

Explaining the Performance of Decentralized Recruitment in Tanzania Local Government Authorities on Institutional Context Perspective

Wilfred Uronu Lameck

Wilfred Uronu Lameck is a lecturer in the school of Public Administration and Management of Mzumbe University

DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v5-i12/1948 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v5-i12/1948>

Abstract

Decentralized recruitment and selection has been advocated by many developing countries as an alternative means for increasing efficiency, effectiveness and fairness in the recruitment of local government personnel. Like others, in the past two decades, Tanzania government also engaged on local government reforms program which aimed at among other things increasing efficiency in the recruitment and management of local personnel through empowering local councils to recruit and discipline their own personnel. Contrary to the expectation, practically, the central government still retains the power to hire and fire local government staff due to poor performance of decentralized system. Although a theory predicts the positive effects of decentralization such as effectiveness, fairness and efficiency in recruitment and selection, these effects have not been realized. One of the arguments which has been advanced in the main stream literature concerning its failure is the existence of corruption and nepotism in the local council and lack of capacity of the local council to recruit the required number and quality of local staff. Nevertheless, other factors related to informal institutions which have impact on the quality of recruitment have received little attention. The objective of this article is to explicate these institutional factors which have impacts on the performance of decentralized recruitment and selection. In order to achieve this objective, I conducted qualitative research with Tabora Municipality in Tanzania as a case study design in which the research started with review of policy and guidelines. Then, the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with heads of department, other key officials and the councilors. Based on these findings, I argue that to better understand why decentralized recruitment fall short, we should study the entire institutional context because formal rules and procedure provide the guidelines but the existing informal social rules and values shape the way these guidelines are interpreted by the actors involved in recruitment and selection process.

Key words- Decentralization, Recruitment and Selection, Formal and Informal institutions

Introduction

One of the key assumptions of decentralization theory is that proximity between government and citizens increases the citizen's control on service delivery (Hope, 2001). This argument is in line with thinking of other developing countries which assume that local governments possess

local knowledge and information which puts them in good positions to design policies and programs and render services which are consistent with local needs and circumstances (Hays and Kearney, 2001; Hope, 2001). Similar argument is used to justify the decentralization of recruitment and selection function to local government with the assumption that local governments are disposed of information about local condition which makes them capable of recruiting their staff more efficiently and effectively (Coggburn, 2001; Njovu, 2013). Apart from that, it is assumed that local government authority is comfortable to work with people it hires itself rather than the people hired by central government because of variation in personality or working styles which can be created by staff hired by central government (Sicilly, 2009). In Tanzania, the decentralization of recruitment and selection is stated in the policy paper of 1998 which aimed at delinking local government staff from their respective ministries and increasing the power of local councils to manage their local staff which includes recruiting their own personnel who are accountable to local council and compatible with local environment.

Historically, in Tanzania the institutions for carrying out recruitment and selection function of local staff have been changing from centralized to decentralized institutions. This alternation can be traced back from the time of independence when the government adopted centralized recruitment system through man power allocation committee which allocated graduates from universities and schools to different regions of the country (Shangali, 2009). Contrary to the expectation, the centralized man power allocation committee did not deliver the expected results. Following its poor performance, in 1982 the recruitment function was shifted to local government service commission which was established in 1982 for the purpose of recruiting local civil servants (Munga et al. 2009). The Commission was responsible for the appointments, transfers, promotions, termination of appointments, dismissal and disciplinary control of personnel within local government office (URT, 1982). Nevertheless, the actual reform was not until 1996 when the government adopted decentralization by devolution which involved decentralization of recruitment and selection of local staff to local government in order to increase autonomy in managing their administrative personnel and accountability of local staff to local councils (URT, 1996). In these reforms, the councils were expected to be empowered as the appointing authorities and employers for local government personnel. This power was also expected to be extended to employment of council's director and the departmental heads while conferring the power to recruit lower cadre staff to council director with the assistance of heads of departments (URT, 1998).

Despite the recent reforms which introduced decentralization by devolution of recruitment of local personnel, the expected results have not been realized. The government is still in a state of dilemma and confusion. While some policies insist on decentralization, others insist on centralization. An example is local government reform program II which was introduced in 2009 with the objective of strengthening decentralization but some other government policies and laws such as the presidential establishment circular of 2006 and the amended Public Service Act of 2007 insisted on centralization. The move to centralization has been compounded by the establishment and empowerment of Public Service Recruitment Secretariat which is the central government agency to recruit local staff and shifting some responsibility of recruitment of local staff to the ministry of health and that of education (URT, 2007).

The numbers reasons have been given in favor of centralization and criticizing the performance of decentralized system. One of the arguments which has been advanced regarding poor performance of decentralized recruitment is the existence of corruption and nepotism which obstructs the effectiveness of decentralized recruitment process. Second is inequity in human resources distribution among rural and urban, and between rich and poor local governments which is caused by competition between local government authorities (Wang et al. 2002; URT, 2012) A third argument is lack of incentives, accountability mechanism and lack of capacity of local actors. This last argument has been supported by the evidence of recruitment in the health sector where the attraction and retention of doctors is still a problem. In this regard, the competition on contract for more security and remuneration has caused inequity in staffing between rich and poor local governments (Lodenstein & Deo, 2011).

Although, there is a lot of empirical literature describing the failure of decentralized recruitment in Tanzania such as Kinemo et al (2015) and Njovu (2009), most of it focus on describing the advantages and disadvantages of the two systems and little attention has been given to the factors which explain its failure. Although the literature points out these causal factors, it does not show how institutional arrangements both formal and informal institutions shape and influence the process of recruitment and selection and its output in local government. The empirical literature from elsewhere shows that the performance of decentralized recruitment is not only determined by formal rule but also norm of conduct or informal rule outside the formal system (Polidano et al 1998; Manning,2001; Sevic 2001: 63) while others shows that decentralization is associated with nepotism and corruption which deviate from formal rules (Bossert et al. 2000; Njovu(2013) This raises a question on how recruitment and selection perform and what roles do formal and informal institutions play?

The concept of decentralization

Decentralization is a concept which has received prominent attention to development literature. Some of authors define it as a process of state reforms composed of a set of public policies which transfer responsibilities, resources or authority from higher to the lower level of government (Falleti, 2005) while others define it as a transfer of authority, responsibility and accountability from central to local government(Barnett et al. 1997). In this article, I followed this second definition because the focal point of the article is the transfer of authority and responsibility from central government to local government. The theory of decentralization assume that proximity between government and citizen's increases access to local information and local context which inform the service providers about the needs of local population (Smoke, 2003; Hasenan, 2010). This is further expected to increase the ability of local government to be more responsive, transparent and accountable to local population (Barnett et al. 1997) while others argue that decentralization increases innovations, creativity to local problems (Rondinelli & Cheema, 1983)

With respect to recruitment, one of the professed goal of decentralized recruitment is to increase effectiveness through increasing the fit between qualification of selected candidates and job requirements of the local government staff. This can further be achieved in the decentralized setting through increasing the attributes of the local staff and the daily job

contexts, improving standard recruitment procedures by using local opportunities and timely filling of the vacant positions (Coggburn, 2001). Second goal is to increase the efficiency through reducing the cost of recruitment process by using simple procedures, little time and resources (Coggburn, 2005; Njovu, 2013) and fairness through merit based recruitment (Ishii et al forthcoming; Sevic, 2001: 63, Polidano et al 1998; Shangali, 2009 & Kinemo et al. 2015).

Decentralized recruitment and the institutional context

The theory of institutionalism shows that the institutions demarcate the boundaries of behavior by defining roles, obligations and prohibition. They define the course of behavior which is appropriate, permitted or forbidden in certain circumstances but also the institutions give meaning to human action and influence the perception, preferences and strategies of the actors (Hendriks, 1996; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) In this article, the institutional context includes both formal and informal institutions. The formal institution implies formal public administration which provides for the rules and guidelines for recruitment and selection while informal institutions includes informal social rules and norms of conduct which guide the behavior of officials and politicians involved in the process of recruitment and selection of local government staff. In Tanzania, the main formal legislation governing recruitment and selection of local personnel includes the Public Service Act no 8 of 2002 as amended by Act No. 18 of 2007. This legislation empowers the president to appoint city directors while the minister responsible for local government is empowered to appoint town council, municipal council and district council directors as well as their heads of departments. Other legislation governing recruitment includes; the Public Service Regulations of 2003, Public Service Scheme of 2003 and the standing order of 2009.

The mainstream empirical literature from Tanzania and elsewhere shows that although the actors are supposed to abide to these formal rules and procedures but in practice, they do not often do. An example is the recruitment process in Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda and Philippines local governments which shows that the outcome of recruitment process in local government is influenced by informal social rules which includes socio cultural factors and the ethnicity differences. Apart from that, the process is influenced by nepotism, tribalism and corruption which consequently affect the quality of recruitment (Kinemo et al 2015; Bossert et al. 2000)

Furthermore, other authors argue that the missing ingredient in the performance of decentralized system is not formal rules and regulations but the norms of conduct (Polidano et al. 1998) while others found that the existence of corruption distorts the merit based recruitment (world bank 1997). The same argument is compounded by Ishii et al (forthcoming) in their research of decentralized recruitment and selection in Philippines and Thailand who found that formal regulations for the recruitment of regular workers were not followed by recruitment board of local government and the final decision was made by chief executive and the number one applicant was not hired. This has also been proved by the civil service models which shows that the informal rules outside the civil service influence the process within a service in small states than big states (Sevic 2001: 63). This implies that in order to understand why decentralized recruitment fall short, we must consider the entire institutional context which include both formal and informal institutions.

The design of the research

In this article, we used qualitative approach with a single case study design. The objective of applying this design was to explore how the decentralized recruitment function in Tabora municipality and why it does not result to intended outcome. In order to discover this complex of factors explaining the failure of decentralization, the case study was sought appropriate (Yin, 2009). The process of data collection began with documentary review with policy documents to get acquainted with guidelines and formal procedures for recruitment. Then the in-depth interview was conducted with a total of 20 different policy officers and four councilors responsible for hiring. This includes the municipal director, the municipal human resource officer and other senior officers from Accounting, Healthy, Legal, Secondary education, community development, Agriculture and Livestock development and Human resources department while the focus group discussion was conducted with junior staff from different department hired in the past five years. The focus group discussion participants included in the research were 8 staff from the education department; 9 staff from community development and human resources department and 9 staff from the agricultural and livestock and healthy department. The data from interview and focus group discussion were analyzed both inductively and deductively by using analytical frame in which different themes were developed and the data were fitted with respective themes

Tabora municipal council – general features

Tabora Municipality is one of the six districts of Tabora Region which acquired a Township council status in 1958 and raised to municipal council in July 1988. The Municipality borders Uyui district in the east, north and west and Sikonge district in the south and is 800 km west of Dar es salaam, 320 km east of Kigoma port on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, and 360 km south of Mwanza city. The climate of the district is generally hot with the temperature ranging between 20 to 32 degrees with relative humidity ranging from 25 to 65% and the rain fall ranges from 650 to 850 mm per annum. The Municipality is projected to have a total population of 197,825 people according to the 2012 census and a growth rate of 2.36 annually. The main economic activity in the municipality is agriculture. The main crops that the farmers grow are maize, rice, groundnuts, beans, cowpeas, cassava, sweat potatoes and tobacco. The municipality is also famous for beekeeping and forest timbering activities. Within the municipality, there are various commercial activities varying in size and encompassing various retail activities such as groceries, stationery, hotel, bars, guest houses, restaurants, cinema and pharmacies. The commercial activities are mainly concentrated in the central area, while the rural areas are largely poorly serviced. In summary, the low incomes of the population, low productivity of land and the existence of poor infrastructure influence the low health quality of the population and their access to health services. Administratively, the municipality is divided into 25 wards and politically it is led by the local council which is the highest decision making authority elected every after five years. The decision making in the council is processed by 13 departments which include: health, finance, economic planning and trade, secondary education, primary education, agriculture, livestock and cooperatives, community

development, works, town planning and environment, administration and personnel (TMC Report, 2015).

Decentralized recruitment procedures in TMC

In the beginning of the recent decentralization reforms, the recruitment in Tabora Municipality was conducted by recruitment boards which was formed by local government authority under Public Service Act of 2002 as amended in 2007 and Public Service Regulation 2003. The boards were comprised of a chairperson appointed from the district, one district councilor as a member, a district administrative secretary or his representatives, a local government officer from regional secretariat and representative from Public Service Commission (Munga, 2009).

In case of a vacancy, the district employment board was informed by district executive director. After notifying the board, the district executive director had to advertise the posts in the local and national media and prepare a shortlist of qualified applicants through district human resources officers. Thereafter, the boards were responsible for interview of the shortlisted candidates. After the interview, the boards decided on the names of the best candidates who were taken to the district planning and finance committee for endorsement and finally a letter of appointment was given to the candidates with copies to the public service commission, the civil service department and ministry of finance (Munga et al. 2009).

The current recruitment procedures in Tabora Municipality

Recently, like other district councils, the recruitment process in Tabora municipality is formally regulated by Public Service Act no 18 of 2007 and the Standing Order of 2009. These regulations specify a number of procedures to be followed by the appointing authorities. First of all, in case of a vacancy of which the appointing authority is a chief executive officer, the chief executive officer concerned has to determine whether the vacancy can be filled by promotion of a public servant serving in a ministry, independent department, regions or local government authority in which the vacancy exists, or the vacancy should be filled by transfer from another organization within the public service or can be filled by inviting applications for the post through advertising the vacancy within or outside the United Republic of Tanzania (URT, 2009)

Second, the applications for the job have to be invited through public advertisement within the United Republic in such manner as may be determined from time to time, provided that such advertisement is not discriminative. All expenses for local or outside the countries advertisements in respect of vacancies in the public service have to be met by the advertising authority.

Third, a public servant who wishes to apply for an advertised post should submit his application to Public Service Recruitment Secretariat or a ministry responsible through the normal official channels and the forwarding officer has to add his recommendations regarding the suitability of the applicant for the post and any other comments which, in his view, might be useful to the appropriate recruitment authority in reaching decision on the application.

Eventually, the public service recruitment secretariat has to forward the findings to the chief executive officer concerned and a copy to the permanent secretary and the public service

commission. Upon receipt of such findings, the chief executive officer has to make appointment basing on the recommendations of the secretariat and the report of such appointments should be submitted to the Permanent Secretary, and copies to the public service commission and the Public Service recruitment Secretariat. Nevertheless, following the amendment of public service act in 2013, the recruitment of lower cadre staff like drivers, secretaries and village executive officers has been decentralized to local government authorities themselves.

Formal roles and the actual practice of recruitment process

The actual recruitment process involves the number of institutions both at the central government and local government level. At the central government level, the recruitment involves two institutions: the public service recruitment secretariat and the ministry of education and health. The role of the secretariat is to search for various professionals with special skills and prepare a database of such professionals for ease of recruitment. Second, the secretariat has a role to register graduates and professionals for purposes of ease of reference and filling vacant posts. Third, it has a role to advertise vacant posts occurring in the public service. Fourth, it has a role to engage appropriate experts for purposes of conducting interviews. Fifth, it has a role to advise employers on various matters relating to recruitment while sixth is to do any other act or thing which may be directed by the Minister.

In performing these duties, the secretariat provides technical advice to all government institutions concerning recruitment. With respect to Tabora municipality, the secretariat uses its representative to advice the council in every recruitment practice conducted. Second, the secretariat recruit for the council the higher level employee who hold degree and above by advertising, short listing, interviewing and selection (interviews- municipal human resource officers and heads of departments)

In doing this, the secretariat cooperation with other stakeholders. The first is the President's Office, Public Service Management (PO- PSM) who is responsible for controlling personnel emolument through approval and offering of permits. Therefore, if Tabora Municipal council sees there is a need for employment they ask for permit from this office.

The second stakeholder is the President Office Public Service Commission (PO-PSC). The Commission is responsible to prepare and distribute guidelines to appointing authorities in order to ensure that the appointing authorities in the Public Service adheres to the prescribed rules, regulations and procedures governing the merit based recruitment and selection (interviews –municipal director).

The third is the district employment committee board (district employment boards) which is comprised of a chairperson, a representative from president's office civil service commission , district human resource officer, district administrative secretary of the respective district representing central government, local government officer from regional secretariat of a particular local government authority and one councilor representing other councilors of that local government authority.

The fourth is the ministry of education and vocational training, the ministry of health and social welfare and prime minister office. These ministries in collaboration with prime minister office do employ teachers and healthy workers including nurses, laboratory technicians and doctors.

In doing this , the ministries have to cooperate with local government in the recruitment process. For example, the Tabora municipality does identify the vacant posts; prepare the budget and send to these ministries while the ministries do the actual recruitment of teachers and healthy workers

Nevertheless, the research shows that recruitment by secretariat is not effective because some employees like nurses in Tabora Municipality who are centrally hired and allocated to the Municipality leave after reporting and scanning the environment because they dislike it while others do not report to their working stations at all (interview with municipal human resources officer, focus group discussion with health staff and teachers).

” a good example last year the public service recruitment secretariat sent to us an employee of a position of system analysts , he only report and left until to today the position is vacant ”(interview - municipal human resources officer)

Furthermore, the research shows that as a results of this type of recruitment, some staff lose the working morale. For example in Tabora municipality, after some teachers being centrally allocated to schools where there is no electricity like *mtakuja* secondary school they become annoyed and lost the spirit of hard working. Consequently, they keep on working simply because they have no elsewhere to go. Some teachers and nurses of Mtakuja dispensary and primary school who were interviewed showed that they were unhappy about the working environment. This implies that the effectiveness of recruitment process is not realized because the staffs hired by central government secretariat do not stay longer with the council (focus group discussion with teachers and nurses). These findings agree with the research conducted by Njovu (2009) and Kinemo et al (2015) which show that the staff hired by central government do not find the local working environment suitable for them.

Moreover, the research shows that centralized recruitment takes long time to get the required employee to fill the vacant posts because of long procedures for verification of employment permit which includes conducting the whole procedure of recruitment like advertising, short listing ,interviewing and others. For example, asking for a permit for recruitment and the actual employment takes the minimum of six months to one year. The issue of prolonged procedures limits the efficiency of recruitment process because of the transaction cost involved between different institutions. These findings are also consistent with the research by Munga et al (2009) and Kinemo et al (2015) conducted in Chamwino district council which shows that the recruitment process by Public Service Recruitment Secretariat is inefficient because of long process for filling the vacant post.

The actual recruitment by the local council itself

With respect to recruitment by the local council, the research shows that the municipality is empowered to recruit lower cadre staff through its employment committees. The staff in this category includes drivers, secretaries and village executive officers. In doing this, the municipality must meet some conditions which include application of permit for employment

from Presidents' Office Public Service Management. After receiving the permit, the human resources officer advertises the post on the newspaper. The candidates who show the interest and apply for a post are short listed and those who qualify are invited for interview. The invitation for interview is done through newspaper or sometimes through their phones. Then, the questions for interview are prepared according to cadre. Although these types of staff are hired by local government itself, it also takes longer because they have to ask for the permit from central government. For example it takes three to six months to get the permit. Sometimes, in the actual selection, the councilors do not follow the procedure due to corruption and nepotism. They intervene and influence the board to change the decision and employ the candidate of their interest. Although there is formal recruitment board, informally it is the councilors who decided on who to recruit.

The best applicant according to interview is picked always but sometimes we get influence of councilor to employ people from their local areas (interviews-Human resources officer)

Moreover, although the research shows that proper consideration regarding skills, competences and traits takes place, there is ample evidence from junior staff that the process is dominated with corruption and nepotism which results to employment of unqualified staffs through corruption network associated with political influence of the councilors. Although there is recruitment board, the councilors influence the board to make decision based on their interest such as recruiting their relatives or their voters even if they do not qualify for a job (interviews – council human resources officer and board members). Due to the influence of the councilors, the committee responsible select someone in advance and pretend to follow the procedure by advertising and calling candidates for interviews but later the results of those who are called for interviewed are not revealed (interviews – Municipal legal officer and human resources officer).

' if the committee has received the corruption it means they have decided on who to employ. The procedure for advertise and call for interview becomes a formality (Interviews-human resources officer).

These findings are also consistent with the research conducted by Kinemo et al (2015) Munga (2009) and Njovu (2009) which shows that the decentralized recruitment is embedded with nepotism and corruption network by local power holders. These local power holders such as the councilors influence the recruitment boards to hire their relatives.

On the other hand, decentralized recruitment has an advantage of retaining the employees. The research shows that the workers who are recruited under decentralization in the municipality stay longer but those who are centrally allocated ask for transfer within a short time because many of them are not used with the local environment. Second, the research shows that decentralized recruitment increases accountability of employees to municipality because it breaks the monopoly of power at the national level by allowing a local council to recruit and make staff accountable to them. Third, the research shows that decentralized recruitment takes short time. For example, after getting a permit to employ, they only follow the procedure of employment which takes the maximum of three months. Fourth, the

decentralized recruitment raises the morale of working. For example applicants who are recruited by municipality have proved to be acquainted with municipal environment and therefore comfortable to work with the municipality.

Comparatively, the centralized recruitment is fair and transparent as compared to decentralized recruitment because under centralization no one knows the employee physically. Only the ability to answer interview questions and his proper qualification can give one the work because all applicants of the job are kept under one pool and the best applicant is selected according to qualification but in decentralized setting, the municipality is able to scrutinize the working experience and academic background of the employees

Furthermore, under centralization, each and everything is open and detailed from the results of oral to written interviews which does not happen under decentralized procedure where even the outcomes of interviews including those who failed are not released (interviews-Municipal director, human resources officer and Accountant)

Second, under centralization, the employees are recruited on merit because proper consideration is given to appropriate skills, competences and traits. This means that if someone is employed as an accountant, he or she has skills and competence which every accountant is supposed to have. (interviews –Municipal director)

Third , the findings suggest that under centralization there is little corruption because there are no such close contacts with applicants which results to influence to solicit for bribe. Even those working in the Secretariat fear to ask for it but in decentralized setting this is a common practice (interview- community development officer)

Therefore, different types of recruitment are performed in Tabora Municipality. All of these recruitment procedures are guided by laws and guidelines and they involve different institutions. The different types of recruitment have pros and coins but overall the decentralized recruitment seems to be more preferred because of its benefits which outweigh the benefits of centralization. Nevertheless , the factors which explain the performance of both types of recruitment have not been fully explored. The research shows that the way the recruitment is conducted and the way different actors cooperate and interact can partially be explained by informal institutions in place.

Conclusion and analysis

The research concludes that in Tabora Municipality the recruitment process is highly centralized. Although recently the power to recruit lower cadres has been decentralized to local government, the local government has to ask for recruitment permit from central government. Overall, both types of recruitment present some pros and cons but what explains the performance of each type is the existence of both formal and informal institutions. In Tabora Municipality, the actual recruitment of local staff is performed through cooperation of different institutions and actors from central government and local government who are regulated by formal institutions. The formal institutions provide a framework of rules and procedures prescribing how the recruitment should be carried out. This includes the Public Service Act, the Public Service Regulations and standing order which specify the procedures for recruitment. Each of these actors responsible for recruitment are required to abide to these procedures. The

procedures define the roles of different institutions in the process of recruitment. Nevertheless, the actual practice shows that up to a certain point the actors deviate from the formal rules. This implies that, the operation of actors is up to certain point determined by the informal network. The local politicians and officials who are involved in the recruitment process use this network to make sure that their relatives are employed by the board. Therefore, to better understand how decentralized recruitment function, we must take into account the existence of both formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions because they prescribe the rules and procedures and the informal institutions because they prescribe the way the actors involved interpret the formal institutions.

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