
Leadership and Inclusiveness in Local Governance: Evidence from Busokelo District Council, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of leadership in promoting inclusiveness in decision-making bodies in Busokelo District Council, Tanzania. Using a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 181 respondents through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Findings reveal that leadership integrity characterized by transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making was perceived positively, though inconsistencies were noted in practice. Inclusive practices such as stakeholder engagement and the promotion of marginalized groups' participation were present but constrained by structural barriers, resource limitations, and political interference. Similarly, fairness in leadership was observed in most cases, yet perceptions of bias in resource allocation persisted. Overall, leadership significantly enhanced inclusiveness and trust in governance, but improvements remain necessary to strengthen equitable participation. The study concludes that integrity, fairness, and inclusive leadership practices are central to participatory governance. Recommendations include improving transparency in resource allocation, strengthening targeted engagement with marginalized groups, and institutionalizing leadership development programs on inclusiveness. This article contributes to governance and leadership scholarship by contextualizing inclusive leadership within Tanzania's local government while offering practical insights for policymakers committed to advancing inclusive governance.

Keywords: Leadership, Inclusiveness, Governance, Decision-Making, Local Government, Tanzania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive leadership is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of effective governance, ensuring diverse stakeholder participation in decision-making processes (Kalshoven et al., 2018; OECD, 2022). Global studies demonstrate that leaders who act with integrity, fairness, and openness foster public trust and equitable outcomes (Brown & Treviño, 2020). Conversely, poor leadership characterized by corruption and favoritism exacerbates marginalization, inefficiencies, and inequalities (Pérez-López et al., 2019).

In Africa, inclusive leadership has been shown to improve citizen engagement, yet structural barriers such as weak institutions and socio-political constraints undermine efforts (Chikwendu, 2021). In Tanzania, decentralization reforms sought to strengthen inclusiveness by empowering local government councils. However, studies show that many councils still face challenges such as lack of accountability, corruption, and exclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities (Komba & Mwaikokesya, 2020; Mboya & Mtey, 2021).

Despite policy intentions, inclusiveness remains uneven in practice, particularly in rural areas such as Busokelo District Council. This study therefore addresses the question: What role does leadership play in promoting inclusiveness in decision-making bodies at the local government level in Tanzania?

The objectives of the study were:

1. To examine the influence of leadership integrity in decision-making bodies in Busokelo District Council.
2. To evaluate leadership practices that promote inclusiveness in decision-making processes.
3. To analyze the role of fairness in ensuring equitable representation of stakeholders.

This article contributes to governance literature by contextualizing inclusive leadership within a rural Tanzanian setting, providing both theoretical and practical insights.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

Leadership: The ability to influence and inspire others toward shared goals through transparency, accountability, and collaboration (Northouse, 2021).

Inclusiveness: The representation and participation of diverse groups, especially marginalized populations, in decision-making (Kalshoven et al., 2018).

Decision-Making Bodies: Formal structures such as councils and committees responsible for governance decisions (OECD, 2022).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Two theories informed this study:

1. **Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985):** Leaders inspire and motivate stakeholders, foster collaboration, and challenge exclusionary norms.

2. Inclusive Leadership Theory (Hollander, 2009): Leaders create fairness, accessibility, and empowerment for diverse stakeholders.

These theories complement each other: transformational leadership emphasizes vision and inspiration, while inclusive leadership emphasizes systemic fairness and equity.

2.3 Empirical Studies

Prior studies confirm that leadership integrity promotes accountability (Owusu-Mensah et al., 2020) and inclusive practices improve participation (Smith et al., 2021). However, most research focuses on urban contexts or single groups (e.g., gender or youth). Few studies address inclusiveness at the grassroots council level in Tanzania—creating the gap this study fills.

3. METODOLOGY

The study adopted a pragmatism philosophy and a mixed-methods approach.

Design: Descriptive cross-sectional.

Study Area: Busokelo District Council, Mbeya Region, Tanzania.

Population: 331 individuals, including local officials, Ward Development Committee members, and community representatives.

Sample Size: 181 respondents, determined using Yamane's formula (1967).

Sampling: Stratified random sampling for officials, simple random for community members, purposive for key informants.

Data Collection: Questionnaires (Likert scale) and semi-structured interviews.

Analysis: Quantitative data analyzed with SPSS (descriptive statistics); qualitative data analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Considerations: Approval obtained from the Open University of Tanzania. Informed consent, confidentiality, and inclusiveness were maintained throughout.

4. FINDINGS ANDS DISCUSSION

4.1 Leadership Integrity

Most respondents affirmed that leaders demonstrated transparency (78%) and accountability (81%). Ethical decision-making was widely perceived, though 15% expressed doubts about consistency. Interviews revealed that while audits and public meetings enhanced accountability, suspicions of favoritism in resource allocation weakened trust.

Interpretation: Integrity fosters trust and inclusiveness, but inconsistent application undermines citizen confidence.

4.2 Inclusive Leadership Practices

Leaders engaged stakeholders through community meetings and consultations. However, participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities remained limited. Mechanisms for diversity promotion existed but were inconsistently applied.

Interpretation: Engagement fosters inclusiveness, but structural and cultural barriers must be addressed.

4.3 Fairness in Leadership

Most respondents agreed that leaders avoided discrimination and promoted equitable representation. However, perceptions of bias in resource allocation persisted, with some groups believing resources favored politically connected individuals.

Interpretation: Fairness is central to inclusiveness, but perceptions of inequity erode trust.

4.4 Inclusiveness as a Driver of Governance

Inclusiveness was strongly associated with improved trust, collaboration, and decision quality. Respondents emphasized that transparent, fair, and participatory processes increased confidence in governance institutions.

Interpretation: Inclusive leadership strengthens citizen engagement and governance legitimacy.

5. CONCUSSION AND RECOMMANDATIONS

Conclusion

Leadership integrity, inclusive practices, and fairness significantly influence inclusiveness in decision-making at the local government level. Busokelo District Council demonstrates progress in participatory leadership, but challenges remain in ensuring equitable representation and overcoming perceptions of bias.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Transparency: Make budgeting and resource allocation fully open and accessible.
2. Target Marginalized Groups: Develop tailored programs to involve women, youth, and persons with disabilities.
3. Institutionalize Leadership Training: Embed inclusiveness and fairness into capacity-building programs for local leaders.
4. Future Research: Comparative studies across multiple councils to identify best practices.

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