Citizens Wake Up

The Chukua Hatua (Take Action) programme in Tanzania

Effective community participation in local governance in Tanzania is not an easy process. Power is very centralized, and few people are prepared to speak out. That is why the Chukua Hatua (Take Action) programme is so exciting. This paper outlines pilots from the first phase of the project – tracking election promises and training and supporting farmer animators, active musicians, and student councils – and shows where and how they were successful and the challenges they faced. It also explains the plans for the next phase, in which Oxfam will work with local decision makers as well as local communities, integrating the most successful elements of the pilots. In this way, the programme will continue to build people’s capacity and skills so that they are truly able to become active citizens.
Introduction

Tanzania was established in 1964 when Tanganyika and Zanzibar were united. Its first President, Julius Nyerere, had a socialist vision for the new country, which continued until the 1990s, when multi-party elections and economic liberalization were introduced.

Since 2000, the Tanzanian government has focused on increasing economic growth and reducing poverty. It has had more success with the former goal than with the latter: although rates of growth have increased, levels of poverty remain high. Growth is being driven by sectors of the economy in which the majority of poor Tanzanians are not involved, such as mining, construction, and tourism. Three-quarters of Tanzania’s poor inhabitants are dependent on agriculture, where the growth rate is declining to a point where it will soon fall below population growth, exacerbating food security problems. In 2011, Tanzania ranked 152 out of 187 countries in the United Nations’ Human Development Index.\(^1\)

Politically, the Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party has dominated the country since its birth in 1964. It has the broad support of the population, especially in rural areas, but overall power rests disproportionately with the President, the Executive, and a small group in the upper echelons of the party. At all levels, power is managed largely through systems of patronage. Policy making and planning are highly centralized and heavily donor-influenced.

Implementation at all levels suffers from lack of co-ordination, motivation, accountability, capacity, and resources. Parliament has little influence over policy making, although there have been signs of positive change in recent times as progressive MPs have begun to advocate effectively via the media and to improve the level of parliamentary debate. The 2010 elections were the first in which opposition parties made serious inroads.
‘Why bother?’ Issues with local governance

‘Not many turn up because many don’t see the importance of village meetings. There is often little implementation of what is decided – so why bother?’ – Male residents of Busanda.

Relative to many countries, Tanzania has an impressive structure in place for local governance at sub-village, village, ward, and district levels. However, the effectiveness of this structure in really allowing local voices to be influential is questionable.

Village- and district-level councils are elected and it is their role to oversee bottom-up planning and decision making through to a full council at district level. However, effective control at both levels tends to be held by centrally appointed officials. Elected representatives at local level often lack the desire or capacity to hold these appointed officials to account.

At local level, meetings are only called by the village chair and executive. These should take place quarterly, but often happen rarely or not at all. When they do take place, they are not well attended because local people have little faith in them, as one young artist points out: ‘We ask questions in meetings but don’t get satisfactory or truthful answers, or we are prevented from asking because only a short time is set aside for questions.’

There is also a sense of insecurity: people are afraid of being excluded from the patronage system and of losing its benefit or protection. There is evidence of more direct threats to individuals who speak out. Party polarization is also an issue, with any challenge by ordinary citizens often taken by leaders as an indication of opposition politics.

In addition, there is a lack of information about policies, laws, people’s rights, and even what is happening in the country. In rural areas, most people get their information from radio, but reception is sometimes poor and people, women in particular, do not have time to listen. Print media are less popular because newspapers arrive very late (up to a week after publication) and in any case many people cannot read.

‘No time to cook’ – the lack of women’s participation in politics

‘A woman can’t speak because she is afraid that if she makes a mistake, people will look down on her and she could be punished.’
—Woman from Loliondo

Women’s participation is severely restricted by their position in society. Patriarchal customs and attitudes mean that women have fewer opportunities to participate than men and, although they do attend meetings, they rarely speak. One woman noted: ‘Even if you say something good in front of five men, only one will listen to you.’

Women lack confidence because they have little opportunity to participate in elections beyond those for special reserved seats, and as a result there are still few women leaders. ‘It is not the custom and we are not allowed to call meetings ourselves,’ said one woman from Busanda. A man from Shinyanga summed up prevailing attitudes when he said: ‘If a woman participates in politics, do you think she can have time to cook for me?’
Supporting active citizens: Chukua Hatua

‘Many of us aren’t recognising our rights and are afraid
Tanzanians wake up and ask our leaders
Citizens, let’s wake up to fight for our rights.’
– Song lyrics composed by musicians supported by Chukua Hatua

Oxfam’s Chukua Hatua (Take Action) programme has been running since
August 2010. It operates in six districts across Shinyanga region, a dry, agro-
pastoralist area which is one of the poorest in Tanzania, and Ngorongoro
district in Arusha region, another pastoralist region prone to drought.

The goal of Chukua Hatua is to achieve increased accountability and
responsiveness of government to its citizens. The programme aims to do this
primarily by encouraging active citizenship, particularly for women – fostering
citizens who know their rights and responsibilities, demand them, and are
able to search for and access information. Underpinning the programme is
the belief that if people demand their rights and entitlements, then the
government will be increasingly compelled to respond.

Chukua Hatua has taken an evolutionary approach to programming, using
multiple simultaneous pilot projects followed by a review of the pilots’
successes and, based on this, a planned programme design to scale up the
successful approaches. The intention is to find out what works as a catalyst
to active citizenship. In the first phase the programme piloted five
approaches:

1. **Election promises tracking**: Training of ‘trackers’ in 36 communities
   prior to the 2010 elections. They made recordings of rally promises and
   took these back to their communities to agree priorities. They are now
   following up progress against the leaders’ promises and recording their
   findings using cartoon notice boards.

2. **Farmer animators**: Orientation of more than 200 farmers nominated by
   their farmers’ groups of approximately 30 people, to understand
   principles of accountability, how to strategize to hold those in power to
   account, and how to share their knowledge and facilitate their groups to
   take action.

3. **Active musicians**: Training 42 musicians from existing groups on
   principles of accountability to act as ‘seeds’ in their groups to influence
   their music, which is widely listened to by communities.

4. **Student councils**: Activating an existing space that should provide a
   voice for students but is currently used by teachers to control students;
   sensitizing students and teachers on issues of democracy to enable
   students to campaign for leadership and to hold elections; linking
   students with community ‘champions’ to help them raise issues with
   teachers and school management committees.

5. **Community radio**: Creating a new space in Ngorongoro district to
   enable pastoralists to share information and debate. Currently the only
   radio outlet accessible is a Kenyan station. Unfortunately, however, the
government has not yet granted the radio licence.
In addition to the pilots, Oxfam has also supported local campaigns where communities were already active, most notably in Ngorongoro, where communities are acting to protect their land rights (see Box 4).

After less than a year in operation, four of the five pilots are demonstrating citizen action, and are beginning to elicit some response from those in power. Actions range from demanding (and in many cases achieving) that unresponsive doctors, teachers, and village government officials are replaced, to taking steps to secure land threatened by outside investors backed by the government, or gaining compensation from mining companies that have taken community land.

Some responses from government have been positive, including responding to people’s demands for improvements for their communities. Some unfortunately have been negative, including threats to communities or local organizations, and attempts to close down spaces or forums. There is much more active citizenship taking place than there is response from local leaders, but this is perhaps to be expected, given that these are still early days in citizens beginning to make demands. In addition, all the pilots were initially designed to focus on what works in building citizens’ ability to demand, rather than on the ability of those in power to respond.

**Box 1: ‘Our great achievement’ – Fredina’s group**

Fredina Said is a farmer animator in Kishapu District, Shinyanga. She began by encouraging her farmers’ group to hold discussions on a number of gaps and challenges. The first gap they identified was that there was no market space in the village. ‘If I wanted to sell my vegetables there were only two options – either to walk from house to house or go to the next village, four kilometres from here,’ explains Fredina.

Fredina mobilized the farmers’ group to write a letter to the district council asking for market space, and then regularly visited the village office to push this through. One of the women from her group is also a member of the village council, which enabled them to access decision makers.

Space has now been allocated for the market, and the women are using it every day. ‘The village government sees the potential of having a market place in our village; they have agreed to grant us a place. This has been our great achievement,’ says Fredina. The community are building stalls and expect to earn a better income from now on.

Fredina and her group have now set their sights even higher. They are lobbying village councils and the Tanzania Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture to get the local mining company to make a contribution to the district. They are working with local elders, and are talking to other groups about their rights and entitlements. They are also beginning to involve men, though this was difficult at first.

If active citizens like Fredina can catalyze others to take action, and link together to create a groundswell of demand for accountability, even greater change for the people of Kishapu is possible.
What works? Reflecting on the first phase

The first phase of the programme has been completed. The key questions now are: 1) What works in catalyzing citizens to act? 2) What makes the government respond, either positively or negatively, to a demand?

1. What works in catalyzing citizens to act?

In some cases, awareness raising is enough. For example, the active musicians’ pilot was very successful in raising the awareness of large numbers of people who then took action, including demonstrating about plans for electricity supply being moved to another district and demanding budget explanations from the district council, while students demanded a voice in the way their secondary school was run.

The election tracking was successful in getting citizens to continue to engage with governance structures after the elections, but elections are only one part of the governance puzzle, and in some instances communities were content to let the trackers take the follow-up action themselves.

The farmers’ animation pilot managed to get farmers’ groups, or other groups such as school committees or faith groups, to take action.

In the student councils’ pilot, students raised issues with teachers and achieved some small improvements on teacher absenteeism and lack of desks. This also provided students with a great experience of democracy.

Across the pilots, from farmers’ to musicians’ groups, a collective voice has been a mechanism for overcoming fear. Building on existing networks, forums, and relationships has worked as a way of achieving some traction in changing people’s mindsets; more can be done on both this and collective voice if the programme is able to continue to contribute to creating the conditions for social movements to emerge.

Box 2: Active citizenship in Tinde, Shinyanga

Kituli village, Tinde ward, has three farmer animators. They are members of different groups, and as a result of their training have been able to mobilize a large number of people by providing information on their rights and entitlements, how to search for and collect information, and the need to demand village meetings and income and expenditure reports.

One of the main issues was that there had been no public account of income and expenditure in the village since 2009. The community wanted these accounts, especially as their trust in the village executive officer (an appointed official) had been undermined by a number of cases where he had abused his position. Community members asked him to hold a village meeting to read the income and expenditure accounts, but he refused. They held the meeting themselves and decided to expel him.

He has now left his post and the headmistress of a village school is the acting village executive officer. The village chairperson was given the task of preparing the income and expenditure report and a meeting was held to read it. In the meantime, the animators and their groups are working on ways of petitioning the district council to allow them to nominate their own village executive officer.
2. What influences the government to respond, either positively or negatively, to a demand?

On the question of government response, some encouraging results have been seen, which could be attributed variously to good tactics, perseverance by citizens, leaders being sufficiently pressurized to act, or a willing local leader. More likely, these positive results are due to a combination of all of these factors.

However, when citizens have the will but not the capacity to make appropriate demands, the response by those in power is more likely to be negative. For example, following the work with active musicians, people acted collectively but leaders chose to reject their demands through intimidation and threats.

The election trackers were given some skills to record, track, and follow up on promises, but when leaders chose not to respond, neither the trackers nor the wider community knew what to do next. Likewise, the student leaders were trained to raise issues, but not how to find ways to ensure that they were listened to. Some teachers listened and acted, but others saw the newfound voice of the students as a threat to their own authority.

In comparison, in the farmer animators’ pilot, where ongoing skills training and coaching were given on how to strategize in taking action, community groups were able to agree their most pressing issues together and decide on the best course of action. Although not always successful in getting a response, they had a higher success rate on positive accountability, with more than 30 known success stories, such as the one described in Box 3.
Box 3: ‘Ignorance is a killing machine’ – Maimuna and the mining company

Photo: Kisuma Mapunda

Maimuna Said is a farmer animator in Shinyanga region, who is responsible for her village receiving a large payment from a mining company. The company, African Barrick Gold (ABG), had committed itself to giving money to local villages; this money should have been paid in 2009, channelled through a board made up of six members – two from ABG, two from the village, and two from the district government to act as overseers. However, the villagers had never been involved, and the board was formed without their approval or participation. Furthermore, the money had never been paid, partly because the company lacked confidence in the competence of the village leaders.

Having completed the training under the Chakua Hatua programme, Maimuna realized what was happening and briefed two women and a man to each ask a question on the issue at the village assembly meeting. Her strategy was successful, and a councillor decided to take the matter seriously. It was raised with the local MP, who proposed a parliamentary investigative tour of the mining districts.

As a result of the discussions that followed, the parliamentary committee agreed that the villages should be paid 180m Tanzanian shillings (approximately $100,000) by the mining company. On the spot, the committee gave TZS 300,000 to open a village account. In addition, the community will now receive TZS 60m per year (approximately $35,000).

‘We have already opened the bank account. We are planning to have a press conference and issue a press release to thank the committee and our MP for the initiative they took for us,’ explains Haji Omari, village executive officer.

The committee also promised the village piped water from Lake Victoria. The next steps will be to work with the animators to document exactly what was promised, and to support them to find ways to ensure that the money is received and well managed. This process can then be shared with other communities to show what can be achieved when they know their rights and are able to take action.

‘Ignorance is a killing machine. I was afraid to ask, because I was not so sure what I would say or what people would think of me, but that was because I did not know what to do. The animation has been a great help and makes things work for me, as well as giving me confidence,’ says Maimuna.
What did not work – and why?

There were a number of components of the programme which worked less well than others:

- The active musicians were not able to work well in the pastoralist context of Ngorongoro, because the communities were widely dispersed and it was hard to reach them.
- The community radio idea did not work because the government did not issue a licence. A different strategy is now needed.
- The tracking of election promises worked better in Ngorongoro than in Shinyanga, because it was begun further in advance of the elections. This gave more time for sensitization of both communities and politicians. In future, an even earlier start would enable communities to push for demand-led promises instead of simply choosing from what was offered to them.
- The farmer animators’ work was less successful than anticipated in spreading awareness beyond the groups that the animators belonged to. This might have been due to their lack of a ‘formal’ position in community leadership; other ways need to be found to promote widespread awareness in communities alongside the animator approach.
- Students were able to make demands within their school environment, but the assumption that they would be able to take this approach into the community did not hold – there was simply not enough respect for young people’s viewpoints. The programme needs to prepare the ground for youth engagement in community decision making before students are able to question their elders.

The lessons from phase one of the project in terms of what worked and what did not will be taken on board in the design of phase two.

A key bridge: understanding the minds of local leaders

‘We can’t invite leaders like the MPs because they come [only] when they have their own issues. We invite them but they don’t attend. Maybe we see them during the [election] campaign, which is when the road is repaired.’ – Resident of Busanda village

The programme recorded a number of occasions where people were prevented from speaking out or challenging authority. This suggested that Chukua Hatua needed to intervene directly in shaping leaders’ responses. Examples of negative responses from those in power were found at all levels, and can be attributed to the fact that leaders are not used to being challenged or held to account.

For example, in Kahama, active musicians’ performances were very popular. However, local leaders claimed that the musicians were in the pay of another political party. Musicians from Kahama said that many people would ask key questions, but they also cited instances where: ‘Unfortunately the leaders phoned the police and claimed the villagers were disturbing the peace’.

Local elected leaders can provide a key bridge between communities and ‘government’; they can be both duty bearers and local activists. In the
Tanzanian context, with a culture of extreme politeness and deference to authority, combined with high levels of centralism, this is a more promising approach than an oppositional one would be.

An exciting opportunity: activating leaders

‘The training has created an exciting opportunity for councillors to learn principles of good governance and apply them at community level. The knowledge gained will help to improve our performance and to execute our roles and responsibilities in a most effective and efficient way.’ – Local councillors in Shinyanga

An ‘active leaders’ project was designed part-way through the first phase of the programme. In August 2011, training was carried out for councillors in two districts in Shinyanga, which included the basics on their roles and responsibilities and how to prepare and assess budgets and plans, together with practical work on gathering communities’ views and presenting these to the district management team to agree an action plan.

Oxfam plans to develop this approach in phase two of the programme, expanding it to elected village leaders, who, depending on their attitudes, can represent either a serious blockage or an opportunity for communities to act. Mechanisms of highlighting positive and negative behaviour will also be explored, for example working with the media to report on both wrongful arrests and positive government responses.

For leaders further up the hierarchy – members of parliament, ministers, district and regional commissioners – the programme plans to take an opportunistic approach to influencing them and supporting communities to influence them, most often linked to issue-based campaigning at national level. This has already been happening during phase one with land rights campaigning in Ngorongoro district.

Box 4: Small acts of courage: local councillors and citizens work together in Ngorongoro district

The Maasai, who make up 80 per cent of the population in Ngorongoro district, are facing a major threat to their homes and livelihoods. In the name of investment, land grabs are leaving thousands of people without homes and livelihoods, with no alternative on offer. In this one district, which is home to about 170,000 people, there are currently six natural resource conflicts and three court cases in progress.

Another potential threat is proposed legislation to introduce a wildlife corridor in Ngorongoro district, which could result in around 20,000 people being evicted from eight villages and in massive cuts to prime cattle grazing lands, together with reduced access to water resources. If the plans go ahead, only one-sixth of the district’s land will remain for the pastoralists.

The Maasai are beginning to stand up for their rights and to seek the support of their fellow (non-pastoralist) Tanzanians. Women are at the forefront, even though traditionally they are marginalized and silent in pastoralist cultures. Following evictions in July 2009, 600 Maasai women marched to the local government offices to hand in over 1,800 political party membership cards – theirs and their neighbours’ – in protest. Community members recently turned out in their thousands to attend village assembly meetings.
Perhaps the most evident sign that things are changing is the behaviour of local councillors. Previously acting against the wishes of the communities they were elected to serve, they are now supporting them, speaking out for the rights of the residents and acting as a united body, together with local civil society organizations (CSOs), to withstand significant pressure from above.

This has not been easy: members of local CSOs have been harassed and arrested for their roles in helping residents raise their voices. When the councillors first attempted to give a press conference, so much pressure and intimidation were brought to bear on them that they abandoned the idea. However, with the support and backing of their communities they tried again a couple of months later, and succeeded.

Activism has triggered wider change. Regional and national organizations are starting to work together. The communities are now actively seeking information on laws and policies in order to take control of their situation. And the Ngorongoro women have started to stand for leadership positions, with the first woman councillor elected in her own right in 2010.

These small acts of courage represent one example of people beginning to realize their rights and standing firm to defend them. Time will tell whether the people of Ngorongoro can protect their land and continue to earn their livelihoods on their own terms.

What next?

Oxfam is now planning phase two of the programme. This next phase will build on the successes of the farmer animators and extend this approach to religious groups and leaders, since faith forms such an integral part of people's lives. It will also expand the approach to other groups such as teachers, youth groups, and traditional birth attendants and healers.

The election tracking work will be subsumed within the animator approach, and broadened to enable animators to look at engaging with budgeting and other village plans. This will enable communities to begin to agree and voice their priorities in advance of elections, and encourage those who seek election to tailor their promises to communities' demands.

The farmer animators' pilot showed that wider awareness raising was possible, but this now needs to be made concrete. To this end, the active musicians' approach will also be adopted with other arts groups, such as theatre.

The gender component will be strengthened by supporting emerging women leaders and working on men's attitudes towards women. Young people will also be targeted, particularly those out of school.

Waking up: what Oxfam has learned

- The programme needs to do more to prepare for negative responses. Scenario planning with partners and communities will be one approach, and risk mitigation measures such as negotiation skills and conflict resolution will be embedded in all animation and active leaders’ training. Linking citizens and partners to national organizations such as the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition is another strategy. This approach will need to be continually responsive to the changing context.
• The next phase will continue to work with local elected leaders. Oxfam has learned that the benefits of changing the behaviour and increasing the capacity of village leaders and ward councillors are two-fold: they are more likely to respond to citizens’ demands positively, and they can be key allies in campaigning to negotiate citizens’ issues upwards to central government.

• Although there have been some notable successes, gender bias in Tanzania is very entrenched and work with women needs to be strengthened, in particular looking at women’s leadership, men’s attitudes to women, and women’s participation in public spaces.

• The fact that there is little room for people to discuss issues and to interact with leaders is a major gap in local accountability mechanisms. This is perhaps the most exciting and difficult area of work in the next phase. A key element of the strategy will be aiming to open up spaces for such debate.

• An evolutionary approach to development is working for the programme. An evolving model of change is perhaps a necessity in an environment as complex as accountability work in a young democracy such as Tanzania.11

• Members of the communities with which Oxfam is working through Chukua Hatua are beginning to become active citizens. The pilot programme has seen some exciting successes. It is truly time now for Tanzania’s citizens to wake up and demand accountability.
Notes

3 Oxfam in Tanzania Strategic Plan 2010–2015, Oxfam GB.
5 Source: Anna Bwana, Oxfam Governance Programme Officer, Shinyanga region.
6 Source: Kisuma Mapunda, Programme Officer.
7 TAMASHA (2011) op. cit.
8 Ibid.
9 Capacity Building Initiative for Poverty Alleviation (CABUIPA), partner report on ‘Councillors: accountability and oversight training’.
10 See ‘Voices from Loliondo’, at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7knZOEVxO0k