

Hadi Mawla

Cara Quinn

ECE 1007 Writing & Composition

2/28/2025

### It Takes a Village to Raise a Country: Decentralization in Tanzania's Social Action Fund

Since the 1970s, there has been a fascination within the development community which seeks to emphasize the importance of decentralization programs. Development partners invest considerable resources and effort in formulating complex strategies for developing countries to implement. Projects, such as Jeffery Sachs' Millennium Project, have become increasingly more audacious and complex, and yet, despite these efforts, poverty continues to trap millions of individuals in the developing world. In the backdrop of disappointment, some industrious nations have cleared their own path towards reform and poverty alleviation. Of particular fascination is Tanzania which developed the decentralization framework for their own poverty alleviation program, the Social Action Fund. Analysis of current literature regarding social welfare and infrastructure investment in Tanzania's Social Action Fund (TASAF) and Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) programs in Tanzania reveals that decentralization is essential in service delivery and sustainability which has not been contemporarily observed. These programs have proven integral to improving life quality outcomes in rural Tanzania. Decentralization in Tanzania has proven indispensable in procuring the successful outcomes of these programs.

Decentralization is the ultimate symphony of politics: it involves mutualism above greed—a feat not common in government. To successfully implement these reforms, governments must satisfy the competing interests of elected officials, bureaucrats, and influencing institutions. Each of these individual pieces are motivated by unique incentives;

satisfying these conditions can be difficult, and in almost all cases there remains significant friction between the any number of competing interests involved in the process. Elected officials are among the most subject to these influences. Influences of significance generally revolve around reelection campaigns alongside institutional and partisan pressures. For instance, “when national parties calculate that their electoral fortunes are more promising at the subnational level [...] they are more likely to support decentralization to make these offices more powerful” (Eaton et al.). Any policy of devolution—political decentralization where central governments relinquish authorities to sub-national governments—removes authority from central bureaucracy and legislatures. In effect, to decentralize is to convince the government to willingly give away its authority. Institutional influences may also capture politicians in their crossfire, such as in the case of unions and corporations. The collective bargaining which unions employ have the most leverage in more centralized governments where advocating for reform is more straightforward. Unions have historically been very successful and “have shaped politicians’ design choices in a number of important cases of decentralization” (Eaton et al.). On the other hand, corporations seek much to gain from decentralization as diluted governments make it easier for corporations to suppress strong unions. This can cause friction within the government which ultimately stymie progress of development objectives. To begin to implement these reforms is thus contingent on a great deal of political maneuvering.

Often, developing nations lack the ability to both unify competing entities and to design decentralization frameworks. The inability to accomplish either renders the entire effort futile. To ensure that developing nations could reap the benefits of decentralization for their development, the EU and global development partners took up the challenge of designing frameworks beginning in the 1970s. The two most prominent frameworks became Rapid Rural Appraisal

(RRA) and the more refined Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). In Africa, even the best RRA and PRA programs continued to have failing project sustainability—the continued presence of benefits—with more than 40% of projects failing only a few years after funding is cut (Kapwani and Lesso). High rates of failure pose significant questions as to the translatability of foreign designed frameworks to organically fit into domestic systems in developing countries.

Developing countries must render onto themselves a necessary domestic component, involving greater responsibility than simply overseeing the implementation of European frameworks. Specifically, these initiatives must always be formulated on intention, trust, and democratic process. When Tanzania announced the emergence of the TASAF program they set its primary objectives to be “education, health, water and rural roads and [...] to provide jobs to many people” (“Tanzania to”). In establishing straightforward goals the government incurs a risk, in which it must be willing to accept constant scrutiny over its programs by the population; although in doing so accountability is brought to the precipice for all to view, increasing competency demands. Reform initiatives must also prioritize transparency and democratic procedure. Typically in decentralization by devolution—DbD—there will be an inherent increase in government transparency. Transferring responsibilities from capital cities to village councils places government action under the auspices of the local populations. However, powerful village councils can quickly become corrupt, making it essential to implement democratic elections in local governments. Democratic elections allow the local citizenry to quickly respond to unfair dynamics in village institutions. This feature of DbD strategies is apparent in Tanzania, where the TASAF program brought restored confidence to institutions which were historically distrusted for corruption (“The Tanzania”). Decentralization initiatives with these features can expect to improve the efficiency of resource allocation, promote accountability and reduce

corruption within government, and by improve cost recovery (Kiwale). There is thus an essential burden applied on developing nations to avoid failure by supporting these reforms beyond the application of foreign frameworks.

It was as a consequence of failure that Tanzania began to devise a unique strategy, the Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (O&OD) Method. The strategy incorporated many aspects from the PRA method but identified its *raison d'être* “as [a] participatory planning methodology to realise bottom-up planning and budgeting with maximum community participation by reflecting the real needs of respective local communities (Kapwani and Lesso).” The development of the O&OD method aligned closely with the emergence of the TASAF initiatives. Its formulation was pioneered by Tanzania's academia, which tailored its growth to directly address domestic issues. TASAF and the O&OD method were being formulated at a time when about half of all Tanzanians were living on less than \$1 a day (“The Tanzania”). However, it was the strong commitment by the government to address poverty and to promote inclusive development that would become the primary features of the TASAF program (“Tanzania Conditional”; “Tanzania’s”).

The long-awaited announcement of Tanzanian’s Social Action Fund finally arrived in the year 2000. The program was valued at \$73,500,000 (USD 2000), with the funding for the program provided by the World Bank, Tanzania, and development partners at a ratio of 81:5:14 (“Tanzania to”). As a social action fund, TASAFs primary mechanism was to entrust local governments to be responsible for their own development. This meant giving money—beans—to village councils and expecting them to optimize returns—fill stomachs. The program's first phase (2000-2005) saw limited application and assistance from the government, with most villages receiving \$20,000 dollars. Despite the limited funding during “preparation, communities had

demonstrated their ability to manage and account for results: ‘beans and full bellies’” (“The Tanzania”). Early success of the program led to more audacious applications during the second phase—TASAF II—which lasted from 2005-2013. TASAF II integrated two new mechanisms, the O&OD methodology and the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), to increase program effectiveness. While initially piloted in a limited number of local government authorities (LGAs), O&OD would be implemented in 80% of LGAs by the end of 2006 (Kapwani and Lesso). The CCT program—which sought to reward individuals with cash transfers for participating in state objectives—was initially piloted in 10% of regions. Program success ensured its utilization as the blueprint for the third and ongoing phase of the TASAF program, TASAF III (“History”). TASAF III sought to expand upon the social welfare investments by the CCT program by introducing them nationwide with the Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN). PSSN provides bi-monthly cash transfers to Tanzanian families and individuals to meet a variety of goals. Transfers seek to support families by covering certain expenses and protecting vulnerable communities; thus hoping to increase disposable income and demand. The PSSN programs support more than 5,000,000 people—1.3 million of which being chronically poor—with an average bi-monthly transfer value of 31,844TZS or \$12.84 (“Tanzania Conditional”). The PSSN program also incorporated a public works program which has allowed more than 330,000 individuals up to 60 days of employment to supplement periods of seasonal unemployment (“History”). Tanzania has invested significantly in the 25 year history of the TASAF; new mechanisms have been methodically added to improve effectiveness. This program has directly impacted the lives of millions of people.

The results of TASAF speak for themselves; between 2000 and 2025, TASAF I-III were instrumental in providing better life outcomes to millions of people within Tanzania. Just six

months after the start of the program in 2000, “communities had already built simple classrooms, water points, dispensaries, and other works” (“The Tanzania”). Villages continued to respond positively to government desires to expand program reach and increase financial support. By the end of TASAF I in 2005, local villages completed 1,704 sub-projects (Figure A). These projects focused primarily on infrastructure development, but the effects on communities were significant nonetheless. Thus, TASAF has directly affected 2.6 million people (Figure B) as a result of their infrastructure investments (“The Tanzania”). Additional impacts have been made by the PSSN programs, where community management committees (CMC) have excelled in administering the cash transfers. PSSN has successfully targeted the most vulnerable while increasing consumption of food and proteins, school enrollment, reduced absenteeism, and better healthcare outcomes (Figure C). One widowed grandmother, Majala Mtwana, aged 75, reported that following the program was responsible for her \$2 a day wage, which enabled her to provide food and clothing working for schools. CMC effectiveness is not only present in handling and distributing cash transfers, but also in directing labor for the public works program. As a result of CMC diligence, families in public works have completed 3,500 new projects while increasing their own disposable income (“Evaluating”; “History”). Perhaps one of the greatest manifestations of TASAF was the role of the LGA, which is entirely responsible for carrying out the program. When announced in 2000, LGAs were seen as corrupt and were distrusted by local populations. These opinions changed radically as villages began to repair social license with the utilization of political decentralization by the Tanzanian government (“Evaluating”).

The scale of TASAF’s participation is primarily owed to the specific modifications in political organization which were curated for the program. Prior to 2000, Tanzania's government had already begun rethinking their historical attitude towards decentralization. Beginning in the

80s, the Tanzanian government worked to create and empower village institutions, which had previously been banned (Kiwale). By 1999, one year before TASAF, attitudes completely shifted and villages were given complete control over all local services ("Decentralization"). To capitalize on this momentum and refine it further for the applications of the TASAF, O&OD was devised. The foundational premise of O&OD was to replace legions of bureaucrats from regional offices with the villagers themselves. In doing so, O&OD created a bottom-up development program in which people identified their problems, developed solutions while considering the availability of resources within the sub-village (hamlet), and then requested support from village councils (Mselle). To ensure confidence in local governments, thus promoting participation, LGAs were held accountable through public monitoring carried out by elected representatives ("The Tanzania"). Supporting local governments was essential in justifying their authority. Elected auditors provided proper consent from the governed, fostering trust which enabled local villages to fully maximize participation. The impacts were beneficial to local governments which began to employ villagers, fostering "a feeling of ownership" within the community (Kapwani and Lesso). Finally, village governments were fully operational and were staffed with locals. Tanzania successfully mobilized millions of villagers to take up the process of decentralization, unlocking the potential of the villages.

The ability of decentralized governments to optimize resource allocation became a major benefit of the decentralization programs. Efficient resource allocation allows the governing entity to maximize outputs for each input. When determined by local councils, resources are also allocated to areas where the local populations feel they are needed most as opposed to bureaucratic field agents applying strict government objectives. Decentralized governments which tailor services for the unique preferences of their constituencies produce better economic

outcomes than do more uniform governments applying the same services (Kiwale). Even at the start of TASAF, when there was minimal funding from the government, villages managed to successfully allocate the money and produce outcomes. Central governments are notoriously poor at cost-effectiveness, however local governments seem to shine in this regard. This effectiveness derives itself from the economic consequences of poor money allocation within towns. Within national governments, money spent poorly is not typically of major concern as the scale of spending is so significant that certain waste is bound to occur. Within smaller government units, mismanagement of money not only is a failure in using their resources but also reduces revenues for the township. In Tanzania, this became evident when townfolk began to “vote with their feet” ("The Tanzania"). If their town failed to properly allocate money for services they desired, they would go to neighboring villages that made those investments ("The Tanzania"). Townsfolk spending their money in neighboring areas meant a reduction in the revenues and economic vitality of the local township. Interestingly, this fostered an environment of competition which saw all villages pay specific attention to the demands of their constituents ("The Tanzania"). Competition imbued a great urgency within the town administrations to use their money well in both a cost effective and representative manner which, when in conjunction with local demands for accountability, produced extremely positive responses from the community.

The greatest metric by which one can assert that decentralization was imperative to the success of TASAF is the direct attestations of the communities which were impacted. Local empowerment, enabled by decentralization, contributed significantly to the resolve of townships in accomplishing their goals. This civic empowerment of the locals allowed for impressive improvements on confidence and the comfortability of life within these villages. Within many



villages O&OD had enabled the locals to attain “self-actualization of their problems, needs and own capability to address them” (Kapwani and Lesso). The impressive attitudes contributed to the high productivity of villages, in which individuals became willing to put their resources to use. It is essential to connect the changes in opinions of local governments with the results displayed in the Tanzanian Social Action Fund. It is even more important to recall that prior to 2000, initiatives had historically failed for sustainability and long-term impacts. In TASAF, project sustainability was reported to be “enviable” since they were decided based on people's needs, were planned by taking resources and labor into consideration, and were monitored and continued by the local townspeople (Kapwani and Lesso). It is thus evident that the O&OD methodology impressed upon the local communities the ability to handle their own issues, and, that the domestic techniques had done something every other European concoction had failed to do—create long lasting meaningful change. Spectacularly, the changes in the mindset towards the local administration created immense changes in how much townsfolk were willing to commit to the success of their environments. Villages found that citizens were willing to accept more expensive designs for water technology than would have been opted for by the town governments (Kiwale). Changes in opinions towards local administration made people more willing to improve their villages even at personal expense. The ability for local governments to take control of their own development and the fundamental changes that caused in local communities is reflected in the long lists of TASAFs accomplishments.

Over the past twenty-five years, Tanzania has undergone a great transformation due to TASAF. At program start, in 2000, Tanzania was a low-income country with poverty dominating the rural parts of the country. Looking back from 2025 it becomes evident that TASAF has contributed to Tanzania’s emergence as a lower-middle income country with a positive future

outlook. The results of TASAF prove to the world that sustainable decentralized development is possible, and that the implications extend far beyond improvements in infrastructure and social welfare nets. Rather, successful decentralization campaigns have the potential to completely transform attitudes of the local population, emboldening them to become active agents of change in their communities. Not only has decentralization created significant benefit for Tanzanians development goals but the long lasting ramifications of the cultural change within villages is likely to impact the spirit of civil service within the country for generations to come. The reason for this success is the strong reliance on the people to be responsible for their own development. The political and institutional systems that enabled local communities to be productive were the result of a great internal effort by academia and the results themselves were produced by the local communities. These findings suggest that policies supporting foreign development must focus less on creating thorough frameworks or expensive direct intervention and should rather enable the countries to produce their own institutions to meet domestic needs. Oftentimes when frameworks are designed by development partners, they fail to take into consideration the unique political, social, and economic environment of the target country. This contributes to the high failure in sustainable development programs across Africa. As compared to historical application of foreign frameworks within Tanzania, domestic decentralization has seen greater sustainability, life outcomes, and self-actualization amongst communities. Paradoxically, Tanzania has made clear that it takes a village to raise a country.

## Works Cited

- C., Kapwani J., and Lesso T. O. "THE EFFICACY OF IMPROVED OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES TO DEVELOPMENT (IMPROVED O&OD) ON THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNITY PROJECT: A CASE OF MSEYU VILLAGE." *Tengeru Community Development Journal*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2021, [ticd.ac.tz/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/5.-Jonas-Copy.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](http://ticd.ac.tz/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/5.-Jonas-Copy.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com). Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.
- "Decentralization and Local Governance Support Strategy." *UNICEF*, 2018, [www.unicef.org/esa/media/4076/file/UNICEF-Tanzania-2018-Decentralization-and-Local-Governance-Support-Strategy.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/esa/media/4076/file/UNICEF-Tanzania-2018-Decentralization-and-Local-Governance-Support-Strategy.pdf). Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.
- Eaton, Kent, et al. *THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DECENTRALIZATION REFORMS*. World Bank, 2011, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN TASAF FUNDED SUBPROJECTS: A CASE OF BABATI TOWN COUNCIL. Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.
- "EVALUATING TANZANIA'S PRODUCTIVE SOCIAL SAFETY NET." *The World Bank*, Sept. 2019, [documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/150071582090321211/pdf/Evaluating-Tanzania-s-Productive-Social-Safety-Net-Findings-from-the-Midline-Survey.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/150071582090321211/pdf/Evaluating-Tanzania-s-Productive-Social-Safety-Net-Findings-from-the-Midline-Survey.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com). Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.
- "History/Background." *Tanzanian Social Action Fund*, [www.tasaf.go.tz/pages/test](http://www.tasaf.go.tz/pages/test). Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.
- Kiwale, Erasto Nehemiah. *THE IMPACT OF DECENTRALIZATION OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN TANZANIA A CASE*

*STUDY OF KILOSA DISTRICT COUNCIL, MOROGORO*. U of Tanzania, MA thesis.

repository.out.ac.tz/860/1/DESSERTATION\_KIWALE\_FINAL\_-COMMENTS-1.pdf?utm\_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.

Mselle, Lazaro. *COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN TASAF FUNDED SUBPROJECTS: A CASE OF BABATI TOWN COUNCIL*. Mzumbe U, MA thesis.

scholar.mzumbe.ac.tz/server/api/core/bitstreams/00956ed2-d8f6-4b96-9ddd-2a91e7c3af74/content. Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.

"Tanzania's Program Lifts over 100,000 Households from Extreme Poverty." *Xinhua News*

*Agency*, 1 June 2022. *Gale in Context: World History*,

link.gale.com/apps/doc/A705641327/WHIC?u=s1322&sid=bookmark-WHIC&xid=adadf75e. Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.

"Tanzania Conditional Cash Transfer (TASAF III/ PSSN): Youth Well-being and the Transition to Adulthood." *The Transfer Project*, transfer.cpc.unc.edu/countries/tanzania/#programmes.

Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.

"The Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF): owning the process of measuring impact1 and achieving results." *The World Bank*, July 2006,

openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/21c04879-1d43-51b6-bd11-40d381094ccc/content. Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.

"Tanzania to Implement Poverty Alleviation Program." *Xinhua News Agency*, 16 May 2000, p.

1008137h3155. *Gale in Context: World History*,

link.gale.com/apps/doc/A62113832/WHIC?u=s1322&sid=bookmark-WHIC&xid=93e2ae99. Accessed 22 Mar. 2025.

## Appendix A

**Table 1. Sector breakdown of TASAF I sub-projects**

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Education <sup>1</sup>	782	45.9
Health <sup>2</sup>	328	19.2
Water	254	14.9
Road	204	12.0
Economic infrastructure <sup>3</sup>	46	2.7
Environment protection	29	1.7
Widows	27	1.6
Orphans	15	0.9
HIV/AIDS sensitization	10	0.6
Elderly	6	0.4
Disabled	2	0.1
Early Childhood Dev.	1	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1704</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>1</sup> Classrooms; some have teachers' houses, offices, VIPs, water points, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Out-Patient Departments, staff houses, incinerators, toilets, etc

<sup>3</sup> Markets, bridges, bus stops, etc

(Figure A)

Appendix A is a table describing sub-projects undertaken by local village councils during the first phase of the TASAF program. It displays local village aptitude in distributing limited TASAF funds to optimize development and complete projects to improve overall conditions.

## Appendix B

### **Households with improved access to:-**

water for livestock from earth dams	82,000
food storage facilities	3,000

### **Children with improved access to:-**

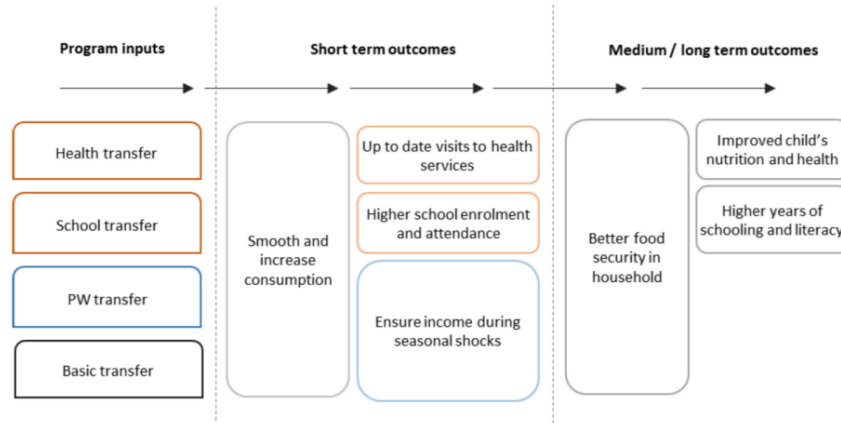
Learning environment (classrooms)	116,370
Sanitation (VIPs)	23,775
Teachers with improved housing	670
Health staff with Improved housing	1,533
Orphans reached with support	1,260
Widows with access to higher incomes	864
Elderly with access to support	468
Disabled reached with support	106
Under-fives reached with ECD centre	57
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2,692,853</b>

(Figure B)

Appendix B is a table which presents the impact on households and individuals by the TASAF programs. It's application corroborates the wide-ranging impacts which were brought about by village participation in development.

## Appendix C

Figure 3. PSSN program logic



(Figure C)

Figure C depicts a flowchart regarding the logic of the Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) program logic. Displays long term impacts of the PSSN program, with specific improvements in food security, schooling, and health being important factors in breaking out of multigenerational poverty.