



Exploring citizens' perceptions on the roles of Members of Parliament in Tanzania: A case of Dodoma Municipality constituency

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ABSTRACT

This study explores citizens' perceptions of the roles of members of parliament in Tanzania, a case of the Dodoma municipality constituency. This study was guided by role theory, which was developed by Robert Merton in 1957. The study used the following specific objectives: to assess citizens' understanding of the roles of Members of Parliament in Tanzania, to identify the factors influencing citizens' perceptions of the roles of Members of Parliament in Tanzania, and to assess the level of citizen satisfaction with the performance of Members of Parliament in fulfilling their roles. The study was conducted at the Dodoma Municipality constituency, which encompasses the entire Dodoma electoral district. Focusing on a single, high-profile urban constituency allows for an in-depth exploration of how residents across income levels, occupational groups, and wards perceive and engage with their elected MPs. Insights gleaned here may later be compared with those from other municipal and rural constituencies in follow-up research between June 2024 and August 2025. The study adopted the interpretivism research philosophy, a qualitative approach, and an action research design. Purposeful and accidental samples yielded 36 participants, including six (6) Members of Parliament (MPs), 20 citizens, and 10 political party leaders. Interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were used to collect data. The analysis of the study data using thematic findings revealed that perceptions of Members of Parliament (MPs) are heavily influenced by structural incentives, socioeconomic contexts, and the information ecosystem. These factors have perpetuated a “development banker” image of MPs whose primary role, in the public's eyes, is delivering tangible goods rather than shaping policy or holding the executive to account. The study concluded that while most citizens recognize that MPs engage in lawmaking and debate, there remains a substantial gap in awareness of their oversight functions, committee work, and budgetary responsibilities. Overall citizen satisfaction with MPs is modest, with trust and approval closely tied to both the visibility of constituency engagement and citizens' understanding of legislative achievements.

Keywords: Citizens, Constituency, Members of Parliament, Parliament, Perception

I. INTRODUCTION

Members of Parliament (MPs) play a crucial role in democratic systems, including Tanzania's parliamentary democracy (Draman et al., 2019). Their roles, as defined by the constitution, mainly revolve around creating laws, overseeing the government, and representing the interests of their constituents at the national policy level (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). However, there often seems to be a significant gap between these official duties and what citizens actually expect from them.

This study primarily addresses the widespread misconception among Tanzanian citizens regarding their MPs' duties (Collord, 2020). Many people believe that MPs should primarily act as providers of direct, personal support, helping with expenses like medical bills, school fees, and everyday needs (Almoatasm, 2020; Azevedo, 2020). This expectation is quite different from the MPs' official responsibilities, which are more focused on legislative work and oversight.

This disconnect isn't just a theoretical issue; it has real-world implications. The pressure from these expectations reportedly causes significant stress for MPs, which can affect their ability to carry out their essential duties effectively. Anecdotal evidence, like reports from the Tanzanian Hansard during the 2024/2025 budget session, suggests that MPs have been avoiding their constituencies due to overwhelming demands, underscoring the seriousness of the problem. Research from neighboring Kenya shows the extent of the issue, with findings indicating that a staggering majority (for instance, 795 out of 800) of communications from constituents are requests for financial assistance (Sulley, 2022). In Tanzania, studies reveal a considerable misunderstanding among citizens, with one study indicating that most (five out

of eight) citizens don't have a clear grasp of what MPs are actually supposed to do (Collord, 2022; Lukiko, 2023). This lack of understanding weakens the representative connection, which could lead to citizen disillusionment and obstruct effective democratic governance (Ahikire, 2023). Despite initiatives from the Parliament of Tanzania's Civic Education unit aimed at educating the public, these misconceptions continue to persist.

While earlier studies have looked into the roles of MPs in Tanzania (Collord, 2020; Almoatasm, 2020; Sulley, 2022), and some have highlighted the challenges MPs face due to constituent demands (Collord, 2020; Azevedo, 2020), especially in Dodoma, there's still a significant gap in information. Current research hasn't thoroughly examined how citizens in specific contexts, like the Dodoma Municipality Constituency, perceive, interpret, and assess the roles of their MPs. From the citizens' point of view in this specific constituency, there isn't enough information about the nature, prevalence, and underlying reasons for these perceptions.

This study aims to fill a gap by diving into how citizens in the Dodoma Municipality Constituency perceive the roles of their Members of Parliament (MPs). Understanding these perceptions is vital for a few key reasons: it sheds light on the degree and specific nature of the disconnect between what people expect and what MPs are officially supposed to do. It also provides insights into why these views continue to exist, even with ongoing civic education efforts. The results will help shape more effective communication strategies and tailored civic education programs. This understanding will enable MPs and parliamentary institutions to better manage what constituents expect, fostering more realistic and productive relationships. Ultimately, grasping and addressing these perceptions is crucial for bolstering democratic accountability, enhancing the quality of representation, and improving the legitimacy and effectiveness of parliamentary democracy in Tanzania. This study investigated these perceptions by examining citizens' articulated understanding of MP duties, their expressed expectations for assistance (especially material/financial), and their criteria for evaluating MP performance.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To assess citizens' understanding on the roles of Members of Parliament in Tanzania
- ii. To identify the factors influencing citizens' perceptions on the roles of Members of Parliament in Tanzania
- iii. To assess the level of citizen satisfaction with the performance of Members of Parliament in fulfilling their roles.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Role Theory

This study was based on role theory, which was developed by Robert Merton in 1957. Role theory served as a framework in social science that explored how individuals acted and interacted within society according to the roles they held. It suggested that people's behaviors and attitudes were shaped by the expectations tied to their social positions and influenced by cultural norms, institutional structures, and interpersonal relationships.

The significance of role theory in this study lay in its ability to shed light on how Members of Parliament (MPs) were viewed in relation to their various roles, such as legislators, representatives, or service providers. This theory explored the behaviors of individuals within social positions and how these roles were shaped by societal expectations.

Role theory could simplify complex behaviors too much by overlooking the context and power dynamics involved in role expectations. To overcome these limitations, the researcher incorporated multi-level analyses and additional frameworks that considered structural, cultural, and situational factors. This approach allowed for a more detailed understanding of both role expectations and performance.

Role theory, while useful for categorizing the socially prescribed tasks of MPs, was critiqued for assuming clearly defined, static roles, underplaying the power and agency that legislators exercised, and oversimplifying the complex trade-offs they navigated. In the Dodoma Municipality study, these limitations emerged as citizens expressed ambiguous or conflicting expectations of their MPs (e.g., balancing lawmaking with constituency service), highlighting how MPs had to negotiate between national party directives and local demands in ways that the traditional role theory framework only partially explained.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Citizens' Understanding on the Roles of Members of Parliament

In Tanzania, Makulilo (2023) conducted a study on oversight functions of the national assembly and good governance in Tanzania. This includes MPs drafting, debating, and voting on legislation. Study represents the views and needs of the people in their electoral district. Some citizens possess a more detailed understanding of the various functions of MPs, which include: MPs hold the government accountable through questioning, debates, and committee work. They often engage with their constituents to gather feedback and address local issues. Informed Citizens, a smaller segment of the population, may have a comprehensive understanding of the parliamentary system, including

understanding how MPs oversee government actions and expenditures and recognizing how MPs influence national policies and development programs.

2.2.2 The Factors Influencing Citizens' Perceptions on the Roles of Members of Parliament

Fish (2006) conducted a study on Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies in Tanzania. The finding revealed the way Tanzanians perceive the National Assembly and its functioning in the post-multiparty election era (i.e., since 1995). Understanding the factors that influence citizens' perceptions of the roles of Members of Parliament (MPs) is crucial for evaluating democratic engagement and governance. Citizens often identify with their MPs on a personal level. The frequency and quality of interactions between MPs and their constituents significantly affect how citizens view their roles. Positive personal experiences enhance trust and approval. The perceived accountability of MPs in their decision-making processes plays a vital role. Citizens are more likely to have a favorable view of MPs who are transparent about their actions and decisions and who actively engage in holding the executive accountable. The portrayal of MPs in the media greatly influences public perception. Positive coverage enhances an MP's image, while negative reporting leads to distrust and skepticism among citizens.

2.2.3 The Level of Citizen Satisfaction with the Performance of Members of Parliament in Fulfilling their Roles

Mwombela (2020) Tanzanian Citizens Assess the Performance of Parliament and Consider Its Responsibility for Legislation and Oversight. The study used a mixed approach and a cross-section design. Findings revealed that in Tanzania citizen satisfaction with the performance of Members of Parliament (MPs) varies widely across different regions and circumstances. Generally, factors influencing satisfaction include responsiveness to constituents: how well MPs are perceived to address the concerns and needs of their constituents. Legislative Effectiveness: The extent to which MPs pass laws and policies that positively impact their communities. Communication and Transparency: The clarity and frequency with which MPs communicate their activities and decisions to the public. Engagement with the Community: How actively MPs participate in local events and their availability to constituents. Trust and Integrity: Public perceptions of the MPs' honesty and commitment to serving the public interest.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A research design is a comprehensive plan that outlines how to conduct a research study, ensuring that the data collected effectively addresses the research problem (Farquhar et al., 2020). This study employed an action research design. Reason and Bradbury (2021) explained an action research design is a participatory, iterative approach that focuses on solving real-world problems while simultaneously generating knowledge. It involves collaboration between researchers and participants to identify issues, implement interventions, and evaluate outcomes in cycles of reflection and action. The researcher used this design because of its usefulness particularly when researchers want to gain an understanding of complex problems and help to create a plan of action using the research findings.

3.2 Population of the Study

The study population refers to the specific group of individuals selected for this research based on characteristics that align with the study's objectives (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). It's the entire group that the researcher was drawing conclusions about. The study included: Six (6) Members of Parliament (MPs): The selection of six members of parliament is due to the fact that the constituency has one elected member of parliament and five other special seats for women. Also, there were 20 citizens and 10 political party leaders. Political party leaders was drawn from the following parties: Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), ACT-Wazalendo (Alliance for Change and Transparency), Civic United Front (CUF), NCCR-Mageuzi (National Convention for Construction and Reform), United Democratic Party (UDP), Democratic Party (DP), Tanzania Labour Party (TLP), CHAUSTA (Chama cha Ukombozi wa Umma) as well as SAU (Sauti ya Umma Party).

3.2 Sample size

Kothari (2004) define sample size as the number of items to be selected from the universe to constitute a sample. In other way, it is a small group of research participants or materials selected from identified population of the study. This study gathered and analyzed data in a systematic way for the purpose of answering the research objective or research question. This study was plan to interrogate respondents from Dodoma municipality constituency ranging people such as 6 members of parliament, 10 political party leaders and 12 citizens as this helped in in-depth understanding on the topic.

3.3 Sampling techniques

Sampling techniques involve the processes of selecting a subset of research participants or materials from a defined study population. Therefore, the researcher employed purposive sampling and accidental sampling techniques.

3.3.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers intentionally select participants based on specific characteristics, knowledge, or experiences relevant to the research question (Etikan, 2016). This study picked participants who were obtained through a purposive sampling for Members of Parliament and political party leaders. Purposive sampling helps researchers focus on individuals or groups that have direct experience or expertise related to the research topic, leading to more meaningful and relevant data.

3.3.2 Accidental sampling

Accidental sampling, also known as convenience sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers select participants based on their ease of access, availability, and willingness to participate (Saunders et al. 2019). This Accidental sampling used to select citizens. Creswell (2014) implies that accidental sampling allows researchers to collect data quickly since participants are readily available.

3.4 Data Generation Process and Methods

The Data Generation Process refers to the underlying mechanism or process through which data is produced or generated (Hastie et al. 2021). This study used primary data collection methods such as the interview method and focus group method, and in secondary data collection methods such as documentary review.

3.4.1 Document Review

Document review is the process of examining documents to assess their content, accuracy, and relevance to the research question. The study also employed secondary data to supplement the primary data. Gay et al. (2012) define secondary data as the source of data that interprets or analyzes the work of others. Secondary data used because it helped complement the primary data with additional insights leading to more comprehensive outcomes. Secondary data gathered from a collection of Statutes Relevant for Parliamentary Business and Roles of 2020, Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (1977), REPOA reports on Parliament, REDET reports on Parliament as well as Political Parties reports and speeches so as to gain more insights into the perceptions of the roles of Members of Parliament in Tanzania.

3.4.2 Interview Method

The study used the interview to obtain information from Members of Parliament and Political Party Leaders. Interviews allow for the exploration of complex topic in greater depth, also provide detailed insights into a person's thoughts, experiences, or perspectives that might not emerge from other data collection methods like surveys (Carlos, 2023).

3.4.3 A Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

A focus group discussion (FGD) used to obtain information to citizens. A focus group discussion (FGD) is a good way to gather people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest (Mishra, 2022). The group of participants of not more five participants guided by a moderator (or group facilitator) who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion among them. Group of five participant were easy to maintain and guide them for discussion. FGD also is proposed as it helped obtain information in the participants' own language. Interaction with participants allows for follow-up questions for clarity, and information provided more quickly compared to if people are interviewed separately.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the systematic process of organizing, interpreting, and making sense of qualitative data to extract meaningful insights. It is also a process of inspecting, rearranging, modifying data to extract useful information from materials collected. For this study, thematic analysis applied, an approach is well-suited for uncovering patterns within textual data such as interview transcripts, focus group discussions, and written responses (Priya, 2021). Thematic analysis including; The process begins with transcribing and thoroughly reviewing interview data to immerse researchers in the content and note emerging patterns. Next, an inductive coding process labels segments of text with descriptive codes, often aided by qualitative software for consistency. These codes are then grouped into preliminary themes through constant comparison. The themes are critically reviewed against the entire dataset, refined or merged as necessary, and clearly defined and named. Finally, the analysis is interpreted and reported in a narrative format complete with illustrative quotes to explain citizens' perceptions of Tanzanian members of parliament.

3.5.1 Ensuring Rigor and Trustworthiness

Throughout thematic analysis, several strategies employed to ensure methodological rigor: Triangulation: Comparing data across multiple sources (e.g., interviews and focus groups) to confirm the consistency and validity of emerging themes. Peer Debriefing: Engaging colleagues or experts in reviewing the coding framework and thematic structure to challenge potential biases. Audit Trail: Keeping detailed records of all analytical decisions, coding processes, and theme development to allow for external review. Reflexivity: Maintaining a reflexive journal to acknowledge and mitigate the researcher's potential biases and preconceptions. This comprehensive and systematic approach to thematic analysis provided robust insights into how citizens perceive the roles of members of parliament in Tanzania.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Validity; Quantitative validity focused on measurement precision, qualitative validity assesses how well methods, data collection, and interpretations capture participants' perspectives. Its four pillars are: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability.

Reliability; Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency and trustworthiness of findings. It is ensured through dependability, intercoder reliability, auditability, and member checking. This study incorporates these aspects to ensure reliability.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study strictly follows ethical guidelines to protect participants' cultural values and human rights. This involves securing clearance from the Open University of Tanzania and obtaining permission from the Dodoma municipal council. Measures include ensuring confidentiality (using acronyms instead of names), obtaining informed consent, and safeguarding privacy. Additionally, participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and objectives, with the assurance that participation is completely voluntary and they can withdraw at any time.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Citizens' Understanding of Members of Parliament's Roles

The study intended to determine the citizens' understanding of the roles of Members of Parliament. The section presents sub-themes on how well citizens comprehend both the constitutional and practical roles of MPs. Efforts are undertaken by parties to educate the public about the responsibilities and challenges faced by MPs. The most prevalent misunderstandings or myths about MPs that have been observed among the citizens. Communication strategies should be improved to enhance public understanding of what MPs are expected to do and additional steps parties could implement to better inform citizens about the roles and limitations of MPs in the democratic process.

By the nature of our citizens it is 50/50. Few understand, because most citizens do not like to know things especially about MPs. (Participant No.1: Political Party Leader)

To a certain extent, it depends on the citizen's environment, citizens understand that an MP is a representative of the people, he should defend the interests of the citizen who elected him and supervise the Government not to play with the country's resources. (Participant No.2: Political Party Leader)

Citizens knows the responsibilities of an MP are Constitutional and the Political Party also expects MPs to defending the interests of his/her Party as well. However, this understanding is partial or limited. (Participant No.3: Political Party Leader)

A complementary study by Mwombela (2020) in Morogoro, Tanzania, found that fewer than half of the citizens surveyed could accurately enumerate both the constitutional mandates and the everyday duties of their MPs. This aligns closely with the mixed impressions shared by our political-party leaders, suggesting that even in the capital region significant knowledge gaps remain. In my view, these findings highlight an urgent need for more targeted civic-education efforts that not only explain what MPs are supposed to do on paper but also demonstrate how those roles play out in constituents' daily lives, thereby strengthening public engagement, realistic expectations, and accountability.

The study intended to establish the understanding of the roles of Members of Parliament, such as the main roles and responsibilities of an MP, and to what extent the public understands these functions. The responses showed the comments below were presented by Members of Parliament (MPs) during the interview session:

Some citizens, again those who are not educated, think that MPs have a responsibility to help them with their needs, give them food, give them money to solve their problems. (Participant No.1: Members of Parliament (MP))

No, a large part of the citizens do not clearly understand the responsibilities of MPs. (Participant No.2: Members of Parliament (MP))

From the perspectives shared by these MPs, it's clear that there remains a substantial disconnect between what citizens expect from their representatives and the formal duties MPs are mandated to perform. While constituents often view MPs through a welfare lens, seeing them as personal benefactors responsible for alleviating individual hardships, the core functions of legislation, government oversight, and constituency advocacy frequently get overshadowed. In my view, this gap in understanding speaks not only to the need for broader civic education campaigns (as we've already discussed) but also to more deliberate visibility of MPs' everyday work. If MPs could, for instance, regularly publish simple "week in review" briefs highlighting bills they debated, questions they raised on the floor, or meetings held on behalf of constituents, it would help reframe their role from one of patronage to one of policy and representation. Over time, consistent, transparent communication of these parliamentary activities would gradually recalibrate public perception toward recognizing and valuing the true scope of an MP's responsibilities.

The study intended to establish the understanding of the roles of Members of Parliament, such as ways MPs share duties and responsibilities with the public, and which methods have been most effective in improving their understanding. The responses showed the comments below were presented by Members of Parliament (MPs) during the interview session:

Citizens are being educated especially during the campaign period. Citizens should continue to be educated on the responsibilities of this Representative of the people because despite being educated, citizens still do not know what the actual responsibilities of an MP are. (Participant No.1: Members of Parliament (MP))

Most of the time in meetings when you meet with citizens, you give feedback on what you have done for them in Parliament and take their problems to take to Parliament, sometimes there is no time to provide that education, so I advise that education, especially the Government, should be provided to our citizens so that they understand our responsibilities well. (Participant No.2: Members of Parliament (MP))

Despite the education provided, but you know that once you become a leader, it does not matter what kind of leader you are, the citizens give you all their problems. Therefore, the education we provide in the environment we meet is not enough, we should continue to provide it especially in rural areas where citizens are very difficult. (Participant No.3: Members of Parliament (MP))

In line with Njau and Mwang'ombe (2022), they evaluated a hybrid outreach model in Kilifi County where MPs combined quarterly "town hall" forums with SMS bulletins summarizing recent parliamentary debates and decisions. They reported a 45 percent rise in constituents correctly identifying at least two parliamentary activities and a 30 percent uptick in written constituent inquiries compared to areas relying solely on in-person meetings. In my view, this study underscores the power of pairing face-to-face interaction with simple, timely digital updates. While town halls build trust and allow real-time Q&A, the follow-up SMS or WhatsApp alerts reinforce learning and keep constituents engaged between meetings. Scaling such blended approaches, especially in rural zones where travel to meetings is hard, could significantly boost citizens' grasp of MPs' day-to-day functions.

The study intended to establish the understanding of the roles of Members of Parliament, such as how knowledgeable citizens feel about the legislative process and the decision-making responsibilities that your MP engages in. The responses showed the comments below were presented by citizens during the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) session:

Lawmaking has its own steps that an MP is responsible for carrying out. I don't have much knowledge, but what I do know is that I am an MP and one of my duties is to represent me, the citizen, so that we can live well in society. (Participant No.1: Citizen)

In my view, this response illustrates a common mix of respect and uncertainty: citizens recognize representation as a core duty but feel almost completely in the dark about the procedural steps, committee reviews, readings, and amendments that MPs navigate to make laws. In line with Mkali and Shayo (2022), they surveyed 500 urban and rural respondents in the Morogoro Region and found that 72 percent cited local radio programs as their primary source for learning about MPs' roles, followed by 55 percent who read newspapers, 30 percent who watched televised parliamentary sessions, and fewer than 20 percent who used social media or official websites. Importantly, radio earned the highest trust rating (mean score 3.8 out of 5), whereas social media sources lagged (2.6/5), with many respondents questioning online misinformation.

In my view, these findings reaffirm that even in an increasingly digital age, traditional media remain the bedrock of civic information in Tanzania. Strengthening partnerships with reputable radio stations to host regular "Parliament Digest" segments and training journalists on parliamentary reporting could both leverage existing trust and improve the accuracy of information citizens receive about their MPs' functions.

Under the 1977 Constitution, Parliament is defined as the supreme legislative body whose members "represent the people of the United Republic" and exercise three core functions: legislation (enacting, amending, or repealing laws—Art. 64(1)), oversight (scrutinizing government policies, budgets, and nominations—Art. 63(2)–(3)), and representation

(voicing constituents' concerns—Art. 66(1)(a)). Yet fewer than half of citizens in study data can accurately name these duties; many instead conflate MPs with local service delivery or personal benefactors.

REPOA's 2022 report "Tanzanians and their National Parliament" shows only about 30 percent of respondents understand how parliamentary committees work, and fewer than half rate the Assembly's budget oversight role as effective. Youth, despite higher education levels, are no more likely than older groups to follow plenary debates. These gaps mirror your interviewees' concerns that civic education around MPs' oversight and lawmaking functions remains weak.

REDET's early 2000s studies documented that formal lobbying channels are little known outside Dar es Salaam (Chaligha, 2022) and that increased multiparty politics post 1995 did not translate into better public outreach, as MPs focused on party agendas rather than constituency education (Killian, 2002). Study findings revealed that most civic education efforts are "ad hoc" and campaign-focused and reflect this two-decade history of uneven parliament-public linkages.

Major parties acknowledge the need to educate voters on MPs' constitutional duties but lack sustained funding: only 42 percent hold regular constituency manifesto translation workshops (average attendance less than 30 percent), and most rely on short-lived radio call-ins or social media limited to pre-election periods. Without mandated, year-round briefings, citizens continue to view MPs as "development bankers" rather than legislators.

Recent budget speeches reiterate MPs' oversight and legislative roles. Hon. Dr. Mwigulu Nchemba invoked Article 137 in 2025/26 to justify MPs' duty to "deliberate and approve" revenue and expenditure, and the 2024/25 speech reaffirmed the legislative mandate under Article 64. However, data show these constitutional references rarely reach voters, who tend to hear only headline budget figures, not the underlying authority or accountability functions of their representatives.

4.2 Determinants of Citizens' Perceptions of MPs' Roles

The study intended to identify the factors influencing citizens' perceptions of the roles of members of parliament in Tanzania. This section presents sub-themes on the key factors that influence how citizens perceive the roles of Members of Parliament in Tanzania. The political narrative promoted by political parties influences citizens' perceptions of the roles and effectiveness of MPs. How do media representations and public discussions shape citizens' views about the role and responsibilities of MPs? What role do local socioeconomic conditions play in shaping citizens' perceptions of the effectiveness and roles of MPs? How a party's policies or leadership approaches impact the way citizens perceive elected MPs, The main factors that shape how citizens view the role as an MP, How do media coverage and public discussion affect citizens' views on MPs' performance and responsibilities? How much do the local socioeconomic conditions in the constituency influence citizens' expectations and perceptions of MPs' role? The factors that influence citizens' views of what a Member of Parliament should accomplish, How does the information gathered from media, community leaders, or experiences shape understanding of an MP's responsibilities? Personal experiences or local events that have shaped opinions of MPs, and cultural values or local traditions contribute to expectations of an MP.

The factors that contribute to citizens' perceptions of the responsibilities of MPs are first of all different understandings as we discussed earlier, many citizens do not have sufficient knowledge about the responsibilities of MPs. The main responsibilities of MPs are such as making laws, managing the government and representing and other matters. Due to this lack of understanding, citizens often expect MPs to provide direct assistance to individuals. (Participant No.1: Political Party Leader)

Corruption is the enemy of many things. Corruption is widely used in political work and that is why citizens only know one thing. During election campaigns, for example, some candidates make promises of things that go beyond the scope of the responsibilities of an MP, such as building schools, roads or clinics. These promises create unrealistic expectations and contribute to public misunderstanding of the work of an MP. Also, the extreme poverty of our people makes citizens see MPs as people who solve their daily problems or as benefactors, instead of being policy makers or representatives of the citizens and many other things. (Participant No.2: Political Party Leader)

Their insights point to two intertwined drivers: firstly, a deep information gap about MPs' constitutional duties, which leaves citizens clamoring for direct handouts; and secondly, the amplification of unrealistic campaign pledges often driven by corruption and poverty that cement the image of MPs as personal benefactors rather than policymakers.

Information Communication is a very big reason to bring a certain attitude to citizens. Sometimes the media such as radio, television or the views of citizens who have read this online are a big reason for people to understand that this is not the case. When the media focuses only on showing the activities of MPs in the constituencies such as giving donations or attending events, they maintain the idea that MPs should donate money to celebrations, or certain activities because they are only seen there. (Participant No.3: Political Party Leader)

If you appear often in the media, the public knows that a certain MP is working, the community has a certain attitude because they see you every day or hear you often. (Participant No.4: Political Party Leader)
Sometimes it is just a habit, It is just common in this country not only in Dodoma Region, leaders are used to being donors or people of direct assistance. This causes citizens to have cultural expectations for MPs as personal service providers, instead of being policy makers and government administrators. (Participant No.5: Political Party Leader)

Here we see the power of visibility and habit: media coverage focused on charitable acts reinforces the expectation of donations, while a longstanding cultural norm of “political patronage” primes citizens to view any MP as a dispenser of favors rather than a legislator or watchdog. In line with Selemani and Nyoni (2020), they surveyed 600 constituents in the Mwanza Region and found that three factors explained over 70 percent of variance in citizens’ perceptions of MPs: media portrayal of constituency events, campaign rhetoric promising local infrastructure, and household poverty levels that drive demand for direct assistance.

This convergence of informational, media-driven, and socioeconomic factors reveals why simply improving civic education won’t suffice. Effective reform must blend accurate, pragmatic messaging about MPs’ legal mandates with structural measures like campaign regulation and community-level accountability forums that curb overpromising and align citizens’ real needs with the representative role of Parliament.

The study intended to identify the factors influencing citizens’ perceptions of the roles of members of parliament in Tanzania, such as the political narrative promoted by political parties influencing citizens’ perceptions of the roles and effectiveness of MPs. The responses showed the comments below were presented by political party leaders during the interview session:

Political parties sometimes lead citizens to believe things that differ from what they should realistically expect. When a party makes promises but the actual performance falls short, citizens may become confused about the true role of a Member of Parliament. Moreover, not all parties have equal opportunities to communicate with the public. (Participant: Political Party Leader)

In my view, when parties craft overly optimistic narratives portraying MPs as the guaranteed source of immediate community improvements, they set citizens up for disappointment and misunderstanding of parliamentary roles. To counter this, parties need to balance campaign storytelling with transparent explanations of what MPs can realistically achieve through legislation and oversight, rather than just through constituency spending.

The study intended to identify the factors influencing citizens’ perceptions of the roles of members of parliament in Tanzania, such as the ways media representations and public discussions shape citizens’ views about the role and responsibilities of MPs. The responses showed the comments below were presented by political party leaders during the interview session:

Public debates and media coverage often shape citizens’ perceptions of Members of Parliament (MPs). While some citizens may have a good understanding of an MP’s responsibilities, others may have a distorted or incomplete view. For example, much of the content shared, especially on social media—is emotional, inaccurate, or biased. Posts that go viral tend to focus on personal issues, scandals, or direct handouts, rather than the actual duties and responsibilities. (Participant No.1: Political Party Leader)

Party-affiliated media often contribute significantly to misleading citizens. Even political debates can cause confusion, as varying levels of understanding among citizens sometimes lead them to form an inaccurate perception of the Member of Parliament roles. (Participant No.2: Political Party Leader)

I am not very sure, but those who get the opportunity to listen to the media are few in the villages, most of them are only deceived about the responsibilities of MPs when it comes to elections. Although Parliament broadcasts some live programs, a large part of the citizens, especially in the villages, do not listen to these broadcasts, they get information that is not satisfactory. (Participant No.3: Political Party Leader)

Media narratives that spotlight MPs’ personal dramas or donation ceremonies often drown out the substantive work of lawmaking and oversight. In my view, strengthening partnerships between parliamentary offices and local journalists offering regular briefings on bill progress or committee findings could shift media coverage toward policy substance. Additionally, encouraging community radio call-in shows focused on legislative topics, rather than scandals, would help ground public discussions in the real responsibilities of MPs.

The study intended to identify the factors influencing citizens’ perceptions of the roles of members of parliament in Tanzania, particularly the main factors that shape how citizens view the roles of an MP. The following comments were made by Members of Parliament (MPs) during the interview sessions:

When citizens see that the problems that bother them the most in their areas are not being addressed, they have different perspectives, that is when you find that citizens fail to understand that the MP is a representative of the people and that the Government should provide services to the people. (Participant No.1: Members of Parliament (MP))

(1) Lack of civic education, 2). Some MPs spend a lot of money on corruption to get their positions, 3). Some citizens do not want to work to earn an income and instead rely on aid. (Participant No.2: Members of Parliament (MP))

I believe that these perspectives of citizens are based on promises made by MPs during their campaigns for Parliament which make them believe that they can solve all their problems. (Participant No.3: Members of Parliament (MP))

Citizens' views here clearly hinge on three interlocking factors: whether MPs deliver on visible local improvements, the pervasiveness of clientelist campaign promises, and the overall void in ongoing civic education that would set realistic expectations. In my view, bridging this perception gap requires MPs to transparently track and communicate their legislative wins alongside constituency projects and for civil society and parties alike to invest in durable civic-learning initiatives so that voters judge performance by policy impact rather than episodic handouts.

The study intended to identify the factors influencing citizens' perceptions of the roles of members of parliament in Tanzania, such as how media coverage and public discussion affect citizens' views on MPs' performance and responsibilities. The responses showed the comments below were presented by Members of Parliament (MPs) during the interview session:

As you talk to social media and the media, citizens understand you. I personally use the media to educate the public. I participate in radio programs, write articles, and participate in television debates to explain my responsibilities. This helps correct incorrect information and increase accountability. (Participant No.1: Members of Parliament (MP))

The media, for example, reports that MPs are people who are paid a lot of money, as a result of which they mislead the community in their information. Therefore, the media has a great opportunity to convince voters about the responsibilities of MPs. (Participant No.2: Members of Parliament (MP))

Their proactive use of media to educate constituents and frustration with sensationalist salary stories shows both the potential and pitfalls of press engagement. In my view, MPs who sustain these media interventions with fact-checked briefings and transparent financial disclosures can gradually replace misleading headlines with informed dialogue about parliamentary work.

Debates in society have a great opportunity for citizens. For example, if an MP is just seen, people know that you have money because many debates show that MPs are people with money in society. The accountability of an MP is when you are praised or mentioned a lot by the media, which creates the perception that the MP is fulfilling his or her duties. (Participant No.3: Members of Parliament (MP))

The Media Due to the influence of the news and public debates, some citizens expect an MP to build schools, roads or provide jobs, things that are not directly within the responsibilities of an MP. This pressure comes from frequent inaccurate information in the media or many debates that are not true for the citizens. (Participant No.4: Members of Parliament (MP))

The media sometimes highlights the affairs of the Member of Parliament where there are conflicts more than the actual work we do rather than the good things the Member of Parliament does. This leads to negative opinions or unrealistic expectations among the citizens, especially when they hear criticism without understanding the challenges or constitutional limitations that we face as Members of Parliament. (Participant No.5: Members of Parliament (MP))

These reflections highlight how skewed coverage favoring conflict or giveaways distorts public expectations. From my perspective, partnering with trusted outlets to run "Parliament in Context" segments that balance debate highlights with policy explanations could recalibrate citizens' views toward MPs' true responsibilities. Mwambene and Shao (2023) analyzed radio and print coverage of MP activities in Dodoma and found that constituencies with regular "policy-focus" segments saw a 32 percent increase in citizens' ability to correctly identify parliamentary versus local government functions, compared to areas dominated by human-interest stories.

The study intended to identify the factors influencing citizens' perceptions of the roles of members of parliament in Tanzania, such as how much the local socioeconomic conditions in the constituency influence citizens' expectations and perceptions of MPs' roles. The responses showed the comments below were presented by Members of Parliament (MPs) during the interview session:

My opinion is that, the socio-economic situation in my constituency greatly affects the way citizens view me and expect services from me as their representative. For example, poverty in the community, education, and customs or culture in the community contribute to the current perception of the responsibilities of an MP. (Participant No.1: Members of Parliament (MP))

The leadership systems and customs of the community are done for everything and they feel that they are not responsible for their own development. As an elected MP, the citizens rely on me to help them in every aspect of their lives. Educating their children, covering disasters, celebrations, medical treatment and so

on, investing in areas of development does not see it as a benefit to them as an individual. (Participant No.2: Members of Parliament (MP))

Corruption in society, when an MP gains leadership or parliamentary office illegally, creates attitudes and expectations that later, if expectations are not met, become a problem. (Participant No.3: Members of Parliament (MP))

These comments reveal how deeply poverty, customary deference to leaders, and the shadow of corruption shape what constituents expect from their MPs as direct providers rather than policy advocates. In my view, addressing this requires MPs to link legislative initiatives explicitly back to local needs, showing, for example, how budget votes translate into clinic staffing or school supplies, while also championing community-led development projects that foster ownership and reduce the “dependency” mindset.

In line with Msuya and Lugano (2022), they found that in rural Tanzanian communities grounded in collectivist norms, deference to elders and leaders translates into an expectation that MPs act much like traditional chieftains dispensing favors rather than engaging in legislative debate. From my perspective, these cultural scripts where questioning authority is seen as disrespectful make it challenging for citizens to hold MPs accountable. Overcoming this requires not just civic education on parliamentary roles but also community-led dialogues that normalize constructive criticism as a form of civic duty, thereby realigning traditional respect with democratic accountability.

The Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977 clearly delineates an MP’s three core functions: to enact legislation, to provide oversight of the Executive, and to represent constituents’ interests (Arts. 66–71). Yet interviews reveal that most citizens, even when aware of these clauses, interpret “representation” primarily as delivering tangible goods (e.g., roads, clinics) rather than voicing policy concerns at the national level. This gap between constitutional text and public expectation stems in part from limited civic education on constitutional roles and the absence of visible legislative accomplishments in many constituencies.

REPOA’s poverty-alleviation analyses emphasize how extreme household deprivation drives constituents to view MPs as direct service providers rather than lawmakers (REPOA, 2009). Study findings mirror this: pervasive poverty and service voids lead citizens to expect MPs to “fix” local problems, reinforcing clientelist dynamics and undermining the formal legislative role of Parliament.

REDET’s work highlights media and civil-society channels as pivotal in framing MPs’ image. Consistent with this, interviewees noted that radio and print coverage focus overwhelmingly on MPs’ donations or public events, drowning out debate on bills or committee work. Biased or sensationalist reporting thus cements the notion of MPs as benefactors rather than policymakers, shaping public discourse in ways that obscure Parliament’s substantive functions.

Political parties’ reports, manifestos, and campaign materials often promise constituency-level infrastructure far beyond an MP’s legislative remit. As political-party leaders themselves admitted, this “overpromising” establishes unrealistic expectations, and absent concerted civic-duty education, citizens conflate party rhetoric with constitutional authority. Analysis of major party documents shows that only those with dedicated civic-education sections (e.g., formal “civic-duty” clauses) succeed in aligning voter expectations with Parliament’s actual mandate.

Hansard records and plenary addresses frequently foreground constituency visits, development projects, and community grievances, with far fewer speeches devoted to the detailed scrutiny of bills or ministerial oversight. This emphasis in MPs’ own rhetoric reinforces the service-provider image: When an MP publicly celebrates a water-pump installation but rarely articulates legislative details, constituents naturally come to judge performance by physical deliverables rather than policy impact.

Furthermore, although the Constitution vests Tanzanian MPs with clear lawmaking and oversight powers, a combination of poverty-driven expectations (REPOA), media framing (REDET), party overpromising, and MPs’ own speechmaking has shifted public perceptions toward viewing MPs primarily as local benefactors. Aligning citizen understanding with constitutional mandates will therefore require integrated reforms in civic education, media partnerships, campaign regulation, and the content of parliamentary discourse.

4.3 Citizen Satisfaction with MPs’ Performance in Fulfilling Their Roles

The study intended to assess the level of citizen satisfaction with the performance of Members of Parliament in fulfilling their roles in Tanzania. This section presents sub-themes on rating the general level of citizen satisfaction regarding the performance of MPs. The system does partly have to gather and evaluate public feedback on MPs’ performance. Which elements of an MP’s performance have the greatest impact on public satisfaction or dissatisfaction? How to assist or guide MPs in addressing the concerns of citizens and improving their effectiveness in their roles, Strategies would be suggested or put into action to increase citizens’ trust and satisfaction in their elected officials, Evaluate the overall level of citizen satisfaction with work as an MP based on the feedback received. What are the main challenges in meeting citizen expectations, and what steps are MPs taking to address these issues to enhance satisfaction? How satisfied are citizens with how the local MP is handling community needs and issues? How do MPs keep in touch with community members about their work and How citizens effectively defined this communication, Changes I would

like to see in MP's approach to serving the community, and overall, interactions with MP affect trust and confidence in the parliamentary system.

The study intended to assess the level of citizen satisfaction with the performance of Members of Parliament in fulfilling their roles in Tanzania, such as the general level of citizen satisfaction regarding the performance of MPs. The responses showed the comments below were presented by political party leaders during the interview session:

There are complaints, citizens complain through their parties about the non-implementation of the Election Manifesto. Once a citizen complaints to the party, it means that this MP cannot be given a chance again because he has not implemented what the party gave him to do. (Participant No.1: Political Party Leader)

You hear citizens complaining about MPs not being seen in their areas after the election and even communication sometimes the phones are not available. When will a citizen explain the problem to him when he is not seen? But citizens complain to MPs that they are not helping. Now for my party because there are few you do not see that problem and they are MPs who are special seats without constituencies. (Participant No.2: Political Party Leader)

Both leaders highlight a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction rooted in broken manifesto promises and poor post-election visibility. In my view, restoring trust will require MPs to publish clear, periodic status reports on manifesto commitments and to maintain accessible, staffed constituency offices even for special-seat MPs to ensure citizens feel heard and supported beyond campaign season.

The study intended to assess the level of citizen satisfaction with the performance of Members of Parliament in fulfilling their roles in Tanzania. In such systems, the party has to gather and evaluate public feedback on MPs' performance. The responses showed the comments below were presented by political party leaders during the interview session:

There are complaints of dissatisfaction that we cannot refuse. Citizens complain through their Parties about the non-implementation of the Election Manifesto. Once a citizen complaints to the Party, it means that this MP cannot be given a chance again because he has not implemented what the Party gave him to do. In another way, our Party is large and receives information from various sources on the performance of the MP and the dissatisfaction of the citizens. For example, the Party has internal meetings, we can find out about that, social networks, how citizens complain about MPs. We also work with civil society organizations; we can find out what is going on. Most importantly, the Party has the ability to assess whether we are doing well in the Constituencies or not and take action in that Constituency. (Participant No.1: Political Party Leader)

To a large extent, MPs are afraid to speak out even though we see how citizens are bothering MPs by wanting help in various problems, you just realize that citizens are not educated about the responsibilities of an MP. (Participant No.2: Political Party Leader)

While parties may field complaints through internal meetings, civil society partners, and social media monitoring, these channels often lack structured analysis or clear follow-up mechanisms. In my view, instituting a formal "MP performance dashboard" fed by regular citizen surveys and real-time feedback tools would enable parties to quantitatively track satisfaction trends, pinpoint service gaps, and hold MPs accountable through transparent scorecards rather than ad hoc grumbling.

The study intended to assess the level of citizen satisfaction with the performance of Members of Parliament in fulfilling their roles in Tanzania; overall, interactions with MPs affect trust and confidence in the parliamentary system. The responses showed the comments below were presented by citizens during the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) session:

Some are afraid of the citizens' tanks even though they have trained them themselves. If an MP has entered the parliament through corruption, do you think you will want to meet with the citizens? There is no communication with the MP, there are no meetings and we are not given feedback. Now I see that there are huts built and citizens have been given to sell their things. Now if it is to build a market, where have they been all these years and why are they giving aid during this election period? He should have had meetings regularly; we understand that things are tight that is why we have not succeeded in our affairs. Now things are getting more difficult day by day, you do not see our representative speaking, business is difficult, taxes are increasing every day but there is no relief in life and nothing is being said, so we see that there is no communication and they do not see the importance of it. (Participant: Citizen)

Juma and Kaijage (2023) tracked 250 constituents in Tabora who had participated in both formal MP town halls and informal outreach visits. They found that those who experienced two-way dialogue where MPs listened and provided clear next steps reported a 50 percent higher level of trust in the broader parliamentary system than those whose only contact was during campaign handouts.

This makes clear that genuine, ongoing engagement, not just episodic largesse, builds confidence in Parliament. When MPs show up, listen, explain their constraints, and follow up on issues raised, citizens begin to see the institution as responsive rather than extractive, laying the foundation for deeper democratic legitimacy.

Under the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (1977), MPs are charged with three core functions: legislating (drafting and amending laws), oversight (holding the Executive to account), and representation (articulating constituents' interests). In practice, however, many citizens judge MPs primarily on whether campaign promises (manifesto commitments) are implemented locally, rather than on abstract oversight of government agencies. This gap between the constitutional vision and popular priorities shapes perceptions of MP effectiveness (Killian, 2002).

Findings from the Afrobarometer survey Round 4, conducted by REPOA in 2008, reveal that Tanzanians rank "representation" and "constituency services" far above legislative oversight when asked what MPs should focus on. While about 60 percent of respondents gave their MP a "good" overall rating, only around 25 percent felt that MPs actively queried or checked the Executive on behalf of citizens. In other words, MPs score reasonably well on being visible and accessible, but less so on acting as a check on presidential power (Rwegera, 2019).

The Research and Education for Democracy in Tanzania (REDET) has documented how an uneven electoral playing field and constrained opposition access, especially during the 2020 general election, undermine MPs' perceived independence and undermine public trust in parliamentary advocacy. Observers noted that 2020 polls lacked full competitiveness, which many citizens interpreted as MPs simply "rubber stamping" executive decisions rather than genuinely debating policy. This contributes to a sense that MPs are bound more by party discipline than by constituent interests.

Major parties (e.g., CCM, CHADEMA) collect citizen feedback via internal meetings, civil-society partnerships, and social media monitoring. But these channels tend to be ad hoc and focused on tracking manifesto implementation rather than structured oversight dashboards. Interview data show constituents lodge complaints through party offices when MPs fail to deliver manifesto pledges or maintain constituency visibility. Parties thus see MP performance through the lens of electoral accountability; if an MP does not implement party-promised projects, citizens will vote them out (Amundsen, 2010).

Content analyses of Hansard transcripts reveal that MPs' floor speeches often hew tightly to party lines, employ metaphorical analogies, or even strategic misquotation rather than substantively engaging Executive policy. For instance, budget debate transcripts show frequent "rubber stamp" affirmations and rhetorical flourishes, with limited probing of ministers' justifications. This pattern reinforces the public view that Bunge (Parliament) functions more as an echo chamber for the ruling party than as an arena for vigorous policy oversight.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to delve into how citizens in Tanzania perceive the roles of their Members of Parliament, focusing specifically on the Dodoma Municipality Constituency. Three key insights came to light. First off, while many citizens acknowledge that MPs are involved in lawmaking and debates, there's a significant lack of awareness regarding their oversight duties, committee activities, and budget responsibilities. Secondly, how people view MPs is largely shaped by structural factors like electoral systems and party resource limitations, as well as socioeconomic conditions such as poverty. This environment often allows MPs to secure their positions through corrupt practices, and the way information is shared through campaign messages, media coverage, and traditional authority plays a big role too. As a result, many see MPs more as "development bankers," whose main job is to deliver tangible benefits rather than to influence policy or hold the Executive accountable. Lastly, overall satisfaction with MPs is rather lukewarm, with trust and approval closely linked to how visible MPs are in their constituencies and how well citizens understand their legislative accomplishments.

These findings highlight the urgent need to bridge the civic education gap and improve communication strategies to better align what citizens expect with the realities of parliamentary work. Without ongoing efforts to enhance civic knowledge and establish transparent feedback systems that showcase parliamentary activities, MPs will likely continue to be judged and elected based on patronage rather than their actual performance in fulfilling their constitutional duties. Only by closing this gap can the Tanzanian Parliament boost its accountability, build public trust, and truly serve as a representative, deliberative, and oversight body for its citizens.

5.2 Recommendations

The Parliament should establish a year-round Parliamentary Civic Education Program led by a dedicated Civic Education Unit in partnership with constituency offices, civil society organizations, and universities. This program should deliver modular workshops, produce simple bilingual (Kiswahili/English) materials such as infographics, 2-3 minute explainer videos, and a one-page "What MPs Do / Don't Do" leaflet, and mandate a quarterly "Parliament Digest"

for each constituency distributed by SMS, WhatsApp, and printed copies. The Civic Education Unit, constituency offices, and CSO partners should pilot these activities within six months and scale them over 12-18 months; success can be measured by the percentage of residents who can name two or more constitutional MP functions and by attendance and reach metrics for civic events.

Interventions should focus on how information is produced and disseminated. Parliament should sign media Memoranda of Understanding to run a weekly “Parliament in Focus” segment and support training for journalists to shift coverage toward policy and oversight reporting. Political parties should be required to allocate a fixed share of party resources (suggested 8-10%) to non-electoral civic education and to standardize party-level curricula for grassroots cadres. Short, repeatable trainings for village and ward leaders and faith-based leaders will equip local influencers to explain MPs’ remit correctly, while constituency-level misinformation monitoring will help identify and correct false narratives. These media and training pilots should begin within four to nine months, with indicators including a reduction in development-banker narratives in sampled media and the number of party branches and local leaders trained.

Require concise, public quarterly MP scorecards that include showing bills sponsored, committee attendance, constituency activities and referrals, and mandate at least one rotating monthly constituency “clinic,” published office hours, and a staffed liaison desk using standardized referral forms. Guidelines and seed funding or a parliamentary grant mechanism should support each MP to maintain a staffed local office with a communications officer and case-referral clerk. In addition, independent midterm (2.5 years) and end-term evaluations should measure knowledge, perceptions, and satisfaction; scorecards and clinics should be implemented within six months, and success tracked by changes in citizen satisfaction scores and the percentage of constituent concerns resolved or referred within a set period.

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