

Mkapa's Local Government Reform - The Legacy of Nyerere and beyond

Einar Braathen¹

¹Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR), International Department, Oslo, Norway

einar.braathen@nibr.no

Under the presidency of Benjamin Mkapa, Tanzania embarked on an ambitious reform for democratic decentralization, the Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP). The paper offers an assessment of this reform from comparative and historical perspectives. . It is based on a project of formative process research on the programme. While there is no lack of critical accounts of the outcomes of the reform implementation since 1999, the paper argues that a comparison with neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Zambia and Mozambique shows that the decentralization reform in Tanzania has produced significant improvements in local autonomy, citizen participation, accountability and service delivery. The LGRP, in combination with Tanzania's economic growth observed also in the agricultural and rural areas, has been instrumental in sustaining the poverty reduction that has been recorded every year in Tanzania since 1995. In a historical perspective, the effects of the presidency of Julius Nyerere (1961-1985) on Mkapa's decentralization reform are assessed from three angles. First, with the assumption that a resilient state at the national level is a prerequisite for effective changes in the central-local relations, Nyerere as a nation builder comes into account. Second, in emphasizing agency, Mkapa as a political leader can be adequately understood as the innovative student of his teacher, *Mwalimu* Nyerere. An example is the 'know-how' of mobilizing the peasantry to secure the rule of the party (TANU, CCM) against urban or regional opposition. Third, when using path dependence theory, the legacy of the *ujamaa* period and the so-called 1972 Decentralization (1972-82, *Madaraka Mikoani* meaning 'powers to the regions') and to some extent the 1982 Decentralization provide a more mixed picture. Mkapa's decentralization reform emphasized the empowerment of the village and the local community. Yet, the power relations in terms of bureaucratic structures and vested Party State interests seem to block real devolution of power to the people.