

THE CITIZEN

Dar es Salaam, Thursday, 30 November, 2006

People's participation crucial for Mkurabita

Dar es Salaam is hosting an international meeting, one of whose major agenda items is ways to help the poor have any unregistered or undocumented businesses and property they own formally recognised as assets that could be used as collateral whenever appropriate.

The meeting is being held under the auspices of an international body known as the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor (Clep).

It is part of the commission's modus operandi to involve stakeholders from all relevant levels, including the poor, in consultations where all can exchange views and make recommendations able to make empowerment of the poor a more effective and result-producing exercise.

The commission is there primarily to give empowerment of the poor the international support and push it so much deserves. In a way, then, its goals are similar to those pursued under Tanzania's Property and Business Formalisation Programme for the last five years and known by its Kiswahili acronym Mkurabita.

That it is in fact Mkurabita that has organised the conference in collaboration with the office of immediate former President Benjamin Mkapa speaks volumes about the seriousness with which Tanzania would like to see plans to tackle poverty implemented.

It is reported on authority that Mkurabita has completed its own diagnosis of the country's informal sector, the analysis partly meant to determine the nature and the size of the sector.

Preliminary findings show that the extent of the sector is greater than normally thought. To be precise, 98 per cent of all businesses Tanzania are said to be informal sector activities or concerns.

The sector has assets worth \$29.3 billion in total, which is equivalent to ten times all foreign direct investments accumulated since independence and four times net financial flows from multilateral institutions in the same period. Sadly, all this is dead capital that cannot be used to create more wealth.

In the face of these revealing facts, it is easy to see the urgent need to help the poor to have their property formalised. And that is why, to us, the work being done by Mkurabita in Tanzania and Clep worldwide is of utmost importance.

This is one of the most crucial exercises of its kind undertaken since independence of Tanzania because its major objective is to end the ordeals of the majority poor, whose poverty is not due to lack of possession of the necessary capital and wealth but chiefly results from operating against the laws.

We do not question Mkurabita's methodologies or objectives. It is however our view that, if the main task was to study the nature of the informal sector so as to advise the government on a meaningful course of action, the exercise should have been conducted using a more purposeful and participatory approach.

Seeking to implement the exercise without the full involvement and participation of the formal sector's frontline players would be denying it support it cannot do without.

Part of the proof of such lack of participation of the poor lies in how the massive house demolition exercise and the relocation of small traders have been carried out. Relative peace prevailed, all right, but it was sorrow and anguish all through for the poor wananchi who lost their earthly belongings in the process.

Even more damaging is the fact that the small traders were being relocated while the integration of the informal sector through Mkurabita is yet to begin in earnest and although no really decent alternative arrangement for them was in place.

Mkurabita should learn from the Clep by allowing the participation of stakeholders in the informal sector and other important sectors or it will crumble under the weight of needless impediments. Initiatives meant to serve the people always gain from the people's involvement. Mkurabita can't be an exception.

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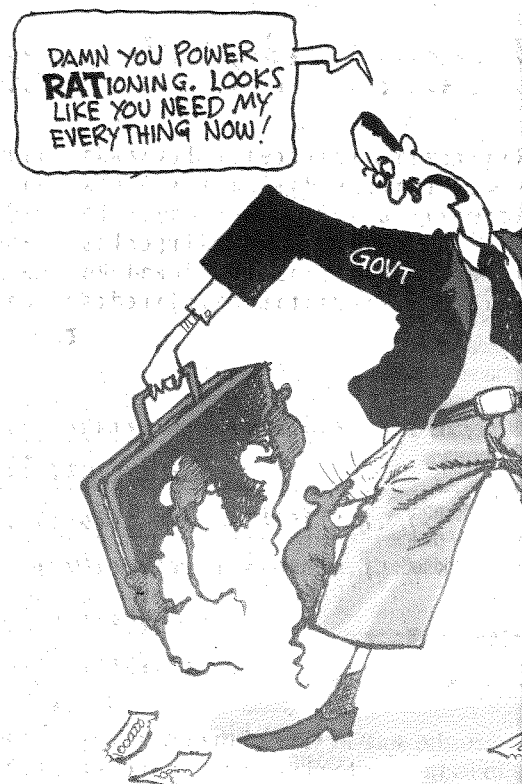
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The elders were

In the Dark Ages – no, actually as late as last year – some African communities forbade women from eating meat. Many progressive African men still get extremely embarrassed and go into hiding when this history is dredged up.

I am not trying to apologise for my great grandfather here, but now modern science seems to be telling us that the Wazee, after all, knew a thing or two that the rest of us don't. The Guardian of London reports that scientists have found that women who eat red meat every day are almost twice as likely to develop certain types of breast cancers.

It was a serious study this. The scientists from Harvard Medical who monitored 90,000 women at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston for more than 10 years, found that those who ate a high meat diet were much more prone to developing the hormonally reactive breast cancers, which account for more half of all breast cancers.

In their study published two weeks ago, the scientists say they think synthetic hormones used in meat production could be behind the trend, which suggests that meat from our village cattle which live a very natural existence are a safer bite.

The findings were based on tracking women 1991, when their average age was 36, until 2003. They completed regular questionnaires to record how often they consumed more than 130 different foods and drinks as scientists tried to establish possible links to cancer. Every two years, they were asked to report whether or not they had developed breast cancer.

By the end of the study 1,021 women had developed had developed breast cancer. Of those, 512 were hormone receptor-positive, meaning the growth of their tumours responded to progesterone and oestrogen.

When the women were assigned to five groups depending on their red meat intake, the researchers found

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