



# Political Will in Implementing Administrative Reforms in Selected Councils in Tanzania: An Analysis of the Shortcomings of the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System

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## Abstract

This study examined the influence of political will on the implementation of administrative reform, particularly the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS) in the Arusha and Dodoma City Councils. Anchored in Political Economy Theory, the research assessed expressed commitment, budgetary allocation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and follow-up actions by political leaders. The study adopted a concurrent mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires from 381 respondents, while qualitative data were obtained from 45 key informant interviews and a review of written documents. A cross-sectional design guided the analysis, with data processed in SPSS Version 23 and thematically analysed. Findings revealed weak political will across all dimensions. Over 54% of respondents rated political leaders' support and follow-up on OPRAS as unsatisfactory, while 52% indicated that budgetary allocations were inadequate and untimely. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were perceived as ineffective by 56% of respondents. These deficiencies resulted in delayed promotions, limited training, demotivated employees, and suboptimal service delivery. The study confirms that political leaders often prioritise visible infrastructure projects over administrative reforms like OPRAS due to electoral and patronage considerations. The study concludes that genuine political will is indispensable for the successful implementation of administrative reforms. It recommends stronger budgetary commitment, institutionalised monitoring frameworks, capacity-building for political leaders, and the alignment of OPRAS outcomes with human resource decisions. Without sustained political support, administrative reforms will continue to function as a symbolic rather than a transformative tool in Tanzania's local government authorities.

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## Introduction

Over the past three decades, both developed and developing countries have pursued ambitious administrative reforms in the public sector, largely inspired by the New Public Management (NPM) doctrine. These reforms sought to enhance service delivery, improve efficiency, reduce costs, and strengthen accountability (Lameck & Shabiru, 2023; Mbilinyi, 2024). In Tanzania and many other



African countries, these reforms were initially introduced under Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and later evolved into homegrown initiatives, notably the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSR) and the multi-phase Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP).

However, the outcomes of these reforms are not clearly successful. A recurring and decisive factor explaining both successes and persistent failures is political will, defined as the genuine, sustained commitment of political leaders to provide policy direction, allocate adequate resources, enforce accountability, monitor progress, and bear the political and financial costs of reform (Rubakula, 2026; Muringa, 2025). Recent studies consistently show that without strong and consistent political will, even well-designed reform instruments frequently fail to move beyond formal adoption into meaningful practice, resulting in limited improvements in public service delivery (James, 2023; Msalangi, 2024; BTI, 2026).

In the Tanzanian context, the introduction of the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS) under the PSRP marked a significant effort to institutionalise performance management across the public service. OPRAS replaced the opaque Closed Annual Confidential Report System (CACRS) with a more transparent, participatory, and results-oriented framework. It aims to align individual performance with organisational objectives, foster accountability, and link performance outcomes to rewards and sanctions. Yet despite its nationwide rollout across Ministries, Departments, Agencies (MDAs), and Local Government Authorities (LGAs), the implementation of OPRAS continues to face persistent shortcomings (Kapimpiti et al., 2024; James, 2023; Sanga, 2025). OPRAS has been severely undermined by weak political will, which has largely confined the reform to a symbolic rather than substantive instrument of change within Tanzanian Local Government Authorities (Rubakula, 2026; Msalangi, 2024). The absence of sustained high-level political commitment has led to chronic underfunding of essential components, including staff training, sensitisation programmes, and performance-based incentives (Lameck & Shabiru, 2023; Kapimpiti et al., 2024). Furthermore, political leaders have consistently failed to prioritise OPRAS in national and local budget allocations, policy directives, and performance contracts, signalling its low strategic importance and weakening enforcement mechanisms (BTI, 2026; Ndunguru, James, & Gration, 2024). This evidence shows that OPRAS is ineffective at delivering the expected outcomes.

This study critically examines the extent to which political will has shaped the implementation of OPRAS in the Arusha and Dodoma City Councils. Although official guidelines clearly outline the roles of employees, supervisors, and technocrats, they remain conspicuously silent on the specific obligations of political leaders, including ward councillors, Members of Parliament, and relevant ministers who wield significant influence over budget allocation, policy priorities, and oversight, especially at the local government level. This gap raises serious questions about the depth and sincerity of political will for genuine public sector transformation. Empirical evidence from Tanzania and elsewhere consistently shows that weak political will, manifested in inadequate budgetary support, limited monitoring and follow-up, and low prioritisation, often reduces reforms such as OPRAS to mere bureaucratic formalities rather than effective instruments of change (Rubakula, 2026; Lameck & Shabiru, 2023; BTI, 2026). This study, therefore, examines the complex interplay between political will (expressed commitment (support of political leaders and follow-ups), budgetary allocation, institutional commitment (monitoring and evaluation mechanisms) and practical implementation of administrative reforms, using OPRAS in the Arusha and Dodoma City Councils in Tanzania as the focal point.

### **Theoretical Literature Review**

This study adopted political economy theory to examine the interplay between political and economic processes in society, particularly the distribution of power and wealth among groups and individuals,



and how these relationships evolve over time (Aphecetche, 2022; Whaites, 2023). It emphasises that successful reforms depend not only on technical solutions but also on understanding the underlying political dynamics, institutions, incentive structures, and power relations that shape development outcomes (Martinez-Bravo, 2023; Burns, 2025). Actors use their power to protect or advance their interests, supporting reforms that benefit them and opposing those that threaten their positions (World Bank, 2022; WHO, 2024). Consequently, many well-designed programmes fail because they ignore these political realities (Aphecetche, 2022; Musiega, 2024).

This theory helps explain why technically sound reforms sometimes stall or reverse, the forces that drive or block policy change, and why political leaders often deviate from ideal decision-making (Sha, 2022). It also examines the varying levels of political will, as well as the incentives, constraints, and opportunities facing reformers (Whaites, 2023; OECD, 2025). In the context of administrative reforms such as OPRAS, the theory emphasises that strong political will is crucial for implementation. However, leaders may resist because of conflicting interests, risks, resource commitments, opportunity costs, and potential loss of power, as their support ultimately depends on whether they perceive themselves as winners or losers in the reform process (Burns, 2025; Martinez-Bravo, 2023).

## **Methods**

### ***Study Area***

This study was conducted in the Arusha and Dodoma City Councils in Tanzania. The two councils were selected from among 186 local government authorities (LGAs) in the country to represent other similar institutions that have been implementing the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS) since 2004. The main objective of OPRAS is to boost employee productivity and enhance the quality of public service delivery. Selection was based on the fact that all Tanzanian LGAs share comparable institutional features, administrative structures, and governance frameworks due to their uniform legal establishment. Given the country's vast land area of approximately 945,000 square kilometres and the limitations of time and resources, it was not feasible to cover the entire nation. Therefore, the two councils were randomly selected as representative samples. They also have similar decision-making bodies, such as elected councillors, ward development committees, and mitaa committees, which include both directly elected members and women in specially reserved seats.

### ***Research Approach and Design***

This study adopted a concurrent mixed-methods approach, facilitating the simultaneous collection of qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This approach enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the role of political will in implementing OPRAS by integrating multiple data sources, including questionnaires, key informant interviews, and a review of written documents. A cross-sectional research design was employed to examine the relationship between political will and OPRAS implementation. This design collected data at a single point in time, enabling a detailed analysis of political will to implement OPRAS. This design was therefore appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to examine expressed, institutional, and budgetary commitments and their relationship to OPRAS implementation. The study, therefore, sought to gather as much information as possible to explain the role of political will in implementing OPRAS in Arusha and Dodoma City Councils.

### ***Data Collection***

This study employed three main data collection methods. A survey using structured questionnaires was conducted to collect quantitative data. The questionnaires were originally developed in English and later translated into Swahili. Prior to the main survey, the instruments were pre-tested on 30 respondents (who were not part of the final sample) in a similar setting to assess the clarity, relevance,



and appropriateness of the questions. Necessary modifications were made based on the pre-test feedback. The sample size of 381 respondents was determined using Yamane's (1967) finite population formula. Respondents were selected using a combination of stratified and simple random sampling techniques from the target population of public sector employees involved in OPRAS implementation in Arusha and Dodoma City Councils. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions, as well as a five-point Likert-scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). It measured key variables, including expressed commitment, institutional support, resource availability and the effectiveness of OPRAS implementation. To ensure data quality, validity and reliability tests were conducted. Content validity was established through expert review by supervisors and subject matter specialists. Construct validity was confirmed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Reliability of the Likert-scale items was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded an overall coefficient of 0.87, indicating good internal consistency of the instrument.

Complementing these, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 key informants using an interview guide. The number of key informants (45) was determined through purposive sampling guided by the principles of maximum variation sampling and data saturation. This flexible approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the role of political will in implementing OPRAS. Interviews lasted between 40 and 45 minutes, a duration that was sufficient to enable in-depth exploration of the role of political will in OPRAS implementation through a focused interview guide, while respecting the busy schedules of senior officials, aligning with established qualitative research standards (Patton, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018), and achieving thematic saturation without causing respondent fatigue. In addition, a document review was conducted to validate information from other sources. Documents reviewed included books, journals, research papers, an unpublished dissertation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2023), strategic plans, budget documents, and CAG reports for 2022, 2023, and 2024. These sources provided vital information on monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, follow-ups on OPRAS, and funds allocated for OPRAS implementation. Survey data were triangulated with information from interviews and a review of written documents to enhance reliability and validity.

### ***Data Analysis***

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative techniques for data analysis. Qualitative data from key informant interviews, field notes, and informal discussions were transcribed, translated into English, and analysed using content analysis to identify emerging themes and patterns regarding the role of political will in OPRAS implementation. NVivo 14 software was used to support the coding process, manage data, and enhance analytical traceability.

Quantitative data from the survey were checked for completeness, coded, processed in SPSS version 23, and analysed using content analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations, were used to assess the relationship between various dimensions of political will (expressed commitment, institutional commitment, and budgetary allocation) and OPRAS implementation. In addition, a review of written documents as secondary sources, including strategic plans, CAG reports (2022, 2023, and 2024), the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), and employee personal files, complemented the primary data. Information from these documents was analysed using content analysis. These documents provided critical insights into staff promotion, demotion, training, and budget allocation, while strengthening the validation of key informants' views on political will.

### ***Ethical Issues***

This study adhered to ethical standards in social science research. Approval was obtained from relevant authorities, including the University of Dodoma (SENETE), reference no. UDOM/GR/209/101, PO-RALG, the Arusha and Dodoma City Councils, and participating



departments, before data collection began. All participants received comprehensive information about the study and were provided with informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through coding, secure storage of recordings, and their subsequent deletion after analysis. The study posed minimal risk to participants and was guided by the core ethical principles of respect, beneficence, justice, and confidentiality.

## Results and Discussion

### *Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms for the Implementation of OPRAS*

Monitoring and evaluation are essential components of effective policy implementation, as they provide vital information to various stakeholders regarding the progress and outcomes of implemented policies (Kapiga, 2023). Monitoring involves the systematic collection and analysis of data to determine whether policies are executed according to approved plans, whether financial resources and inputs are utilised as intended, whether expected outputs are likely to be achieved, whether intended beneficiaries are being reached, and whether timelines are being adhered to (Kapimpiti, Kipilimba, & Matiku, 2024). Evaluation, on the other hand, provides periodic, objective assessments of planned, ongoing, or completed projects or programmes. It addresses critical questions related to design, implementation processes, and results. In light of this importance, the present study examined the adequacy of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for implementing the Open Performance Review and Appraisal System (OPRAS) in Arusha and Dodoma City Councils, to establish their role in achieving the performance management tool's intended goals.

The survey findings revealed substantial gaps in these mechanisms. As shown in Table 1, 56% of the 381 respondents (Dodoma  $n=175$ ; Arusha  $n=206$ ) disagreed that effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms existed for OPRAS implementation, while only 44% agreed. The perception of inadequacy was more pronounced in Arusha City Council (64% negative responses) than in Dodoma (59% negative responses). These results suggest a generally low level of institutional commitment, particularly among political leaders, to facilitating the successful implementation of OPRAS.

*Table 1: Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism on the Implementation of OPRAS (n = 381: Dodoma n = 175; Arusha n = 206)*

| Variable  | Overall    | Dodoma     | Arusha     |
|---|------------|------------|------------|
| Views on the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms |            |            |            |
| Yes   | 166 (44%)  | 72 (41%)   | 74 (36%)   |
| No  | 215 (56%)  | 103 (59%)  | 132 (64%)  |
| Total   | 381 (100%) | 175 (100%) | 206 (100%) |

*Source: Field Data, 2024*

The study establishes that monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for OPRAS implementation remain inadequate in the two local government authorities. This has resulted in poor employee adherence to OPRAS guidelines and undermined the tool's overall effectiveness. The mere existence of guidelines without systematic initiatives to assess their proper application and accuracy reflects low institutional and political commitment. Successful implementation of policy and reform programmes depends heavily on strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms driven by political leaders (Lameck, 2023). Key informants, including an official from the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG), confirmed that OPRAS is often implemented without sufficient determination. This situation has negatively affected employee promotions, training opportunities, and the ability to apply sanctions for unsatisfactory performance (Lameck & Shabiru, 2023).



Furthermore, the findings indicate that monitoring and evaluation activities play a very limited role in shaping new policies or rectifying weaknesses in OPRAS implementation. This is largely attributed to insufficient commitment from the top political leadership at the ministerial level. Inadequate financial resources allocated to monitoring and evaluation activities have also been cited as a major constraint, making it difficult to cover local government authorities nationwide. Such shortcomings are contrary to the official OPRAS guidelines (Lyamuya, 2022), which strongly emphasise the need for effective, continuous monitoring and evaluation to achieve the desired goals.

The study further observes that the absence of well-established monitoring and evaluation mechanisms has failed to create a conducive environment for the effective implementation of OPRAS. This has made it difficult for employees to achieve intended objectives and has complicated the proper completion of OPRAS forms. These findings contradict Lucumay (2025), who argues that strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for administrative reforms enable the adoption of adaptive strategies in response to emerging circumstances. Regular monitoring and evaluation not only reflect the level of political will but also promote transparency and accountability in tracking OPRAS achievements. This position is supported by Kikoti & Lameck (2023), who maintain that reforms with strong political backing are subject to consistent monitoring, allowing leaders to identify improvements and address setbacks effectively. Therefore, the successful implementation of administrative reforms by both political leaders and bureaucrats.

Effective monitoring and evaluation are also vital for generating timely feedback on implementation progress. Such feedback enables line managers to align departmental activities with performance targets, supports informed decisions about employee development, and serves as a critical input for strategic planning and continuous improvement (ADB, 2025). However, the study found that annual monitoring to assess OPRAS's strengths and weaknesses was not consistently conducted. This gap contravenes the OPRAS guidelines, which call for continuous evaluation (Anosisye, 2024). and has made it difficult for authorities to implement corrective measures. Similar outcomes were documented by Kalifumu and Njunwa (2024); the absence of a dedicated performance appraisal committee also hinders the effective implementation of OPRAS.

This study argues that administrative reform tools like OPRAS require effective, continuous monitoring mechanisms and remedial actions to address ambiguities and improve the tool. Such efforts demand strong support from political leaders, especially ministers responsible for PO-PSMGG and PO-RALG, through emphasis on agreed targets, regular follow-ups, and enforcement of compliance. Political will remains a major instrument for the effective implementation of reforms in public institutions. Its absence often leads to project abandonment and unsatisfactory service delivery (Dominic & Rutenge, 2024). As explained in the Political Economy theory, political will is more likely to emerge when reforms align with leaders' interests and do not threaten their power and authority.

Strong monitoring mechanisms also enable the adoption of adaptive strategies, such as addressing promotional delays, refining SMART objectives, and providing needs-based training (Burns, 2025). They also demonstrate organisational commitment to learning from experience and to maintaining transparent, accountable implementation. OPRAS offers greater potential to provide employees with constructive feedback and to facilitate targeted improvements (Bakar et al., 2025). Evidence from Chopra (2015) on India's MGNREGA programme and from Jain and Ross (2012) further underscores that intensive, well-designed monitoring significantly enhances reform outcomes. This study argues that robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that promote a results-oriented public service across government institutions are indispensable to OPRAS's effectiveness.

***Follow-ups on Promises Made by Political Leaders in OPRAS Implementation***

Assessing the extent to which political leaders follow through on their promises and public statements regarding administrative reforms such as OPRAS is critical to determining whether their expressed commitment translates into concrete actions. According to Fredrick et al. (2025), expressed commitment is a vital dimension of political will in implementing reforms, as it reveals the consistency between leaders' words and their actual support for policy execution. This study examined the perceptions of the respondents and key informants on follow-up actions taken by political leaders in the Arusha and Dodoma City Councils to facilitate the effective implementation of OPRAS.

The findings indicate that political leaders' follow-up remains low in both councils. As shown in Table 2, more than half of respondents (217, or 56.96%) rated the extent of follow-ups as low, 87 (22.83%) as moderate, and only 77 (20.21%) as high. The pattern was consistent across the two study areas, with Dodoma recording a higher proportion of negative responses (63.43%) than Arusha (56.31%). These results suggest that political leaders are not effectively fulfilling their oversight role in ensuring that OPRAS delivers improvements in employee performance and institutional effectiveness.

*Table 2: Follow-ups (Overall n=381, Dodoma n=175, Arusha n=206)*

| Variable  | Overall           | Dodoma            | Arusha            |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Extent of follow-ups by political leaders on OPRAS</b> |                   |                   |                   |
| Low   | 217 (56.96%)      | 111 (63.43%)      | 116 (56.31%)      |
| Medium  | 87 (22.83%)       | 38 (21.71%)       | 49 (23.79%)       |
| High  | 77 (20.21%)       | 26 (14.86%)       | 41 (19.90%)       |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>381 (100%)</b> | <b>175 (100%)</b> | <b>206 (100%)</b> |

*Source: Field Data, 2024*

This low level of follow-up contradicts the objectives of the Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP, 2000), which positioned OPRAS as a key instrument for improving institutional and individual performance. It also deviates from the assumptions of New Public Management theory, which expects political leaders to provide sustained oversight of results-based reforms. The study links weak follow-up to a prevailing negative attitude among political leaders, who viewed OPRAS as offering no direct benefits to their voters. Instead, leaders prefer to channel resources and attention toward visible development projects, such as road construction, water supply, hospitals, and education infrastructure, that enhance their political popularity (Tuseko et al., 2025; Whaites, 2023).

From the perspective of Political Economy theory, this behaviour reflects low political interest in reforms that neither serve leaders' immediate economic or political interests nor help them retain power (Tesha, 2023). Key informant interviews reinforced this view. One political leader from the Dodoma City Council stated,

*"OPRAS, as a performance management framework, delivers no discernible benefits to the electorate and represents an inefficient use of public resources. It is therefore both prudent and imperative to redirect financial allocations toward high-impact developmental interventions such as borehole drilling for water access, the construction and rehabilitation of road networks, and the development of healthcare facilities, which directly address critical socio-economic needs and yield tangible improvements in citizens' quality of life (December 2024).*

Similar sentiments underscored leaders' preference for voter-centric projects over administrative tools such as OPRAS. Key informants also noted that political leaders fear the risks, resource demands, and potential resistance associated with implementing reforms (Silidion, 2024; Selemani, 2022). The study argues that effective follow-up by political leaders is essential to promote transparency,



accountability, and hard work among public servants. Such follow-up would enhance opportunities for employee promotion and training, ultimately improving service delivery to citizens (Rugeiyamu, 2024). However, leaders tend to support programmes that offer direct electoral benefits, as evidenced by budget priorities for the 2023/2024 financial year (URT, 2023). While Silidion (2024) emphasises that OPRAS ultimately benefits citizens through better service delivery, this linkage remains poorly understood or appreciated by many political leaders. Interview data further revealed a clear disconnect between words and actions. A senior official from Dodoma City Council remarked that:

*"Since its introduction in 2004, the implementation of OPRAS has suffered from a persistent and egregious lack of meaningful oversight and follow-up by the responsible ministry. This institutional vacuum has undermined the tool's intended purpose, reducing it to a largely performative exercise dominated by superficial, 'copy-and-paste' form-filling practices that lack substantive analysis, accountability, or measurable impact on public sector performance."* (December 2024).

Councillors similarly prioritised infrastructure over administrative reforms. Interestingly, one Arusha councillor acknowledged the potential value of OPRAS but stressed the need for education and awareness:

*"Our foremost priority lies in driving concrete development initiatives that deliver real socio-economic value to society. That said, we are prepared to conduct necessary follow-ups on administrative tools. Nevertheless, as OPRAS has been phased out and succeeded by PEPMIS, such follow-ups can only be constructive if accompanied by thorough training and orientation on the PEPMIS system, thereby preventing continued reliance on an obsolete framework"* (December 2024)

The study argues that targeted capacity-building for political leaders at both national and local levels should be enhanced to enhance their understanding of administrative reforms and their broader societal benefits. Political leaders possess significant influence to drive reform success by supporting bureaucrats and enforcing compliance (Nziku, 2023; Mwamwala, 2022). Although a small proportion of respondents (20.21%) observed relatively good follow-up, the dominant viewpoints were fear of resource commitment and time costs, with leaders preferring low-risk development projects that bolster their chances of re-election (Pudjono, 2025; Rubakula, 2026). Effective implementation of administrative reforms, particularly OPRAS, demands active follow-up on procedures, guidelines, and resource utilisation to ensure adherence and accountability. Strong follow-up mechanisms would enhance employee performance and the quality of public services (Ndunguru et al., 2024).

### ***Support of Political Leaders on the Implementation of OPRAS***

Political leaders play a pivotal role as initiators and influencers of administrative reforms, particularly in shaping the effective implementation of administrative reform tools, such as the OPRAS. Their support is crucial for fostering accountability, transparency, and resource mobilisation, thereby determining the extent to which reforms translate into improved organisational performance (Silidion & Rutenge, 2024). This study examined the perceived level of political support for OPRAS in the Dodoma and Arusha City Councils to assess its influence on reform outcomes.

Survey findings from 381 respondents showed predominantly low political support for OPRAS implementation. Overall, 54.9% rated support as low, 29.4% as moderate, and only 15.7% as high. The pattern was consistent across the two councils, with 59.4% in Dodoma and 60.7% in Arusha indicating low support (Table 3). These results suggest a significant gap between policy rhetoric and practical commitment at the local level.



Table 3: Support of Political Leaders on the Implementation of OPRAS (Overall n=381, Dodoma n=175, Arusha n=206)

| Variable  | Overall     | Dodoma      | Arusha     |
|---|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Level of support by political leaders for OPRAS |             |             |            |
| Low   | 209 (54.9%) | 104 (59.4%) | 125(60.7%) |
| Medium  | 112 (29.4%) | 44 (25.2%)  | 58 (28.1%) |
| High  | 60 (15.7)   | 27 (15.4%)  | 23 (11.2%) |
| Total   | 381 (100%)  | 175 (100%)  | 206 (100%) |

Source: Field Data, 2024

Key informant interviews reinforced the essential need for robust political backing. One informant emphasised that

*"For OPRAS to achieve its intended objectives, sustained support from political leaders who serve as both policymakers and reform initiators is indispensable. Such leadership commitment is critical because it strengthens institutional accountability and enhances transparency, thereby ensuring that bureaucrats, as the primary implementers, execute the system with greater rigour and integrity."* (December 2024).

Strong political support was viewed as instrumental in facilitating fair performance appraisals, enhancing service delivery, promoting responsiveness, and ensuring efficient resource utilisation in local government authorities. Furthermore, it contributes to sustainable performance excellence by linking appraisal outcomes to promotions, training, and recognition, thereby fostering a collaborative decision-making approach (Mzenzi, 2023).

Despite verbal endorsements, the study found a pronounced disconnect between political rhetoric and actionable support. Political Economy Theory helps explain this disconnect, as political leaders frequently express commitment to OPRAS but fail to provide timely, adequate financial resources, effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, or consistent follow-up on established guidelines. Consequently, critical aspects such as capacity-building initiatives often deviate from OPRAS procedures, undermining the tools' effectiveness. As Peter (2023) notes, the success of administrative reforms hinges not merely on public statements but on complementary institutional infrastructure, sustained resource allocation, and tangible investments that translate policy intentions into measurable outcomes.

The findings align with broader observations in the literature regarding political will. While some governments may demonstrate commitment through resource investment, even with limited public pronouncements (Muringa, 2025), others issue strong rhetorical support, often to satisfy donor conditionalities, yet fail to translate this into concrete action (Ndunguru et al, 2024). In this context, several respondents (15.7%) who perceived higher support attributed it primarily to donor-driven requirements rather than intrinsic governmental priority. Such dynamics highlight the complex interplay between domestic political will and external influences (Beisheim, 2025).

Effective implementation of administrative reforms like OPRAS requires political leaders to align their public statements with substantive actions, including allocating sufficient budgets for training and performance incentives, establishing robust monitoring systems, and creating enabling organisational environments. Expressing commitment alone, without supporting policies and infrastructure, remains insufficient (Ngulugulu et al., 2023).

Ultimately, sustained political support is indispensable for administrative reforms such as OPRAS to achieve its objectives of enhancing employee performance, accountability, and the delivery of quality public services in the Arusha and Dodoma City Councils. This study underscores the need for political



leaders to move beyond symbolic gestures toward genuine, resource-backed engagement in the administrative reform process.

### ***Budgetary Commitment to the Implementation of OPRAS***

Budgetary commitment is a critical dimension of political will to implement administrative reforms. Adequate and timely allocation of financial resources is essential to translating policy intentions into tangible outcomes, particularly for tools such as OPRAS in local government authorities (Mwita, 2022). This section examines the extent to which the financial resources allocated to OPRAS activities in the Dodoma and Arusha City Councils met the requirements for effective implementation.

The study's findings indicate substantial inadequacies in the provision of resources for OPRAS. As shown in Table 4, 52% of the 381 respondents reported that the financial resources allocated to OPRAS failed to meet operational needs, while 28% rated the allocation as moderate and only 20% as sufficient. The pattern was consistent across the two councils, with 58% in Dodoma and 59% in Arusha indicating low fulfilment of needs. These shortfalls primarily manifested as delayed or insufficient funding for employee promotions, needs-based training, salary increases, and essential operational support.

*Table 4: Budget Allocated on the Implementation of OPRAS (n = 381: Dodoma =175 and Arusha = 206)*

| <b>Variable</b>   | <b>Overall</b>   | <b>Dodoma</b>     | <b>Arusha</b>     |
|---|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| The Extent to which Financial Resources Allocated for OPRAS Fulfilled the Needs |                  |                   |                   |
| Low   | 197 (52%)        | 102 (58%)         | 121 (59%)         |
| Moderate  | 107 (28%)        | 47 (27%)          | 49 (23%)          |
| High  | 77 (20%)         | 26 (15%)          | 36 (18%)          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>381(100%)</b> | <b>175 (100%)</b> | <b>206 (100%)</b> |

*Source: Field Data, 2024*

Inadequate budgetary allocation resulted in several operational challenges. Promotions frequently deviated from OPRAS performance guidelines, salary adjustments were delayed, and training programmes on identified competency gaps were either postponed or severely scaled back. For instance, in the 2023/2024 financial year, only TShs 33.6 million was disbursed in Arusha, against a planned TShs 98.2 million, and TShs 76.3 million in Dodoma, against a planned TShs 76.3 million, for promotion and training activities (URT, 2023). Such constraints also limited supervisory monitoring, particularly in geographically dispersed sectors such as primary education and health services.

Key informants consistently highlighted a disconnect between planning and actual disbursements from the Ministry of Finance. Budgeted amounts often failed to align with approved projections, largely due to competing national priorities and donor conditionalities. Several respondents noted that senior political leaders prioritised high-visibility development projects, such as infrastructure, health facilities, and water projects that enhance political visibility and voter support, while assigning lower priority to administrative reforms, such as OPRAS.

From a political economy perspective, this pattern of resource allocation is not accidental but a rational strategic choice by political actors. Political Economy Theory holds that leaders tend to channel scarce resources toward initiatives that maximise political returns, consolidate patronage networks, and strengthen their electoral legitimacy, while underfunding reforms that yield diffuse, long-term institutional benefits with limited immediate political payoff (Rubakula, 2026; Muringa, 2025; Martinez-Bravo, 2023). In this context, OPRAS is often perceived as costly in financial and political terms and as having low visibility among voters, leading to systematic deprioritisation. One senior official from Arusha remarked:



"While OPRAS appeared to be a conceptually robust tool for assessing employee performance in theory, its practical implementation was gravely weakened by the consistent neglect of political leaders, particularly their failure to provide adequate funding and institutional backing. This shortfall in political will and resource commitment has rendered the tool largely ineffective in driving genuine public sector accountability and productivity." (December 2024).

This selective commitment protects short-term political interests at the expense of institutional strengthening, leading to employee demotivation, delayed career progression, and eroded trust in the tool. The research contrasts with cases such as India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, where adequate budgetary provisions supported effective implementation (Beisheim, 2025). In Tanzania, however, persistent underfunding, exacerbated by donor dependence and late disbursements, has severely constrained OPRAS's effectiveness. Effective implementation required not only sufficient funding but also alignment between political rhetoric and resource prioritisation. Without such budgetary commitment, OPRAS risked becoming a ritualistic exercise disconnected from actual performance improvement. Weak budgetary commitment from political leaders remained a major impediment to OPRAS's success in the Arusha and Dodoma City Councils. For the administrative reforms to achieve their objectives of improving employee performance, accountability, and quality public service delivery, political leaders must move beyond selective prioritisation driven by short-term political calculus toward genuine and sustained resource commitment.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore that inadequate budgetary commitment, weakly expressed commitment (insufficient follow-ups and lack of support from political leaders), and institutional commitment (monitoring and evaluation mechanisms) constituted major impediments to the effective implementation of the OPRAS in Dodoma and Arusha City Councils. Despite policy endorsement, the consistent under-allocation and untimely disbursement of financial resources have undermined performance-based promotions, needs-oriented training, supervisory monitoring, and overall service delivery. This selective prioritisation of visible development projects over administrative reforms reflects deeper political economy considerations, in which political leaders favour initiatives that yield immediate electoral gains. Consequently, OPRAS has largely remained a symbolic rather than a transformative tool, resulting in employee demotivation and suboptimal public service outcomes.

To address these gaps, the government should institutionalise and strengthen political accountability by ring-fencing adequate budgetary resources for administrative reforms. Targeted capacity-building programmes for political leaders, coupled with a robust joint monitoring and evaluation mechanism, are essential to bridge the gap between policy rhetoric and practice. Furthermore, improved coordination with development partners should prioritise the long-term sustainability of domestic funding. These measures will foster genuine political will, enhance employee performance, and realise the potential of administrative reforms to strengthen accountability and service delivery in Tanzania's local government authorities.

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