Theoretical framework

Introduction

The push for decentralisation has been the involvement of the people in the development process. The underlying assumption is that placing more power and resources at a lower level of government will enhance development. There are several arguments that support this idea. Firstly, the local people have knowledge of the shortcomings of facilities. Their preferences are believed to give a more adequate picture of the needs than relying on perception of the officials at the central government. Secondly, if government officials are more accountable to the local people, these people are supposedly more willing to participate in the planning and development process (see for example Bahl 1995; Bergh 2004).

The same way of reasoning can be found in the Local Government Reform Programme and in particular the bottom-up planning process. With regard to service delivery in Tanzania, the important aim of the bottom-up planning process, among other things, is to ensure local participation in primary school and health care provision. The government commitment to ensure that participation is realised, the so-called O&OD methodology, was introduced to be used countrywide. The O&OD is a participatory community planning process to empower the people on the basis of bottom-up planning approach and positive thinking. This chapter explores the theory behind the O&OD process, resulting in a few hypotheses that can be tested in an empirical research.

This chapter mirrors the bottom-up planning process (O&OD-methodology) from two perspectives. The first perceptive is described in the next section and is based on the ideas laid down in the Policy Paper on Local Government Reform (1998). This is the government’s policy theory on local autonomy and local participation. This policy theory has its weaknesses, caused by the institutional framework. In the last section of this chapter these weaknesses are explored as well, resulting in competing explanations
of the factors that contribute to development at the local level. These rival explanations result in three other hypotheses that will be tested in the empirical study as well.

Bottom-up planning as envisaged in policy documents

*Development*

The main assumption in the Policy Paper on Local Government Reform (1998) is that involvement of local people will enhance development. It is clear that local communities do not have enough resources to build facilities that can provide the social services needed. There is always a need for support from the higher governmental layers, either in money or in kind (knowledge). This involvement from the central government does not mean that the decision-making has to be made on the central level. The past has shown that a passive local community that waits for the (central) government to make the decisions is incapable of contributing to real sustainable development.

For this reason the Local Government Reform presents a new planning procedure. To examine the effects of this procedure requires a method to assess whether or not local development does occur and whether it is caused by this procedure. Development can be used as the dependent variable.

Development is a variable that calls for a comparison of a situation at a certain time with a situation from a previous time. If this comparison shows an increase of infrastructure, such as building, equipment or staff, one might think that there is some kind of development. This way of reasoning has its shortcomings. After all: the improvement of infrastructure might lag behind the increase in the demand. For example, if the increase of students exceeds the increased capacity of the buildings, there is some kind of development, but one could hardly argue that this development fulfils the needs of the local people.

To assess development one needs to compare the actual situation with a norm reflecting the actual needs of the people depending on those facilities. For this reason the developments of facilities can be compared to the national standards of these facilities. These national standards take into account the number of citizens that are depending on the facility. In that sense the comparison of the actual situation with the national standards does provide some more information on the real development that took place during a certain period of time. Both measurements can be used to assess whether or not the facility showed development.

*Bottom-up planning as a means to increase development*

The Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (O&OD) methodology is a procedure to enhance local participation as a means to increase development. The O&OD methodology is the result of government efforts to harmonise the various participatory approaches and tools being used by different development supporters in different districts and at different times (The United Republic of Tanzania 2005, the Programme Report by Prime Minister’s Office Regional Administration and Local Government). Obviously, the government was eager to adopt the O&OD methodology because of the success-
ful results associated with various participatory approaches used by various development supporters such as NGOs.

There is some evidence that participatory approaches lead to success. One example is the Moiivarro Village in Moshono Area Development Project where World Vision Tanzania (a Christian NGO), supported the restoration of school classrooms, the laying of a section of water pipe and the construction of a tank at the water source all through community participation (Kelsall & Claire 2003). Some other success stories show also that community participation and empowerment contributed to realising development projects. In these cases, community members seem to internalise the approach and even took new initiatives to improve their environment, even after the project came to an end. Active communities appeared to take their destiny into their own hands, sometimes even changing their leadership. In Kilimani village, in Rufiji District, the local community identified poor leadership as one of the main obstacles to development. As a result the village leaders were trained and success was realised in the implementation of the water project.

These examples show that community participation can contribute to development. The question is therefore: can O&OD methodology, in the context of Decentralisation by Devolution, produce meaningful community participation and empowerment? Does it make an impact on development at the local level? The answer to this question lies in the design of the bottom-up planning process.

**O&OD incorporated in the bottom-up planning process**

As stated before, the District Council is the highest decision-making institution in the district. Any decisions taken by government to support local initiatives have to be made by the District Council. The main assumption in the Local Government Reform is that further decentralisation enhances development. This assumption receives some support in the success stories on community participation. Therefore the planning procedure requires for communities to identify their needs and to state their wishes. Councils on the other hand are supposed to support these wishes. Figure 6.1 pictures these assumptions in the bottom-up planning procedure.

**Figure 6.1  The model of bottom-up planning process**
Involvement

The bottom-up planning procedure as pictured in figure 6.1 is the ideal type: a system working like this is expected to enhance the development of facilities. In this model the first major assumption, based on the success stories of community participation, is that if local people are involved in the planning procedure, this will strengthen development. This brings us to the first hypothesis that can be used to check the model:

**H1:** *If the local people participate in the planning process, development will occur at the local level.*

Involvement in itself is a vague factor. Involvement can be regarded both as ‘awareness’ and ‘ownership’. Awareness refers to the knowledge of the local people about their role in the planning procedure. Do they know about the content of their respective village plans? Here local people are expected to be able to state development preferences contained in their respective village plan. If the majority of local people are not aware of the content of these plans, one can hardly regard the local community as ‘involved’ in the planning procedure.

Ownership refers to the knowledge of the follow up of village plan. After a plan is formulated the decision-making on the Council level and the implementation determines whether or not the wishes are actually realised. Involvement requires a local community that is able to say what happens after the plan was formulated, and what happened with the development of the facility involved. If the status of the facility remained poor and the local community did not undertake anything to change this, one can hardly speak of involvement.

Taken into account

The planning procedure itself demands a specific use of the institutional framework. The involvement of the local people results in specific wishes with regard to the development of the facilities in their communities. It is the district council that has to decide whether or not these wishes are taken into account. According to the main principle of devolving autonomy to the local level, it is expected that the council takes into account these wishes. This brings us to the second hypothesis underlying the O&OD process:

**H2:** *If the council takes into account the development preferences of the local people, development will occur at the local level.*

Of course the district council will be unable to grant all wishes stated by the local communities. The financial resources will simply fail to fulfil all these wishes. Therefore the hypothesis is formulated in a more subtle manner: it is not a question of whether or not the council grants all the wishes, but whether or not the council considers these wishes. The O&OD process expects that the council uses the wishes stated by the local communities for its decision-making. The opposite is of course that the council ignores these wishes. That would be a violation of the ideas of O&OD and can be
considered as a sign of central (top-down) interference at the decision-making process instead of decentral (bottom-up) decision-making.

The involvement of the local people in the planning process is considered to be meaningful if their development preferences are to be ‘taken into account’ at council level. In this regard, the development preferences contained in the village plans are expected to be at least reflected in the council plan. To assess whether or not local preferences are taken into account, one could compare the council plans with the village plans. If the council plans reflect development preferences contained in the village plan, there is evidence that these preferences are really taken into account. If there is no trace of these wishes, it is safe to assume that those requests are being ignored.

Support

The third hypothesis deals with the content of the decision-making. The main assumption of devolution to local communities is that the decisions of the council do reflect the ideas, wishes and initiatives of the local communities. The council is expected to support those wishes. This generates the following hypothesis.

**H3:** If the council supports implementation of development preferences at the local level, development will occur

Despite the inclusion of the preferences of local communities in the council plans, the underlying theory of the O&OD methodology is that development only occurs when the council supports the implementation of these decisions. The support referred to here is either financial support or support in kind. If one really wants to enhance local participation, these local communities should feel supported in their wishes. To assess whether or not local communities received support one could compare the financial resources mobilised at the local level with the support received from the council. If the realization of the wishes depends fully on contributions from the community itself, there is no support at all. The assumed use of the planning process in the O&OD procedure is that the council, of course, fully supports local wishes.

Alternative explanations for development

There is often a discrepancy between the system (in this case: the policy) on paper and how it is actually used (Van Dijk 2008: 150). The model of the O&OD methodology is an ideal that ignores some relevant factors. These factors interfere with the decision-making by the councils, interfere with the gathering of information by the officials at the council level and interfere with the use of resources by local communities. In other words: there are some strings connecting the bottom-up planning process that might have an impact to the expected results from the O&OD methodology.

The first factor deals with interference from the central government with LGAs. Although the relationship is characterised in terms of consultation and advice, it leaves many questions as to whether it indeed provides the LGAs with the discretion to respond to the needs of the local people. After all: the central government, to be more specific, the sectoral ministries for health and education formulate national norms that
have to be complied with by local facilities. These norms deal with the number of staff in relation to the number of pupils or clients, the number of buildings and equipment and even the maintenance of the equipment. The result of these national standards and guidelines is that they might be dominating the decision-making procedure at the district council.

This is more likely, taken into account that many senior staff at the local government authorities is employed by the central government. Thus, there are incentives for the local government staff to be responsive to central wishes and central policy instead of the development preferences of the local people.

The second issue is the connection between the lower local government staff and their respective district council. The local government staff at the lower local government level and at the facility level itself are employees of the district council. In this regard, it is likely that they perform what they are asked to do by the district council. As a result, the sense of local accountability can be diluted and the prevailing wishes in the council plans could be those forwarded by lower local government staff as instructed by council staff.

This administrative relationship between council and those in charge of health facilities or head teachers of primary schools, also works the other way round. It is likely that the district council might collect data directly from these officials, instead of using the planning procedure. After all: this information provides more specific information on the current status of the facility. The quality of the O&OD plans also affects the information. Obviously, if development preferences made by the local people expressed through village plans are not clearly stated, the responsible staff at the district council will probably use other possible sources of information.

The third factor is of a different nature. The two types of issues mentioned above reflect the failure of the bottom-up planning procedure. The third factor provides an alternative for the local communities themselves. There have been several development partners supporting community development initiatives. Often, such development partners work directly with communities either by facilitating and initiating development projects or by supporting the development projects that have already been started. On the other hand, local people themselves can sometime mobilise resources through development partners. In this situation the observed development changes at the local level could be a result of the relationship between communities and development partners, and not due to the O&OD methodology. The type of development relationship between communities and development partners are likely to have an impact on development since it often supports either the already initiated development project or is a response to the local people’s specific request. In this situation local people are more likely to be more willing and committed to participate since their preferences for development are respected. Besides, the support from development partners has a less bureaucratic procedure in comparison to those found in the government administrative system.
**Figure 6.2**  The actual model of the bottom-up planning process

- **Central government**
- **Council level**
  - Community development preferences are incorporated in the district plan
- **Village and Ward level**
  - Community development preferences are compiled into the village/ward plan
- **Community level**
  - Community members identify development preferences
- **Development partners**

- **Involvement**
- **Taken into account**
- **Support**