

## **Tanzania Local Government Overview**

Before 1961 Tanzania was a colony of Great Britain where all urban and rural administration were based on colonial framework. After gaining its independence in 1961, Tanzania government spent more than 30 years to develop a system of local governments that would function in the most democratic way and give power to local people. There were different periods of reform in Tanzania which more or less affected the development of the county.

The newly independent government identified a system of Councils as the best administrative structure to solve the most significant problems of the society, such as poverty, illiteracy, and disease. However, over the course of time local governments became unpopular among the central authorities and residents as they could not meet the needs of the citizens, in terms of appropriate administration and management.

The local governments' lack of foresight caused the system to fail and a movement to the decentralization process from 1972 to 1984. During this era the government switched its focus to "Rural Ujamaa Socialism" and urban councils merged with rural councils. All social services and economic needs were not controlled by the Central Government. Due to improper implementation of the decentralization policy, the government expenditures largely increased and bureaucracy penetrated into all levels of social life. As results of the decentralization era, standards of living fell, social services collapsed, school enrollment decreased and resulted in the increase of illiteracy.

Faced such a bleak effect of the centralized governmental system, Local Government Authorities were reintroduced. They were supposed to improve performance, giving citizens the opportunity to be involved in the governance system.

The governance structure is comprised of the village level, the local government authorities, the regional secretariats, and the central government. The local government authorities are represented by urban councils, district authorities, regional secretariats, and the central government. Urban councils include city, municipal, and town councils. District authorities represent district councils, town

authorities, and village councils. The function of regional secretariats is to disseminate policy and support local government. The central government consists of parliament, ministries, departments, and agencies.

The structure of the government at a lower level is represented by village general assemblies, village councils, standing committees, and other adopted committees. The village councils are formed by four Standing Committees: the Committee for Finance, Administration, Planning and Economy; the Committee for Works and Economic Affairs; the Committee for Defense and Security; and the HIV / AIDS Committee. This level can also be characterized by providing opportunities for high civic engagement and public participation<sup>1</sup>.

Local Government Authorities are divided into two categories: urban authorities and rural authorities. The urban authorities are in charge of the administration and development of urban areas, including towns, municipalities, and cities. The rural authorities are also known as district councils. To improve the work of local authorities, 99 districts have been created, which were organized under the 1982 Local Government Act. Nowadays, 114 councils (22 are urban and 92 are rural) function in 99 districts. Twenty-two urban units are referred to as cities (Dar es Salaam and Mwanza), municipals (Arusha, Dodoma, Iringa, Kilimanjaro, Mbeya, Morogoro, Shinyanga, Tabora, and Tanga), and town councils (the remaining 11 communities)<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of local governments is to provide main services such as healthcare, education, water, roads, and agriculture in the restructured public sector. Overall, Local Government Authorities represent two main functions. The first is providing administration, law and order, and the second is economic development and planning in the areas they represent<sup>3</sup>.

However, this reform was not realized because of the weak human resource capacity and management. The outcomes of this reform are that the councils are poorly managed; they have a lack of properly qualified personnel and at the same time the councils are over-employed. The system still faces great problems in terms of transparency in the council affairs.

To solve the problems mentioned above, the government developed and implemented the Local Government Reform Program, the purpose of which is to improve local authorities and

transform them into effective instruments of social and economic development. Further, the main goal of this program is to improve quality, access, and delivery of public services, and as a result to reduce poverty in the country.

The current reforms are classified into two types, which are called systematic and non-systematic reforms. Systematic reforms concern the issue of fiscal decentralization, legal harmonization, and human resource autonomy. Non-systematic reforms address the issue of governance, restructuring, capacity building, and program coordination.

Since the implementation of the Local Government Reforms began in 2000, there has been a considerable improvement in terms of Local Government Authorities. The quality of service is getting satisfactory. This improvement enables people to participate in planning and realization of local authority duties and responsibilities. The local government reform as well as the Public Service Reform Program caused a shift in roles and responsibilities of public servants that resulted in changes in the Central Government ministries. Thus, in the future the functions of the ministries are to focus on policy making, regulation, monitoring, and evaluating services provided by local governments, service boards and executive agencies, NGOs and the private sector<sup>4</sup>.

Despite its functional organizational structure, the current system of governance is challenged by the low level of local leaders' professionalism and the lack of appropriate mechanisms of information dissemination. The system is not transparent in terms of releasing figures on revenues and expenditures. The majority of people in the country think that the government is the sole provider of social goods, therefore people possess a low capacity of public awareness and sensitization. There is no appropriate auditing, which results in low performance of social good by local authorities. Finally, the re-call mechanism of the elected officials is problematic because it is not easy to remove them from office before the expiration of the five-year tenure.

Further, it is quite difficult for the central government and its ministries to realize all the reforms in terms of responsibilities and functions as well as transferring the resources and authorities to the local governments. In order to be able to deliver services efficiently and responsively, the Local Government Reforms have to overcome financial and human resource problems.

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<sup>1</sup>Source: An overview of governance structure at local government level. ICC Conference, Arusha, 19 May, 2008

<sup>2</sup> Source: U.S. Department of State

<sup>3</sup> Source: Online Gateway of the United Republic of Tanzania - Administration

<sup>4</sup> Source: Oxford Policy Management, June 2000