THE DAILY GOVERNANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH: GENDER PERSPECTIVES FROM DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA

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Introduction

In the international development community, the understanding of governance has changed during the past decades. Governance is now used as a broader concept than government. According to the UNDP, “governance is the complex of mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences” (Uphadhay 2006). In this new perspective, local governance has received increased attention. A World Bank discussion paper, for instance, defines local governance as “the way authority is organized, legitimated and employed by and on behalf of local people through planning, decision-making, rule enforcement and accountability processes” (Helling et al. 2005). Actors involved in local governance include local governments and other public sector structures and committees as well as civic social institutions by which people organise to act collectively such as village committees, water user groups, rotating credit and saving associations and youth groups.

Environmental health is certainly an issue of public concern. It requires individual and collective efforts to ensure that the natural and built environment are free of undue hazards and that households and communities have access to essential services including water supply, sanitation and solid waste management. Local governance is particularly important for environmental health as this is the level where many environmental health hazards can be controlled and environmental health services are provided and/or managed (Cairncross et al. 2003). However, weak public structures on national and local levels are often a key cause of poor environmental health, especially in the context of...
urban poverty. Urban residents are exposed to many health hazards and almost left to themselves in the day-to-day management of environmental health (Harpham and Tanner 1995, Atkinson et al. 1996, Harpham and Molyneux 2001, Obrist and Eeuwijk 2003).

This paper examines such a situation in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. As in many other cities of developing countries (UN-Habitat 2003a, UN-Habitat 2003b), high rates of urbanisation in combination with slow economic growth have undermined efforts of the government of Dar es Salaam to provide adequate services to local residents. Water, sanitation and garbage are among the most pressing environmental health concerns (UN 2001). Recent reforms to tackle the economic and political crisis underlying environmental health problems include the introduction of a multiparty system, a nation-wide decentralisation process strengthening local governments, a liberalisation of the market, a privatisation of formerly public services and a poverty reduction strategy (World Bank 2004).

In 2000, Dar es Salaam was divided into three Municipal Councils with a lean City Council for coordinating joint activities. To increase popular participation, one councillor from each ward in a municipal area is now elected into the Municipal Council. An important function of these newly formed local governments is the monitoring of formerly public services which have been partly privatised, like water provision and the removal of solid and fluid waste.

In the policy debates accompanying these reforms, the experiences of urban residents on the lowest levels of the political hierarchy is often neglected. Our paper looks into the ward and focuses on environmental health on the ground level. It asks how local residents have experienced these reforms in local governance and service provision in an inner-city neighbourhood.

Recent evidence from a study in Accra (McGranahan et al. 2001: 131) indicates that women play increasingly important role in environmental management on the ground level, particularly in niches between the public realm of the state and the private arena of the household. As an extension of their reproductive role they collaborate, for instance, in keeping the communal areas of house compounds clean and are considered primarily responsible for maintaining the space between the houses.

Up to now, this topic has not received much attention in the social science literature on African cities. Recent studies in Cairo, Dar es Salaam, Lusaka and Mopti have concentrated on urban women’s