

Tanzania: Exposing Unnecessary Expenditure in Tanzania

Civil servants' basic salaries are relatively low in Tanzania, but some civil servants benefit from various additional allowances including travel, sitting, and/or others when they attend training workshops. Civil servants are keen to receive this additional income.

Sikika, a Tanzanian civil society budget organization that focuses on the health sector, challenged this kind of government expenditure. Sikika is one of four civil society members of the Health Equity Group, a coalition that focuses on maternal and child health. In 2006 the coalition, led by Sikika, analyzed the government's health budget for the first time. In 2006 and later years it presented the budget analysis at the annual Health Sector Review, which is attended by government, donors, and civil society organizations.

After the 2008/2009 budget had been tabled in parliament, Sikika examined what it later called “unnecessary expenditure” in its analysis of 2008. For that year, Sikika found that the health sector allocated 22,6 billion Tanzania shillings (Tshs) for allowances, Tshs 3.9 billion for workshops and training, Tshs 1.6 for overseas and local travel, and Tsh 6.0 billion for vehicles—adding up to a total of Tshs 34.2 billion for “inefficiencies.” Sikika argued that this money should be reallocated for other items that would improve health care.

Sikika's analysis covered 15 issues in total. Health sector officials – including the Permanent Secretary for Health – were not pleased. But the issue got the attention of the Prime Minister, who announced the following month that future government expenditure on workshops and seminars needed to be approved by his office and that there would be restrictions on expenditure on new vehicles. The Budget Guidelines of February 2009 included a special section that called for spending cuts on training, workshops, travel, and vehicles.

In coming years, Sikika continued to monitor these expenditures. For the 2009/2010 budget, Sikika did not publish its analysis. Instead, it used the analysis to engage with government officials, politicians, donors, and trade unions. Government officials provided little response. Some parliamentarians privately expressed support, but most did not speak out in public meetings except for one opposition MP. This MP's efforts made some government officials see the issue as a political one between the ruling party and the opposition.

Sikika's analysis showed that in 2009/2010, overall allocations to the “unnecessary expenditure” categories decreased by 22 percent. But the decrease was all in training and workshops –probably because expenditure on training required approval from the Prime Minister's Office. Other categories saw increases.

In 2010/2011 there was a nominal (before inflation) increase in total “unnecessary expenditures.” Again, training expenditure decreased, but not the other categories. In fact, allowances increased by more than 57 percent over those two years.

Other actors including donors, the Presidency, and other civil society organizations also raised this issue, but most focused only on salaries and allowances. They did not look at other categories of “unnecessary expenditure.” Some donors recognized that they had encouraged the bad practices with allowances, but their influence over this part of the budget was limited because most of their government funding did not go to the recurrent budget, which houses the unnecessary expenditures. Trade unions used the analysis of allowances to argue for salary increases.