

# Is Apolitical Endeavor Desirable in Local Government Authorities Today?

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## Abstract

This article aimed at ascertaining the role of councilors in enhancing public service delivery in local government authorities with an experience from selected wards at Kinondoni Municipal Council. Politico-administrative relations in provision of public services in most African countries termed as a quest for development and still desirable today. In attempt to that, this article assessed whether an ingredient of political bodies in the structure of local government authorities in Tanzania enhance effective service delivery or not. The study employed a case study design where questionnaire, key informant interview and documentary review were used to gather data. The study revealed that councilors' capacity to deliver public services depends on the budget allocation by sector, relationship with municipal permanent officers, quality or education level of councilors, and efforts to supervise development projects. Moreover, the findings found that the extent to access the identified public services differ among communities and lack of funds was singled out as the main reason for delivery failures.

**Key words:** Councilors; Local government authorities; Service delivery; Ward.

## 1. Introduction

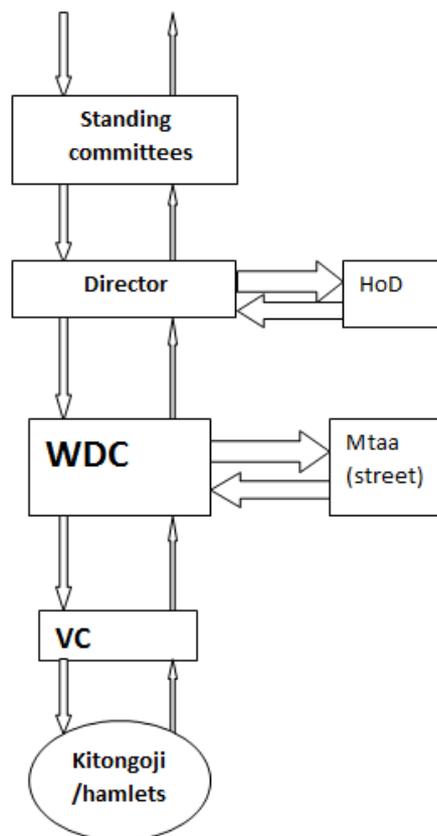
Councilors' endeavor is a prominent feature in the structure of LGAs affecting the potential for socio-economic development. Recent burn data shows client dissatisfaction towards public service delivery [1]. Councilors in the structure of local government systems among other things stand as watchdogs on local government personnel' functionalities for enhancing socio-economic development through service delivery. Venugopal and Yilmaz [2] note that the council often serves as a rubber stamp in the planning and budgeting process and that '...the technical staff often has more power and influence compared to councilors in preparing technical reports, planning and budgeting, and managing personnel.

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Local government authorities are important grassroots institutions which have both administrative and development roles. The development role, which is the most critical, involves ensuring the well-being of the people in areas of social service provision, agricultural development, community development and governance [3, 11]. Local government authorities in the United Republic of Tanzania, established by the Local Government Acts Number 7 and 8 of 1982 with categories of rural and urban authorities. Rural authorities include village councils, township authorities and district councils that cover a wide area and a population divided and grouped into hamlets, villages and wards. Wards are very important because they are the constituencies for elected councilors [4]. Moreover, LGAs in Tanzania is a government consisting of a group of politicians known as councilors; each representing a ward. When councilors meet, form a council. This is the supreme policy making organ concerned with the formulation of policies, making by-laws, regulations, approving budgets, electing senior political officials and discussing community problems as presented by respective councilor. According to the ongoing local government reforms, councilors poses an ultimate power on appointments recommended by the Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government. Hence, councilors and the permanent public officials have to work together to enable the local authority to discharge its functions properly as shown hereunder.

***The administrative machinery of Tanzania Local Government Authorities at the council level:***



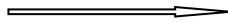
**Figure 1**

Source: Local Government Amendment Act No.6 of 1999.

Key:



-Executive relationship.



-Advisory relationship.

WDC- Ward Development Committee.

HoD- Head of Department.

VC- Village Chairperson.

The history of LGAs in Tanzania shows that; the continuous changes had been made to provide a new face and practices reflecting quality service delivery and meet the demand of local people. Since decentralization era of 1972-1984 known as *deco centration strategy* the government started to re-think on the direct management of the development process and effective provision of social services [5, 1]. A number of committees were established in the villages, wards, districts and regions, as vehicles for people's participation in different matters that affect their wellbeing. The most appropriate way thought was to provide people with the right to elect local leaders herein referred as councilors. Councilors act as representatives to the urban and rural councils and let people participate in government at local level thus bringing in public services under the control of people through local councils, giving local councils powers (political devolution) over all local affairs and securing finances for better public services. Councilors have both individual and collective responsibilities which are to be discharged in accordance to the laws of the country.

Despite the effort done still most of councils fail to deliver satisfactory services in lieu; As noted by [4, 6], most of district councils have largely failed to play their role effectively. Further it is true that Tanzania as a country is coming from a state of inequality and disparity in service delivery and will find it very difficult to address these disparities [7]. This poses the question on the effectiveness of councilors performance in enhancing service delivery in the country. Perhaps this may be due to the prevail weaknesses of councilors' capabilities to fulfill their respective responsibilities.

Since the establishment of local government authorities in Tanzania many studies have been carried out to assess the functioning of LGAs country wide but little has been done in evaluating the performance of locally elected bodies in local areas herein referred as ward councilors and their capabilities in improving delivery of public services. Therefore, this study focused on ascertain the role of ward councilors on service delivery with the experience from KMC.

## 2. Methodology

This study employed case study research design where Kinondoni Municipal Council was chosen to acquire a sample of 135 respondents. The population of the study were councilors and ward community members who are beneficiaries of the identified services herein referred as health services, clean and safe water, waste

management, infrastructure networks, and waste management. The nine (9) wards of KMC namely Mbezi, Saranga, Kibamba, Kimara, Manzese, Kinondoni, Msasani, Kunduchi, and Magomeni were chosen with an assumption that community members of these wards, take part in planning and implementation of various activities concerning their welfare in public service delivery with fair resource-distribution in lieu.

Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were employed to select sampling unit. Key informant interview, documentary review and questionnaire were tools employed to get data on whether councilors performance impede or pervade effective service delivery.

Content analysis and simple descriptive statistics through SPSS version 16 were used for the qualitative and quantitative data collected through key informant interview, documentary review and questionnaire respectively.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

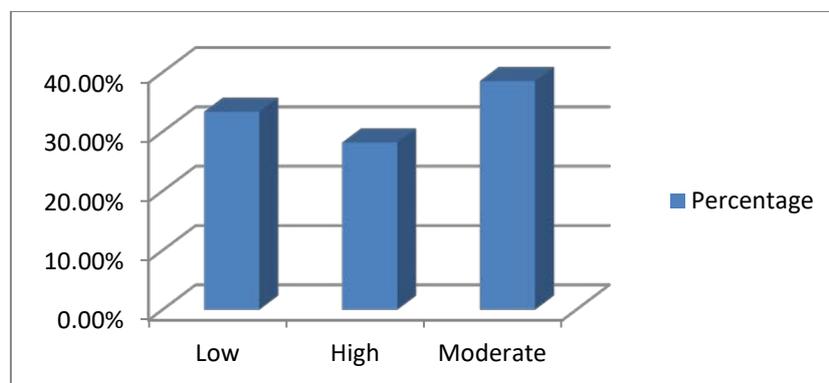
#### ***3.1 The roles of ward councilors in enhancing service delivery***

The study sought respondents' opinions from key informants and a review of various documents related to LGAs regarding ascertaining the roles of ward councilors in facilitating service delivery to their respective wards. The main local governments laws do not specify clearly the roles of local elected leaders towards service delivery instead article 145 of the URTC establishes LGA's in which councilors recognized as local elected leaders. Further, section four (4) of LG Finances Act cap. 290 of 2002, section.3 of LG District Authorities Act, and section 3 of LG Urban Authorities Act cap 287 and 288 respectively provides for the establishment of LGAs in Tanzania. These statutes identify the existence of councilors, their roles and functions in facilitating effective service delivery but do not provide how those roles and functions can be performed by councilors. This result is consistent with [8] who reported that, the main role of the ward councilor is to make sure that the concerns related to the wards they serve in, are being attended to.

However, councilors act as the link between the public and the municipality. In this study about 97.8% respondents acknowledged that councilors act as mediators between the people they serve and the municipality. Only 2.2% respondents were not aware of the mentioned role. This implies that most of the community members including councilors in KMC know the roles of their representatives in the council as most of them were even much detailed in explaining how this role can be performed. Meetings were mentioned as an essential tool in providing participatory ideas concern services delivery through related committees, in which councilors got suggestions and decisions for further proceeding in municipality committees and full council where councilors represent their issues. This results are in line with [9] showed that in order to perform the mediating role effectively, councilors have the task of ensuring that the public participates in council initiatives. This can be done by encouraging the residents to participate in municipal initiatives. KMC Councilors encourage the public to pay rates; educate the public on municipal business and part of their job is to facilitate community participation in municipal policy-making or by-laws. In order to fulfill their various mandates in the community, the councilors have to understand both the municipality and the communities which they serve. The findings further add that; the capacity of a councilor to do that depends on experience poses, personal attributes and

ability to mobilize the community. [10] state that the nature of the relationship between the residents and the municipality determines the extent to which the councilor can play a mediating role between residents and the municipality. Councilors are mainly elected on the basis of their political affiliation. The relationship between the municipality and the residents is sensitive to party politics as voters vote according to political affiliation and elected members are therefore bound by party political mandates.

Furthermore, councilors play a role on determining and supervising the implementation of development activities or/and public services projects. In Tanzanian LG system ward councilors act as chairpersons of different development committees and WEO's act as the secretary of such committees. Their responsibilities are closely connected to each other as both strive to make the development plans of their wards achieved. Delivering services like those identified in this study to the communities is the central aim of the development committees. As noted by [11] that ward chancellor due to their political position, have strategic powers which could influence decision making process and community participation in developmental projects. Across the study wards ,councilors were responsible on project supervision related roles such as: providing ward residents a progress report, explaining the decisions of the council in committing resources to development projects and related programs; assessing whether the municipalities' programs and plans having intended impact; assessing whether services being delivered fairly, effectively and in a sustainable way, determining whether capital projects are being committed in accordance with the IDP Plan; Staying in close contact with their constituencies to ensure that council is informed of all issues on the ground; These results are persistent with [7] who reported that councilors have a role of conveying information from council to residents on matters related to projects feedback. Despite having well identified roles, the opinion by the respondents with regard to the supervision level done by councilors in different public services projects was moderate. (see figure 2). About 38% of respondents rated supervision level by councilors as moderate while 32% rated it as low and only 26% said it was high. These ratings may suggest effective supervision been done by ward councilors in supervising various developmental projects and the low rate suggested may be due to factors such as lack of project plan related qualifications of councilors, lack of funds and even influence from political parties as a means of monitoring councilors performance. About 91% of respondents acknowledged high extent of political parties' interference on councilors role while 8.9% rated low extent.



**Figure 2:** Supervision level of councilors in different public services projects as rated by the respondents in the study area based on point scale; High=1, low=2, moderate=3.

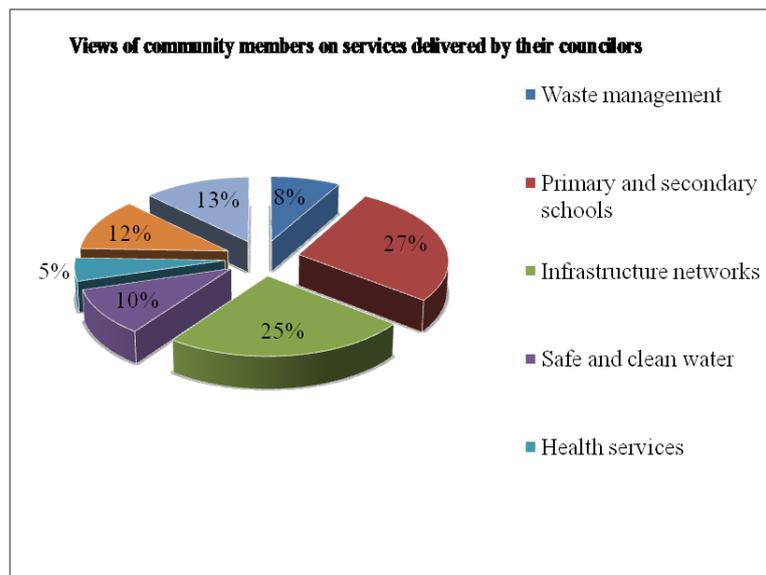
### 3.2 Access to services and residents' views on service delivery

The study indebted to know the opinions on the services provided by KMC and the extent of delivery. Community members expressed their dissatisfaction towards services delivery in some wards although in other wards services were delivered timely and effectively. This may be due to presence of classes, as noted when interviewing one among the member of squatter areas '... in wealthier streets where residents have ability to deal with social concerns like schools, water services, waste management, infrastructure networks are improved compared to our places where we have just money for food mostly and depend the rest from government.....

Likewise, residents blamed local government for poor waste management and requested assistance from councilors on a range of personal and family issues that require the support of social workers rather than councilors. This response may be due to poor understanding of the mandates of councilors and jurisdiction of local government as a tier of government that is responsible for the provision of particular services.

KMC councilors delivered only 8% of waste management services per year as rated by respondents, this failure may lead to the increase of contaminated diseases like cholera, diarrhea and other related health problems. Probably councilors fail to deliver effectively in waste management due to unfair budget allocations; lack of enough packages and incentives to the councilors for coordinating, delivering services and motivation. Councilor from one of the opposition parties' interview, had the following to say on the future trend of fund allocations by-sector:

*“Previously we were undermined by our fellows from ruling party but now we hope to see some changes in budgeting and fund allocations by-sector, citizens now should know that the budget will be equally distributed and the fund will be directed perpendicular to priorities and needs of the respective constituencies.”*



**Figure 3:** Perceived views of community members on services delivered by their councilors as rated by the respondents in the study area based on percentages for each identified services.

#### 4. Conclusion and recommendations

Apolitical endeavor is not desirable in those selected wards at Kinondoni municipal council. Local councilors are trying to perform their roles in a relatively well-resourced municipality for effective service delivery. However, the specific context in councilors' work poses several challenges. At the political level, the municipality is divided along political party lines consequence to the negative repercussions on the functioning of the municipality in providing services effectively. The political leaders who are supposed to lead the municipality are not immune to the 'politicking' and suffered severely lack of fund. The consequence is that councilors appear to be focused on serving the political party rather than serving the common good of the municipality and the residents.

Given these challenges, municipals are recommended to develop clear guidelines in the allocation of responsibilities and decision making, to adhere on the needs of the residents rather than the interests of the political party and self-enrichment. Moreover government should provide financial and non-financial support to the councilors such as trainings and cash allowances for them to perform efficiently.

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