

Transparency Enhancement in Tanzania: A Focus on Local Government Administration in Mbeya District

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Abstract: *Transparency is advocated as one of the key factors for enhancing good governance. It includes the ability of the government, government machinery and private firms to observe laid procedures, and in that regard without having undue influence. Transparency is pre-requisite for proper management of both government and private entities. It includes ensuring that resources both material and financial are set to accomplish the tasks intended. This paper attempts to report the extent to which transparency is executed in local government administration in Tanzania with concentration on Mbeya region. Although the paper has opted for the case study design as one unit of enquiry has been opted for the study, yet it represents the general procedures for the transparency in the entire local government system. The qualitative approach has been opted to accomplish the study. Observation, documentation and experiential are the main sources of data for the study. The analysis of the study is descriptive in nature, as narrations have been made on the factual trend analysis of the local government in Mbeya. The objective of the paper is to report the level of transparency of local government administration. The issues given weight are transparency in awarding tenders for development projects, which indeed consume huge amount of money. Secondly, is the narration of transparency in decision-making from lower echelon to district level. Thirdly, is the presence or absence of corruption in the undertaking of government business. The paper provides problems and the suggestive measures to curb the problems. This article concludes that local government administration in Tanzania faces challenges on the implementation of the programs and projects. However, there is high level of transparency on the pursuance of local government activities, and specifically decision making.*

Keywords: *local government, administration, management, transparency, enhancement strategies*

1. INTRODUCTION

Transparency is vital for the enhancement of good governance. It includes the ability to observe rules and procedures that are laid for the implementation of the respective activities. Transparency does not necessarily mean availing the top secrets of the institution to other organ, not at all. It simply means observing what the law requires on every undertaking. When the law requires concealing one has to conceal. Providing prohibited information by the law to the people that is not transparency. In investment, transparency could mean the extent to which investors have access to any required financial information about a company such as price levels, market depth and audited financial reports. When transparency relates to information flow from the company to investors, it is also known as "full disclosure" (Norman, 2012). In local government it refers to the extent to which people have ready access to any required financial information about a village, ward and council such as revenue, market depth and audited financial reports. In administration perspective, particularly local government administration and management, transparency would mean ensuring that the procedures for making any decision from village to council level are done on merit, in an orderly manner, in the perceived open way of doing the institutional business. It includes right organ conducting right issues. We do not expect that a decision, which is required to be done by a certain committee, performed by an individual. Literally new concept of transparency requires not only letting the truth be available but imposes to disclose it to every stakeholder/villager (Smith, 2010). This paper does not entail to discuss the legal framework of the local government administration in Tanzania rather the general stipulated and implemented procedures. We intend to report what is done, what ought to be done, and the challenges for the same.

Generally, the local government established under the constitution of United Republic of Tanzania under article 142 (URT, 1977). The facilitation of the councils is covered under the law of parliament of 1982 (Act. 7, 8, 9). The mandate of the local government in Tanzania includes the administration and management of all issues of development, which affect the people socially, politically and economically. For the purpose of administration of the councils, the law has set about five categories of management. The lowest government level is the village government, which is governed by 25 members, and are lead by the chairperson elect. The executive director at this level is employed by the government and is known as Village Executive Officer (VEO). The main decision making body is the village assembly, which constitute all members of the village irrespective of difference in political parties, faith, and race. The government council, which is the 25 members' committee body, does the conduct of day-to-day activities on behalf of the entire society in the village.

The second level is the ward, which is managed by the Ward Executive Officer (WEO), and the chairperson of the ward council is the Councillor. The management body at ward level is the ward development committee (WDC), which the councillor chairs. The rest of the members include village chairperson and the village executive officers, which are situated in the area of jurisdiction of the ward. In addition, it includes four members elected from civil society, religion, and any professional personnel that seem to be of assistance in expounding the issues of the ward. The main function of this body is to discuss matters of priority accumulated from villages, and forward them to the higher level, which is the district/town/municipal or city council. Matters that can be decided at this level include any developmental contribution that is required per person or per household as the committee may deem fit.

The administration, which supervises the ward, is the division level. The head of the division is the Division Officer (DO), which formerly was known as Division Secretary (DS), and the main duty is supervise both activities of central government by linking the district level central government administration(district commissioner), and the district executive directors. Division officer supervises the implementation of the various development projects in the division. This level has no committee or any other body other than the division officer. In the past, before 2007, the division officer was 100% under the central government. However, due to the need of consolidating activities at this level, a need for serving both governments was instituted.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Transparency is vital in the administration of both the government and private firms activities the world over. of course several authors indicate the importance of transparency in corporate entities especially the disclosure of the financial accounts. Specifically, Mustafa et al. (2009:5) assert that transparency in Kosova Financial system is exercised. They add that shareholders are informed properly and in a timely manner and that there are indications that the rights of shareholders are being respected and that they are able to exercise their key functions. Lawrence and Nezhad (2009:76) narrate that the growing influence of NGOs requires that donors, academics, and policy makers start carefully examining transparency and accountability both in micro and macro level. They emphasise the importance in non-governmental organisations due the many reasons including rendering trustee to the donors and the government in which these NGO are working.

In another study of social responses in Pakstan it was noted that transparency is crucial in enhancing productivity of both the people and the management. Ahmad et al.(2012) notes that nowadays, optimal decision making demands that it must always take into account all the necessary social issues that can influence or will be influenced by the particular decision, hence transparency is not an optional but a must.

Bokpin (2013) indicates that transparency in finance is a key in creating trust among stakeholders. There indeed several authors who assert on the importance of transparency and accountability in managing organisation, the list include (Norman, 2005; 2003; Admati, and Pflleiderer, 2000; Berger and Hann, 2002; Bhattacharya and Chiesa, 1995; Boot and Thakor, 2001; Scharfstein, 1988; Shivdasani,1993; Shleifer and Vishny, 1997; Singh and Yerramilli, 2007).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The preparation of this paper has observed a qualitative approach. There is no measurement of variations, frequencies, or tendencies. We have used documentation, mostly legal documents; observation, and experience as major data collections sources. The study has opted a multiple case study design as only the two councils are involved. The study has further assimilated experimental design characteristics due to the researcher's access to supervision and monitoring of the developmental projects in the district. Hence, had ability to experiment some practices that reflect transparency within the district in various wards and divisions. The area of study is Mbeya district, which covers, Mbeya city council and Mbeya district council. The paper significance includes eluding the people and worldwide government administrators on the functionality of the decentralised system with a focus on transparency in the undertaking of local government programs in Tanzania. Further, it provides an enlightenment measures rendered in mitigating difficulties manifested in the management of the councils.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The system of local government administration in Tanzania is associative in nature. The implementation of the projects and programs depends on the willingness and the wishes of the people. Wishes refer to the desired ambition of the people, which is noted on formal meetings such as village assembly. These wishes are normally documented in formal meetings, and are kept as official resolutions of the village government popularly known as minuetts. Willingness refers to readiness of the people in pursuing the tasks they observed or they desire/agree (wishes) to accomplish. The following discussion narrates the decision making process of local government councils. It also narrates the procedures for procuring materials and tenders. Thirdly, provides discussion on general transparency and weakness associated with the administration and management of the councils.

5. VILLAGE AND WARD LEVEL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The Village Assembly (VA) is conducted quarterly in each year. However, we call for an emergency assembly if there is need for such. These VA discuss developmental programs in terms of priorities. The programs include number of schools to be constructed, health centres, local infrastructure such as roads, ponds for irrigation, and electricity to mention but a few.

These priorities are consolidated and discussed at ward level under the chair of the ward councillor. The composition of the ward level includes the chairpersons of the villages, the village executive officers, and nominees from religion, political parties, and professional people. These meetings, however, are open to every citizen in the ward. They are allowed to observe the proceeding without contributing any concern. The resolutions at this level are presented at the district/town/municipal/ or city council.

6. TRANSPARENCY LEVEL AT VILLAGE AND WARD

Generally, the transparency level in terms of decision-making is absolute. The narrated procedure is according to what the law provides. In addition, in most wards in Mbeya district observe the conduct of these meetings quarterly. For example, in the year 2012 the average village meetings were 50%. The leadership at district level was not comfortable with the trend. Hence, we conducted training to all village leaders in every ward and made an emphasis on observance of rules and regulation at work place. The Districts Commissioner (DC) led the delegation and stipulated on the importance of the meetings. Partly, the assemblies are used to present the revenue and expenditure at village level. The revenue includes funds from district council, which are channelled to the villages for construction of schools, hospitals, ponds, and other projects. We collect some revenue from various penalties, which the villages had mandates to pose as fine. In addition, villages do collect voluntary contribution of funds from people pending resolution made at village level. These are voluntary contributions in terms of size of contribution, but are naturally mandatory in terms of the minimum amount to contribute.

In this vein, we note that transparency for the year 2012, was 50%. This was due to irresponsiveness of the officials at village level to convene the meetings. Normally, the chairperson orders after discussion with the executive officer on the calling of the assembly.

The intervention at district level made most leaders to rise and had to conduct meetings in accordance to law. The results of the enlightenment made to these lower echelon leaders, was the improved transparency. In this regard, during the year 2013, the percentage of conduct of the village assembly was 99%. The total number of wards in Mbeya district is 50. In the year 2013, 49 wards conducted the respective meetings. One ward did not conduct the meetings due to the death of the councillor, hence the ward meeting was not held, and this affected one village, which the councillor was dwelling. At this village level, no procurement is conducted, especially the tenders. Tenders according to the law are conducted at council level. Reports on the financial position were presented, and the assembly assented.

7. DECISION MAKING LEVEL AT DISTRICT COUNCIL

The procedure for making decision at this level starts at the departmental level. Each department prepares plans in conformity to the respective council strategic plan. This includes budget versus time for implementing the desired activity. The accomplished budgets are then presented for discussions at the committee of management, which is chaired by the council executive officer known as District Executive Director (DED), Town Executive Director (TED), Municipal Executive Director (MED), and City Executive Director (CED). Various departments are then matched with the Council standing committees. The discussions of the standing committees complete the exercise of verification prior to the finance committee, which is the main sub-committee that supervises the budgetary process. Normally the consent of the finance committee is very important as does give indications that the budget will be assented by the full council. The full council is the major decision making body at the level of the council. When all is done in the committee, the council is recalled. Normally, the full council seat twice per year. However, we convene an emergent council on any issue of emergency. Most council are sensitive to recall these meetings since they are costly. Full council includes all members elect at the ward level, all executive officer at ward level, division officers, and head of departments, representative of political parties, and the district administrative secretary. In addition, the District Commissioner may attend if deemed necessary. In this full council, citizens are allowed to present themselves without contributing. Citizen can observe throughout the deliberations of this meeting. Hence, transparency at this level is hundred percent practised.

8. PROCUREMENT OF VARIOUS JOBS

Procurement is normally done in accordance to the law. We are firm in reiterating that Tanzania procurement system is transparent. It is open and any one that needs to be considered for the provision of services at this level can do so. Qualifications for tender are open. They are procedurally advertised through newspapers and or any advertising machinery. Date for the opening of tender is set from the day of adverts. We generally do not support the law, not the practices of the crew of the council. While the law is transparent in its nature, it nevertheless provides slack time, which hinders most council to start the work timely. Generally, it requires about four months accomplishing the process of advertising to the awarding of the job to the winner. This is a concern to most of us.

9. TRANSPARENCY AT THE LEVEL OF THE COUNCIL

We have noted that transparency is exercised throughout the deliberations and finally the decisions at the council level. In addition, we firmly argue that even in the procurement processes transparency is observed. However, the weakness is appended to the law. In some instance, the cost for purchasing the equipments increases due to the total administrative cost for purchasing the equipment. Normally, we convene about four meetings for preparing and awarding tenders. All these meetings have financial implication in terms of remunerations we pay to the committees. Most of these purchases the executive director can make. The Director has the machinery to vet the quality of the product. Even the people we use for the procuring are essentially under the executive director. Hence, instituting a law on the procedure is actually trying to increase cost of purchase unnecessarily. It is easy, for example, to take disciplinary

measures to one person who deals with the procurement than pursuing same disciplinary measures to the committee.

10. CHALLENGES OF TRANSPARENCY AT VILLAGE, WARD AND COUNCIL LEVEL

In this part, we provide challenges of the three levels of the council. The main challenges that the village level assembly face are poor attendance of the people in the meetings. Hence, while decisions are made openly, yet the number of people that participate in this assembly is usually less than a half of the people in the respective village. The law requires that the village assembly be announced to the public. In most villages, the announcement is made, yet rural population just like that of urban is busy with personal activities that seem to provide merit to their household. Once the announcement is made, the fulfilment of the law is evident. Poor attendance is a deterrent to the performance of the meetings as those who do not attend could have had some diversified thinking on the matters. The village government provide no allowance to the participants of the assembly. Hence, participation to these assemblies depend on the loyalty of the people. At ward level, the situation is different, as payment is made to the participant. Hence, normally the attendance is about 98% according to the study of 2002/2003 (IITRC, 2013). The challenge at this level is not related to transparency. The main challenge is on nominating projects that seem to have few resources, yet have been nominated by many villages. Usually, identifying the most pressing need per village is difficult. At times, the brilliance of the councillor who chairs the meeting at ward level is the 'veto' for the ultimate decision. The councillor has no stipulated veto power. Of course, it includes councillor's ability to persuade the rest of the member. However, when there is contestation of the priorities at the ward level the decision is made through voting. The challenge at the council level includes incompetent firms who cannot accomplish the projects that the council award. This is due to general inability of the firms that vie for the projects. The perception of the people is that council personnel are corrupt. In essence, most of these projects are not accomplished due to several reasons. The first is the delay of the government money to the council. Normally the budget for the projects is debated and assented in June 31 and the funds are normally released to the councils the third quarter of the year which is between January and March the following year. The financial year ends on 31st June. Therefore, two measures need to be taken. Firstly, is assenting to budget on face value-on ability of the central government to render the funds. Secondly, the treasurer should provide information to the CEO of the councils on the time for remittance of the funds so that they could equally respond to the same. Thirdly, is for the councils nominating competent firms in terms of financial and proficiency ability to execute the projects. We have applied this strategy in Mbeya District Council and have faired well.

11. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we argue that transparency is a prerequisite for the enhancement of development of the local government councils in Tanzania and beyond. It is transparency, which enables the people to avail trust to their governments. Transparency yields commitments of both the people and the workers. Transparency does away with malice and suspect. Transparency facilitates the optimal use of public funds, since checks and balances are obvious. We therefore appeal to government and private sector to articulate transparency as mandatory for creation of harmonious relationships among the people, whom we serve, and the subordinates and peers whom we work with. We recommend that proper functioning of local government will depend on the abilities invested in the workers and the entire management of the councils. Seeking proper functioning of the local government should go together with the competence based recruitment, appointment and promotion. Striking a balance between development and people we depend upon would require adept understanding of the priorities of the nation, the components that foster development, and proper governance of which transparency is one of key factors.

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