

Improving Citizens' Access to Information on Public Services in Tanzania

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Lack of Information on Basic Public Services

Like citizens in many developing countries, Tanzanians go through many layers of government structures and processes to access information on basic government services. They also face a mountain of bureaucracy from government officials who treat the information as “confidential.” It is not uncommon for some government officials to unlawfully take advantage of the lack of knowledge or information by service-seekers to solicit bribes.

In the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, 56% of Tanzanian respondents stated they had paid a bribe for public sector services in the past 12 months, and 85% of respondents perceived the public sector to be corrupt.¹ Similarly, dealing with permits and licenses is cumbersome and time-consuming and provides many opportunities for graft. The World Economic Forum's 2013-2014 Global Competitiveness Report lists inefficient government bureaucracy as one of the most problematic factors for doing business in Tanzania.²

Several government initiatives have been introduced in recent times to address some of these issues. For example in 2010, public service reforms introduced client-service charters in all ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) in order to increase accountability by setting performance standards.³ Multiple e-government initiatives have also been introduced to promote efficiency and good governance. One such initiative is the *Nifanyeje?*, or How Do I?, website that is the subject of this case study, compiled through a series of interviews, desk analysis and online surveys.

Nifanyeje? - The One Stop Shop for Information

Tanzania joined Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011. The president at the time, Jakaya Kikwete, said the intention in joining OGP was to “make government business more open to its citizens in the interest of improving public service delivery, government responsiveness, combating corruption, and building greater trust.”⁴ In its first National Action Plan (NAP), for the period of 2012-2013, Tanzania committed to establishing a website to address access to public services. Specifically, it committed the government to: explore the feasibility of establishing a *Nifanyeje?* website where citizens can get practical information of how to go about getting government services (getting a scholarship for university, water or electricity services, drivers license, business license, passport, etc.) and what to do if they are unable to secure the service in the required time.⁵

The overarching goal of the *Nifanyeje?* online hub was to provide ordinary citizens with information on how to access public services from various government institutions. The specific objectives were to:

- Create and maintain a platform to act as a one-stop hub for a broad pool of data and information, including budgets, acts, policies, development programs, forms, annual reports, and international agreements as delivered by various units of government.
- Make information easy available and with little cost by removing the need for time-consuming journeys around various government institutions. The platform had to simplify key procedures and

1 2013 Global Corruption Barometer: <http://www.transparency.org/gcb2013/country/?country=tanzania>.

2 2013-2014 Global Competitiveness Report: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2013-14.pdf

3 Extract from *Role Of the Public Service as an Essential Component of Good Governance in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights*, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Development/GoodGovernance/Corruption/TANZANIA.pdf>.

4 Opening speech of President Kikwete at the Dar es Salaam OGP Africa Regional Meeting in May 2015.

5 http://www.opengov.go.tz/files/publications/attachments/OGP-Brief3-Nifanyeje_sw.pdf.

requirements for accessing certain services thereby reducing time spent for interaction between citizen and government officials.

- Reduce bureaucracy by making the most needed information available, and cutting down on a majority of cumbersome processes and procedures, and undue secrecy.

The *Nifanyeje?* website tried to address the lack of a single integrated platform where information of public interest could be published by the government and accessed by the general public. Prior to its advent, every government unit collected and managed their own information. For instance, the Ministry of Education collected and published its own data on education: Basic Education Statistics, or BEST. Ministries of Finance, Health and Water would do the same for the same type of data or information that was frequently requested by the public or end users. This made a search for a simple detail a daunting task even for experienced researchers, academics and journalists.

When assessing the commitment as part of Tanzania's first OGP NAP implementation in January 2013, OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism's researcher found the commitment to be potentially transformative in impact, and it was completed on time. The progress report indicated that 85 services have been identified, created, organized, and published on the *Nifanyeje?/How Do I* section on the government portal.⁶ The report however noted that there was limited use of the website as it was still on trial at the time.

Through evidence collected using interviews and online surveys for this case study, the research team found out that there has been progress on general usage of the website since the assessment was carried out by the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM).⁷ The number of users on the portal (www.tanzania.go.tz/howdoi) has grown from zero to 22,329 users during the period from May 1, 2013 to July 21, 2016, an average of 1,595 visitors per month with 70% of these visitors hailing from Tanzania.⁸ Through interviews, the research team was able to establish that most usage of the *Nifanyeje?* website for visitors in Tanzania is mostly concentrated in Dar es Salaam and several other urban centers including Arusha, Mwanza and Moshi.

However, as of August 30, 2016, the number of categories of services or information available on the *How Do I* online facility had declined from 85 to 49. According to an information officer interviewed at the Ministry of Information, Sports, and Culture (MISC), this decline is in part attributable to a government issued data directive in March 2016 that requires agencies to revise their published information in line with the directive before republishing.

Officials from e-Government Agency, which oversees public services delivered by information and telecommunications technology, and MISC attributed the drop in the number of services to the fact that information published was now being subject to quality, timeliness, and accessibility criteria. Quality information was defined as including a brief and precise description of what is being offered, what documentation or requirements are necessary to obtain the government service, and contact information including a telephone number and Google map to locate the specific MDA that is offering the service.⁹

When tested, the website's features worked well except for the search function, which, the researchers were informed, was under maintenance.

Reducing Transaction Times and Costs

The spread of state-of-the-art computing devices and access to the Internet means that a task that could have taken a matter of days or months in the past can now quickly be accomplished through an Internet-enabled mobile phone, tablet or desktop computer. Instead of an investor in South Africa traveling from Pretoria to Dar es Salaam to collect application forms and ask for a set of procedures to register a company, he or she can download the forms and any other relevant information without any geographical or physical barriers.¹⁰

The current *Nifanyeje?* service is mainly meant to provide information and some documentation to the end user on how to go about obtaining a particular government service from the various MDAs that have made their content available on the portal. Through *Nifanyeje?*, links to other e-Services by government MDAs are now more readily accessible.

6 2013 IRM Report: Tanzania: <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Tanzania%20OGP%20IRM%20public%20comment%20%28Eng%29.pdf>

7 Suzan Mshakangoto interview with Research Team, July 14, 2016. Dar es Salaam.

8 Annex 1, *How Do I* - Google Analytics, submitted by e-Government Agency. July 14, 2016.

9 Suzan Mshakangoto interview with Research Team, July 14, 2016, Dar es Salaam.

10 Ezekiel Kamwaga interview with Research Team, July 18, 2016, Dar es Salaam.

Among administrative tasks that are facilitated by *Nifanyeje?* by moving them online are:

- Obtaining application forms for passports and certain certificates: One would have to spend a week if not months and travel long distances to collect these forms, thereby incurring costly and non-service expenses.
- Calculating Pay As You Earn (PAYE) income tax: In the past one would have to review a PAYE instruction booklet and rummage endless tables, an exercise which was time consuming and prone to human error.
- Preparing an application for a mining license: By publishing all the requirements online, *Nifanyeje?* is the first stop for a prospective miner requiring a specific license, who can now be equipped with all the information and requisite documentation or requirements before embarking on long journeys (often from as far as Canada) to come and invest in Tanzania. In the past, this step could mean several round-trip flights and wasted time, inconvenience and costs.
- Registering a company: The first step toward the objective can be completed 100% online. Entrepreneurs can look up available company names and gets prompt feedback from the Business Registration and Licensing Agency's website, which is linked to the *Nifanyeje?* hub. Again, this saves time, travel and money.

When the *Nifanyeje?* portal was launched in 2013, citizen-state interaction on the portal was nonexistent. Now the service includes a comment/query feature for users to submit their complaints, seek further clarifications and or get a number to call the relevant MDA for appointments or direction to office premises (if they are unfamiliar with use of Google maps provided on same page).

Users' comments or the responses to them are not published on the portal, however, a feature that could have gone a long way toward enabling users and oversight institutions to monitor government response. According to an e-Government Agency staff member, there are plans underway to add a comments/feedback feature on the site as well as to develop mobile platforms including an SMS interface.

Nevertheless, the savings in time spent researching and traveling - and savings of costs - is a big benefit for those using public services. To take one example, even those unfamiliar with the food import/export business can easily see the requirements and process to be followed to apply for a permit from the Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority (TFDA). Prior to *Nifanyeje?*, permit seekers would have to travel to TFDA headquarters or a regional office just to find out about the permit requirements, wasting time, money and productivity. Now one can approach the offices of a particular MDA armed with all the required documentation and knowledge about the process.

A Snowball Effect

The *Nifanyeje?* service has had a snowball effect, inspiring other units in the government to emulate the practice of disclosing detailed information about how to access services on their websites. Among them are the TFDA, the Tanzania Revenue Authority, the Dar es Salaam Water and Sewerage Company, the Tanzania Electricity Supply Company, the Tanzania Ports Authority, and the Tanzania Customs Integrated System, along with others.

An online search by the research team revealed that at least one MDA platform has mirrored that of *Nifanyeje?* by providing similar functionality with its own particular content. The Tanzania Commission for Universities has a 'How Do I?' feature on its home page.

Along with encouraging others to making more information available online, *Nifanyeje?* has also had a spillover effect in terms of an increase in public services offered online, say government officials as well as representatives of civil society organizations. When *Nifanyeje?* started up operations in 2013, there was only one government e-service: the TRA's online tax calculator for import duties and PAYE. As of August 2016, there are eight from as many MDAs.

The research team tested the following services and were all found to be functional:¹¹

Paying bills is easier. In the past, the Tanzania Electricity Supply Company would issue a consumption bill in paper format, which meant taking it to their offices to spend hours verifying it or else end up with the power

¹¹ Annex 7, screenshot of functional e-Services.

getting disconnected (unless the customer took the bribery short-cut). Now the bill can be verified online prior to physically going to settle at a nearby office or even paying with mobile money. Likewise, the water bill can also be checked online, and better still (once established through a mix of online and offline efforts), the bill can be paid through electronic payments, thus removing the risk of bribery. Currently, however, among more than 50 urban water utility companies, this service is being offered only by the Dodoma Urban Water Supply Authority.

Looking for a job? It might be worth checking the public service recruitment portal, where government MDAs calls for candidates. Although it's not being updated in a timely manner, this is a good initiative that can help job seekers who cannot afford to buy newspapers on a daily basis.

For businessmen and women who use the ports – air, sea and surface – for exporting and importing can use the Tanzania Customs Integrated System (TANCIS) for clearing goods at ports of entry. Clearing customs in the country used to be a lengthy and costly process. Systems were fragmented, documents had to be manually exchanged across a variety of organizations and agencies, and there was a general lack of coordination between regulatory agencies¹². TANCIS also issues SMS alerts to inform importers on the progress of their clearance requests so that they know at all times what is happening and be able to do verifications. TANCIS has also been hailed for cutting on admin costs for clearing agencies and removing bribery and red tape.

Toward more Openness and Usefulness

Nifanyeje? is a by-product of the OGP process in Tanzania and has generally played a big part in changing government practice and policy direction. According to interviews with government officials, OGP has had some influence in shaping these changes. They say that the OGP process acted as a catalyst for existing efforts within government, beyond *Nifanyeje?* to make services more friendly and efficient for customers and citizens.

Today it is mandatory for MDAs to publish data in an open source format. A government circular – Circular No. 2 of 2015, issued by the chief secretary of the president's office – covers all government MDAs and calls for open data to be available on the MDAs' websites and on the government portal.

The circular also established an interim institutional arrangement:

- The National Bureau of Statistics is responsible for coordinating official statistics and managing Open Data Portal content.
- e-Government Agency was mandated with developing and maintaining of the Open Data Portal and providing technical support to public institutions.
- The Records and Archives Management Department coordinates data classification and verification.
- Tanzania Information Services is charged with raising awareness on Open Data Initiatives.

An official from the State House Good Governance Unit observed: “OGP has helped define the kind of information to be published by requiring consideration of what would be a good standard to meet under OGP. So our government uses OGP tools and values as benchmarks in coming up with, for example, open data policy, online services, client service charters, etc. From 2013, there was already some form of movement to review or develop policies and/or systems, but with the advent of OGP it meant that the government had to be more ambitious in setting targets, objectives and focus on implementing few things at a time.”¹³

Coordination amongst the different MDAs is one of several challenges to be overcome. For example, there is no overall lead institution with a mandate to coordinate the implementation of Open Data initiatives. A drawback, according to one interviewee,¹⁴ is that the new circular is not easily accessible, and very few government officials outside the OGP circle know about its presence and contents; and so it will be very difficult to enforce or monitor.

On *Nifanyeje?* itself, there is more work to be done, including improving the end-user experience, searchability of services and user interactivity, linking more agencies' websites to the hub and expanding the number of services for which information is made available.

A key feature that would help improve the service is adding a feedback feature that would allow for more dialogue between citizens and government representatives. This would also improve accountability, because users of public services could give feedback about their experience and see the government's response to them.

12 <http://www.icf africa.org/news/tanzania-improves-the-process-for-clearing-import-and-export-goods>.

13 State House Good Governance Unit and Immigration officials tele-interview with research team, Nov. 10, 2016. Dar es Salaam.

14 Ernest Kamwaga interview with researcher, August 20, 2016.

Training to government officials on the types of information to be published is also essential for improving the quality of the information. The e-Government Agency informed the research team that all information officers in MDAs receive training at least once a year on how to publish content on *Nifanyeje?* regularly using a set of quality, searchability and interactivity criteria. This training regime needs to be improved to inform a more robust and usable platform for the citizen end users.

A possible ambition for the *Nifanyeje?* is to offer users a hub where they can make fill out forms, pay fees, and collect the service end product, such as a certificate, receipt, passport or other government document. Already, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals enables prospective and existing mining investors to obtain certain licenses through online registration and payment of government fees. This helps increase efficiency and productivity on the part of ministry officials but it also helps the country combating corrupt practices that occur with most face-to-face exchanges¹⁵. The myriad of services offered by TRA could be used for a pilot project and later rolled out to other MDAs and to the subnational level.

It will also be important to strengthen awareness efforts to ensure that more customers and citizens come into contact with their government when seeking services, even though they might be physically displaced from the service. The government needs to publicize widely the existence of many of its e-initiatives – including *Nifanyeje?*.

For all of its benefits, a service like *Nifanyeje?* will never be able to satisfy all citizens' need for information. This is especially true in a country like Tanzania where as of 2016 Internet penetration is still only at 34% of the country's population.¹⁶ With mobile Internet subscriptions growing at faster rates than fixed subscriptions thanks to smartphones becoming available at cheaper prices, plans are now in place to incorporate mobile platforms, including SMS services and social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter etc. Such developments would help bring information on government services to a broader range of Tanzanian citizens, but innovations to reach offline communities are still needed.

15 The Online Mining Cadastre Transactional Portal (OMCTP) is a platform that enables customers to register applications, review licenses, send performance information and make license payments and royalties electronically: <https://portal.mem.go.tz/site/CustomHtml.aspx?PageID=d7f3f61d-4689-4280-a59a-b865f002dd60>.

16 Annex 2, screenshot showing estimated number of Internet users from <http://www.tcra.go.tz/images/documents/telecommunication/CommStatMarch16.pdf>.

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