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## **Constituency Development Fund: Who decides?**

**By Irenei Kiria**

On 17 August 2007, Prime Minister Edward Lowassa, in his speech to conclude the 8<sup>th</sup> Parliament session in Dodoma, told the nation that 7.5 billion shillings have been approved by Parliament for implementation of a Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in financial year 2007/08. He further said that the Government is finalizing a bill for the CDF law to be brought to Parliament for enactment.

The CDF would give each MP funds for development projects in his or her constituency. According to Lowassa, the amount of funds received by each constituency would depend on the size of the constituency, its population and the degree of poverty.

The Prime Minister's speech revealed a number of things that merit further attention. First, Parliament has passed a budget for implementation of something which does not yet exist by law. Why the rush? What if enactment of CDF law becomes impossible? Second, have citizens been consulted?

From the same speech we learned that the CDF is meant to be a catalyst to implement the ongoing Decentralisation-by-Devolution policy ('D-by-D'). However, the top-down decision to enact the CDF appears to run contrary to the spirit of D-by-D.

If you ask MPs why they support establishment of a CDF, they normally give two reasons. First, they point out that MPs currently spend their own money to help poor people in their constituencies, and so the CDF will relieve them of that burden. But this ignores MPs' primary oversight role. If the MPs are busy managing CDF monies, will they still be able to effectively scrutinize and monitor Government spending?

Furthermore, what precautions are in place to ensure that the CDF does not turn into another form of *Takrima*? If during their election campaigns MPs promise certain philanthropic projects and are elected for that reason, they ought to use their own money to deliver, not taxpayers'.

The second reason cited by MPs in support of the CDF is that this money will speed development efforts at the local level. But what of all the other existing funding mechanisms with that same goal? To recap, these include the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF), the Local Government Capital Development Grant system (LGCDG), the ASDP, the PADP, the PEDP and other sector and general purpose grants that are sent to fund the activities of our Local Government Authorities. Have the shortcomings with these channels been adequately addressed from the citizens' perspective?

The CDF saga is a poignant illustration of priorities and how decisions are made in Tanzania. It seems we often decide to do certain things because other countries have done so, and/or as a result of directive from the central government.

So, we will implement the CDF because it has been done in Kenya and because the central government has decided to do so. I have not heard anybody saying the citizens decided. How many orders have the Prime Minister or President given to Councils to implement? Were they priorities for each particular Council?

For example, think of the recent directive by President Kikwete to construct a dispensary in every village and a health centre in each ward. This directive does not adequately address the fact that existing health facilities are critically under-resourced. The money for new health facilities could be used to attract and retain health workers in rural and underserved areas, and ensure availability of drugs and supplies throughout.

But let us return to the CDF issue. Where do we go from here?

First, Parliament should explain why they decided to approve the budget for the CDF, when it does not yet exist legally. The process to table the CDF bill in Parliament should be stopped until citizens' consent and alternative preferences are sought.

In the meantime, MPs should work with citizens to strengthen transparency and accountability in the implementation of local government development initiatives through existing funding mechanisms mentioned above.

Second, the government should explain how they came up with the idea of CDF and how it will address the problems facing other local government funding channels. The 7.2 billion shillings passed by the Parliament for implementation of the (non-existent) CDF should be re-directed to Councils to beef up their under-budgeted annual plans

Finally, if the CDF is implemented, the government should provide constitutionally sound explanations regarding who is going to be accountable to whom when it comes to debating CDF budget and implementation reports in Parliament.

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