When government commitment meets community proactiveness: Governing gas and community engagement in Tanzania

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Following natural gas discoveries in offshore south-eastern Tanzania, the government has made several governance arrangements to prepare for the anticipated petro-economy. The emerging gas governance regime recognises, among others, the significance of engaging local communities in governance processes. This policy commitment is met with proactive communities which push for their engagement in decision-making and governance processes. This paper examines how government responds to community efforts for their engagement in decision-making processes in the gas sector. Particularly, the paper seeks to establish whether government's commitment to community engagement translates into a positive response to bottom-up participation efforts by gas communities. Drawing on interviews with community members, politicians and local and central government officials and critical analysis of gas policy framework, the paper shows that the government has consistently repressed community efforts for their engagement in gas governance. This negative response to community efforts calls for a deeper examination of extractive resource politics relative to the practice of community engagement.