



## Role of grassroot leadership in promoting rural development in Tanzania; A case of Mtama district council

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### Abstract

The lowest part of local government leadership is at the grassroots. Nevertheless, most of the grassroots areas are characterised by poverty and underdevelopment which are associated with poor governance and leadership. The purpose of the study was to assess the role of grassroot leadership in promoting rural development in Mtama District council, Tanzania. The study adopted the case study design covering a sample size of 161 respondents drawn from a target population of 276 employees comprising District Executive Director, District Administrative Secretary, Ward councilors, Ward Executive Officers, Members of the Ward Development Committees, Village Chairpersons, Village Executive Officers, Members of the Village Councils and village members. The study used purposive and random sampling techniques to select village leaders based on position and community members. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, the study used correlation analysis to determine the relationship between independent and the dependent variable. The study revealed that governance practices, innovation and administrative leadership have significant influence on promotion of rural development in Mtama District, Tanzania. The governance practice had positive role in promoting rural development at coefficient value of .327\*\*; innovation had positive coefficient value of .201; while administrative role of leadership had positive and strong coefficient value of .405. Based on the study findings, the study concludes that grassroot leadership is very instrumental in promoting rural development in district councils in Tanzania. In order to improve the role of grassroots leadership in rural development, the study recommends that the Government should increase its efforts to improve grassroot leadership in areas of governance practices, innovation, and administrative systems in order to promote rural development. Further, local government authorities should improve on project supervision and promote social accountability mechanisms so as to improve cost-effectiveness of development in rural areas; since involving the citizens is likely to result in improved articulating development priorities, project planning and implementation, better monitoring of activities, and checks on how the budgets are spent.

**Keywords:** grassroot leadership, governance, innovation, administrative roles, rural development

### Introduction

In modern system of governance, leadership occurs in two main categories namely those working in central system and those at local government authorities. However, local government works closely with local administrative units known as grassroot. This is the lowest level of government which is intended to provide services in the most convenient way and be easily accessible to the people. Leaders in these small local administrative units are called grassroot leaders. According to Wilson (2018), grassroot leadership refers to people who are change agents and have a passion for implementing changes in their community. Moreover, grassroot leadership is associated with the capacity, commitment, and ability to mobilise, influence, and make decisions that stimulate development (Antonakis *et al.*, 2004).

In Africa the grassroot leadership has transformed majority of citizens in rural areas since grassroot leadership encourages people to have shared vision and goals of an organization, while challenging them to be innovative, problem solvers through coaching, mentoring, and by providing both challenge and support to the local people. However, grassroot environment and communities are dynamic which affects leadership actions and decisions which are necessary to the development of people and local areas (Chandan and Devi, 2014).

Tanzania is one of the countries that have experienced poor governance in local administrations and over 87% of land disputes in rural areas are caused by grassroot leadership. Also, it is reported that from 2010 to 2020, an estimated of 43% of laboratory rooms in schools has not been completed; among the reason being weakness of local leadership in mobilizing resources (Ministry of Education Tanzania, 2020). Furthermore, grassroot leaders have not done enough in managing public offices for citizen service satisfactions (REPOA, 2008).

According to Charles and Adlyne (2019), the achievement and success of local administration depends on the commitment and skills of grassroot leaders who promote socio-economic projects in local areas. This is because the available resources such as land, minerals, people, water sources, forestry, and wildlife cannot bring development if the grassroot leaders have poor planning and management capacity. Oni and Nchekwube (2014), found out that the factors which slow down social-economic development at grassroot include corruptions, irresponsibility, lack of creativity and innovations, inadequate skills and selfishness. Igbala *et al.* (2012), contend that insufficient citizen participation in decision making threatens development in local areas. Therefore, promoting rural development in district councils depends on the effectiveness of grassroot leadership. This indicates that the level of development in

rural areas depends on the quality of grassroots leadership (Charles and Adlyne, 2019).

**Statement of the problem**

Local areas in Tanzania are facing the challenge of stagnant economy which subjects them into extreme underdevelopment and poverty. For example in 2018 about 14 million people especially rural communities lived below the national poverty line of TZS 49,320 per adult equivalent per month and about 26 million lived below the \$1.90 per person per day as per international poverty line. The other challenges affecting rural communities include insufficient public services, and unsatisfactory infrastructure facilities (World Bank, 2018).

In Tanzania, underdevelopment in rural areas remains a major threat to decent human life especially in Mtama District Council. Nevertheless, citizens continue to experience the impact of administrative decentralization on participatory local government and service delivery. According to Larise *et al.* (2017), over 56% of rural community spends about 1-2 hours to access public services such as secondary schools, water, health, and public offices. Therefore, this study focused on the role of grassroots leadership in promoting rural development in Mtama District Council. The study focused on assessing the influence of grassroots leadership in promoting development projects in rural areas in Tanzania.

**Research purpose**

The main purpose of the study was to assess the role of grassroots leadership in promoting rural development in Mtama District Council, Tanzania. Specifically, the study sought to examine the practice of good governance, innovative approaches, and the administrative leadership roles in promoting rural development in Mtama District Council, Tanzania.

**Research methods**

The study adopted a case study design covering a sample size of 161 respondents drawn from a target population of 276 comprising district executive director, district administrative Secretary, ward councilors, ward executive officers, members of the ward development committees, village chairpersons, village executive officers, members of the village councils and village members. Primary data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Results and analysis**

**Role of governance practice in promoting rural development**

The study assessed the role of governance practices in promoting rural development. The study revealed that involvement of citizens in decision making process was above average with a mean score of 2.85, and the ability of members of the community to access the administrative services offered by grassroots leadership was rated at the mean score of 2.80. Also, the overall mean of governance practice was rated at 2.83.00; implying that citizens are involved in decision making process and are able to access administrative services offered by grassroots leadership. Further, the study conducted correlation analysis to establish the strength of the relationship between governance

practices and rural development. According to the study findings, governance practices has positive and significant influence on promotion of rural development at coefficient value of 0.327\*\* as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Correlation between Governance Practices and Rural Development

Correlation of governance Practice and Rural Development	Coefficient Value
	.327**
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).	

From these findings, it is clear that governance practices play important role in promoting rural development. The finding are supported with the response of one interviewee who said that, *“We always attend the village meeting even through the leaders usually just presents about what they have done and what they will do but they have never asked us about what we want to do something which made us feel like we are not important”*. The findings relate with those of Bellvera, *et al.* (2008), which note that the practice of good governance empowers citizens to access administrative services and to be participate effectively in decision making process.

**Role of innovation in promoting rural development**

According to the study results, all attributes of innovation had above average mean scores implying that innovation was instrumental in promoting rural development in Tanzania. The contention that grassroots leaders always innovate on projects and programs to promote rural development had the mean score of 2.84, while the involvement of other stakeholders in innovation activities in rural areas was rated at a mean score of 2.91. However, the overall mean on innovation in promoting rural development was rated at 2.90. This implies that innovation plays important role in rural development. This findings are supported by the opinion of one interviewee who said that, *“The government institutions have been encouraging local leaders to innovate social and economic projects in order to increase rural development and to assist the government to provide quality and affordable social services to all member of the community”*.

Further, the study conducted correlation analysis to determine the relationship between innovation and promotion of rural development in Tanzania. The results indicate that innovation had positive but weak relationship with promotion of rural development at coefficient value of 0.201\* as indicated in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Correlation between Innovation and Rural Development

Correlation of Innovation and Rural Development	Coefficient Value
	.201*
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).	

The findings are supported by a report of World Bank which notes that successful services for poor people emerge from institutional relationships in which the actors are accountable to each other (World Bank, 2004) [8].

**Influence of administrative leadership roles in promoting rural development**

The last objective was to assess the influence of administrative roles in promoting rural development in Tanzania. The findings indicate that grassroot leaders work effectively to manage public resources in rural areas with a mean score of 3.35; indicating high agreement level that grassroot leaders work effectively to manage public resources. Also, the absence of challenge in supervision of public services scored the mean of 3.07 indicating existence of a weakness in supervision of public services. The overall mean score on administrative role in promoting rural development was 3.21; implying that the administrative role of grassroot leadership played a significant role in promoting rural development in Tanzania. The findings are supported with the opinion of one of the respondents who said that, *“Our leaders are doing their best, we have seen a lot of development activities namely they built a school in our area so that our children don’t walk so far; also, they dug a well for our daily use”*.

Further, the study conducted correlation analysis to establish the strength of the relationship between administrative leadership and promotion of rural development in Tanzania. According to the findings, administrative role had positive and significant relationship with promotion of rural development with a coefficient value of 0.405\*\* as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Correlation between Administrative Role and Rural Development

Correlation of Administrative Role and Rural Development	Coefficient Value
	.405**
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).	

These findings relate with those of a study by Afuba (2017), which contends that local leaders are responsible to manage public resources and supervise all development projects in rural areas.

**Conclusions**

The study conclude that the development in the rural areas depends a lot on governance practice, innovation and administrative role even though there are some challenges need to be solved so that to increase rural development. Nevertheless, the study concluded that governance practice had positive and moderate relationship with promoting rural development. Also, innovation had positive and moderate relationship with rural development. Finally, the administrative role had positive and strong relationship with rural development. Among the three constructs of grassroot leadership, administrative role had the highest influence on promotion of rural development in Tanzania followed by governance practice and innovation in that order.

**Recommendations**

From the study findings, it is clear that grassroot leadership is very instrumental in promoting rural development. It is therefore, imperative that both national and local governments develop and implement programmes that focus on improving leadership capacity at the grassroots. The study recommends that the government should increase investment in improving governance practices, innovation capacity, and administrative roles of local leaders in order to

promote rural development. Specifically, aspects of innovation scored lowly meaning it has not been adequately embraced by grassroots leaders. Therefore, the study recommends that the government should develop a training programme for grassroots leaders to improve their innovative capacity. Further, the local government authorities should improve on supervision of rural development projects with assignment of specific roles and promote social accountability mechanisms as they can increase cost-effectiveness of development in rural areas, since involving the citizens is likely to result in improved planning and priorities, better monitoring of activities, and checks on how the budget is spent.

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