

“Show Me the Money”

A proposal for a Daraja pilot 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.

How easy (or hard) is it for citizens to access information on local government plans and budgets? Is local government fulfilling its responsibilities to make information available?

The project described in this proposal is one of several pilot projects that Daraja will carry out during 2008 and 2009. The projects are designed to test and hopefully demonstrate the potential of increased scrutiny of local government to deliver real improvements in people's lives. Lessons learned in carrying out these projects will inform a more comprehensive programme of activities to be launched in late 2009.

What problem does this project aim to address?

The government budget cycle is vitally important, both for government and for those who want to hold government to account. More than any other document, the government budget expresses the government's real priorities. Speeches and policy documents can emphasise the importance of a particular measure, but unless money is made available through the budget, such statements are virtually meaningless. If the community asks for better rural roads, for example, and the government promises to respond to this but doesn't allocate any money for the purpose, the request has effectively been turned down.

Later in the budget cycle, once money has been spent, the financial reports and audits that compare actual expenditure to what was in the budget are an opportunity to check that government is delivering on its promises and plans. If roads were requested, promised and budgeted for, was the money really spent as planned and have the roads improved?

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.

However, if interested citizens are not able to access budget and financial reporting data, the potential of the budget for holding government to account is lost. Central government has recognised this, and insists that local district budgets should be published and available for members of the public to read. Furthermore, Tanzania's constitution actually spells out that citizens have the right to access information.

The reality doesn't always live up to this nice principle. Citizens face major obstacles if they try to access budget information. For example, some local governments only publish a very brief budget summary that hides the details that tell the real story. Even if community members succeed in getting some budget figures, they are often from an earlier draft that is out of date and effectively meaningless. Information on actual expenditure is even harder to get hold of.

What does Daraja want to do about this?

The first objective of the *Show Me the Money* project is to find out how accessible local government budget data really is. We will therefore find some volunteers who will go to the district authorities to request some information, and see how they get on.

The second objective will be to stimulate local debate on government transparency in the budget cycle. We will therefore analyse and publish a report on the response our volunteers received, highlighting the right of citizens to access this kind of information.

Since this project is a pilot, there is also an important third objective: to increase Daraja's own understanding of how local debate and accountability pressures on local government can be promoted.

How exactly will *Show Me the Money* work?

The steps involved in the *Show Me the Money* project are straightforward:

- Step 1: Three members of the public will be recruited to try to access some specific budget information on Njombe District Council's plans as well as reports on expenditure for previous years. This will include some information that local government is legally required to publish, as well as some other useful information. Different channels will be used, including checking public notices, approaching an elected councillor and writing a formal request to the planning officer. The response to each of these approaches will be noted, and any information that is provided will be analysed.
- Step 2: The results of these enquiries will be published in a report that will be presented to the district executive director and the district council chairperson. It will also be distributed locally, including to local media, who will be encouraged to hold a discussion programme on the topic.

How will we know that we have succeeded?

Whether or not we succeed in accessing the data we request, we will have met our first objective – to understand how easy it is to access data.

Our second objective is to stimulate debate. In order to measure this, and get feedback on the project, the report will include a mobile telephone number to which people can send their comments by SMS. (Mobile telephone coverage is now widespread in Tanzania). Also, we will keep track of media coverage, including particularly on the local radio station, to see whether a debate has been started.

Finally, for the third objective – our own learning – we will make sure the whole project is well documented, most particularly when distributing the report. Who accessed the report, and who participated in debates? Who was influential in getting a debate going? What were community members saying? Who was most able to influence district officials?

Which will cost how much?

The costs involved in a project like this are not very high. We will provide our information-seekers with a small allowance to reimburse them for their time, and publishing and distributing the report will need some money. In total, the project will cost £600.

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), who will give you more details, or speak to the person who gave you this information sheet.