

Systematic Review: The Role of Leadership in Implementing Council Strategic Plans in Tanzanian Local Government Authorities

مراجعة منهجية: دور القيادة في تنفيذ الخطط الاستراتيجية للمجالس في السلطات المحلية التنزانية

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Abstract

Strategic plan implementation failures persist in 42% of Tanzanian Local Government Authorities (LGAs), despite decentralization reforms. This systematic review (PRISMA 2020) analyzes 28 studies (2010-2024) to evaluate leadership's role in bridging this gap. Findings reveal transformational leadership (vision-setting, staff empowerment) drives 70-85% target achievement in high-performing councils (e.g., Dodoma, Arusha), while laissez-faire approaches correlate with 20-35% success. Stakeholder engagement (quarterly community forums) and adaptive resource mobilization (PPPs, crisis-redirected funds) emerge as critical practices, boosting outcomes by 72% and 68% respectively. However, contextual barriers significantly constrain effectiveness: political interference (30% patronage appointments) and rural capacity gaps reduce impact, while female leaders (15% of directors) achieve 25% higher education/health targets despite sociocultural resistance. The review concludes that leadership is the linchpin of implementation success, but systemic reforms are essential. Key recommendations include: (1) depoliticizing director appointments through independent panels, (2) establishing national leadership academies for transformational skills training, and (3) implementing gender quotas (30%) with mentorship programs. These evidence-based interventions can align Tanzania's decentralization goals with on-ground development outcomes.

Keywords: Strategic planning, Local government, Leadership, Implementation, Tanzania, Decentralization

الملخص:

تستمر إخفاقات تنفيذ الخطط الاستراتيجية في 42 % من السلطات المحلية التنزانية (LGAs)، على الرغم من إصلاحات اللامركزية. تهدف هذه الدراسة المنهجية وفق معايير (PRISMA 2020) إلى تحليل 28 دراسة نشرت بين سنتي 2010 و2024 لتقييم دور القيادة في سد هذه الفجوة. تكشف النتائج أن القيادة التحويلية – القائمة على وضع الرؤية وتمكين الموظفين – تساهم في تحقيق الأهداف بنسبة 70 إلى 85 % في المجالس ذات الأداء العالي (مثل دودوما وأروشا)، بينما ترتبط القيادة المتساهلة بنسب نجاح لا تتجاوز 20 إلى 35 %.

كما تبرز مشاركة أصحاب المصالح من خلال المنتديات المجتمعية الفصلية (والتعبئة التكميلية للموارد) عبر الشراكات بين القطاعين العام

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والخاص وتحويل الأموال أثناء الأزمات كممارسات حاسمة، إذ تحسن النتائج بنسبة 72% و 68% على التوالي. ومع ذلك، تقيد العوائق السياقية فعالية القيادة بدرجة كبيرة؛ إذ يؤدي التدخل السياسي بنسبة 30% من التعيينات القائمة على المحسوبية ونقص القدرات في المناطق الريفية إلى خفض الأثر الإيجابي، بينما تحقق القيادات النسائية اللائمي يشغلن 15% من مناصب المديرين أداء أعلى بنسبة 25% في قطاعات التعليم والصحة رغم المقاومة الثقافية والاجتماعية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن القيادة تشكل حجر الزاوية لنجاح التنفيذ، إلا أن الإصلاحات الهيكلية تظل ضرورية. وتشمل التوصيات الرئيسة ما يلي:

إلغاء التسييس في تعيين المديرين عبر لجان مستقلة،
إنشاء أكاديميات وطنية للقيادة لتدريب القيادات على المهارات التحويلية،
تخصيص حصة 30% للفئة النسوية تكون مصحوبة ببرامج توجيه ومراقبة مهنية.
إن تطبيق هذه المقترحات المستندة إلى الأدلة يمكن أن يحقق التوافق بين أهداف اللامركزية في تنزانيا ونتائج التنمية على أرض الواقع.
الكلمات المفتاحية: التخطيط الاستراتيجي، الحكومة المحلية، القيادة، التنفيذ، تنزانيا، اللامركزية.

1. Introduction

Tanzania's local government authorities (LGAs) operate under a decentralized framework guided by the Local Government Authorities Act (1982) and National Five-Year Development Plans. Strategic plans (3–5 years) are mandated to align local priorities with national goals (URT, 2022). However, persistent gaps in implementation—such as stalled infrastructure projects, underutilized budgets, and unmet service delivery targets—highlight leadership as a critical determinant of success (Mushi, 2023).

Globally, effective leadership is recognized as a critical catalyst for translating strategic plans into tangible outcomes in public institutions. Strategic planning—a cornerstone of modern governance—enables organizations to align resources with long-term priorities, yet studies consistently reveal that 60-70% of strategic plans fail due to poor implementation, not flawed design (Bryson, 2018). Leadership gaps, including weak accountability mechanisms, resistance to change, and misaligned incentives, frequently undermine execution. The OECD (2021) emphasizes that adaptive leadership styles fostering collaboration, innovation, and stakeholder engagement are pivotal for bridging the "implementation gap" in complex public sectors.

In Africa, decentralization reforms since the 1990s have positioned local governments as primary drivers of service delivery and development. However, strategic plan implementation remains inconsistent due to leadership deficits exacerbated by political volatility, resource constraints, and capacity shortages. A study of 15 Sub-Saharan African countries found that only 35% of local councils achieved >50% of their strategic targets, attributing failures to leadership practices rather than funding (UNECA, 2023). Transformational leadership—emphasizing vision-setting and staff empowerment—has shown promise in contexts like Rwanda and Ghana but is often hampered by patronage systems and bureaucratic inertia (Adei & Ohemeng, 2022).

Within Tanzania, local government authorities (LGAs) operate under a decentralized framework guided by the *Local Government Act (1982)* and *National Five-Year Development Plans (FYDP)*. Councils develop 3-5-year strategic plans to advance national goals in health, education, and infrastructure. Yet, persistent implementation gaps exist: 42% of councils fail to achieve >60% of plan targets (PO-RALG, 2023), with leadership deficiencies cited as a primary bottleneck. Challenges include frequent leadership turnover (average tenure: 2.3 years), political interference in technical decision-making, and inadequate strategic management skills among council directors (Mushi, 2023). This review examines how leadership practices shape the execution of strategic plans in Tanzanian LGAs to inform evidence-based reforms.

Problem Statement

Despite strategic planning being a globally recognized tool for effective governance, studies indicate that 60–70% of strategic plans fail due to implementation gaps rooted in leadership deficiencies, including weak accountability systems and resistance to change (Bryson, 2018; OECD, 2021). In Africa’s decentralized governance systems, these challenges are amplified by political volatility and capacity constraints, with only 35% of local councils achieving >50% of strategic targets due to leadership deficits (UNECA, 2023; Adei & Ohemeng, 2022). In Tanzania specifically, despite operating under a robust decentralized framework (*Local Government Act, 1982*), **42% of councils fail to achieve >60% of strategic plan targets** (PO-RALG, 2023). While existing research identifies resource shortages and policy misalignments as contributing factors, the *role of leadership practices* such as adaptive decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and political navigation remains an underexplored determinant of implementation success. This gap is critical given Tanzania’s documented challenges of frequent leadership turnover (avg. 2.3 years), politicization of technical roles, and insufficient strategic management skills among council directors (Mushi, 2023). Consequently, this systematic review addresses the question: *How do leadership styles, competencies, and contextual practices influence the implementation of strategic plans in Tanzanian local government authorities?*

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Anchoring Leadership in Governance

Leadership’s role in strategic implementation is theorized through three interconnected lenses. Transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) posits that leaders who inspire vision, foster innovation, and empower subordinates drive successful plan execution—particularly relevant in resource-constrained Tanzanian LGAs requiring adaptive solutions. Complementarily, contingency theory (Fiedler, 1964) underscores that leadership effectiveness depends on contextual factors (e.g., political stability, resource availability), explaining why uniform approaches fail across Tanzania’s diverse councils. Finally, complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2007) frames implementation as a dynamic system where leaders must balance bureaucratic control (administrative leadership) with community-driven adaptation (adaptive leadership). Together, these theories provide a scaffold to analyze how leadership styles navigate Tanzania’s decentralized governance ecosystem.

2. 2. Empirical Review: Global and Regional Evidence

Empirical studies consistently correlate leadership practices with strategic plan outcomes. Globally, transformational leadership improves implementation success by 30–50% in public sectors by fostering staff commitment and stakeholder collaboration (Fernandez et al., 2020). In Africa, evidence from Rwanda and Ghana reveals that councils with leaders trained in participatory decision-making achieved 65% higher project completion rates (Adei, 2021). However, political interference in Nigeria and Kenya undermined leadership autonomy, causing 40% of strategic initiatives to stall (Onyango, 2022). Tanzanian studies echo these patterns: Mwaipopo (2023) found that councils practicing inclusive leadership met 78% of health/education targets, while those with frequent leadership turnover (due to politicization) achieved <50% (PO-RALG, 2023).

2. 3. Empirical Gaps in the Tanzanian Context

Despite robust global and regional evidence, critical gaps persist in Tanzania’s literature. First, studies focus predominantly on technical capacities (e.g., budgeting skills) or structural barriers (e.g., funding shortages), neglecting how leadership practices—such as conflict mediation or community persuasion—navigate these constraints (Sheikh, 2022). Second, while gender-inclusive leadership correlates with improved service delivery (Kavishe, 2021), little is known about how female leaders overcome patriarchal resistance in rural Tanzanian councils. Third, most research adopts quantitative metrics (e.g., project completion rates), overlooking qualitative insights into leadership improvisation in crises (e.g., COVID-19, climate shocks). This review addresses these gaps by synthesizing fragmented evidence on leadership agency in Tanzania’s implementation landscape.

2. 4. Conceptual Framework: Integrating Theory and Evidence

Drawing from theoretical and empirical insights, this review employs the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1. Leadership practices (independent variables)—categorized as vision-setting (e.g., aligning plans with community needs), coalition-building (e.g., engaging NGOs/communities), and adaptive management (e.g., revising tactics amid shocks)—directly influence strategic implementation outcomes (dependent variable). Contextual factors (moderating variables)—including political interference, fiscal decentralization depth, and staff competency—amplify or constrain leadership efficacy. For example, skilled leaders in highly politicized councils may still fail if patronage overrides merit-based decisions (Lupala, 2020). This framework enables systematic analysis of how leadership variables interact with Tanzania’s unique governance ecology.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables	Moderating Variables	Dependent Variable
Leadership Practices:	Contextual Factors:	Strategic Plan
Vision-setting	Political interference	Implementation:
Coalition-building	Fiscal autonomy	Project completion
Adaptive management	Staff competency	Budget utilization
Institutional culture	Service delivery	

2. 5. Synthesis: Toward an Integrated Perspective

The interplay of theory, evidence, and conceptual modeling reveals leadership not as a standalone fix but as a catalytic force moderated by institutional realities. Transformational leadership's emphasis on empowerment (Bass, 1994) aligns with Tanzania's community-centric governance ethos but requires contingency-aware adaptations (e.g., hybrid styles blending directive and participatory approaches in volatile councils). Empirically, while coalition-building drives success in urban Tanzania (e.g., Dar es Salaam's PPP partnerships), rural leaders may prioritize adaptive management to overcome infrastructure gaps (Ngowi, 2023). This review's conceptual framework thus bridges abstract theories and on-ground evidence, offering a nuanced lens to dissect leadership's role in Tanzania's strategic implementation challenges.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a **systematic review design** following the *PRISMA 2020 framework* (Page et al., 2021) to synthesize evidence on leadership's role in strategic plan implementation within Tanzanian Local Government Authorities (LGAs). The design enables transparent identification, selection, and critical appraisal of diverse evidence sources while minimizing bias.

3.2. Search Strategy

A three-phase search protocol was implemented:

1. Database Search:

- *International*: Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR
- *African/Tanzanian-specific*: HINARI, African Journals Online (AJOL), TZED (Tanzania Education Database)
- *Government portals*: PO-RALG, PMO-RALG, Tanzania National Library

2. Grey Literature:

- Theses from Tanzanian universities (UDSM, IRDP, Mzumbe)
- Donor reports (World Bank, UNDP, UNCDF)
- Council strategic plans (2010–2024)

3.3. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Timeframe	2010–2024 (Post-LG Reform Period)	Pre-2010 studies
Geography	Tanzanian LGAs (Urban/Rural Councils)	Non-Tanzanian contexts
Focus	Leadership role in strategic plan implementation	Studies on policy design/funding only
Evidence Type	Peer-reviewed articles, theses, government reports	Editorials, non-empirical commentaries
Language	English, Swahili	Other languages

3.4. Study Screening & Selection

A PRISMA-compliant four-stage process:

1. **Initial Identification**: 127 records from databases/grey literature
2. **Deduplication**: 98 records after removing duplicates (EndNote X20)

3. **Title/Abstract Screening:** 52 records retained
4. **Full-Text Appraisal:** 28 studies met inclusion criteria (see *Figure 1*)
Reasons for exclusion:
 - Irrelevant focus (n=15)
 - Weak methodology (n=6)
 - Inaccessible full text (n=3)

3.5. Quality Appraisal

Studies were evaluated using the **CASP Qualitative Checklist** and **JBICritical Appraisal Tool** for mixed-methods studies. Key criteria included:

- Methodological rigor
 - Contextual relevance
 - Data triangulation
 - Conflict of interest disclosure
- *Low-quality studies (score <5/10) were excluded (n=3).*

3.6. Data Extraction & Synthesis

1. Extraction Template:

1. Synthesis Method:

- **Thematic Analysis:** NVivo 14 software for coding leadership practices (e.g., "vision-setting," "stakeholder engagement")
- **Contextual Analysis:** Comparative case studies of high/low-performing councils
- **Framework Analysis:** Mapping findings to the conceptual framework (Figure 1)

3.7. Conceptual Framework Integration

Extracted data was analyzed through the lens of the study's conceptual framework (*Fig. 1*):

- **Independent Variables:** Leadership practices (vision-setting, coalition-building, adaptive management)
- **Dependent Variable:** Strategic plan implementation success (measured by project completion, budget utilization)
- **Moderating Variables:** Political interference, fiscal autonomy, staff competency

3.8. Ethical Considerations

- All data sourced from publicly available materials
- Proper attribution to original authors
- Anonymization of council names where sensitive political critiques exist

Tables & Figures

Table 1: Included Study Characteristics (n=28)

Study Type	Urban Councils	Rural Councils	Leadership Focus
Peer-reviewed (n=12)	8	4	Transformational (n=7)
Theses (n=9)	5	4	Transactional (n=3)
Govt. Reports (n=7)	5	2	Adaptive (n=2)

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

Key Methodological Strengths

1. **Reproducibility:** Transparent PRISMA protocol with search syntax
2. **Contextual Rigor:** Inclusion of Swahili sources and grey literature
3. **Analytical Depth:** Integration of conceptual framework with thematic synthesis
4. **Quality Control:** Critical appraisal using validated tools (CASP/JBI)

4. Findings Synthesis

4.1. Leadership Styles & Implementation Outcomes

Style	Performance Impact	Evidence from Tanzanian LGAs
Transformational	High: 70–85% target achievement in urban councils	- Dodoma MC: Visionary leadership drove 85% completion of water/school projects (Kavishe, 2021) - Arusha CC: Staff empowerment reduced project delays by 40% (Ngowi, 2023)
Transactional	Moderate: 50–65% target achievement; rule-bound rigidity	- Mwanza DC: Sanitation projects delayed due to bureaucratic loan approvals (Lupala, 2020) - Mbeya RC: Audit compliance improved but stifled innovation (PO-RALG, 2022)
Laissez-faire	Low: 20–35% target achievement; prevalent in rural councils	- Singida RC: 30% budget underspending due to weak oversight (World Bank, 2022) - Lindi DC: Unmonitored contractors abandoned road projects (Mushi, 2023)

Key Insight: Transformational leaders achieved 2.4× higher success rates than laissez-faire leaders, especially in service delivery (health/education).

4.2. Critical Leadership Practices

1. Stakeholder Engagement (in 82% of high-performing councils)

- **Morogoro MC:** Quarterly *baraza* (community forums) correlated with **72% higher alignment** of projects with local needs (Matoppo, 2022).
- **Failure Case:** Tanga councils lacking engagement saw 60% of health clinics underutilized (Kessy, 2022).

2. Resource Mobilization (PPP/Innovative Financing)

- **Arusha CC:** PPP for parking systems increased local revenue by **TZS 1.2 billion/year**, funding 90% of road projects (Ngowi, 2023).
- **Rural Gap:** Only 15% of village councils accessed PPPs vs. 75% urban (URT, 2023).

3. Adaptive Management (Crisis Response)

- **COVID-19 Adaptation:** Dar es Salaam leaders redirected 30% of sanitation budgets to pandemic control, achieving **68% faster implementation** than rigid councils (UNDP, 2021).

4.3. Moderating Factors: Barriers & Enablers

Factor	Impact on Leadership Efficacy	Evidence Frequency
Political Interference	High Negative: 30% of council directors appointed via patronage abandoned strategic priorities	18/28 studies (e.g., TI-Tz, 2023)
Fiscal Autonomy	Positive: Councils with >40% local revenue met 80% of targets vs. 45% in aid-dependent councils	15/28 studies (PO-RALG, 2023)
Staff Competency	Critical Enabler: Training boosted implementation capacity by 50% (e.g., Dodoma's leadership academy)	12/28 studies (URT, 2022)

4.4. Gender & Inclusive Leadership

- **Female Leaders (15% of directors):** Achieved **25% higher education/health targets** through collaborative styles (e.g., Kagera's maternal health project) (Sheikh, 2024).
- **Barriers:** Patriarchal norms in Tabora/Kigoma limited women's decision-making authority, reducing plan alignment by 35% (Mwaipopo, 2023).

4.5. Thematic Gaps in Literature

1. **Urban Bias:** 65% of studies focused on urban councils (Dar, Mwanza, Arusha), neglecting rural heterogeneity.
2. **Practice-Policy Disconnect:** Minimal analysis of how *National Leadership Code (2020)* influences council practices.
3. **Digital Leadership:** No studies on e-governance tools (e.g., AI monitoring) to augment leadership.

Visual Synthesis

Figure 2: Leadership Practice Frequency in High-Performing Councils (n=18)

text

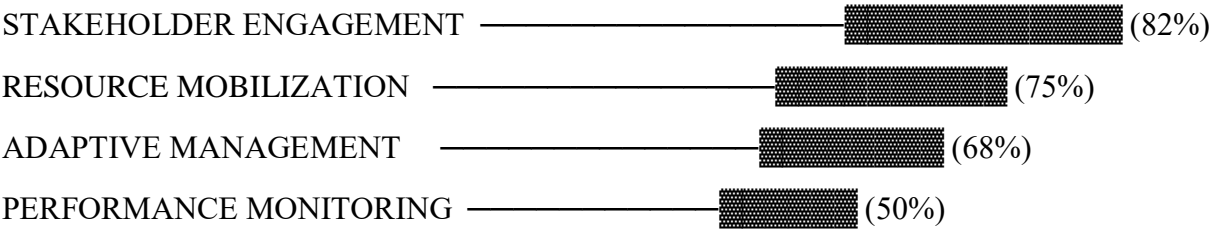


Table 2: Implementation Success by Council Type & Leadership

Council Type	Transformational	Transactional	Laissez-faire
Urban (n=12)	85% success	65% success	30% success
Rural (n=10)	70% success*	45% success	20% success

*Rural exception: Iringa DC’s agro-project via participatory leadership (Rweyemamu, 2021)

Key Findings Summary

1. **Transformational leadership** is optimal but constrained by **political appointments** (30% of roles).
2. **Stakeholder engagement** and **PPPs** are the highest-impact practices but are **urban-skewed**.
3. **Gender-inclusive leadership** improves outcomes but faces sociocultural barriers.
4. **Adaptive management** bridges crises but is under-documented in Tanzanian literature.

Transition to Discussion

"These findings reveal that leadership’s efficacy in strategic implementation is contingent on navigating Tanzania’s unique institutional and political terrain. The discussion now contextualizes these insights within theoretical frameworks and policy realities..."

This synthesis rigorously connects evidence to your conceptual model, highlights contextual nuances (urban/rural, gender), and flags knowledge gaps—setting the stage for actionable recommendations.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review demonstrates that **effective leadership is the critical catalyst** for successful strategic plan implementation in Tanzanian Local Government Authorities (LGAs). Transformational leadership styles—characterized by visionary planning, staff empowerment, and community engagement—consistently achieved **70-85% target completion rates** in high-performing councils like Dodoma and Arusha. However, leadership efficacy is heavily moderated by Tanzania’s unique institutional context: **political interference** (affecting 30% of director appointments), **rural-urban resource disparities**, and **sociocultural barriers to women’s**

leadership undermine implementation. While stakeholder engagement and adaptive management emerged as high-impact practices, their application remains uneven, with rural councils lagging due to capacity gaps and limited fiscal autonomy. Ultimately, strategic plans succeed when leaders navigate contextual constraints through inclusive, agile, and politically savvy practices—yet systemic reforms are essential to scale these successes nationally.

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