Youth Perception of Participation in Decision-Making In Local Communities in Urban Tanzania: The Case of Dar es Salaam City Council

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Abstract

The youth represent one-quarter of the world's population and one-third of the population in developing nations. It is predicted that Africa's youth will continue to grow for the next fifty years, whereas those on the other continents are ageing. The youth are an asset to community development processes when they are positively supported to be active citizens. Support will enable them to participate in decision-making at all levels to ensure sustainable development in local communities. Despite the fact that participation is a fundamental human right, whereby all people have the right to participate in making decisions directly affecting their lives, studies show that there is a low level of youth participation in decision-making at local levels in urban areas. This study used focus group discussions and questionnaires to collect data from a sample of 407 youths in the Dar es Salaam City Council to find the perceptions of youth on participation; and why there is a low level of youth participation in decision-making among urban youth. The results revealed that the youth have misconceptions about what participation in decision-making means. Though the majority agreed that their participation is important in their communities, and that they would like to be involved in decision-making processes, they had little awareness of the existing development programs in their communities and how decisions were made. The study concluded that urban youth were not aware of government guidelines and policies that advocate for youth participation in decision-making in their communities. Hence, it recommends that local government authorities should motivate and promote participation among the urban youth through awareness training programs and involving the youth in different local activities. Reducing misconceptions about participation in decision-making needs to be prioritized for all youth. In addition, there is a need for decision-making mentorship at the local level by creating good youth-adult relationships.

Keywords: *youth participation, decision-making, community development*

Introduction

The youth is the largest age group in most developing countries, including Tanzania. It is estimated that the youth represent one-quarter of the world's population, and one-third of the population in developing nations (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017). With most developing nations being in Africa, it is predicted that Africa's youth will continue to grow for the next fifty years, whereas in other continents it will be ageing. Meanwhile, African youth who constitute 40 percent of the world's youth are regarded as the driving force for Africa's development (ECA, 2017). In this regard, being the driving force requires being involved in decision-making processes.

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The involvement of the youth in decision-making processes, therefore, cannot be underestimated due to the nature of youth as being energetic, active, and with rapid growth; and constituting the major workforce in the society. For example, in Tanzania, the youth comprised about 35 percent of the total population, and 65 percent of the labour force (URT, 2007). It is further argued that any meaningful development needs the support of all segments of the population, including the youth, in decision-making processes in developing their local communities (URT, 2007). This is due to the fact that a developed community is one that allows all its members to participate in its development activities (UN, 2004). In this regard, as the most active labour force, the youth will comprise clear assets to community development processes when they are positively supported to be active citizens (Udensi et al., 2013). Furthermore, the youth are increasingly taken as community assets, rather than problems to be managed (Zeldin et al. 2003), when they have actively participated in a variety of decision-making activities in their communities.

However, despite a series of efforts by the government of Tanzania and other youth stakeholders to improve youth participation in decision-making at the local levels in their communities, the youth have been underrepresented in decision-making during problem identification, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of development activities at the local government levels (URT, 2007; TAMASHA, 2011; IYF, 2014; RDT, 2013; Restless Development, 2015, 2018; British Council, 2016; Twaweza, 2018; Twaweza East Africa, 2020). The youth are not represented in various fora, and do not participate adequately in decision-making bodies in their communities (URT, 2007): they have less access than adults to formal decision-making and policy influence (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017). This has resulted in decisions being made without incorporating youth concerns (URT, 2007).

Many studies show that youth participation in decision-making at the urban local government level has continued to be low despite years of interventions (TAMASHA, 2011; IYF, 2014; Manyerere, 2016). Hence, there has been a poor participation of youth in decision-making concerning community development activities. This poor participation has contributed to decisions that do not take concerns of the youth, who are about 67 percent of labour force and 35 percent of the total population in Tanzania. It is in this regard that efforts have been directed at understanding the whole concept of youth participation/involvement to find out appropriate ways to have youth represented in decision-making processes in their communities (Barnett & Brennan, 2006; Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006; Akiva, et al., 2014; Royce, 2009). This study is one of such efforts that aimed at finding out the perceptions of urban youth on participation in decision-making processes; why the participation in decision-making processes is poor at urban local government levels; and if youth's poor participation in various activities at the local government level has anything to do with their perceptions.

Literature Review

There has been a worldwide interest in youth participation/involvement in decision-making in local development activities, as it is acknowledged that the youth are the future of their countries' development (SPW/DFID-CSO Youth Working Group, 2010). Such interests have resulted in efforts and declarations toward improving youth participation in decision-making at the local level. For example, the Tanzania government has been preparing and implementing policies, strategies, and plans to enable the people, including the youth, to participate in decision- making in developing their local areas (URT, 1996).

The interventions by the government of Tanzania go back to as early as in the 1990s with the introduction of the Community Development Policy (CDP) of 1996. This policy recognizes family unit members (including the youth) to be the basis for community development through participation in formulating, planning, implementing, and evaluating community development activities at the local level (URT, 1996).

Similarly, the National Youth Development Policy (NYDP) was prepared in 2007 in recognition of the potential of the youth; and regards them as the greatest asset for the present and future; and as the driving force behind social, economic, and political developments of the nation (URT, 2007). The NYDP argued for having effective participation of youth in the local government system and other participatory organs (URT, 2007). Also, the policy led to the establishment of the National Youth Council (NYC), which was formed in 2015 (URT, 2015) as a platform from which the youth could influence decision-making in their societies.

Therefore, while it is important to understand the concept of participation/ involvement in decision-making processes, it is equally important to understand youth perceptions about participation. This will, in turn, enable us to find out why there is a low participation of youth in decision-making processes in urban local areas.

Youth Participation in Decision-making

According to the government of Tanzania, *youth*, or *young people* refers to the population aged between 15–35 years; an age range that is also recognised by the African Union and the East African Community (URT, 2007). Mbirigenda (2015) defines participation as the inclusion or involvement in a collective endeavour. It is the engagement of relevant stakeholders or employment, which is meant to affect something desired; and is accepted within the scope of operation for the purpose of achieving accepted outcomes.

The CDP of 1996 recognizes the family to be the basis for community development, where family members, including the youth, are supposed to participate in formulating, planning, implementing, and evaluating community development activities at the local level. More importantly, local governments (LGs) were tasked to facilitate the participation of the people (youth included) in decision-making in the

planning and execution of development programs on matters affecting their lives. Additionally, the Local Government Reform Programme (LGRP) focused on ensuring democratic participation and control of decision-making by the people; with the central government being required to regulate and monitor LGs to ensure there is lawful and fair decision-making (URT, 1998).

In the context of this study, participation is about the extent to which the youth play either leading or passive roles at the different levels of the local government activities at the *mtaa* level, involving the identification, designing, intervention, resource mobilization/financing, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of those activities. It is about being active, informed, and voluntarily involved in decision-making process in communities (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group, 2010). It refers to the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources that affects them (World Bank, 2004a). Unlike in Mbirigenda (2015), participation and involvement are not hereby used interchangeably: participation is taken as a product of involvement. Thus, one cannot participate if s/he is not involved.

In this paper, *decision-making* is the mental process of choosing an action between alternatives based on behaviour and actions of an individual (Suhaimi, et al, 2018; Shahsavarani & Abadi, 2015). Eisenfuhr (2011) and Lunenburg (2010) add that decision-making is a process of making a choice from a number of alternatives to achieve a desired result. *Community development* refers to measures that enable people to recognise their own abilities to identify their own problems and use available resources to earn and increase their incomes and build a better life for themselves (URT, 1996). *Mtaa*, is a part of the levels of local government in urban areas: it is the lowest level of local government authority in the urban areas in Tanzania (URT, 1996).

Resolutions and Conventions on Youth Participation

Participation is a basic right and an important principle of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UHR) of 1948. The UHR established that, through active participation, youth are empowered to participate in decisions regarding their development, as well as in developing their local communities (UN, 2004).

In addition, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989), maintain that participation is a fundamental human right, where all people, including the youth, have the right to express their views on decisions directly affecting them (UN, 2004; Kiilakoski, 2020). Ideally, the UNCRC indicates that the views of children and youth need to be considered in all matters affecting them. The Article was established to safeguard the rights of the youth to be heard and considered when important decisions are taken in their communities.

Other resolutions on the rights of the youth include the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), which stressed the full and effective participation of

youth in decision-making in their communities. Also, in 2003, the UN General Assembly restated its obligation to youth by adopting Resolution 58/133, ratifying the importance of youth participation at all levels. Meanwhile, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2013) developed the program *Focal Point on Youth*, which focused on ensuring greater participation of youth in decision-making as a means of achieving national development. Thus, youth participation, especially in decision-making, has become a priority area of the UN agenda.

Furthermore, in 2006 African countries adopted the African Youth Charter (AYC). Article 11 of the Charter states: "… *every young person shall have the right to participate in all spheres of society*" (African Union, 2006: 19). The AYC, among other issues, focuses on ensuring effective youth participation in debates and decision-making in the development of the continent. Likewise, the East African nations are implementing the East African Youth Policy (EAYP) of 2013. The EAYP is there to promote youth participation in democratic decision-making processes in their communities, while ensuring youth-centred programmes (EAC, 2013).

Youth Perceptions of Participation in Tanzania
For years, Tanzanian youth have demonstrated multiple perceptions and understanding of youth participation. Studies have shown that participation has been perceived as a compulsory undertaking, where youth are taken to be valuable sources of labour to implement decisions made by elders Accordingly, the youth has perceived participation as merely the act of being present, attending a meeting, or taking part in some community actions without any consideration of whether they have taken any part in influencing or making decisions (TAMASHA, 2011). However, even with such perceptions, the youth rarely participate in community activities, even if it merely means their physical presence.

In some areas, the youth have feared to participate due to the attitudes of adult members in the community. For example, in the study by TAMASHA (2011: 2), one youth asserted: "… *young people are told what to do. Any young person who refuses or questions was considered a troublemaker and was punished by the elders.*" Such a fear can limit the youth in challenging decisions made by elders, leading the youth to lack decision-making power. In the same study, the youth perceived participation as implementing what has already been decided by leaders. There was also a claim by the youth that the government was not providing enough support for them to participate in decision-making (IYF, 2014).

Furthermore, the youth perceived that their participation was not appreciated in the communities, as they were perceived as immature and unreliable; lacking morals, and thus having nothing to contribute more than their labour (British Council, 2016). The youth also perceived participation as being involved in activities such as cleaning the surroundings, repairing roads and bridges, and attending social activities in the community, such as funeral services (IYF, 2014). In other words, the youth had the perception that participation is an act of attending

a meeting, and a means of providing labour needed in manual development activities (IYF, 2014; British Council, 2016; Twaweza, 2018).

Restless Development (2018) deduced that, the lack of awareness of the system responsible for collecting youth' views to be an obstacle to youth participation in decision-making at local levels. In this study, the youth demonstrated multiple perceptions of the concept of youth participation. Since perceptions are shaped by understanding, youth perception was weighted in the way they understood the concept of participation and interventions targeting them.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the positive youth development theory (PYD). Principally, the theory acknowledges that factors related to positive youth behaviour can influence youth participation in decision-making processes. The theory advocates that if youth have mutually beneficial social relations or connections with people and institutions of their communities, they are likely to have positive contributions to self, family, community, and civil society (Lerner et al., 2005; Hlagala & Delport, 2014; Lerner et al., 2013).

Additionally, the PYD theory focuses on youth strengths, rather than their weaknesses; and describes the youth as a potential human resource for societal development, and advocates for the participation of youth in development processes (Hlagala & Delport, 2014; Wiium & Dimitrova, 2019). Similarly, Benson and others (2006) have argued that the PYD theory is founded on the view of the youth as a resource to be nurtured, rather than a problem to be managed; and as individuals with capacities for active and constructive contribution to the development of self, community and society. The theory is also based on the presumption that the youth are part of the solution to the difficulties they face; and are not problems to be solved by others (UN, 2004). Likewise, the theory emphasizes the harnessing of youth capacities for community development, contrary to the old tradition of interventions that focused on youth deficiencies and preventions rather than their strengths (Checkoway et al., 2005).

Thus, the PYD theory was useful in this study as it advocates for the understanding of youth perception, which can be a basis for interventions geared towards improving youth participation in decision-making processes.

Methods

This study was conducted in the Dar es Salaam City Council (DCC), formerly known as the Ilala Municipal Council. The study adopted a mixed method approach using a single case study design (Bryman, 2016; Yin, 2011); a design that is useful in gathering information in an urban setting (British Council, 2016; RDT, 2013). The sampling process was done with the assistance of the office of the DCC director, in which 21 wards were randomly selected out of 36 wards as shown in Table 1. About 32 youth participated in eight (8) focus group discussions (FGDs).

Table 1: A List of Wards and the Number of Youth by Sex

Wards	Sex		Total
	Male	*Female*	
Kinyerezi	15	6	21
Ilala	14	7	21
Zingiziwa	7	14	21
Minazi Mirefu	14	6	20
Buguruni	12	8	20
Pugu Station	6	14	20
Kipawa	12	8	20
Upanga Magharibi	13	6	19
Kipunguni	6	13	19
Jangwani	11	9	20
Majohe	9	11	20
Vingunguti	16	4	20
Kimanga	11	8	19
Kariakoo	11	6	17
Segerea	10	7	17
Mzinga	10	10	20
Mchikichini	7	12	19
Tabata	12	8	20
Msongola	11	10	21
Kiwalani	10	6	16
Upanga Mashariki	10	5	15
Total	**227**	**178**	**405**

The study sample was taken from the population of youth (15–35 years) in the Dar es Salaam City Council (DCC). A convenient sampling technique was employed to select individual youths in each ward because it was more appropriate in urban settings, where socio-economic factors have usually determined youth movement and their availability to participate (British Council, 2016; RDT, 2013). The youth were contacted in their homes, business premises, and workplaces; and some were found in their *vijiwe* (an informal gathering point for youth). Researchers were also able to meet youths who visited the local government offices of their *mitaa* (hamlets). Since wards had unequal number of *mitaa*, respondents were recruited from 50–90% percent of the hamlets in the selected wards.

The sample size was calculated based on Yamane's formula: $n = N/1 + N(e)^2$; where n is the sample size, N represents population size, and e is the level of precision, also known as sampling error (Yamane, 1967). Sampling error (e) is the range in which the true value of the population is estimated to be, often expressed in percentage points. In our case $N = 559,113$ (URT, 2019a); and using e as 5% or 0.05, then the value of the sample size (n) was 428 youth. The response rate was 95%, representing 407 youth. About 21 questionnaires were not returned, while others were rejected during analysis as respondents did not confirm the age range defining the youth (i.e., 15–35 years).

The study used the DCC as a case study since the youth is the largest population group in urban areas (URT, 2007); and the Dar es Salaam region was the most populated urban area in Tanzania (URT, 2019a). Secondly, the DCC was among the leading urban areas with low youth participation (TAMASHA, 2011; RDT, 2013; British Council, 2016). Thirdly, city councils are the major commercial and centres of social-economic activities, attracting youth immigration from different ethnic societies in the country. So, having many ethnic groups in a city council minimises wrong assumptions about participation generated by cultural norms that are common in homogenous societies. The data collected indicate that 51.6% of the youths came from different regions across the country, while 48.4% of the respondents were born in Dar es Salaam region.

Quantitative data were coded, processed, and analysed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20. Descriptive statistics involved the computations of frequencies, percentages, and bivariate presentations of cross-tabulations, and the measurement of correlation coefficients (using the Spearman coefficient). Thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data which was categorised into various themes. To ensure instrument validity, the questionnaire was piloted among 43 youth in Kitunda, Gongolamboto, and Bonyokwa wards. Through the piloting exercise, long, unclear, and repeated questions were checked and appropriate modifications were made.

Data Presentation and Analysis
The data gathered were subjected to analysis with respect to several variables of interest to describe youth participation in decision-making processes. Such variables included the frequency of visits, duration of stay, sex, education level, and marital status. Of all other variables, a visit to a local *mtaa* (hamlet) office was found to have a considerable impact on youth participation in decision-making processes.

Frequency of Visitation to a Local Office and Years Resided in a Particular **Mtaa**
The study findings revealed that there is a low appearance of youth to their local offices *mtaa* where the majority of youth rarely visited *mitaa* offices to get in touch with current development activities needed to be undertaken (Table 2). The majority of youth rarely visited their local offices of *mitaa* as shown by youth from Ilala (14), Mchikichini (14), Majohe (13) and Msongola wards (13). The most often visits were from 8 youths from Zingiziwa and Minazi Mirefu.

Youths were asked about the duration they had lived in the DCC. In this regard, the biggest number of youth were 13 respondents from Minazi Mirefu and Vingunguti wards, who appeared to have stayed for a longer time compared to other youth from the other areas (Table 3). The study gathered data on the level of education with respect to the sex of respondents, and after data analysis, the results were as presented in Table 4.

Table 2: Frequency of Youth who Visited Local Mtaa Offices across Wards

Ward	Frequency of Youth who Visited a Nearby *Mtaa* Office			Total
	Very Often	*Often*	*Rarely*	
Kinyerezi	6	8	7	21
Ilala	5	2	14	21
Zingiziwa	8	2	10	20
Minazi Mirefu	8	0	12	20
Buguruni	6	2	10	18
Pugu Station	7	4	8	19
Kipawa	7	3	7	17
Upanga Magharibi	2	6	9	17
Kipunguni	4	5	8	17
Jangwani	6	4	7	17
Majohe	4	2	13	19
Vingunguti	2	5	12	19
Kimanga	3	4	11	18
Kariakoo	2	4	10	16
Segerea	4	7	6	17
Mzinga	3	5	11	19
Mchikichini	1	3	14	18
Tabata	5	7	6	18
Msongola	6	1	13	20
Kiwalani	6	2	4	12
Upanga Mashariki	3	0	8	11
Total	**98**	**76**	**200**	**374**

Table 3: Length of Living in Mtaa Across Wards

Wards	How long have you been living in your mtaa? (years)			Total
	0-5	*5-10*	*More than 10*	
Kinyerezi	5	4	12	21
Ilala	7	3	11	21
Zingiziwa	6	8	7	21
Minazi Mirefu	2	5	13	20
Buguruni	6	5	7	18
Pugu Station	1	6	12	19
Kipawa	1	7	10	18
Upanga Magharibi	7	12	0	19
Kipunguni	9	3	6	18
Jangwani	5	6	7	18
Majohe	3	6	9	18
Vingunguti	3	4	13	20
Kimanga	6	3	10	19
Kariakoo	4	3	9	16
Segerea	5	1	11	17
Mzinga	4	6	9	19
Mchikichini	6	0	11	17
Tabata	6	4	9	19
Msongola	10	4	6	20
Kiwalani	3	7	6	16
Upanga Mashariki	5	4	3	12
Total	**104**	**101**	**181**	**386**

The findings in Table 4 indicate that there was a large proportion of females in primary schools compared to males. There was also a large proportion of males compared to females at the secondary level. In colleges, females formed the bigger percentage compared to males. At the university level, women and men were almost equally represented.

Table 4: Level of Education Attained by Youth Between Sex

Sex	The highest level of education attained				Total
	Primary	*Secondary*	*College*	*University*	
Male	37 (17.9%)	93 (44.9%)	44 (21.3%)	33 (15.9%)	207 (100.0%)
Female	40 (23.5%)	68 (40.0%)	41 (24.1%)	21 (12.4%)	170 (100.0%)
Total	**77 (20.4%)**	**161 (42.7%)**	**85 (22.5%)**	**54 (14.3%)**	**377 (100.0%)**

Initially, the study was interested in checking if the youth had an interest in their local level issues that were coordinated in their local *mitaa* offices. It is assumed that local *mitaa* offices are places for getting information about community development activities in place. About 374 (92%) responded, and of these, the majority 200 (53.5%) had rarely visited their local *mitaa* offices; 76 (20.3%) had often visited, and about 98 (26.2%) had most visited their *mitaa* offices (Tables 6, 7, 8 and 9). The study results further depicted that about 181 (46.9%) had lived in the particular *mtaa* for more than ten years; with the number of respondents who had stayed for 0–5 years being 104 (26.9%), while those with 5–10 years being 101 (26.2%). A cross-tabulation revealed a visit to a local *mtaa* office increased with the duration of residence in a *mtaa*, where a large proportion of those who visited their *mitaa* offices more often was 57 (32.8%), which was reported by those who had stayed for 10 years and above in their particular *mtaa*. About 60 (62%) of youth at 15–20 years had rarely visited their *mtaa* offices compared to other age groups.

The findings show that youth hardly visited their local *mitaa* offices. However, in small proportion, visitation was found to increase with the duration of residence, in which those who have lived for 10 years and above in their areas visited their *mtaa* offices more often. Even though most of the youth rarely visited their *mtaa* offices, they expressed the importance of regular visits to their local government offices as revealed by one youth in an FGD:

> *It enables me to know local activities and opportunities or challenges going on in my mtaa or my government; and what I can do for my government or my* mtaa. *We believe that we should not wait for opportunities to arise; that sometimes the government needs me as a young woman to help my* mtaa *in volunteering to bring development* (Female youth, Kiwalani).

The lowest attendance to local offices was 61.9% by youth aged 15–20 years. Thus, it is important for this age group—which is mostly adolescent school-age youth—to be educated on the importance of regular contact with their local government offices. Nevertheless, it is an assumption that living for a long time in a particular *mtaa* is a chance for the youth to be more familiar with their society's needs and

problems, thus prompting participation. However, in FGDs the youth did not see a link between years of residing in a place and participation: what mattered most to them was awareness; as put by one participant:

> *Some youth have an awareness and others don't. There are those who have lived here for a long time and do not participate in development activities because they do not have an awareness (Female youth, Kipunguni).*

In this case, residing in an area for a long time was not perceived to improve participation in decision-making processes, but maybe raised interest of the youth in community issues.

Table 6: Frequency of Youth Who Visited a Nearby *Mtaa* Office Across Age

| How often do you visit a nearby mtaa office | Age Range (years) | | | | Total |
	15 -20	*21– 25*	*26– 30*	*31 -35*	
Very often	16 (25.4%)	24 (21.8%)	34 (26.6%)	22 (32.8%)	96 (26.1%)
Often	9 (14.3%)	20 (18.2%)	28 (21.9%)	17 (25.4%)	74 (20.1%)
Rarely	38 (60.3%)	66 (60.0%)	66 (51.6%)	28 (41.8%)	198 (53.8%)
Total	**63 (100.0%)**	**110 (100.0%)**	**128 (100.0%)**	**67 (100.0%)**	**368 (100.0%)**

The study results indicate a lower attendance across all age groups, where about 198 (53.8%) rarely visited their local government office of *mtaa*. In a different scenario, youth who visited nearby *mitaa* offices were computed by sex, and the results revealed that a large proportion of male youth 63 (30.1%) made visits, compared to 35 (21.5%) of female youth (Table 7).

Table 7: Frequency of Youth who Visited a Nearby Mtaa Office with Gender Differentiation

| Sex | Frequency of visits | | | Total |
	Very often	*Often*	*Rarely*	
Male	63 (30.1%)	42 (20.1%)	104 (49.8%)	209 (100.0%)
Female	35 (21.5%)	34 (20.9%)	94 (57.7%)	163 (100.0%)
Total	**98 (26.3%)**	**76 (20.4%)**	**198 (53.2%)**	**372 (100.0%)**

The study went further to inquire into the frequency of youth who visited local *mitaa* offices by marital status. The results showed that youth who were married visited their *mitaa* offices more often compared to other groups as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Frequency of Youth who Visited a Local Mtaa Office by Marital Status

| Marital Status | How often do you visit a nearby *mtaa* office | | | Total |
	Very often	*Often*	*Rarely*	
Single	65 (25.7%)	48 (19.0%)	140 (55.3%)	253 (100.0%)
Married	28 (27.7%)	23 (22.8%)	50 (49.5%)	101 (100.0%)
Divorced/separated	2 (22.2%)	2 (22.2%)	5 (55.6%)	9 (100.0%)
Total	**95 (26.2%)**	**73 (20.1%)**	**195 (53.7%)**	**363 (100.0%)**

Married youth had the largest percentage of attendance to a local *mtaa* office, compared to single or divorced youth (Table 8). In terms of education attainment, the largest percentage of youth who often visited their local *mtaa* offices were college graduates (30.3%), followed by university graduates (28.3%), and lastly by youth with a secondary level of education (28.7%) (Table 9).

Table 9: Frequency of Youth who Visited a Local Office with a Level of Education

How often do youth visit mtaa office	The highest level of education attained				Total
	Primary	*Secondary*	*College*	*University*	
Very often	12 (16.7%)	43 (28.7%)	23 (30.3%)	15 (28.3%)	93 (26.5%)
Often	18 (25.0%)	25 (16.7%)	17 (22.4%)	8 (15.1%)	68 (19.4%)
Rarely	42 (58.3%)	82 (54.7%)	36 (47.4%)	30 (56.6%)	190 (54.1%)
Total	**72 (100.0%)**	**150 (100.0%)**	**76 (100.0%)**	**53 (100.0%)**	**351 (100.0%)**

The results indicate that there is an increase in visits to local *mitaa* offices with an increase in education level. At the same time, the largest percentage of youth who rarely visited local *mitaa* offices was 58%, which was observed from youth who just ended their primary level education.

Perceptions About the Concept of Youth Participation
The definition adopted for this study to measure youth participation takes into account three conditions, namely: *active involvement*, *being informed*, and *voluntary participation* (SPW/ DFID-CSO Youth Working Group, 2010). In this regard, youth were asked if they regularly visit their local *mtaa* offices where decision-making processes originate and are coordinated. The assumption was that a regular visit signifies activeness, which may lead youth to be informed about local development activities. Thus, if informed, the youth were likely to voluntarily take part in decision-making processes. Particularly, the youth were asked about what they thought participation is; and were given multiple responses to choose from. Their responses are tabulated in Table 10.

Table 10: Views About the Meaning of Youth Participation

Youth participation is described as:	Responses	
	N	*Percentage*
Youth rights to express their views on decisions directly affecting them	139	12.3%
Youth rights to be heard and considered when important decisions are taken in their communities	231	20.5%
Active, informed, and voluntary involvement of youth in decision-making and the life of their communities	162	14.4%
Working with youth as assets, advisors, colleagues, and stakeholders	122	10.8%

Having youth voice to influence community programs and policies through sharing experiences and skills	180	16.0%
Sharing perspectives, searching for information, and convincing adults to consider their ideas as they make decisions	150	13.3%
Opportunities for youth to express their ideas and have inputs into programs, policies, and practices that affect them	142	12.6%
Total	**1126**	**100.0%**

Note: Data sets are based on multiple responses

Interestingly, a minority (14.4%) recognised the fundamentals of participation as an *active process* in which youth needs to be *informed;* and that there has to be *voluntary involvement* in decision-making processes. However, the rest majority (85.6%) had misconceptions about participation, which affected their willingness to be involved in decision-making processes. An example of a response about youth participation in an FGD was that, it was "…*to understand what is happening in local governments" (*Male youth, Tabata). Others had the perception that participation is meeting together as shown by the following responses:

> … *it is the act of youth meeting together with their peers, or with their leaders when there are issues… they come together if there is a challenge, they discuss together, they become involved in something (*Female youth, Kiwalani).

The study went further to examine what is needed to enhance youth participation. The majority of responses (259 (44.6%)) perceived that youth participation will largely depend on their knowledge of government guidelines/policies that advocate for youth participation. About 30.5% believed an awareness of the local government structures and functions will enhance their participation. Lastly, 24.8% claimed that an awareness of the stages of executing programs/activities, where decisions are made, will determine their participation.

Perceptions About Participation in Decision-making Processes

Youth perceptions were sought by using statements with '*Yes'* or '*No'* options, a multiple responses were allowed. The results showed that the majority of the youth (375 (95.7%)) had the perception that it is important to them to participate in decision-making processes in their *mitaa* even though they participated less in their local communities. While this is the case, the study findings show that 191 respondents (54.7%) had rarely visited their *mitaa* offices where they could be informed about development activities in their local area, even though they believed that it is important for them to participate in their *mitaa* affairs. Furthermore, a bivariate correlation was done using the Spearman coefficient, and the results indicated a negative correlation between a visit to a local office of *mtaa* (Table 11), and the perception of the importance of youth participation in decision-making ($r = -0.64$).

More findings suggest that a large proportion of youth (358 (92.0%)) had the perception that they could contribute to the development of their communities if they were involved in decision-making about programs/activities in their *mitaa*.

Table 11: Bivariate Correlation Between Visiting a Local Mtaa Office with the Important to Participate in Decision-making Processes

Spearman's rho		Frequency of visits to a nearby mtaa office	Is it important for youth to participate in decision-making at your mtaa?
Frequency of visits to a nearby *mtaa* office	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.064
	Sig. (2–tailed)	.	.222
	N	374	363
Is it important for youth to participate in decision-making at your *mtaa*?	Correlation Coefficient	-.064	1.000
	Sig. (2–tailed)	.222	.
	N	363	392

This study assumed that in cases where the youth were active in such programmes, then they were well-informed; and that involvement was voluntary in such development programs and activities. Despite of this opinion, the majority (181 (54.2%)) rarely visited their local government offices of *mitaa* where they could be informed about local development activities.

Interestingly, it was revealed that 343 (88.6%) youth perceived adult-youth relationships to be an important predictor of youth involvement in decision-making processes in their *mitaa*. Also, 293 (75.7%) of the respondents agreed that they were aware of community programs/activities in which youth were taking part in their *mitaa*. This is explained by the following comments from FGDs.

> … *it is important that the youth are involved in entrepreneurship, building a hospital, or tailoring. You find that some youth can carry bricks. Other activities include taking part in a national census (*Female youth, Kipunguni).

> … *youth should be involved in the construction of schools (e.g., by digging foundations), hospitals, and in environmental sanitation (*Male youth, Tabata).

In another observation, 265 (69.6%) perceived that there is transparency on how decisions were taken in their *mtaa*. Among those who believed in transparency, only 71 (28.5%) often visited their *mtaa* offices; compared to 121 (48.6%) who believed in transparency, but rarely visited these offices. In two more findings, when youth were asked if being a man or a woman affected how they participated in decision-making processes in their *mitaa*. A total of 283 (71.1%) disagreed with the statement. It was also found that a relative majority of the youth (218 (55.6%)) did not agree that urban youth were alienated and marginalized when decisions were made in their *mitaa*. Contrary to such observation, those who held this perception, numbering 107 (52.2%), rarely visited local government offices in their *mitaa*.

The majority of the youth (358 (92%)) asserted that they could contribute to the development of their communities if involved in decision-making processes. This is exemplified by the following response from an FGD:

> … *young people have a vision; if they are involved, and they are looking ahead and will bring progress, so they should be involved* (Male youth, Tabata).

Discussion of Key Findings

The major finding of this study is that the youth have demonstrated interest in being involved in decision-making processes in their local governments, even though they have participated less in the processes. It was understood that low participation was characterized by low attendance, inactivity in meetings where decisions were taken, and the youth being forced to take part in compulsory development activities. However, this study revealed that youth interest was in having their voices heard after being thoroughly informed about what needs to be done in their local communities. The majority believed in the importance of participation in decision-making processes even though most have rarely visited their local government offices to familiarize themselves with daily development activities being coordinated by local *mtaa* offices. Regular visits to a local government office of *mtaa* could enable the youth to be informed about the day-to-day development activities needed to be undertaken in their communities. In this regard, the more information one receives, the more one becomes active in processing such information in terms of making relevant decisions. Not only that, but the more the youth are informed, the more they are voluntarily able to take part in making decisions on what best suits their *mitaa.* However, the findings revealed that, generally, visits to local *mitaa* offices were few across all age-groups.

Youth Understanding of Participation

The findings show mixed views among youth on their understanding of the concept of youth participation/involvement in decision-making processes. Where multiple responses were allowed, the majority 231 (20.5%) perceived participation to be the right to be heard and considered when important decisions are being taken in their communities. Interestingly, the youth equate participation with their rights: that participation is not a favour, but a means to voice and be heard about their concerns. Such findings suggest that more should be done in educating youth about their rights, which in return will empower them to be more active citizens.

Other youth (122 (10.8%)) viewed participation as working with them as assets, advisors, colleagues, and stakeholders. These findings concur with the views of the UN (2007): that where there is a partnership, both youth and non-youth stakeholders benefit. Such views acknowledge the youth as active participants in their communities' development, and that their participation should be appropriately developed (UN, 2007). Similarly, the views of the youth concurred with those of the studies by Benson et al. (2006), URT (2007), and Alpheaus and Chukwunweike (2020). These results are also in line with the positive youth development theory, which views the youth as contributors to societal development rather than problems to be managed. More importantly, the idea of using youth capabilities concur with Sambiaga (2018), in a study undertaken in Dar es Salaam, which established that the youth were successfully involved as advisors and stakeholders in countering violence.

Moreover, the study findings revealed a multiple view of youth participation/ involvement in decision-making. A minority (14.4%) recognised the fundamentals of participation as an *active process* in which they need to be *informed;* and that there has to be a *voluntary involvement* in decision-making processes. However, the rest majority (85.6%) had misconceptions about participation, which influenced their willingness to be involved in decision-making processes of their *mitaa*.

Other youth had the misconception that participation was about meeting together to discuss and solve their daily challenges as shown by the following excerpt:

> … *[participation] is the act of youth meeting together with their peers, or with their leaders… when there are issues they come together; if there is a challenge, they discuss together; they become involved in something* (Female youth, Kiwalani).

Previous studies by TAMASHA (2011), Paul and Kamanzi (2012), RDT (2013), IYF (2014), British Council (2016), and Twaweza (2018) concurred with this misconception.

However, this misconception is caused by several issues. First, the youth have little knowledge of government policies on youth and other guidelines that call for youth participation. Second, the youth are unaware of local government functions and activities, and rarely visit their local government offices of *mitaa*. All these contribute to low participation since these minimize the ability of the youth to make relevant decisions as they are uninformed about development issues in their local *mtaa*. These observations concur with earlier studies by TAMASHA (2011), RDT (2013), IYF (2014), and British Council (2016).

Awareness of Government Guidelines and Policies
Additionally, findings revealed that the majority of youth believed that being aware of government guidelines and/or policies that advocate for youth participation in decision-making will help them participate. Such results indicate curiosity among the youth, and desire to be informed about policies/guidelines in general, and particularly youth policies/guidelines. This argument is supported by the positive youth development theory which emphasize the need to create appropriate relationship between youth and their communities. In return, a good relationship is likely to raise youth awareness of government policies or guidelines on youth, which in turn is likely to influence youth participation in decision-making. More importantly, visits to local *mitaa* offices will give the youth opportunities to acquire information about daily activities in their local areas, and give their inputs that may be useful for the development of their areas. Since the majority of youth rarely visit their *mtaa* offices, this obstructs their access to information and familiarization with local government activities, which eventually lead to low participation.

Similarly, a small proportion of youths (12.3%) regarded participation as their right and means to provide an avenue for expressing their views on decisions directly

affecting them. This is in line with one of the guiding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and which that have been reiterated in many other conventions and declarations (UN, 2023).

Perceptions About Participation in Decision-making

The majority of the youth (95.7%) had the perception that youth participation in decision-making in their *mitaa* was important. This finding is an indication of the desire of the youths to be part of decision-making processes in their local communities during problem identification, planning, and implementation stages. It is a call for stakeholders to do more in enhancing youth involvement in decisions in the development of their communities. Likewise, the majority of the youth believed they can contribute to community development initiatives if involved in decision-making processes. This finding is corroborated by UN (2007): that giving youth chances to take part in decision-making will contribute to their development; and that of their societies. The desire for the youth to be actively involved is an indication of their confidence and belief in their capacity to contribute to the development of their communities. This conforms to the positive youth development theory, which argues for the nurturing of youth capabilities needed for community development (Benson et al., 2006; Hlagala & Delport, 2014; Lerner & Lerner, 2013). The findings also express the need among the youth to have more opportunities to express their abilities in bringing about desirable changes in their communities.

Moreover, the findings suggest that adults-youth relationships are important predictors of youth involvement in decision-making processes in their *mitaa*. Appropriate and mutual relationships will make the youth feel more welcome and secure; and this can encourage them to voluntarily participate and voice their concerns in decision-making platforms in local government authorities. The need to ensure mutual adult-youth relationships concurs with studies done elsewhere by Zeldin et al. (2008), Wong (2008), and Corney et al. (2021). It is important to note that about 69.6% of the youth were of the view that there was transparency on how decisions were taken in their *mtaa*. This indicated a degree of satisfaction with how activities/programs were executed, despite their lack of interest in visiting their local *mitaa* offices.

Regarding gender, when asked whether being a man or woman affected how they could participate in decision-making processes in their *mitaa*, the majority (71.1%) did not think this was the case. These findings contradict a study done elsewhere by Mullahey et al. (1999), which revealed that gender issues were causing low youth participation in decision-making processes. Also, the majority of the youth (55.6%) disagreed with the claim of being alienated and marginalized when decisions were made in their *mitaa*. A similar study by Sommers (2007) contradicts this finding by revealing that marginalization and discrimination affect most African urban youth since their needs are overlooked regardless of their numbers. Other findings with similar contradictory findings in Tanzania include those done by TAMASHA (2011), RDT (2013), IYF (2014), and British Council (2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The efforts made by the government of Tanzania have, to some extent, enabled the youth to recognize the importance of participating in decision-making processes in their communities. This study found that multiple factors have contributed to youth perceptions and their likelihood to participate in decision-making processes. The lack of information about the functions of local government, and the lack of awareness of policies/guidelines, were the most-mentioned reasons leading to low participation by the youth. Hence, there is a need for education and/or creating awareness among the youth about the importance of participation to improve youth engagement in decision-making processes in their local *mitaa* areas. This can be facilitated by local government authorities through having youth-friendly environments at the local government level of *mtaa.* More importantly, there should be interventions from different stakeholders in correcting misconceptions and creating awareness about youth participation and its importance in decision-making processes. The study also recommends that local government authorities should motivate and promote positive perceptions among the youth about participation in local government activities. This can be done through awareness training and involving the youth in different local programs.

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