

PARLIAMENTARIANS' ACCESS TO INFORMATION: A CASE STUDY OF DODOMA PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY IN DODOMA TANZANIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the current status of the Dodoma Parliamentary Library with regard to performance and effectiveness in providing relevant information to members of parliament. A case study was employed as the study was based on one specific library. In gathering data, the triangulation method was used including questionnaires, interview schedule, and personal observation as data gathering instruments. Findings of the study established that generally the status of the library in providing information to Parliamentarians was not good. The library provided weak information services grouped in three sections namely; technical, reference, and circulation and lending services. In order to effect their duties parliamentarians mainly need political and policy related information, general news and scientific and technological information. The performance of the Dodoma Parliamentary Library was mainly affected by inadequate facilities such as computers, inadequate funds, few trained staff, few collections and inadequate information sources in different media and formats. Other factors include lack of information literacy skills and low morale of reading culture among parliamentarians. Consequently, several recommendations were made: increasing library space, recruiting more well trained library staff, automating library, improving and diversifying library collection, conducting information literacy and information technology training to the parliamentarians, requesting the government to allocate more resources to that library, giving library staff time to conduct research to improve their services, and requiring the library to have a policy for effective planning of activities.

Introduction

In Tanzania, the Parliament is the principal organ that has the authority on behalf of the people, to oversee and advise the government and its organs in the discharge of their respective responsibilities. It consists of the President

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of the United Republic of Tanzania and the National Assembly. The most important function of Parliament is to make laws. The subjects on which Parliament can legislate have been laid down in the Constitution. According to the United Republic of Tanzania Constitution (1977), the functions of the Parliament include:

- To deliberate upon and authorize any long or short-term plan,
- To debate the performance of each Ministry during the annual budget sessions,
- To enact legislation where implementation requires such legislation,
- To put any question to any Minister concerning public affairs that are within his responsibilities,
- To deliberate upon and ratify all treaties and agreements to which the country is part and the provisions of which requires ratification,
- To call upon the government to account for their actions.

In general, members of parliament have to investigate, make decisions and provide recommendations on matters of national importance. They have to make different decisions at different levels and on several and different issues for the interests of all citizens.

Basing on the functions of parliamentarians, their access to information is extremely critical in order to make informed discussions, judgment and rational decisions on various national issues. They require accurate, timely and precise information in order to contribute effectively during Parliament sessions; correctly analyze and forecast the implications of various policies and be able to influence such policies.

Libraries as one source of information are the most likely places where one can find a wide variety of information in different sources and different formats. There are different types of libraries such as national, academic, public and special libraries. According to Kumar (1987:72) a special library:

"is a library established, supported, and administered by a business firm, private corporation, association, government agency, or other special interest group or agency to meet the information needs of its members or staff in pursuing the goals of the organizations"

In other words, a special library is the one which serves a particular group of people, such as the employees of a firm, government department, or the staff and members of a professional research organization. Such a library deals essentially with special kind of information related to the functions/roles of its parent organization. Parliamentary libraries are one example of special libraries. They mainly provide information related to the information needs of parliamentarians.

Therefore, a modern, active, well equipped, and well staffed parliamentary library is an essential apparatus for any parliament. It is an essential apparatus in the sense that the parliamentary library is required to cover in-depth, accurate, timely and historical information on subjects such as agriculture, trade, defense, economics, education, the environment, science and technology, social issues, health services and many more.

The Dodoma Parliamentary Library: Historical Perspective

The Dodoma library started around 1992 after being transferred from Bunge House in Dar es Salaam to Dodoma-Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) House. It was just a small room and the main content of its documents basically were **HANSARD** (Taarifa Rasmi za Bunge). Included also were some journals such as Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Journal and other specific reference books that related to the needs of members of parliament. Most of these documents were obtained through donations and a few through purchases. Their use was rather poor perhaps because many of the members of parliament had low level of education and depended mostly on **HANSARD** documents.

With the increasing number and level of education of parliamentarians, the need for information has also been increasing and thus leading to increasing number of users of that library. Consequently, the library collections have also increased, with donation of materials being obtained from various local and foreign sources. Different types of information sources are being acquired depending on the library budget availed by the parliamentary office.

Objectives of the Study

In analysing the role of parliamentary library and research services in Tanzania, Kimbunga (1996) observed that library services provided the Parliament library in Dodoma were inadequate and were mainly basic reference and information services plus direct loan items to individual members or committees. On top of these, the library was also seriously considering concentrating on the provision of services such as; on-line services, compilation of subject bibliographies, translation services, inter-library loans, photocopying and current awareness services. Since Kimbunga's study it seems no any other study has been undertaken to examine the situation. Therefore, this study investigated the current status of the Dodoma Parliament Library with regard to its performance and effectiveness in providing relevant information to Parliamentarians. Specifically the study was designed to:

- Examine types of services provided by the Dodoma Parliamentary Library

- Identify the information needs of Parliamentarians
- Determine various sources of information used by Parliamentarians.
- Determine constraints that hinder the provision of better information services.
- Recommend ways in which provision of information services to Parliamentarians could be improved.

The findings from the study were considered critical as they could form a basis for improving the quality of library and information services by influencing the allocation of more resources, train Parliamentarians (users) in information literacy skills and, raise awareness among Parliamentarians on the use of library and information services.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Dodoma Municipality, at the Parliamentary library, specifically established to serve the information needs of Parliamentarians in Tanzania. The population for this study was purposefully determined and included members of the Tanzania Parliament and the staff of Dodoma Parliamentary Library. A total of 47 respondents were selected on the basis of their availability and their convenience. This constituted 40 Parliamentarians who were conveniently but randomly selected from the population of 254 Parliamentarians. Always members of Parliament are very busy, and so convenient sampling was thought to be the best technique in getting the needed sample. In the case of the library staff, purposive sampling was used as it allowed the researchers to identify only those respondents who were familiar with the information services and functions of the Dodoma Parliamentary Library. A total of seven members of staff were identified.

Face to face interviews were used to get information from Parliamentarians. This is because members of Parliament are always busy, and so they could not have enough time to fill in questionnaires. In the case of library staff, self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. In addition, physical observation of available facilities, resources and the way services were being used in the library was done.

Data collected were analysed in two ways. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the close-ended questions and quantitative data while content analysis was used to analyse open-ended questions (qualitative data).

Findings and Discussion

Background information of respondents

The background information of respondents was important in gaining an understanding of the general characteristics of the population under study in terms of gender and education. It was found that majority (67.5%) of

Parliamentarians were male. This is because of the fact that in most developing countries including Tanzania, there has always been unequal representation between male and female Parliamentarians. For example, in 2002 females comprised less than 20% of the Tanzanian Parliament. In case of the library staff 71.4% of respondents were male while only 28.6% were female.

Knowing the level of education of respondents was also important because education has influence on access, use and provision of the library and information services. Educated individuals have the chance of being more responsive to the library for information than uneducated ones. Findings revealed that slightly over half (55%) of Parliamentarians had university degrees, 17.5% had diplomas while the remaining 27.5% indicated other category (secondary, primary education and certificates). The higher percentage of Parliamentarians with university degrees presuppose that their level of education actually influences them to build a culture of reading and find evidential information prior to any parliamentary session. In the case of library staff, although they were few in number almost three quarters (70%) were university degree holders. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of respondents by education.

Table 1: Education of Respondents

Level of Education	Parliamentarians		Library Staff	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
PhD	5	12.5		
2 nd degree	7	17.5	3	42.9
1 st degree	10	25.0	2	28.6
Diploma	7	17.50%	2	28.6
Other	11	27.5		
Total	40	100	7	100

Information Services Rendered by the Dodoma Parliamentary Library

It was important to know the types of services provided by the Dodoma Parliamentary Library in order to assess whether these services responded to the information needs of Parliamentarians. It was observed that the library provided weak information services grouped in three sections as described below. Such services were necessary given the size of the library and Tanzania Parliament office in general. The three sections in the library were:

- **Technical services:** Deals with the acquisition of all information resources (documents). Processing of library materials for example

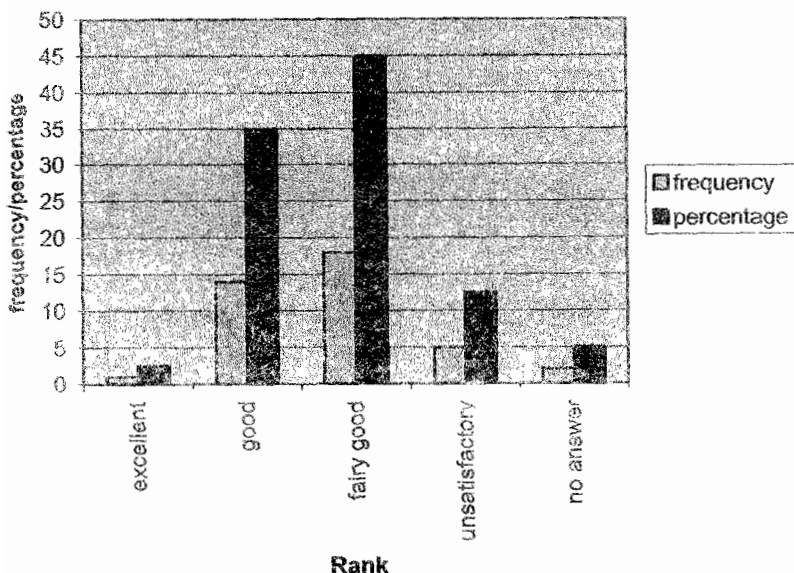
stamping, numbering and labeling of documents. The section also dealt with the organization of documents and provision of Internet services.

- **Reference Unit:** Deals with responding to queries from users. It directs the users to other libraries and information services such as University of Dar es Salaam library, government department libraries and public libraries where required information can be obtained. It also makes accessible reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopedia and yearbooks. Arranges and shelves those materials available and assists users on how to use these information resources.
- **Circulation and lending services:** Deals with borrowing of publications, issuing reminders for overdue and reservation of requested documents.

In addition, photocopying, typing and research services were also being carried out.

In order to determine the extent of efficiency and effectiveness of these services, respondents were required to indicate this by ranking the services. Results in Fig.1 show that the majority (45%) of respondents indicated the services to be 'fairly good', followed by those who ranked the services as 'good' (35%). 12.5% of the respondents ranked as 'unsatisfactory' while 5% did not provide any ranking. Very few (2.5%) respondents said library services were excellent.

Fig. 1: Level of Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Services



In order to solicit information on the frequency of use of Dodoma Parliamentary Library as one source of information, the findings indicate that 45% of parliamentarians were using the library frequently, 45% were using the library rarely and 10% never used the library as their one source of information.

Generally, the findings suggest that the current status of the library in providing required information to members of parliament was not that good. The library's contribution to Parliament business was not very much known by some Parliamentarians and some of them could probably not see its importance. One explanation is that the library had probably not been adequately publicized. In addition, inadequate information and literacy skills among Parliamentarians contributed to this problem. Other studies have shown that effective use of information services by members of Parliament was most often limited by lack of awareness (Fairer-Wessels, 1987; Kempson, 1992 and Kaniki, 1995).

Information Needs of Parliamentarians

Knowing the information needs of members of Parliament is important because these needs have a direct bearing on the selection and acquisition of library resources. Since the Parliamentary library is a special library then it has to deal essentially with special kinds of information that would further the interests and functions of the Parliamentarians and the Parliament in general. Thus, providing an information service, which enables the members of Parliament to keep track of the significant development in their field of interest, requires that the library is fully cognizant of their information needs. It is by doing so that it can operate a relevant information service. In this study respondents were asked to indicate only one choice among the broad subject areas in which Parliamentarians needed information. The findings are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Areas in which parliamentarians needed information

Area	Frequency	Percentage
Political /policy matters	24	60
Science and technological	4	10
Entertainment	2	5
General information	10	25
Total	40	100

Political and policy related information (60%) was the mostly needed information by members of parliament in order to effect their duties. General information (25%) ranked second followed by scientific and technological information (10%). What this implies for Dodoma Parliamentary Library is that in order to meet needs of their users some priority in the acquisition of

information sources for the library should base upon the areas indicated as priority by their users. In other words, areas in which information is needed most by Parliamentarians should always dictate the acquisition priorities of the library. As representatives of the people, Parliamentarians would need political and policy related information mostly.

Information sources used most by the Parliamentarians

The study intended also to determine the methods/channels that members of parliament regularly use to obtain information. Findings in Table 3 indicate that books, television, newspapers and radio were frequently used sources of information. Only a few respondents indicated to have been using the Internet. This is probably because most Parliamentarians were not conversant with the use of computers.

Table 3: Sources of Information

Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Newspapers	8	20.0
Books	13	32.5
Television	11	27.5
Radio	5	12.5
Internet	3	7.5
Total	40	100.0

When asked on how often they used computers, over half (55%) of respondents indicated that they rarely or never used computers. Only a few respondents (15%) indicated to have been using computers daily (Table 4). This suggests that, although members of Parliament were aware of the existence and the importance of computers for online acquisition and communication of information, a few were enthusiastic users. This could be attributed to many factors such as limited access in relation to available computers (During this study only five computers were available in the library), computer illiteracy, low levels of education of some Parliamentarians, language problems, and social and cultural norms. In addition, the availability of some spare time to work on computers was also a problem given that Parliamentarians have many activities to perform.

Table 4: Use of Computers by Parliamentarians

Time	Frequency	Percentages
Daily	6	15.0
Weekly	9	22.5
Monthly	3	7.5
Rarely	12	30.0
Never	10	25.0
Total	40	100.0

Parliamentarians were also asked to indicate other places (apart from their library) where they go for information. Findings in Table 5 show that half of the respondents (50%) indicated government departments as most important information providers. This was followed, in that order, by the mass media (25%), public libraries (5%) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) (5%). 20% of respondents indicated the other category without specifying (Table 5).

Table 5: Other information providers used by Parliamentarians

Information provider	Frequency	Percentage
Government departments	20	50
NGOs	2	5
Mass media	10	25
Public libraries	2	5
Others	8	20

Problems Affecting the Dodoma Parliamentary Library

The study also investigated problems that affected effective access to and provision of library and information services at the Dodoma Parliamentary Library. The responses to this question were critical for the study in providing some practical recommendations to the improvement of library services. A number of problems were identified as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Problems Affecting the Provision of Information Services

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate funds	25	53
Inadequate space	39	83
Inadequate trained staff	37	79
Inadequate up to date and relevant materials	40	85
Inadequate modern facilities such as computers	43	92
Don't know	4	8.5

Overwhelming majority of respondents indicated inadequate modern information facilities such as computers, inadequate up to date and relevant materials, inadequate working space, inadequately trained staff and inadequate funds as the major problems that hamper proper functioning of the Dodoma Parliamentary Library.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to investigate the current status of the Dodoma Parliamentary Library with regard to its performance and effectiveness in providing relevant information to the members of Parliament. The study was based on the assumptions that with a well resourced and functioning Parliamentary Library, the provision of relevant and up to date information services to the Parliamentarians could be effective hence in turn, facilitate the effective performance of Parliamentary functions.

Findings however, suggest that generally the status of the library in providing information to Parliamentarians was not all that effective. The library reflected a weak information base that in turn affected the level of information services provided. In order to effect their duties properly, Parliamentarians mainly need political and policy related information, general news and scientific and technological information. However, there are some problems, which affect their access to relevant information characterized by lack of modern information facilities such as computers, few and inadequately trained staff, poor collections and the absence of a variety of sources of information for users to have access to different varieties of information. Funding of the library also presented another problem. In addition, most of the materials found at that library were outdated and incomplete which in some ways led to low morale and poor reading culture among Parliamentarians.

Recommendations

Basing on the findings and particularly the drawbacks experienced by the Dodoma Parliamentary Library in providing information services to its users, recommendations and strategies were made, which if implemented by the Tanzania Parliament management could improve information services for Parliamentarians in the country:

The library building should be expanded to accommodate more reading materials, facilities, offices and above all create enough space for library users.

The library staff should be trained to cope with the increasing number, not only of members of Parliament, but also their information needs. This can be achieved by recruiting more qualified staff as well as training those on post (especially on Information Technology).

The library should have its own website and automated services for the Parliamentarians to access and retrieve information from anywhere. This will improve the management, dissemination and use of information by Parliamentarians.

The library collections should be improved and diversified by providing adequate and relevant materials. Resource sharing is one way of achieving this. The parliament library should establish linkages for resource sharing with other parliament libraries in the region and other libraries such as university libraries. They should become active members of networks such as the Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Eastern and Southern Africa (APLESA).

Members of Parliament should be conscientized through seminars and other user education programs on the importance of using the library frequently, how to use it and how to use the new information technology such as the computer and the world wide web. They should be given user education to overcome under-utilization and misuse of existing library and information resources.

The government should allocate more resources to the library in order to improve its standard of performance. The library should also struggle to get funds from other sources including the donor community as well as national and international organizations.

Under changing social, political, economic and technological environment, the parliament library staff should conduct research from time to time on issues regarding the provision of, and access to information for the purpose of improving their services.

A policy should be put in place that would ensure effective planning of information services and make the library one of the core activities of the Tanzanian Parliament.

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