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Street Level Bureaucrats and the Implementation of Kilimo Kwanza Initiative: The Case of Bagamoyo District, Coastal Region, Tanzania

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Abstract:

This study explored the implementation of Kilimo Kwanza initiative by street-level bureaucrats in Bagamoyo district in the Coastal region of Tanzania. Primary and secondary data was used to provide important information that informed the findings of the study. Results indicate that Kilimo Kwanza initiative faced a number of challenges symptomatic of other policy initiatives that were implemented in Tanzania such as limited resources at the lower levels, mismatch of expectations between official at the central government and lower level officials and lack of clear strategy of implementation that was shared between policy makers and implementers. The study sees the importance of bringing to the fore the role of frontline officials in the implementation of future policies in order to avoid similar shortcomings in the implementation phase

Keywords: Street level bureaucrats, policy and agriculture

1. Introduction

The role of street level bureaucrats in influencing policy implementation is very crucial in spearheading social and economic development of any society. The importance is more so now than before because of the role decentralization has taken in today's world. Decentralization has placed more responsibilities on frontline managers and employees in the whole process of promoting social and economic development in any particular society.

In developing countries like Tanzania, the role of street level bureaucrats in implementing various policies is very important. Policies and initiatives end up being implemented by officials at the lower level of administration namely; officials at the district, ward, and village levels. It is at these levels that policies and other initiatives come into practice. As Hansensfeld put it, "the impact of street level bureaucrats working within the human services is quite appreciable because they 'process people.'" (Ricucci 2007, p. 903). They make important decisions during policy implementation that may influence the impact and indeed outcome of any particular policy. Some of the initiative taken by these officials can lead to success or failure of the policy

It is from the same background that this study seeks to explore the role of street level bureaucrats in implementing policies and various initiatives in Tanzania. It is impossible and even unwise if one pretends a paper of this magnitude will be able to explore various policies and make a logical conclusion on how they are implemented by street level bureaucrats. Tanzania has many policies that seek to address a number of diverse issues of importance to the nation. They range from health, agricultural to educational and many others which are geared towards addressing social and economic issues. The paper cannot explore all of them rather focuses on a single policy initiative that the government implemented. The policy initiative that has been chosen for analysis is a well-publicized initiative, the Kilimo Kwanza policy initiative, which literary means agriculture first.

The Kilimo Kwanza policy initiative was championed by the government through conferences, roundtable discussions, policy forums and involved influential individuals from the government and the donor community. The then president of the United Republic of Tanzania his Excellency Honorable Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete personally spearheaded efforts to champion this initiative that promised to revolutionize the agricultural sector in Tanzania. The main aim was to increase productivity in the agricultural sector and consequently reduce poverty as majority of Tanzanians are employed in the particular sector. A green revolution like the one which took place in Asia in 1970s and 1980s (Policy Forum, 2009), could propel the country out of poverty and even provide a foundation for industrialization in the long run.

It is not the first time that scholars have written about the influence frontline employees in policy implementation. This will continue to be so as issues of policy implementation play important role in promoting government agenda in different parts of the world. It is even more so to less developed societies where proper policy implementation means saving lives and lead to positive social change. Policy implementation is not without controversies, it is therefore imperative to study policy implementation in Tanzania for the purpose of shading light of what is happening at the lower levels of administration where policy implementation takes place. Lessons learned from this study will help improve processes that are involved in policy implementation in the future. The focus on the grassroot is also symbolic and important as it is at the bottom end of government business that officials face their clients and in this case the tax payers who expect better and quality services from the government.

Lipsky (1969, p. 1), defined street-level bureaucrats as “those men and women who in their face-to-face encounters with citizens, “represent” government to the people.” Street-level bureaucrats include but not limited to teachers, social workers, police officers, court officials at lower levels of the judicial system and generally those individuals that administer state’s resources to the citizens. The expectations of the clients and those of the government are handled by the street-level bureaucrats. Lipsky identified key characteristics of street-level bureaucrats as interactions with citizens in the course of performing their job, although they work within the bureaucratic structure, they have a fair amount of independence on their job and so discretion. The attitude and behavior of the street-level bureaucrats can affect their clients significantly and potentially have extensive influence to their clients/citizens (Lipsky, 1969, p. 2.)

The key argument Lipsky makes is street-level bureaucrat has an important role to play in the structure of the government and indeed in policy implementation. He argues that rather than looking at the national level in understanding public policy implementation, focus should be at the lower levels where policy is implemented. It is argued that policies made at the higher levels do not reflect the various ‘realities’ and diverse interests at the lower levels, it is a dilemma which forces frontline employees to use their discretionary power to implement policies as they see it fit and as per different circumstances (Waidaningrum, 2006).

In developing countries like Tanzania these officials face a number of challenges which in one way or another affects their performance and consequently policy implementation. These challenges range from lack of enough resources to lack of enough information on policies they implement which is crucial in fulfilling their responsibilities. There are also problems with goals, laws, and guidelines which are vague and inconsistent. Generally, the social context to which street-level bureaucrats operate is complex and cannot be captured in detailed regulations (Duner & Nordstrom, 2007, pp 429-430). It is this complex nature of their working environment that forces frontline government employees to use their discretion during policy implementation.

Examination of the implementation of the Kilimo Kwanza policy initiative is of great importance given the nature and history of implementation of other policies in Tanzania. The Ujamaa villagization policy which was adopted after the Arusha Declaration in 1967 can be taken as an example. The policy was implemented to promote among other things collective efforts in agricultural production failed to achieve its intended objectives due to problems in implementation at the local level.

The interpretation of the policy at the lower levels of administration left much to be desired. People were forced to leave their villages; pastoralists were forced to practice animal husbandry something alien to them. Chachage and Cassam (2010) once pointed out that the policy was “ideal in principle but the way it was enforced shows it was not effective in practice.” This has been an isolated case, in general Tanzania has a stock of policies; but what is lacking is making them work

Following the above line of reasoning, this article seeks to use Lipsky’s theoretical assertion to explore the role played by frontline implementers of Kilimo Kwanza initiative in Bagamoyo district in the Coastal region of Tanzania. Specifically, the paper sought to:

1. Identify official duties of street level bureaucrats in implementing Kilimo Kwanza initiative
2. Find out whether the implementation process by frontline employees represents expectations of the policy at the national level
3. Find out the challenges facing street level bureaucrats in implementing Kilimo Kwanza initiative

2. Methodology

This study is based on qualitative case study conducted in Bagamoyo district in Coastal region. Further, the study employed interpretive social science approach which according to Neuman (2000) intends to help the researcher develop and understand social life and discover how people construct meaning in natural setting. “The researcher learns what is meaningful or relevant to the people being studied or how individuals experience daily life” (Neuman, 2000). The case study explored the environment to which Kilimo Kwanza policy initiative was implemented by street-level bureaucrats. The investigation used various data collection techniques such as interviews, observation and documentary review. Individuals who were involved in the survey were purposefully selected and most of them were agricultural officers from Bagamoyo district.

3. Results and Discussion

This discussion and analysis is informed by information that was gathered from government officials at the district, ward and village levels who were directly linked with the implementation of the Kilimo Kwanza policy initiative in Bagamoyo district.

3.1. Official Duties of Street Level Bureaucrats in Implementing Kilimo Kwanza Initiative

Findings show that all government officials at the district, ward and village levels who participated were aware of the existence of Kilimo Kwanza initiative. Generally, they say the initiative is geared towards improving agricultural production and the lives of the farmers. According to one officer “Kilimo Kwanza is a programme that focuses on contributing to increasing crop production in order to improve food security and improve livelihood of the farmers.” It also shows that most of the agricultural extension officers relate the initiative with the government’s intention to provide farmers in rural areas with agricultural inputs such as seeds and other farming equipments.

Many of the implementers of the initiative at the lower level of administration who interact with farmers seem to have different directives in terms of their official duties in implementing the Kilimo Kwanza initiative. To some their main duty is to motivate farmers to work more on their fields and increase food production while others used most of their time to educate the community and other stakeholders about the benefits of the initiative. This group regarded themselves as the agents of the government and their main duty was to participate in a public awareness campaigns to promote the initiative.

Some of the answers they gave when asked about their official duties in implementing the initiative were such that we participate in public awareness campaigns, encourage farmers to use modern agricultural inputs like fertilizers, evaluate implementation of the policy and report to the government, establish links with researchers for the purpose of linking their efforts and those of the farmers in order to improve agricultural production, provide training that will enable farmers to practice modern agricultural practices and introduce farmers to demonstration farms so that they can learn and copy advanced farming practices in order to increase agricultural output.

When the understanding of the initiative by these officials is interrogated by looking at their responses it becomes clear that there is no common understanding of the policy initiative by the lower ranking officials who are supposed to implement Kilimo Kwanza initiative. This is substantiated by the statistical evidence that was gathered, among 19 respondents who were asked whether they were given guidelines to enable them implement properly the initiative, only 31.6 per cent of them said they were given guidelines while 68.4 per cent of respondents were not aware of such guidelines. This explains why government officials involved in implementing the initiative at the lower level of administration were not in the same page when it came to the implementation of the initiative.

3.2. Whether Implementation Process by Frontline Employees Represents Expectations of the Policy at the National Level

To understand the directives of policy makers at the national level in relation to the Kilimo Kwanza initiative one needs to go no further than the implementation framework which was spearheaded by the President's Office, Prime Minister's office, Ministry of Agriculture Food and Cooperatives, Ministry of Finance, Bank of Tanzania among others and other key collaborators mainly at the local government level. The Regional Administration and the Local Government played an important role in implementing phase at the lower levels of administration.

The framework identified tasks and responsibilities of government officials at different levels of administration and these were famously outlined in the ten pillars of Kilimo Kwanza initiative. Tasks and roles under the Regional Administration and the Local Government represent the expectations of the policy makers at the national level and hence subject to this analysis. Lower level officials were expected to help in the efforts to modernize and commercialize agriculture in their localities. This could be done by launching sensitizing campaigns at the district, ward and villages levels to encourage farmers to use best methods of agriculture to achieve maximum output from their agricultural undertakings.

Further, extension officers were expected acquire knowledge and skills through training on the effective utilization of science and technology in agriculture and consequently use those to establish demonstration farms that were to be used to teach farmers proper farming methods. Extension officers were expected to be professionals who could be deployed in every ward to offer agricultural extension services through model farms and provision of guidance on proper farming methods. Looking at the ten pillars of Kilimo Kwanza initiatives one sees a multitude of roles and tasks that are supposed to be fulfilled by lower ranking officials, however, the few outlined above represent logical and realistic roles and tasks that policy makers at the national level expected officials at the lower levels of administration to fulfill in order to achieve the primary objective of the initiative namely to make significant the role of agriculture in the national economy.

Most of the officials the study interviewed indicated that they were involved in various campaigns to promote the initiatives. Encouraging farmers to use best practices and indeed the use of science and technology was common among the majority of the officials interviewed; however, there were no concrete plans to make sure that the talk translated into practice. The study was unable to see clear strategies at the lower levels that pointed to a certain direction in terms of implementation. One officer in Bagamoyo said "the government did not provide us with conducive environment to implement this initiative, there were no clear instructions or guidelines, we only heard more about the initiative from the media than from the official government channels."

In order for the officers at lower levels of administration to implement the initiative appropriately training had to be part of the whole package. Refresher short courses had to be organized to orient officials with various issues related to the initiative. This was clearly stipulated in the framework where by officials were expected to be trained in effective utilization of science and technology in agriculture and there after establish demonstrations farms that were to be used to teaching farmers proper farming methods. The study found very little evidence that officials were trained; demonstrations farms that were established depended not on collective efforts but isolated efforts of different officials. Demonstration farms in Bagamoyo were mainly of rice, vegetables and cassava. Each official at the lower level helped farmers as he/she saw it fit.

Many officials seem to implement the initiatives without proper guidance or simply by assuming what they are implementing is what the government wants, this is supported by evidence from the field as pointed out by one official; "as an agricultural extension officer in Bagamoyo, I believe that I am implementing the policy as required although I have not received directives from the government on how I should go about implementing this initiative." There is an element of doubt that has been demonstrated by many officials met. Further evidence of the mismatch of expectation is the result of the response gotten when lower level officials were asked the question whether they thought implementation conforms with the directives and expectations of the central government. The question was answered by 17 individuals and 10 of them said that the implementation did not match the expectation at the higher levels, this represents 58.8 per cent of all respondents.

3.3. Challenges Facing Street Level Bureaucrats in Implementing Kilimo Kwanza Initiative

As identified earlier in this discussion, this initiative was conceived in order to come up with strategies that would transform the agricultural sector and hence reduce poverty to almost 80 per cent of the population that is involved in one way or another with agricultural activities. To bring change to the agricultural sector and indeed how policies were implemented a lot had to change, change had to come in many ways including improving the relationship between the top officials and frontline bureaucrats who were

directly involved with the implementation of the initiative. Further, a lot had to be done to bring farmers and other stakeholders together so as to enable a holistic approach to the implementation process.

All these had to go hand in hand with efforts to address major challenges that have persistently and constantly affected negatively the agricultural sector in Tanzania, they include but not limited to poor access and low use of improved seeds and fertilizers, limited access to financing for adoption of modern technologies, lack of market for produce, overreliance on rainfall which is normally unpredictable due to climate change and under investment by the relevant authorities mainly the government and the private sector.

To attain progress the above-mentioned challenges had to be addressed and our investigation asked frontline employees the challenges they were facing in implementing the initiative in Bagamoyo district. Many of the frontline officials met identified poor infrastructure coupled with inability to have a reliable means of transport as major challenges that hinder them from fulfilling their responsibilities. To implement the initiative frontline employees had to walk long distances to visit farmers and there is very little support from the government in terms of supporting them with reliable means of transport.

Further, the situation is not helped by a working environment that is not favourable. Employees lack proper housing, there is also shortage of office equipment such as furniture and stationeries, all these shortcomings demotivate employees and as a result affect negatively implementation of the policy initiative. One official at the lower levels said “most of the money for this initiative is spent for conferences and workshops in big cities like Dar es Salaam, we the implementers are not involved, we end up receiving vague directives to implement the initiative.”

This situation cannot be ignored since majority of agricultural extension officers, almost all of those who were interviewed were of the view that if the situation does not change significantly one should not expect any success in implementing this initiative or any other initiative that is geared towards improving the performance of agricultural sector in Tanzania.

The other challenge that was identified by almost all officials who responded to this question (14 out of 19) was difficulties in getting farm inputs for majority of farmers in Bagamoyo. It emerged that majority of farmers were poor and could not afford fertilizer, improved seeds, pesticides and insecticides. A farmer said

“our efforts are frustrated by difficulties in getting farm equipments such as pesticides, fertilizers, water blowers, farm machines like tractors, and even cashew nut grinders, when we report this to agricultural extension officers we end up being given empty promises.”

To make matters worse, frontline officials had no clear directives on how to help in such a situation. One could say that there was no clear policy that was specifically made to assist poor farmers and this frustrated the efforts of those who are implementing the initiative at the lower level.

Moreover, there were no coordinated efforts by the central government to help the initiative succeed by helping lower level officials with on job and tailor-made training programmes that are focused on helping agricultural extension officers to implement specific programmes and initiatives in the agricultural sector. With Kilimo Kwanza initiative one official said “I am only using my experience to implement directives from the higher levels of government. Very few officials were trained on how to implement this initiative and I was not one of them.”

Other challenges facing frontline officials relates to failure to put in place equitable and reliable market system for such crops like cashew nut and seaweed which has recently become important source of income to many families in Bagamoyo. Additionally, the efforts of frontline employees have also been frustrated by land conflicts that are mainly caused by land grabbing by the so-called investors who have taken large swaths of land for such projects like EcoEnergy and harbour project. Without proper mechanisms to resolve these conflicts between small farmers and large investors the efforts of frontline employees to implement Kilimo Kwanza initiative are largely compromised.

Generally frontline employees are faced with a multitude of challenges that hinder them from implementing Kilimo Kwanza initiative, apart from those discussed above the most notable challenge relates with low pay which in turn affects their daily performance. Some of these officials complained of poor standard of living that is reflected in the type of accommodation they have. “We are not able to build or rent a decent house due to the low level of the salary we receive from the government,” complained one official, under such circumstances some of these officials neglect some of their core functions of helping farmers and instead engage in other activities that are unrelated to the agricultural sector like engaging in small business to supplement their meager income.

4. Reflection

While most of the literature reviewed and mostly from Lipsyk showed that street level bureaucrats manipulate policies and exert discretion in the implementation phase, the implementation of Kilimo Kwanza initiative did not follow that sequence due to a number of reasons one being lack of clarity in terms of directives. In order to effectively use discretionary powers one needs to first understand clearly the intention of the policy objectives, when there is clarity one is able to manipulate the policy to suit his intentions and those of the policy makers. A thorough examination of the Kilimo Kwanza policy initiative shows that implementation was at best random and at worst chaotic due to lack of coordination between higher levels of government and the lower levels.

From the analysis above the Kilimo Kwanza initiative was more of an emotional campaign that lacked a clear and coherent strategy and was mainly linked with the desire of political leaders to see Tanzania achieve success in the agricultural sector. The implementation framework that was developed which was famously known as the ten pillars of Kilimo Kwanza ended up being a document of discussion at various conferences and workshops and there were very little efforts to bring to the fore the role of frontline workers in implementing the initiative.

As it is commonly known and as rightly pointed out by Rowe (2012, p. 11) “street level bureaucrats develop systems, processes and rules of thumb to help them in their work,” this level of discretion can either help to properly implement a policy or lead to failure of implementation, with the case of Kilimo Kwanza initiative the directives from the principal were vague and hence difficulties for the

frontline employees to develop systems, processes and rules of thumb that could have been useful in the implementation of the initiative.

Further, the performance of street level bureaucrats is highly dependent on their attitude. The sense of commitment is highly dependent on the value the system places on them, this has to be reflected on how they are closely involved in order to understand policies and initiatives they are supposed to implement. It is these officials who meet citizens and are expected to respond to their needs in the course of implementation. As such it is imperative they think positively about their work and this should go hand in hand with clear and unambiguous instructions from their superiors. Good communication in terms of what is expected of them simplifies their already complex job of meeting the expectation of their clients.

A close examination of the implementation of Kilimo Kwanza initiative by frontline officials show that their attitude is negatively affected by lack of cohesion between themselves and their superiors at the higher levels of administration. While at the centre of administration the resources and rewards are not enough they are significantly substantial compared to the lower levels of administration where officials are struggling with limited resources. As we have seen, street level bureaucrats are poorly rewarded and this affects the implementation of Kilimo Kwanza initiative. The extent to which bureaucrats feel rewarded matters a lot in their performance and this is in many circumstances reflected in their behavior (Hughes et. al, 2012).

Looking at the implementation processes of the Kilimo Kwanza policy initiative in Bagamoyo district, it is clear that there was no clear strategy and hence confusion in the implementation. The initiative falls in the category of those policies, national campaigns and initiatives that were hastily introduced, aggressively advocated and forcefully implemented but with little positive impact to the community as it was intended. The implementation process of the initiative clearly shows the mismatch between the good intention of the policy initiative and the reality in the implementation phase. The narratives at the national level are not backed by actions and indeed resources at the lower levels hence deficiency in implementation.

Factors which led to failure in implementation of other policies in the past notably the Ujamaa Villagilization policy continues to play crucial role in the failure of implementation of other policies. Enforcement of Kilimo Kwanza initiative at the lower level leaves a lot to be desired. It is fair to say there was no need of having such as a massive campaign to promote an agricultural policy initiative in a sector that was already positioned to benefit from other well-coordinated strategies and policies like Agricultural Sector Development Strategy (ASDS) and Agricultural Sector Development Programme (ASDP) not to mention The Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania (SAGCOT).

While Kilimo Kwanza initiative lacked a clear strategy to link the local and the national level, the other strategies and policies referred above had a clear framework that brought together line ministries and Local Government Authorities (LGAs) which coordinated activities at the local level. Such coordination and clarity clearly helped to link agricultural plans at the national level with District Agricultural Development Plans (DADPs), something alien to Kilimo Kwanza initiative (URT, 2005). Failure to bring into the fore the role of frontline officials in the implementation process has negatively affected implementation and consequently led to the failure of the initiative.

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