

User Participation in Delivering Public Services in Africa: Theory and Practice

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Abstract

For over three decades now, African countries particularly those in the Sub Sahara have been implementing public sector reforms aiming at improving delivery of public services through user participation among other strategies. In this paper, we examine how these reforms have shaped public service delivery through user participation in the Sub Saharan Africa (SSA). We envision the reforms process in three periods: the first was mid 1980s to 1990s- where the significant effect is conceived to be mainly preparatory and setting the scene for the reforms actions to take place; the second was mid 1990s to early 2000s conceived mainly as a phase for structural improvements and; third was mid 2000s – dates convincing improvements in service delivery through user participation is seen to have happened. We use evidences from different countries in the SSA to show the value of understanding the context in creating the fit for policy adoption. The main argument this paper raises is that as much as all of the reform packages implemented in Africa from the 1980s were externally prescribed by the World Bank and donors; they did not fit into the African context hence failed to empower users.

Keywords: user, participation, reforms, NPM, service delivery

1. Introduction

User participation in delivery of public services has now become a world-wide governance concept. It is a contemporary approach to public service delivery that is linked to the 1980s paradigm shift from the traditional system of 'public sector administration to the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm to promote state's responsiveness to the needs of the ordinary citizens at the grassroots levels (Hope Sr, 2001; Hope Sr & Chikulo, 2000). It is one of the concepts that emerged during the early 1980s as a result of the reforms that were embarked on in Public Administration to improve performance of the public sector which was by then deteriorating drastically since the 1970s. This deterioration was attributed to various reasons which include excessive centralization and too large bureaucracies which increased the running cost. As a result, the public sector during the 1980s was characterized by inefficiency, poor quality services, dissatisfied public servants and public service users (Hope Sr, 2001; Hope Sr & Chikulo, 2000). Therefore, there was a great need for improvement in the performance of the public sector in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness to the citizens' (users') needs (Carstens & Thornhill, 2000; Wunsch & Olowu, 1996).

It was during this period that some countries started to find ways of getting out of the public sector malaises. A new paradigm emerged gradually which was later labeled 'the new public management (NPM)'. It started in the UK, then spread to the United States, Australia and New Zealand; and afterwards to the Scandinavian countries (Lane, 2002). The concept of NPM was spread to the African countries through donors and multilaterals in the 1990s and 2000s. The reasons for many governments and the international organizations to emphasize on the move to the NPM model is to ensure that public service delivery is effectively, efficiently and equitably be done. The measures taken through NPM to achieve this goal include: first- embarking on decentralization by devolution – which is a replacement of the traditional centralized and hierarchical structures – to allow decisions on resource allocation and public service delivery be made at the grassroots levels; i.e. closer to the point of delivery; and second, providing a wider scope for obtaining feedback from service users and other local community members. The purpose among other things was to strengthen connections between the public service delivery agencies and the citizens and bring the state and citizens – who are the principal users of the public services – closer to each other. It also aimed at increasing responsiveness of the public sector to the needs of the service users (Pyper, 2011; Robinson, 2007).

At a later stage the emphases on user- participation in service delivery seemed to gain popularity in Africa compared to the developed world. This was mainly witnessed during the 1990s when African countries had no other option than shifting from the traditional provider-centric service model to the NPM model that promotes more user-centred approaches to public service delivery (Bovaird, 2007). In the provider-centric model of public service delivery, citizens – who constitute a large proportion of the users – are often viewed as mere recipients of the services delivered, while in the NPM model, a more market-led approaches to public services delivery are

used, which focus on the service users as customers who can participate in making choice on the services they want which in turn shape the public service delivery process in the direction of their preferences (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000; Gaventa, 2004)

It is argued that user participation enhances social accountability that increases direct connections between the agents for public service delivery and users of these services (Christensen & Lægreid, 2014). This argument reinforces an earlier one by Gaventa (2004) that the engagement of citizens – who are the fundamental users of public services – into partnership with state institutions, the private and voluntary sector agents enhances the state’s responsiveness to the public needs through the services delivered.

2. Unpacking the concept of ‘user participation in public service delivery’

In this paper ‘public services’, ‘users’ and ‘user participation’ are the main concepts under discussion. To facilitate its understanding and application in the public services delivery- we first describe the way they have been conceptualized before linking to the Africa’s experience.

Public services

In this paper we use the definition of public services as provided in Webster dictionary. The dictionary defines “public service” as a service rendered in the public interest.¹ Public services include but are not limited to education, health care, water and sanitation and security. These services are usually provided by the public sector; which according to the definition by the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), consists of governments and all public agencies, enterprises, and other entities that deliver public goods and/ or services (IIA, 2011).

2.1 Users

‘Users’ in the context of public service delivery are the ‘consumers’, ‘customers’ or ‘clients’ (Fotaki, 2011; Lathlean et al., 2006); i.e. those who make use of the public goods and services. In Public Administration, the users of public goods and services are not only the citizens but also other people who are non-citizens such as foreigners seeking immigration services. However, the citizens are by and large the principal users of most of the services provided by the government, public agencies and enterprises. Thus in the perspective of NPM, we considered citizens as people regarded as the customers of the public services provided by the public sector through its various agents (Osborne, 2006).

2.2 User-participation

User-participation as a concept in governance can be defined differently depending on the context in which it is used. It means at large, ‘involvement’; which can be defined as ‘...an active and equitable collaboration between professionals and service users concerning the planning, implementation and evaluation of services and education’(Lathlean et al., 2006:733). In this paper, user-participation is conceived as a form of mutual activity by both governmental and non-governmental actors, where at least some of whom are ‘users’, that is, they are directly involved in the processes and/or outcomes of the activity (Bochel et al, 2008). The concept is similar to what Kelsall & Mercer (2003) imply to in the field of ‘participatory development and empowerment’ ; where people at the grassroots levels particularly the poor and marginalized actively determine their social and political needs in the context of unequal power relations, participate actively in choosing, setting and pursuing their development goals. It is also similar to the concept of coproduction (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2008; Joshi & Moore, 2004) where the delivery of public services is done through regular, long-term relationships between the professional service providers (in any sector) on one hand, and the public service users or other members of the community on the other hand. In such a relationship, all parties make substantial resource contributions.

In order to achieve active participation of the users in service delivery, organizations such as user-committees, user- groups, tenant groups and other communities of identity have also been widely formed as one of the means to enhance efficient public service delivery in consistency with the user-expectations/needs (Cross, 2014; Manor, 2004). User- committees and user-groups are widely spread across various sectors such as education and natural resources, and they take different names depending on the sector and context in which they operate. In the education sector for example, in South Africa, they are popularly known as ‘school governing bodies’ (Mafora, 2013; Mncube & Mafora, 2013), in Tanzania ‘school committees’ (Masue, 2014) and in Ethiopia and Ghana ‘school management committees (Essuman & Akyeampong, 2011; Yamada, 2014); whereas in the natural resources sector there are such examples as joint forest-management committees in Tanzania and Zambia (Mbwambo et al., 2012; Nielsen & Treue, 2012; Wily, 2000); and river basin committees in Brazil (Ribeiro, Vieira, & Ribeiro, 2012) to mention but a few.

3. Gauging user participation: theoretical models

We use Arnstein’s ladder of participation, and Continuum of user participation to explain the level of user participation in Sub Saharan Africa. User participation varies in terms of degree of influence or control the users

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/public%20service>

have on the services delivered. In order to understand the concept, different typologies have been used to distinguish the weak and strong forms of participation. Arnstein (1969) gauges degree participation on a ladder metaphor ranging from non-participation to citizen power for practical illustration of how participation can be described (fig 1). Her ladder of participation is one of the examples of normative typologies of user participation which classifies participation into ‘good’ (citizen power) and ‘bad’ (nonparticipation) forms (Cornwall, 2008). It examines participation from the perspective of the receiving end (i.e. the users).

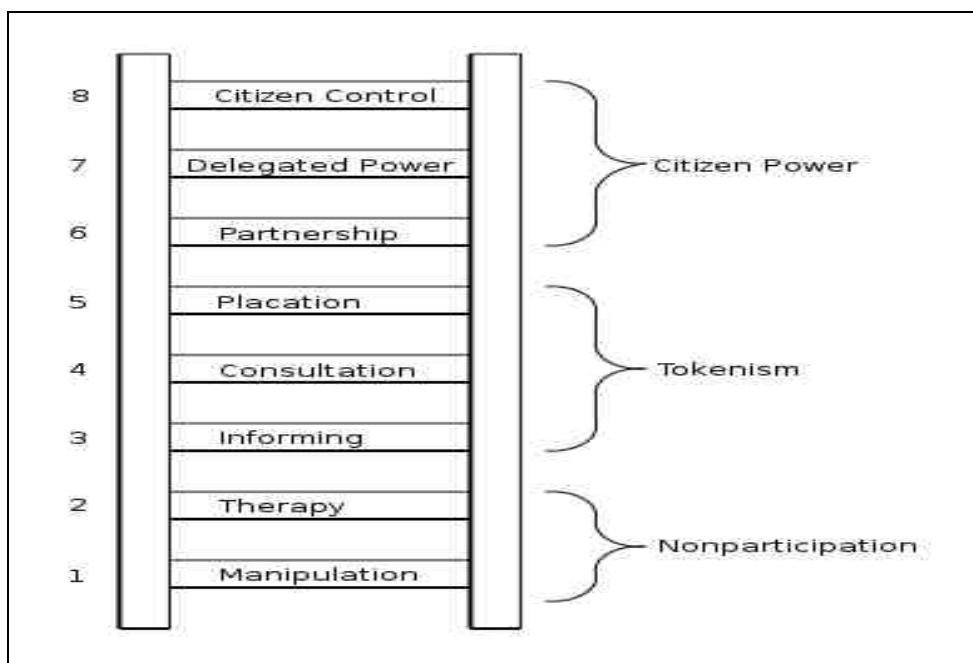
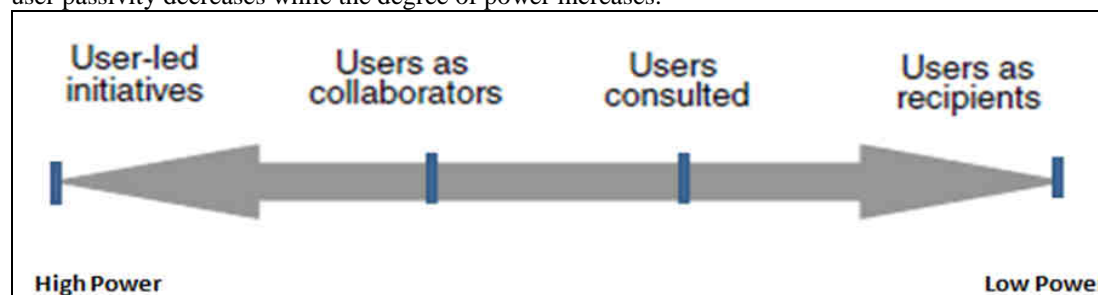


Figure 3: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation¹

In her typology, Arnstein differentiates weak from strong forms of user participation on the basis of degree of influence (power) the users have on the services delivered. In the lower rung, she places manipulation and therapy which connotes lack of power. At the middle, she places placation, informing and consultation as forms of weak participation which she calls ‘tokenism’. Token participation means passive, non-influential users. They can just be informed of what is or will take place but have little power to influence changes. On the top of the ladder, she places partnership, delegated power and citizen control as the forms of participation that imply citizen (in this case user) power. This rung illustrates the situation where the service users have power to influence change, that is, to design and deliver services that meet their needs. This is what can be described as ‘user empowerment’.

We combine the Arnstein’s ladder of participation and that of the continuum of user participation to have the horizontal look of the concept and expanded conceptualization. The model of user participation views participation along a continuum of power from low to high. As illustrated in figure 2, the model largely resembles Arnstein’s (1969) ‘ladder of participation’, but it works in a horizontal ray of power distinctions. The right hand side of the continuum indicates a high passivity of the service users (i.e. low power); that is, they are mere recipients of the service. Then, as you move from the right hand side towards the left of the continuum, user passivity decreases while the degree of power increases.



¹ Source: Arnstein, S. (1969). "A ladder of citizen participation." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 35(4): 216-224. cited in Bray (1999). *The Private Costs of Public Schooling: parental and community financing of primary education in Cambodia*. UNESCO/IIEP.

Figure 2: Continuum of user participation in service delivery

Source: modified from Lathlean et al (2006:426)

As depicted on figure 2, Lathlean et al (2006) illustrate user participation at four levels; *Users as recipients*, *users as collaborators*, *users as collaborators* and *user-led initiatives* (i.e. depicting public service users as actors who can initiate and deliver services) in public service delivery. When users in public service delivery are mere recipients, they do not have any say on the services delivered in terms of choice and deciding the quality. This is called 'producer-centric' public service delivery model (Bovaird, 2007). This is what is described by the Arnstein's ladder of participation as non-participation. This model of public delivery was popularly used in public service delivery during the period between 1960s and early 1980s.

The second level in the continuum depicts user participation through 'consultation'. This level of user participation depicts 'weak user power'; i.e. does not demonstrate sufficient user influence on the services delivered. It is similar to 'token' participation that Arnstein's ladder of participation illustrates where users are just consulted or informed of what is going to take place, but they have no opportunity influence change in the plan or its implementation.

The third and fourth levels (users as collaborators and user-led initiatives) illustrated by Lathlean et al (2006) in their continuum of user participation indicates 'users power'. These two levels demonstrate authentic user participation in service delivery. The concept of 'users as collaborators can be linked to Ostrom's (1996) concept of co-production, where users and service deliverers contribute to production and delivery of a particular service. The concept of cost-sharing in education, health care, water and sanitation can be cited as good examples of user collaboration in public service delivery. User-led initiatives in service delivery mean that the public service users are solely responsible for delivering the services. This level of user participation is similar to the highest level of participation in the Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (citizen power) where the citizens – in this case public service users have control on the type, modality of delivery and quality of public services.

4. User participation in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

As pointed out earlier, the concept of user participation underpins to a large extent the theories governing NPM reforms. In Africa, particularly the SSA, public service delivery has undergone considerable transformations over time in response to what is conceived as New Public Management. The transformation took place through Public Service Reforms (PSR) (Kiragu, 2002; Mutahaba & Kiragu, 2002). According to most of policy documents (see for example the Tanzanian Policy Paper on Local Government Reform, 1998) - the purpose of most of these reforms was to improve performance of the public sector through involvement of users in designing and delivering public services. In this part of the paper, we examine the SSA countries' efforts to realize user participation in the delivery of public services in three eras: the structural reform era; the capacity building era and; the service improvement era.

4.1 The structural reforms era (mid-1980s to mid-1990s)

This was the first wave of PSR in the SSA region, which emanated from the macroeconomic and fiscal reforms that came with the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) financed by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and donors as a condition for getting aid (Gibbon, 1993; Kiragu, 2002; Lugalla, 1997). The structural reforms were adopted in response to the recommendations of what is known as 'the World Bank's 1981 Berg Report on social and economic crisis in Africa'. The report informed that underdevelopment in Africa was caused by a number of reasons, among them include (Davidson, 2004; Lugalla, 1997:19-20; Zondi, 2009:8-9) : (1) adopting inappropriate economic policies including the import-substitution policies that resulted into the commodity- based economies that led to becoming too dependent on export; (2) the state becoming the sole employer without a concomitant increase in the quality and reach of public services; (3) price controls meant for safeguarding 'national interests' which led to increased budget and balance of payments deficits. Consequently, the three reasons were seen to contribute to (1) price rise of imports which in turn caused scarcity. (2) Inability for farmers to get imported inputs, which led to production below capacity and apparently low selling price of farms products.

It is important to notice that reforms were implemented through a number of strategies. According to Zondi (2009) and Lugalla (1997), most reforms included but were not limited to: control of money supply, local currency devaluation, cutting of public borrowing and government expenditure for unproductive sectors of the economy; and the introduction of user fees – a phenomenon which was popularly known as cost-sharing – in education and health. Other measures that were associated with SAPs include liberalization of trade, decrease of tariffs, creating attractive environment for foreign investments, abolition of price controls by allowing the

market self-control of prices, privatization of public enterprises, withdrawal of subsidies, retrenchment of workers and, on top of all, democratic pluralism (multiparty politics). Yet the reforms could not realize much of the expectations in stabilizing the countries' external and internal balance of payments and enhance their expert capacity. For instance- Tanzania continues to suffer from economic stagnation and in some instances a very gradual growth.

4.2 The capacity building era (mid-1990s to 2000s)

Prior to the introduction of reforms in the public sector, the concept of capacity building in the SSA countries was narrowly focused on 'staff training'. During the second era of public sector reforms, there was a remarkable move to a broader definition of what the scope of capacity building consisted in. According to Kirangu (2002:5-6) the key reform aspects that were embarked on during the second era of PSR included

- Increasing staff skills by emphasizing more to on-the-job and short-term training;
- Improving management systems and structures. The systems that were given priority for improvement included those for human resources, financial and information Management, while for the structures the focus was on governance, particularly decentralization;
- Restoring incentives and improving pay, and mechanisms for sanctioning non-compliance with new codes of ethical conduct; and
- Improving the work environment by increasing budgetary allocations for operations and maintenance expenditures, office equipment and retooling. It is important to note that most of the above mentioned PSR packages were funded by donors, multilaterals and the World Bank through projects launched in the 1990s. For example, the World Bank funded capacity building projects in Ghana (1995), Kenya (1994), Tanzania (1993) and Uganda (1995). On the part of multilaterals, UNDP was one of the major multilateral agency that actively supported capacity building-based PSR programmes in Africa during the second half of the 1990s. Donor (bilateral) support to PSR projects related to capacity building included the UK's DFID (afterwards ODA) which focused much of its support to systems financial and human resources management; and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) which focused on supporting development of financial management systems had projects in Kenya and Tanzania, to mention a few.

4.3 Service delivery improvement era

Generally, the first and second eras of public sector reforms in Africa did not bring about much significant outcomes particularly with regard to improvement in service delivery and responsiveness to the needs of citizens. As indicated earlier in this paper, the first era (structural reforms) resulted to serious pains to the citizens (users), especially, those related to the downsizing and retrenchment of employees. The pain came out of the public majority's inability to pay user-fees for the fundamental services such as education (Davidson, 2004) and health, unemployment due to retrenchment, shortage of skilled labour which led to poor public service delivery (Kiragu, 2002). The failure to the capacity building reforms to impact on service delivery, the continual global shift towards market-led economy and adoption of NPM necessitated the move to the third package of reforms geared towards improvement in the public service delivery-the decentralisation Decentralisation is a transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from central government to intermediate and local governments or quasi-independent and/or the private sector.

The rationale for African countries embarking on decentralization include achievement of greater effectiveness in the public sector and advancement of democratic participation at the local levels (Brinkerhoff & Azfar, 2006; Hyden, 2005). Further arguments for decentralization insisted the increase of transparency, accountability and responsiveness of government institutions to the needs of the people at the grassroots level in terms of conforming to the preferences of ordinary people at the grassroots level (Manor, 2006:285). It is an attempt to help public organizations nurture the 'principle of affected parties' by ensuring inclusion of different social interest groups in the decision making process (Christensen et al, 2007:92) and that delivery of public goods and services reflect people's interests. It is argued that when decentralization is democratic, it expands the room for popular participation in decision making and in implementing local development programmes. However, some critical arguments have also been raised that decentralization does not always lead to positive outcomes. Estache and Sinha (1995) for example, have reported based on results from a cross-sectional study of developed and developing countries that decentralization leads to increased spending on public infrastructure. A study by Azfar and Livingstone (2002) found that decentralization made no significant positive impact on the efficiency and equity of local public service provision in Uganda; while in South Africa and Namibia, it was also found in a study by Sayed and Soudien (2005) that decentralization led to increased inequality or new forms of exclusion.

5. Experience with user participation in public service delivery in the SSA

The question can best be addressed based on the theoretical models and the reform trends that Africa has passed through in the last three decades. These can provide a picture of how public service delivery has evolved over time, particularly with regard to increasing user participation in service delivery.

Insert Figure 3 here

5.1 During the SAPs period

During the period between 1980s and 1990s, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa started involuntarily to implement SAP measures as a pre-condition to getting aid and loans from the IMF, the World Bank, and other donor agencies (Lugalla, 1997). Consequently, many of the SSA countries (e.g. Ghana, Uganda, Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania) recorded significant achievements with regard to implementing SAP measures such as retrenchment, freeze in recruitment, privatization, agencification, and cost sharing in education and health (Hope Sr & Chikulo, 2000; Kiragu, 2002; Lugalla, 1997; Zondi, 2009). In Ghana for example, the number of central government employees was cut by about 14% from 301,000 (1986) to 260,000 (1990); in Uganda by about 50% from 320,000 (1990) to 147,000 (1997) and in Tanzania by about 24% from 355,000 in 1992 to about 270,000 in 1997 (Kiragu, 2002:2). It was not only these two countries which have demonstrated significant reforms in the public sector. According to Aye (2008), most of the countries in SSA had the lowest ratio of civil servants to population in the world. However, involvement of users (citizens) in service delivery was top-down, often related to cost-sharing through payment of user fees. These resulted some adverse effects to the citizens particularly exclusion of the poor. For example in Tanzania for example, effects were seen in the sectors of education and agriculture. In education, SAPs had adverse effects on the primary education in Tanzania by increasing exclusion of the poor (Davidson, 2004). It was noted that by 1993, gross enrolment in primary education had dropped from 98 percent of the early 1980s to 71 percent due to the introduction of cost-sharing. The state of physical infrastructure in the schools deteriorated continuously and schools faced serious shortage of stationery and other teaching and learning supplies (Lema, Mbilinyi, & Rajan, 2004; Masue, 2010). In Agriculture, the elimination of fertilizer subsidies together with persistent inflation and subsequent devaluation of the country's currency (shilling) caused rapid increases in local input prices for the different varieties of fertilizer. For example, the domestic market prices for fertilizer (in nominal terms) rose from 32 to 91 percent in 1991/92 and 1992/93 respectively (Wobst, 2001); which resulted in the deterioration of the agricultural sector. Kenya experienced the same in the education sector following the implementation of cost sharing. Kiragu (2002:3) informs that while gross enrolment in primary education in the country before the onset of cost-sharing policy was about 100 per cent; it dropped to about 70 percent because of the introduction of fees and other levies.

5.3 During the Capacity Building period

As it was for the first era of public sector reforms (the SAP era), the second wave of the reforms (the capacity building era) did not bring significant impact on service delivery in most of the SSA countries. Why? Because (1) the capacity building measures were often taken in piecemeal and were fragmented (Kiragu, 2002), probably because they were excessively dependent on external support from the World Bank, multilaterals and donor countries, hence, lacking sustainability as it was observed in Tanzania by Therkildsen (2000:62); (2) The outcomes of the downsizing exercise that was implemented in the public service in most of the SSA countries were insignificant; hence, they could not bring positive changes in employees' pay. This is to say in other words that financial resources released from the retrenchment of redundant employees were not enough to substantially improve the low salaries of public servants (Karyeija, 2012; Kiragu, 2002); which led to deterioration of morale and discipline in the public service and perpetuation of unethical conduct such as bribery and corruption during the 1990s. So it can generally be argued that during this period, user involvement was insufficient as much attention was put on the public servants at the expense of the users. Much of the user participation during this period was more of tokenism with consultation.

5.4 During the service improvement period

User participation in the delivery of public services in Africa particularly the SSA has become more popular during the service improvement era (2000 to date). Efforts have been made by the governments to increase participation of users in decision making regarding planning, developing and delivering public services. The outcomes of these efforts are mixed; while in some cases success stories have been reported, experiences have indicated a number of challenges. We use the following cases from SSA to explain such mixed results.

Case 1: Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) initiative at Duru-Haitemba village forest reserve (Kajembe, Monela, & Mvena, 2002)

The launching of CBFM at Duru-Haitemba village forest reserve (in Babati District in Northern Tanzania) in the 1990s was meant for addressing the issue of control and authority over the woodlands resource. People at the local level were empowered and motivated to make decisions and to take responsibility for those decisions as the main protectors of the woodlands resource. This reorganization redefined the asset structure in such a manner that ownership of the woodlands was transferred to the local people. Through this transformation the government secured better relationship with same people who it had earlier thought to be a threat to forest conservation and sustainability.

The CBFM initiative at Duru- Haitemba succeeded because there were the following things in place (Kajembe et al., 2002:170):-

- Clearly defined boundaries;
- Congruence between appropriation and service delivery (provision) rules and the local conditions;
- Good collective choice arrangements;
- Conflict resolution mechanisms;
- Clearly defined resource property rights;
- Villagers' right to devise their own institutions without being challenged by external government authorities; and
- A common pool resource institution that was established by the villagers.

Case 2: School Management Committees in Uganda (Prinsen & Titeca, 2008) and Tanzania(Masue, 2014)

School committees in Uganda and Tanzania are legally established to enable citizens at the local levels participate in planning and implementing school decisions. In both countries, the composition of these committees involves both community members and teachers, with the head teacher being the secretary of the school committee (in the Tanzanian school committees). In their study entitled: "Uganda's decentralised primary education: Musical chairs and inverted elite capture in school management committees"; Prinsen & Titeca (2008) report that SMCs have at large managed to reduce the levels of embezzlement of school funds considerably in recent years. As a result, the average school in 2001 received 80% of the funding disbursed (Reinikka & Svensson, 2005). An analysis of 15 schools which were part of Prinsen and Titeca's (2008) study indicates that the grants allocated by the central government reached these schools by 100%, without any money being embezzled on the way to the school. This happened due to increased transparency, awareness of the people and accountability.

Masue's (2014) study entitled: "Empowerment of school committees and parents in Tanzania: Delineating existence of opportunity, its use and impact on school decisions" found that involvement of parents and school committees in Tanzania has been achieved more convincingly in the operational issues such as construction and maintenance of school infrastructure, resource contribution and other fundamental aspects; than on critical/strategic issues such as education policy, curriculum and pedagogy. The main challenges that are faced include poor democracy in the formation of school committees, particularly due to the school committees' attachment to the bureaucracy; and insufficient transparency particularly on the schools' bank information. However, evidence from the study still indicate that involvement of school committees and parents in education service delivery is superior to the top-down approaches in responding to the local preferences and fostering the sense of ownership.

Case 3: Users/stakeholder representation in water resource management in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Manzungu, 2002)

The experience drawn from Manzungu's (2002) paper is that stakeholder representation in water resource management in South Africa and Zimbabwe faces a challenges related to 'identity' of the users. Stakeholder analysis in the water sector was weak; as a result, representation of the actual water users was not exact. Because this, the process was captured by elites of various kinds. Regarding stakeholders is identity, which is an important issue in stakeholder representation, black smallholder farmers in both South Africa and Zimbabwe appeared to be uncaptured in the new organizations despite their numerical superiority. Despite the fact that the black farmers were a stakeholder group that needed to protect its interest by having and maintaining its own identity first, they did not get this chance very well. Also, it was found that feedback meetings were not conducted as required because there was often no budget for such activities.

Case 4: Health Facility Governing Committees in Tanzania (Frumence et al, 2014)

Tanzania decentralized her health systems in the 1990s in order to foster community participation in health planning and delivery of health services. To that effect, health facility governing committees (HFGCs) were established countrywide to enable communities participate the health service delivery. HFGCs have been established at all levels – the regional and district hospitals, health centres and dispensaries in the early 2000s. Membership to these committees is drawn from different stakeholders, among them includes community members who basically receive health services from these facilities, ward and village leaders and representatives of health service providers for both profit and non-profit health facilities operating in the same catchment area. The committees are fundamentally responsible assisting and facilitating the management teams in planning and managing community-based initiatives within their catchments areas among other things. This qualitative study which was conducted in Kongwa District in Central Tanzania by Frumence, et al (2014) found that the HFGCs

have led to improvement in health service delivery particularly with regard to addressing community health needs at the grassroots levels more consistently with the users' preferences than it used to be with the centralised system of health service delivery; as captured from the quote below (Frumence et al, 2014: 1130):

You can find that we as experts have planned certain things, but when you involve the committee members, they can bring different perspectives, which will lead to better decisions based on community needs than what we(as experts) thought. (Dispensary level FGD number 3, participant 4)

It was also found that HFGCs facilitated mobilization of resources to support the delivery of health services at the facility level by encouraging /educating community members to join the Community Health Fund (CHF), and the generated funds can be used to purchase drugs and medical supplies for running health service delivery at the health facility.

Case 5: User Participation Lead to Sense of Ownership for Rural Water Systems in Kenya (Marks & Davis, 2012)

In their paper entitled: "Does user participation lead to sense of ownership for rural water systems? Evidence from Kenya" based on a study that they conducted involving 1140 households in 50 rural Kenyan villages to examine sense of ownership for piped water systems; Marks and Davis (2012) inform that: 73% of the households said they had prior awareness of the water project before construction began, and that 71% identified local actors (such as the water committee, village residents and others) as having had the highest degree of influence over decisions associated with service provision, tariff structure, and the amount of up-front contributions required of the service users. In addition, 80% of water user committee members reported that community members mobilized themselves without external support to initiate the project that resulted in their water system's installation (Peters & Davis, 1572). The scholars conclude that some, but not all, types of participation enhance community members' sense of ownership for rural water projects.

6. A summary of important observations of user participation across the three periods

The trends of reforms in most of the SSA countries, the achievements of the reforms were structural at large during both the SAPs and Capacity building reform periods. Significant changes were achieved at the structural level while at the service delivery level the quality public services remained poor, with the citizens (users) lacking the opportunity to participate in decision making regarding the planning and delivery of public services. Based on the insights drawn from the literature, the first two eras of public sector reforms in the SSA (SAPs and Capacity building) did not impact significantly on user participation in public service delivery. They resulted on weak user participation, poor services and alienation of the users particularly the poor.

Table 1: Important observations on user participation (1980s to date)

| Reform period | Key reform measures | Status of user participation | Impact on service delivery and users |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|
| SAPs (1980s – 1990s) | + Retrenchment + Freeze of recruitment + Privatization + Cost sharing + Cutting of public expenditure | Weak + Informing + Consulting | + Poor services + Exclusion of users |
| Capacity building (1990s – 2000s) | + Staff training + Improvement of management systems and structures + Pay reform + Improvement of office equipment and retooling | Weak + Informing + Consulting | + Poor services + Exclusion of users |
| Service improvement(2000 to date) | +Decentralization + Formation of user groups /committees | Fairly Strong +collaboration | + Inculcation of a sense of ownership among users + Responsiveness to user preferences |

As illustrated in table 1 above, it is during the third wave of public sector reform the notion of user participation gained a recognizable popularity. The degree of participation was fairly strong; which fostered inclusion and

responsiveness to the citizens' needs. Despite the achievements in user participation in public service delivery, there are some challenges which remain as the necessary preconditions for its success. These include the following:-

First, competence: the evidence from the Tanzanian and Ugandan school committees (Masue, 2014; Prinsen & Titeca, 2008) indicates that they are often facing the challenge of competence due to lack of training. Also the fact that these committees are somehow part of the bureaucracy rather than the people at the grassroots levels there is more incentives to account for higher authorities than to the service users. After all school teachers (bureaucrats) are members of the committees. For such reasons, their capability to decide autonomously is constrained. This observation suggests that sustainable user participation requires competent individual actors. Capacity building and autonomy are critical factors for effective involvement of user participation.

Second, resource capability: In order for user participation to be effective, individual members of community and the community itself must have resources (financial) to contribute to the public service delivered and to enable delivery of planned services to the citizens (users). Evidence from the case of users' representation in water resource management in South Africa and Zimbabwe has shown that feedback meetings (which are very important for the health of user organizations) were not conducted as expected due to budget constraints. In the study on HFGCs in Tanzania (Frumence et al., 2014), successful resource mobilization by the HFGCs enabled purchase of drugs and medical supplies at the health facility level. This particular experience underscores the importance of resources particularly financial resources in ensuring meaningful user participation in public service delivery.

Third, effective communication among the actors: This is yet another challenge for effective user participation in the delivery of public services. There is a need for stakeholder/user organizations to disseminate effectively information about important things in relation to planning and delivery of the services. Such information may include but is not limited to: level of contributions, modality of contributing, important events such as meetings and where they are expected to take place, rules and regulations and so on. The Duru-Haitemba CBFM initiative (Kajembe, Monela & Mvena, 2002) was successful because among other things, there was clear information about the boundaries of the area to be protected.

Fourth, collective choice and action: Here it means that members of the community/user group should have a shared vision that is well communicated to its members and clearly agreed upon. Collective choice and action can be achieved through involvement of every member at each stage of decision making through a transparent dialogue. The one of the secrets behind the success of CBFM initiative at Duru-Haitemba was collective choice and action among the members of the local communities.

Fifth, effective conflict resolution mechanisms: Conflict is always part of social life – in groups, communities and societies. Conflicts may rise for example due to lack of information regarding 'rules of the game', division of responsibilities, role conflict, task ambiguity, differences in ways of thinking and inadequacy of resources. The best way to resolve conflicts in a user group, committee or community is through dialogue. Conflicts cannot simply be suppressed. Rather, they should be addressed to create harmony and understanding among particular stakeholders through appropriate mechanisms as we have seen in the Duru-Haitemba CBFM initiative in Tanzania.

Sixth, autonomy: This is another challenge which faces successful user participation in public service delivery. By autonomy here I mean freedom of choice; where individual users or their organizations are free to decide on important issues surrounding the whole process of planning and delivering public services; for example, on nature, scope and types of the services to be delivered, ability to spend resources and ability to set levels of costs to be shared to mention a few. All these have some implications to the effectiveness and sustainability of user participation in public service delivery. We have seen the bottlenecks of autonomy to the school committees in Tanzania and Uganda brought about by the failure to separate the committees from the state bureaucracy; and we have also learned some successful stories from Duru-Haitemba CBFM and the case of rural water systems in Kenya where autonomy of the users has led to successful community participation.

7. Conclusion

The insights drawn from the theory and practice of user participation indicate that there is a gap between the theory and practice of user participation in public service delivery in Africa. This discrepancy can be attributed to (1) context variations between the African countries (particularly culture) which is different from that of the developed countries where these theories originated; and (2) the low socio-economic status of the African

countries has led to failure in the implementation western reform models such as privatization and cost-sharing. These two observations suggest that a transferred reform policy or innovation should be accustomed to the environment in which it is meant to be adopted.

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