

# Local Voice and Rights in Practice: A Review of Initiatives to Strengthen Demand-Side Accountability

A proposal for a Daraja research project  
January 2008



## Introduction

Local government that responds effectively to the needs and priorities of the local community is a long way from being achieved in rural Tanzania. District officials are accountable to an elected council, which is supposed to ensure that the interests of citizens are always taken into account. However, the reality is that electoral democracy is still emerging, accountability pressures on councillors between elections are very weak, and there is little local scrutiny of government plans or performance by either the media or civil society. As a result, local government responds more to the interests of central government than to the local community, and in many cases doesn't face much accountability pressure at all.

Daraja aims to address this in three ways. First, Daraja will build the capacity of the community, civil society, the media and elected representatives to scrutinise local government plans and performance and hold local government to account. Second, Daraja will promote opportunities for the community to make their needs and priorities clear to local government. And third, Daraja will work with national government and donors to promote policies that reinforce rather than undermine the accountability of local government to the wider community.

What lessons can Daraja learn from other organisations that have been doing similar work in other places? How can we make sure that our work is as effective as possible?

The project described in this proposal is a research project that will ensure Daraja's work is informed by the experience of other organisations working towards similar goals. The research will review a number of strategies to promote demand-side accountability pressures on local government and draw out useful lessons for Daraja to take on board.

This proposal introduces the basic ideas behind the study, and outlines the research methods that will be used in conducting the research. It is a statement of Daraja's objectives for the study.

## Research Topic, Objective and Questions

A significant focus of Daraja's work will be to strengthen demand-side accountability pressures on local government, and thus to contribute to more responsive and more effective local government. This is not an entirely new idea, but rather one that has been employed in a number projects and programmes around the world. By understanding similar initiatives, Daraja would be able to build on the experiences of other actors, take on board ideas of best practice and avoid making some of the same mistakes. This study is therefore

### About Us - Introducing Daraja

Daraja is a new organisation, working in rural Tanzania, aiming to make local government responsive to the wider community. Our name, Daraja, comes from the Swahili word for bridge. This reflects our approach of bringing the community, local government and other institutions together. We are registered as a charity in the UK (No. 1116346) and are in the process of registering in Tanzania.

We aim to:

- *Work with local government*, so they are better able to respond to the community;
- *Work with the community*, so they can hold government to account;
- *Bring government and community closer together.*

Daraja's founding director has 8 years' experience in rural development, research and advocacy in Tanzania, and a Masters degree in Development Management from the University of Manchester. As such, the ideas behind Daraja are informed by development theory and grounded in the reality of rural Tanzania.

designed with the objective of increasing understanding of a range of approaches to promoting demand-side accountability pressures on local government. The approaches to be covered will include at least the following:

- *Community radio and local print media* – using the media to provide scrutiny and accountability pressure on local government. There are examples of this in Sri Lanka, Uganda and South Africa.
- *Public expenditure tracking* – monitoring public service delivery by following the flow of funds and making sure that they are spent in line with the district budget. There are examples of this idea in practice from Tanzania and Uganda.
- *Citizens' report cards* – asking citizens what they think of the state of public services and the performance of local government. This will include examples from Bangladesh and Ghana.
- *Capacity building for grassroots organisations* – supporting community groups and building their capacity to hold local government to account. This idea has been tried in many places, but with limited success.
- *Participatory budgeting* – developing and agreeing the district budget at public meetings as a way to ensure that plans fit the community's priorities. This idea comes originally from Bolivia, and has since been employed particularly in South America.

The study will aim to answer some key questions for each approach. What are the key features that define the approach? What particularly successful example(s) of the approach in practice can be found? What are the factors that appear to influence the extent of success of the approach? What are the commonly occurring obstacles and how have or could they be overcome? What key lessons can be learnt from both more and less successful examples of the approach in practice? The study will also synthesise the findings from each of the approaches covered, aiming to answer the following questions:

### **How will we go about the study?**

The research will be conducted by looking at case studies of each approach. Rather than visit all these projects, existing reports and project evaluations will be used. We will also conduct a small number of interviews with key individuals involved in implementing these approaches, by telephone or email rather than in person.

For each of the approaches included in the study, a small number (2-4) of real world examples will be identified and briefly documented. However, the emphasis will be on analysing the approaches rather than the specific examples.

### **How will we use the report?**

The report will provide very useful input into the development of Daraja's future programmes. Through this, we will be able to learn from the experience of others, rather than reinventing the wheel.

We will also share the report widely with other organisations that are interested in similar work, and we intend to publish and distribute a summary report.

### **How much will the project cost?**

The main cost involved in this work is time. Much of the time involved will be provided by volunteers, but the project will be led by a current student of International Development, who will be given a small grant for their time. It will cost a total of £400.

### ***How can I help?***

Daraja is looking for people who are able to cover some or all of this cost. If you are interested, please contact our coordinator, Ben Taylor ([bentaylor@daraja.org](mailto:bentaylor@daraja.org)), who will give you more details, or speak to the person who gave you this information sheet.