. The empirical data generated from the secondary sources shows that records are poorly managed and in many instances important records have been missing. For instance village development plan document. The implementation of participatory planning which is espoused by Local Government Reform Programmes (LGRP) has been uneasened and would probably continue to be uneasened if important records will always go missing. In other words, local people’s effort to articulate their own local development will be a difficult practice and hence little will be the output. Given these facts, the study recommends the following:

5 Local Government (District Authorities) Act No. 7 of 1982 and Local Government (Urban Authorities) Act No. 8 of 1982

6 UN-Habitat 2007 International Guidelines on Decentralization and the Strengthening of Local Authorities
1. Urgent measures to be taken by the government to construct offices in the villages and mitaas where government offices are missing.

2. Funds should be set aside in the budget for the proper management of the offices. This recommendation is in line with Massoi & Norman’s (2009). They argued the government to allocate funds to run the lower level local government offices because formerly it was not practiced. In their opinion, this retarded projects implementation as citizens were required to buy papers for carrying out some office works (Ibid: 138).

3. Village and mitaa leaders to be empowered on the importance of managing records properly in their offices. Further, records management skills be imparted to these leaders to enhance them carry out records management functions.

4. Councils to regularly carryout inspections on records and hold accountable those leaders who will not comply with the prescribed standards.

References


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Vision, Goals and Strategy.


### Table 1: Have the village/mtaa leaders seen the village development plan?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village/mtaa</th>
<th>Category of leaders</th>
<th>Response</th>
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| Kingorwila   | -2 members of Ward Development committee  
               -1 Mtaa Executive Officer  
               -In-charge of the dispensary  
               -1 Ward Executive Officer   | √        |
| Boma         | -2 Mtaa Executive Officers  
               -1 Mtaa Chairperson           | √        |
| Tawa         | -1 Ward Education Officer  
               -1 Village Executive officer  
               -1 Kitongoji Chairperson     | √        |
| Kidodi       | -1 Village Executive officer  
               -1 Village Chairperson        1 Kitongoji Chairperson  
               -1 Ward Executive Officer     | √        |
| Iyogwe       | -1 Village Executive officer  
               -1 Kitongoji Chairperson     | √        |
| Ngerengere   | -1 Village Chairperson  
               -1 Kitongoji Chairperson     | √        |

*Source: Compiled from Mollel (2010).*