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ALTERNATIVE VIEWS ON DEVELOPMENT AND
POVERTY REDUCTION:
TANZANIAN GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVES ABOUT
FOOD, LAND AND DEMOCRACY

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INTRODUCTION

There is a terrible gap between mainstream assertions about development and democracy in Tanzania, and what is happening on the ground. The majority of Tanzanians struggle to survive deepening impoverishment, exploitation and disempowerment, while a minute number become obscenely wealthy and powerful. Macroeconomic policies are decided upon by a small cadre from the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), central government and specialists, largely economists – the majority of the people are systematically excluded. This is supposedly the era of political liberalisation and multi-party democracy. Multi-party politics has actually led to a reduction in politics at the level of the legislature, however. That is, the ruling party dominates its members as well as the nation, in the name of party discipline; while the so-called opposition strives to take their place, without challenging the basic structure nor content of political rule and economic framework.

People lack recourse to the kind of development debates which flourished on the continent in the 1960s and 1970s to help understand the historical processes at work. Instead, they are confronted by economic fundamentalist ideology which gives primacy to the ‘free market’ and a client state.

At the same time, there has been an increase in civil society activity in Tanzania, coming from all spectrums, from left to centre to right. While most civil society

organisations (CSOs) are oriented towards welfare and service delivery, there is a growing group of activist organisations who have sought to challenge the corporate-led globalisation process and to defend the rights and entitlements of the people. They are organised around different specific issues – environmental issues, land rights, women’s rights, youth rights, human rights. What they share in common is a critical transformative stance vis a vis the state and the existing political economic order; a deep commitment to the majority of the people who have been exploited and marginalised; and a willingness to act and to speak out.

In this paper, I will draw on the views of villagers who have participated in participatory action research in three rural districts of Tanzania, and the national campaign which has resulted, in order to share alternative ways of looking at development and democracy. They represent a substantively different outlook on what development should be about, and what the meaning of good governance is. This paper draws on the rich and often heated exchange of views that has occurred at all levels, especially within village and district meetings, small focus group discussions, and coalition meetings at national level. Additional insights have been provided by numerous individuals, again at all levels, mostly in discussion, but also in writing (see especially Shivji and Peter 2001).

The second section will briefly examine mainstream assumptions about development and democracy, drawing on the experience of HPIC debt relief and Poverty Reduction Strategy in Tanzania. The third section provides information about the early work of the Rural Food Security Policy and Development Group (called KIHACHA today, an acronym for *Kikundi cha Uhakika wa Chakula*), and the issues that loomed large as a result of this process. The goals and objectives of the campaign are presented in the fourth section, along with a description of the way in which the campaign is being organised thus far. Lessons learned, and implications for the future are presented in the concluding section.

POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

Tanzania became one of the early recipients of HPIC debt relief, following the ‘successful’ preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), and satisfactory

‘performance’ with respect to macroeconomic stabilisation. Critical voices were raised from the beginning, however, about the contradictions that were built into the process (see TCDD/PRSP 2000ab; Mbilinyi 2001). How could a Poverty Reduction Strategy be predicated on the perpetuation of the present package of economic reform policies i.e. structural adjustment, liberalisation and privatisation, one of the three basic conditionalities of HPIC debt relief? Wasn’t SAP a major cause not only of deepening impoverishment of the majority, but of growing inequalities as well between the rich and the poor, between rural and urban areas, and between different regions and ethnic groups?

The very conception of poverty reduction was focused on symptoms, not causes; palliatives which might win the hearts and minds of some social groups, but could not provide lasting solutions. Indeed, the message clearly has been that poverty is an unfortunate accompaniment to globalised development. Steps must be taken to ameliorate poverty, so as to avoid the turmoil and unrest which might contribute to a mass movement against globalisation in general, and the client states in particular. However, globalised capitalism both creates and thrives on immiseration of the masses, and clearly cannot be the source of poverty reduction nor poverty eradication.

The political dimension is just as contradictory. HPIC demands not only the perpetuation of macroeconomic stabilisation (ie SAP plus) and poverty reduction measures, but some semblance of participation and/or consultation. In Tanzania, as elsewhere in Africa, consultative workshopping has been the major form of ‘participation’. Representatives of different ‘stakeholders’ have been invited to present their views about ‘poverty’, causes of poverty, and possible solutions and/or recommendations at workshops organised at the zonal and national level. That is the extent of the participation – workshopping!

What has been the focus of discussion in these workshops, and in the exchanges that have taken place between the donor community, led by the World Bank and IMF institutions; the government, led by the Treasury; and civil society, led mainly by national civil society organisations (CSOs)? The terrain of participation was confined within strict parameters – people and organisations were free to provide input on monitoring indicators of progress in poverty reduction, but were not to comment on

macroeconomic stabilisation. That was already decided upon; that was not open to question for another twenty years. Hence, activist CSOs have talked about twenty years bondage to SAP as the price to be paid for HPIC – and indeed, its very reason for existence.

Mainstream Assumptions

What are the main assumptions about development and governance which underlie PRS and associated policy statements and processes? A tentative list is presented below, with the expectation that participants will contribute new and/or different ideas:

1. Development depends on external finance, in the form of loans (public, private), grants, and foreign private investment.
2. Development means incorporation into the global capitalist economy [referred to as integrating with ‘globalisation’].
3. Development depends on an external- or export-orientation in terms of production and commerce.
4. The principles of the ‘free market’ will support the development process.
5. Development equals growth.
6. Good governance is a matter of efficiency, transparency and expertise – in other words, a management problem.
7. The grassroots people [‘villagers’, ‘the uneducated’, ‘the poor’, sometimes ‘women’ and ‘youth’] need to participate in their development, through self-help endeavours, hard work and compliance with the development paradigm.
8. The grassroots people **lack** education, entrepreneurship skills and attitudes, and an independent attitude.
9. The grassroots people are too dependent on the state and outsiders – they must learn to be self-reliant, to compete in the market like everyone else.
10. Participation and consultation actually mean going out to inform and sensitise the people about policies – they do not mean being informed and sensitised **by** the people.
11. Stakeholders workshops provide the needed participation and consultation.

NEPAD?

How new is NEPAD, how different from the mainstream assumptions which have characterised development planning, including the PRSP process, and the policy framework within which our governments operate? In spite of often tantalising references to renaissance, African-owned processes and the like, NEPAD is built around many of the same basic assumptions noted above. Development will depend upon further incorporation into the global capitalist economy, more or less on the terms set by the large corporations and their state agents led by the IFIs. While token reference is made to accountable government, a culture of human rights and popular participation (para 43), the very process through which NEPAD was formulated has been highly exclusionary and non-participatory at national and PanAfrican level. African ownership has been reduced to the involvement of a few government leaders, while excluding the vast majority of African peoples who have not been involved in its formulation, nor have they been informed about it. Instead, African people are invited to participate in its implementation – par for the course.

Growth remains the key priority, rather than redistribution mechanisms and sustainable development. The key objective is to bridge the gap between Africa and the developed countries, by increasing Africa's competitiveness in the international market (para 98). An appropriate environment must be created to attract foreign private investment (para 154), including land reform (158), and so on, so that Africa is no longer perceived to be a risky place to invest. Trade barriers in the developed world need to be removed, especially for those goods for which Africa has comparative advantage [?].

There is hardly any discussion about politics and democracy. Development is an economic issue, defined by neoliberal economic notions of the market, financial management and the like.

RURAL FOOD SECURITY POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP – KIHACHA

What is KIHACHA? Who is KIHACHA?

KIHACHA is a network of concerned organisations and individuals that advocates for people's rights to food, land and democracy at all levels. Its core is a group of researcher

animators based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Dar es Salaam who have worked with village and/or district animators, and more than 2000 villagers who have participated in animation activities since 1998 in three districts, Ngorongoro, Njombe and Shinyanga Rural. A campaign network has been established involving civil society organisations from all three districts and regions, and activist organisations based in Dar es Salaam. The National Campaign Committee (NCC) provides leadership in setting policy for the national campaign. The committee includes leaders from four activist civil society organisations, that is Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), TANGO, Hakiardhi and TAMWA. Village and district campaign committees are being established this year to spearhead the programme in the three districts – hopefully other districts will join, with the support of other coalition members.

What Does Rural Food Security Depend Upon?

Using participatory action research tools, KIHACHA research animators from the University of Dar es Salaam working with local animators were able to facilitate a fairly open discussion and debate at local level on the meaning of food security, the factors which support or undermine it, and the kind of strategies of action which would improve the situation. Although there were different views and priorities for some groups, according to gender/age, position in local political structures and income/class categories, a general consensus did emerge which reflected a holistic, multilayered view of society.

Food security meant that people had access to adequate amounts and quality of food, and good nutrition, throughout the year. More than half of the people in the nine villages participating in this process did not have food security all year round.

What factors were needed for food security? First of all, food security was highly associated with income security, having access to livable incomes, and a sustainable livelihood. In many areas, and especially among the poor, there was a sense of their livelihoods as peasant cultivators or livestockkeepers being threatened and/or highly uncertain. What was the problem? People spoke about the negative outcomes of liberalisation, privatisation and structural adjustment. For example, the withdrawal of producer subsidies had made farm inputs too costly and often unavailable. Crop and livestock prices were too low to provide a favourable rate of return, after factoring in the

costs of farm inputs, labour and other items. Moreover, people spoke about the lack of a certain market, one which they could use to predict returns. In Tanzania, the free market [*soko huria*] is referred to as *soko holela*, the chaotic market; people demand *soko la hakika* or *soko la haki* – a certain or a just market.

In Ngorongoro, the priority issue was the lack of certainty over rights to land and other natural resources. Pastoralists had had a long history of being dispossessed of their land and livelihoods, beginning in the colonial era. This process has heightened during the present SAP era, with priority given by government to the interests of foreign companies engaged in tourism and hunting, and the wildlife industry which supports them. The mining industry poses a similar threat in much of Shinyanga. There and elsewhere, grassroots people ask, Who is the government accountable to? The private investors and the donors, or ‘the people’ *wananchi*?

Many other factors were perceived to be important, besides access to a sustainable livelihood and the means to achieve it i.e. land and fair markets. They included access to education; savings and credit; peace and security; good roads; and water.

When asked about what kind of policies would make a difference, villagers’ common reaction was – Policy? Don’t talk to us about policy, that is government business. We know nothing about policies, we have not participated in making policies. In 2000, when we returned with popular versions in Kiswahili of eight policies, people noted that some of the policies were potentially meaningful, but they lacked concrete strategies of implementation, and the resources with which to put them to work. Two key points have been adopted by KIHACHA from the villagers’ views:

‘a policy not implemented is not a policy’

‘a policy which lacks resource allocation for its implementation is not a policy’.

They also demanded that the government carry out similar processes in policy formulation, i.e. bring popular versions of policy statements to villagers first, to get their views through animation processes, before they go to the government drafts people, to Cabinet and to Parliament. In other words, they demand that villagers, women and men, young and old, poor and rich, should fully participate in the entire policy process – policy

formulation, implementation and monitoring. They reject the concept of ‘being enabled to participate’ as in *kushirikishwa* – their demand is direct participation, *kushiriki*.

Contradictions emerged in the discussions at village and district level, reflecting especially gender/age and class/income differences. Some women, especially women activist leaders, insisted that women’s rights to land and livestock had to be incorporated into local strategies and demands, along with the defense of community rights. The different perspectives of village government leaders and the villagers have also become starkly evident during the course of the campaign. At the same time, people are having to learn how to negotiate local contradictions in order to come up with a common stand vis a vis big capital [ie big companies] and the state, without putting the other contradictions secondary and forgotten.

Feedback workshops have become an essential part of the process, organised at village, district and national level. They provide an opportunity to village women and men to express their views directly to leaders of government and CSOs, and to experts, and to defend their policy positions. On the other hand, the latter have the opportunity to learn from the people, and some have recognised and valued that process. However, holding workshops where villagers can ‘dialogue’ with more powerful actors cannot, by itself, bring change. This can slip too easily into feel good research/organising activity.

The creation of a coalition and the planning and implementation of a national campaign has become one effort to move forward and to engage directly in the policy process. KIHACHA’s campaign has a specific organisational component, by building a strong coalition at all levels. It builds on earlier efforts to campaign around land reform and violence against women, and contributes to new efforts to ‘get resources back to the people’. All in all, we perceive this work to be part of a process of building a social movement for democracy.

Villagers and their representatives at national workshops have decided on the main theme of the campaign, the **right to food, land and democracy**, *haki ya chakula, ardhi na demokrasia*.

THE RIGHT TO FOOD, LAND AND DEMOCRACY CAMPAIGN

What Is The Campaign Goal And Purpose?

The main campaign goal is that the voice of the people in villages and city streets has been heard and incorporated into decision-making about development policy; their ownership and control of land and other resources has increased; and food security has become the right of every person. The purpose of the campaign is to ensure that the structure of social relations and governance within villages/neighbourhoods and outside has become one of participatory democracy as a result of the demands of a broad coalition of grassroots people and activists.

What Kind Of Changes Does The Campaign Want To See?

Three main changes are sought:

1. The capacity of grassroots people and activist groups to organise themselves and lobby for the right to food, land and democracy has been strengthened;
2. The opportunity for different social groups to participate in structures of policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation has become wide and open; and
3. Understanding and public awareness about the right to food, land and democracy has been increased through a public debate.

Three specific areas are highlighted. One is to strengthen the structural position and power of the village assembly, which consists, by law, of all women and men at and above the age of 18 years. In the present legislation for local government reform, the village assembly is reportedly supreme, but in practice, it has been overshadowed . Moreover, new government reform processes completely overlook the village level when it comes to decision-making power and control over natural resources.

The second is to strengthen people's self-organising through their own producer associations and/or cooperatives, without government or political interference.

The third is to revisit neoliberal economic reforms, associated with the free market, in order to ensure that the development framework, and government structures, protect the interests and livelihoods of the majority.

How is the Campaign being Conducted?

A variety of campaign materials were produced, on the basis of the issues raised by villagers who participated in the process. They include a calendar entitled 'Is food not the right of every one?' with captions like 'chaotic market is killing us', 'let the people be listened to', 'democracy begins in the home', 'the small ones should not be marginalised [ie children, youth]' and 'our land must not be taken'. One poster shows 'secret government' torn between the demands of investors and donors, on the one hand, and 'the people' on the other. The former call for privatisation and free markets; the people say, 'food first'. Its question is, 'who is government accountable to?' A second poster asks the question, 'which kind of leadership is best for us?', showing a typical top-down exclusionary process juxtaposed with a participatory inclusionary process.

Two t-shirts have been created, using the government-being-pulled-apart scene and the 'rights to food' picture from the calendar. Villagers are especially keen to wear the torn apart government shirt, whereas this shirt puts off or frightens many government officials and 'educated' people, young and old, with vested interests in the present system.

Two popular booklets were published in Kiswahili, with lively graphic illustrations, **Haki ya Chakula, Ardhi na Demokrasia** and **Uchambuzi wa Sera Kuhusu Uhakika wa Chakula**. The former provides the basic arguments of the campaign, and the latter provides more information on the processes leading up to the campaign and grassroots views about each of the eight policies they reviewed.

A colourful brochure has also been printed in multiple copies, providing the goals, purpose and objectives of the campaign.

Following the recent national workshop to plan the campaign, in January this year, involving participants from village, district and national level, the village and district campaign committees have begun to implement the campaign. Members of the coalition and other partners are also taking part by, initially, helping to disseminate the campaign materials. Within two months, February-March, every region had been covered, and nearly everyone of the 120 districts in Tanzania.

Special media workshops were held to win over support from all branches of the media, with the support of one of our key committee members, TAMWA. There has been

an extremely high publicity coverage of every step of the campaign. Villagers from Njombe were highlighted recently in the national news on tv, radio and in the press as a result, denouncing the results of free market policies, demanding their rights as peasants and/or as women, demanding to be heard. Public meetings have been held with the support of coalition partners, involving CSOs and grassroots groups; academic community; and others. Presentations have been made to the multilateral UN agencies, and to some bilateral agencies. Principal Secretaries of 7 key ministries have been visited to share the views of the grassroots through the campaign goals and objectives, and to solicit their responses. We have met with two Parliamentary SubCommittees, and individual Parliamentarians; some have begun to incorporate some of the issues in their own presentations in Parliament and to the media, with or without acknowledgement.

This is the first short part of a two year intense process, and so it is much too early to evaluate achievements and gaps in the work. Moreover, we do see this as part of a long process of building capacity at all levels, so as to build a social movement for democracy. Nevertheless, lessons have been learned, which will be discussed in the next section.

WHAT LESSONS HAVE BEEN LEARNED?

Greater clarity has been achieved about what the key issues are, from a grassroots perspective, about development and democracy, arising from the experience of KIHACHA thus far. In summary they include the following:

1. Grassroots groups/people demand the right to participate in policy processes on their own behalf – through their own organisations led by themselves.
2. Grassroots groups/people demand self-government processes – *kujitawala*, where they take a full and active part in determining policy and controlling basic resources at all levels; they have been ruled long enough by others; in short, theirs is a desire for participatory democracy, not electoral or representative democracy.
3. ‘Development’ from a local perspective connotes real material improvement in the lives and livelihoods of grassroots people – not abstract statistical signs of economic growth.
4. The foundation of economic development is economic democracy, which is built on principles of equity and cooperation, not competition and greed.

5. Change will depend on building a mass movement for democracy at all levels, which is grounded with the people.
6. Civil society organisations may need to refocus their efforts ‘downwards’ and horizontally, rather than upwards to top decision-makers; so as to contribute to the building of the mass movement, and to avoid cooptation by the state, which legitimises policies and programmes which run counter to the interests and desires of the people.
7. Economic policy at all levels need to be demystified, its basic assumptions challenged, and new forms of development thinking/dreaming devised, which correspond to the vision and interests of the ‘grassroots’/disempowered.

These resonate with the issues raised by others engaged in participatory action work in Asia and Latin America, as well as in Africa. Participatory action research is highly associated with the concept of participatory development. The concept of *participatory development* takes explicit account of structures of inequality and power relations, and calls for transformation of decision-making processes *at all levels*, as shown by Rahman (1993) below:

- all segments of society have a voice in deciding what the key priorities/objectives of development will be
- all segments of society participate in making key decisions on the policies to be followed to reach these objectives
- at the level of implementation, all segments of society participate in deciding how to use means so as to reach given ends
- all segments of society benefit equally from development, in terms of access to and control over key resources at all levels of society
- special measures are adopted to overcome inequalities and disempowerment of the past, so as to enable specific disempowered groups (women, youth, pastoralists, the poor) to access resources and become full participants in development.

Participatory development recognises the need to build *popular social movements* for popular democracy. Political organisations -- not political parties which are defined here as state institutions -- need to be created and/or strengthened, which challenge the structures of power in place in politics, economics and culture. These organisations are *self-organisations*, led by members of a given interest group such as smallholder livestock-keepers, farmers, workers, marginalised youth or working women.

Building a popular democracy depends on a process whereby grassroots people become increasingly responsible for their own self-emancipation, through experience in organising themselves and struggling for their rights. Emancipation cannot be provided to the disempowered by, for example, an NGO that seeks to represent their interests -- this would be a continuation of the paternalistic missionary relationship which has fostered dependency attitudes and behaviour in the past.

The examples of community-based and community-led actions are increasing worldwide, especially in 'third world' countries of the South (Kaufman and Alfonso 1997, Morse et al 1995). New models of democracy have emerged, with real empowerment of people at the local level, in what has been referred to as "deepening democracy" (Wright 2000). Steps are taken to scale up from community to regional and/or municipality level, thus strengthening the voice of the poor in decision-making.

The assumptions of NEPAD and other policy initiatives therefore need to be challenged, in order to adopt a more people-centred, transformative framework. The elements of an alternative vision of development and democracy are identifiable within concrete experiences in Africa and elsewhere. We need to turn to the people to learn these lessons, and move forward.

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