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**Tanzania's Transparency Agenda**  
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# Tanzania's Transparency Agenda

BY ELSIE EYAKUZE



**RAKESH RAJANI** (left) is the founder and head of Twaweza East Africa. He has been involved with setting up Open Government Partnership from the outset. His work and research interests include basic education reform and the role of information in citizen-driven change and public accountability.

**MATTHIAS CHIKAWA** (right) is a member of the Parliament in the National Assembly of Tanzania and has served as Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs since February 2008.

## Minister Matthias Chikawe and Rakesh Rajani, a Tanzanian civil society leader, discuss the potential impacts of OGP in Tanzania.

**M**atthias Chikawe, Tanzanian Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, does not mince words when he talks about his country's participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP). "It's something that is not in our culture," says Chikawe. "Our government has always been run on confidentiality, so this is a big change. You need a big change of attitude by civil servants."

"It's one thing to say, 'Let's do it and make a plan.' But it's quite another to change a culture," adds Rakesh Rajani, head of Twaweza, a government accountability NGO in East Africa. Rajani goes on to stress that the Tanzanian government, known for its lack of transparency, is not monolithic: there are those who support change, and those who might need coaxing into it.

Chikawe and Rajani are sitting in adjacent chairs at the Twaweza offices in Dar es Salaam in a rarely seen instance of government and civil society collaboration. It is a hopeful sight, considering the checkered history of Rajani's relationship with his government. In 2005, while he was executive director of Haki Elimu, an education advocacy NGO, the government banned the organization from "undertaking and publishing any studies on Tanzania schools." The situation was resolved in 2007. Chikawe admits that there are still many in government who are suspicious of civil society. Yet both men are members of the steering committee of OGP.

Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete is keen on OGP, says Chikawe. "The president said to me: 'Go out there and see if we

can use the Open Government Partnership for our own development. This is not about foreign policy.'" OGP, says Chikawe, is about using transparency for Tanzanian democracy building and economic growth.

Rajani points out that these statements signal a new way of governing—one in which "government doesn't just rule, it actually seeks to solve problems collaboratively. It recognizes that it doesn't have all the answers. In that sense, it can also be very liberating for government, to not have to feel it has to shoulder all the responsibility and fix all the problems."

Tanzania's OGP plan focuses on health, water, and education—services through which citizens and government interact every day, and where the impact of improved governance would be felt most immediately. Rajani and Chikawe emphasize that citizen participation begins with access to information. Yet according to 2010 World Bank data, only 11 percent of Tanzanians are Internet users (although 20 million use mobile phones). OGP-Tanzania is drafting a communications strategy to use modern information technology, and the anticipated Freedom of Information Act will be used to support OGP-Tanzania's transparency agenda.

When the two men are asked if the social media community has been approached to assist with OGP-Tanzania's agenda, uncertainty creeps into the conversation, because social media are still new, and public institutions are in the initial phases of trying to harness them for

their work. For several years now, however, young Tanzanians have been using various social media with some success to push for increased transparency. Plus, says Rajani, the issue of communication goes beyond new technologies. What OGP-Tanzania must figure out is how to spread the culture of open government throughout the public sector, right down to service providers on the ground.

Chikawe says that citizen participation is being sought through two main approaches: public meetings, with a focus on where local government projects are planned and how they are monitored; and access to the Internet, to make information available. Twaweza is interested in creating opportunities for citizens to engage more effectively in their day-to-day interactions with the government, such as at public schools and clinics.

"Practical accountability on the ground is important," says Rajani. "Citizens have to have some level of confidence that there will be consequences."

Rajani points out that government accountability and confidence are also beneficial for the public sector. If government

employees are rewarded or disciplined according to how they perform—as verified by their "clients," citizens—it could motivate an overall improvement in services.

"Open Government Partnership is about helping government to create an environment in which citizens can get things done," says Rajani. ●

**ELSIE EYAKUZE** is a columnist for *The East African* who blogs at *The Mikoche Report*.

