What was the objective of this research?

To understand the social, cultural, and political environment in Tanzania where civil servants work, and how it influences their decisions about infrastructure.

What research methods were used?

Three months were spent in two water and sanitation departments in Tanzania, where the researcher observed the day-to-day work routines of employees. The researcher also conducted in-depth interviews with: civil servants in local and regional government, members of Community Owned Water Supply Organizations (COWSOs), water-users, and members of civil society.

What data was collected?

Information about the relationships between water and sanitation departments with both government and non-governmental institutions, including NGOs and COWSOs. The research also focused on the opportunities and constraints civil servants face in these departments in engaging with the communities they serve and in maintaining water points on existing projects.

What were the findings?

While civil servants eagerly want to engage with rural communities in order to better address issues of water access in rural areas, the institutional dynamics and bureaucratic procedures within their workplaces subvert their best intentions.

How does this happen?

The lines of communication within the government and the bureaucratic processes civil servants are required to follow direct civil servants’ focus away from the communities they serve and towards the needs of institutions at higher levels of the government.
What are some examples?

- District water and sanitation departments are mandated to frequently report to higher levels of government (President’s office for Regional Administration and Local Government, Ministry of Water). Conversely, there are no formal procedures for ensuring that employees of water and sanitation departments meet with community-based institutions and village governments to discuss issues of water access and service delivery. As a result, there are more incentives to address the needs of these institutions than the needs of rural communities.

- Budgetary processes require district water and sanitation departments to create budgets that are debated and circulated within district offices before they are forwarded to higher levels of the state. COWSOs do not directly participate in these budgetary processes, creating a situation of upward accountability around planning.

- In making decisions over whether to build new projects or to fund existing infrastructure, civil servants are influenced by the broader policy environment, which they perceive as being principally geared towards constructing new projects. This political focus on building new infrastructure makes it difficult for civil servants to base their decisions on their knowledge of local contexts.

Importance

- These findings are significant when set against the current approach to water policy in Tanzania, which seeks to empower local communities to participate in water service delivery through a demand-based approach. In this approach, communities are mandated to create COWSOs, however, it is not clear how the needs of these institutions and rural communities are being considered in decisions over water-service delivery at the level of local government.

- The theory of change underpinning the proposed Payment-by-Results program assumes that civil servants within district water and sanitation departments will use additional funds to work with communities on operations and maintenance more intensively and effectively than they have to date. However, this research shows that there are a number of barriers and constraints that civil servants face in addressing these two agendas, which are not solely dependent on funding. These barriers and constraints should be considered in efforts to incentivize civil servants to engage more regularly and substantially with communities on water service provisioning.