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Report on the Tanzanian Public Accounts Committee in Comparative Perspective

riccardo pelizzo
abel kinyondo

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The Tanzanian Public Accounts Committee in Comparative Perspective

By

Ricardo PELIZZO and Abel KINYONDO

Introduction

The purpose of the present policy brief is to compare and contrast the organization and the activity but also the working practices and the functioning of the Tanzanian with that of the Public Accounts Committees (PACs) from the East African region. The survey data included in this study were collected by one of the authors who administered a survey questionnaire designed by CPA and WBI to Chairs and Clerks of 6 East African Public Accounts Committees—Malawi, Seychelles, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The evidence presented here shows that Tanzania’s PAC is line with best practices at the global level. Specifically, the PAC is well above the regional average in terms of several organizational features, and that, most importantly is the most active PAC in the region.

Note that the size of parliamentary staff is an important predictor of PAC’s performance. It follows that since Tanzania’s PAC has at its disposal a smaller number of staff than the other PACs in the region, if given a larger and well trained staff it would have the potential to outperform PACs from elsewhere within the East African region by an even wider margin and could make an even more significant contribution to promoting good governance and citizen trust in the political system.

The importance of PACs’ organizational features

In the course of this analysis, we look at five characteristics that have customarily been discussed in any of the studies published in the wake of the Overseers (McGee, 2002). These include the size of the legislature, the size of the committee, the partisan affiliation of the committee Chairperson and the size of the Staff supporting the committee and the percentage of opposition members serving on the PACs.

There is a simple reason why we decided to present some evidence on each of these five characteristics. The reason is that the a large (and growing) body of scholarly work has shown that each of these organizational characteristics has a major impact not only on the amount of activities performed by a PAC, that is its output, but also on the quality of its overall performance and its effectiveness. For instance, McGee (2002) stated quite clearly that PACs operating in small legislatures operating in either parliamentary or semi-presidential systems are less likely to work well because in small legislatures “there may be a lack of government members to serve on the committee (and on parliamentary committees in general) given the large proportion of members who will hold ministerial office” (McGee, 2002:83). The problem is less significant in East Africa because, except for Seychelles that has a semi-presidential form of government, all the other East African countries included in our analysis have a presidential form of government and ministers are not selected from among parliamentarians.
Small PACs are also believed to be less likely to work effectively because of their size. Indeed, a small PAC may be confronted with a variety of problems: its members may have too many other committee duties and may not devote sufficient attention to their PAC work, its members may have commitments that prevent them from attending the committee meetings and preventing the PAC from reaching the quorum, or the committee may be dominated by government-affiliated MPs who have little intention of effectively scrutinizing the expenditures of the government that they support.

That said, McGee (2002) stated quite clearly that while small PACs or PACs operating in small legislatures may be dysfunctional because of size, bigger PACs may have a suboptimal performance because they either lack the capacity of the support “to carry out their work effectively” (McGee, 2002: 83). Hence, the size of the support staff is the fourth factor that we consider in our analysis. The important point here is that PACs need to have well trained staff. Comparative analyses have shown (Stapenhurst, Pelizzo and Jacobs, 2013) that when PACs have a large but inadequately trained staff at their disposal, having a large staff does not enhance PAC performance. Ideally however, a PAC needs the support of a committee clerk, a member of staff, and a researcher.

The fourth factor that, according to the literature (e.g. McGee, 2002; Stapenhurst et al, 2005), may affect the PAC performance is represented by the partisan affiliation of the PAC Chairperson. A long series of studies (McGee, 2002, Stapenhurst et al., 2005) has in fact emphasized that the presence of an opposition Chairperson has a beneficial impact on the functioning, the performance and the legitimacy of the PAC.

Finally, since previous analyses (Pelizzo, 2011) showed that the presence of opposition MPs on the PAC is a major determinant of the number of meetings held and of the number of reports produced by the committee, we decided to present some information on this organizational feature as well.

**Some evidence from Eastern Africa**

The data presented in table 1 provide an indication of the size of the legislature, the size of the PAC, the partisan affiliation of the Chairperson, the percentage of opposition MPs and the size of the staff in Tanzania and other five East African countries including Malawi, Seychelles and Zambia.

**Table 1. Organizational characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Size of the legislature—number of MPs</th>
<th>Size of the PAC—number of MPs</th>
<th>Opposition Chairperson</th>
<th>% of Opposition MPs serving on the PAC</th>
<th>Size of the staff—number of staff members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 For the purposes of this policy brief East African region includes also Seychelles, Zambia and Malawi. This was intentionally done so as to broaden the scope of analysis which in turn allows for sound generalization of results.
With regard to the size of the legislature, the data show that the Tanzanian legislature is considerably larger than the average size of a legislature in Eastern Africa. In fact in Eastern Africa, the size of a legislature varies from a minimum of 33 seats in Seychelles to a maximum of 375 seats in Uganda, with an average of 218.2 seats. The Tanzanian legislature with its 370 seats is the second largest legislature in the region, it is nearly as large as the largest one, and it is remarkably larger than the regional average (218.2 seats).

With regard to the size of the PAC, the data reveal that Tanzania is also above average. In fact the size of these committees varies from a minimum of 7 in Seychelles to a maximum of 28 seats in Uganda. Since the number averages at 17 MPs, the number of members working in Tanzania’s PAC (18) is above average.

The data at our disposal show that there is some variation both in the process through which members are selected and in the duration of the appointment. With regard to the duration of their appointment there is considerable variation. Members are appointed for 1 year in Zambia, for 2 and a half years in Uganda and Tanzania (where they used to be nominated for the full term, that is five years), and for the full term of 5 years in Malawi, Seychelles, and South Sudan. Note that the length of the term of appointment coupled with political parties’ ability to appoint and remove PAC members may have a significant impact on the independence of committee members and ultimately on the PAC performance.

The only aspect in which the Tanzania’s PAC seems to be below the regional average concerns the percentage of opposition MPs serving on the committee. Data shows that in Tanzania opposition parties are, on average, not as well represented in the PACs as their counterparts elsewhere in the region. Indeed, while the percentage of opposition MPs serving on a PACs in East Africa varies from 11.7 per cent in South Sudan to a maximum of 77.7 per cent in Zambia, the percentage of opposition MPs in the PAC stands only at 20 in Tanzania. This is well below the regional average which is 35.7 per cent. Note that this average is slightly better than the world average reported by Stapenur, Pelizzo and Jacobs (2013). Nevertheless, if one removes the Zambian case, that clearly represents an outlier, one finds that the percentage of opposition MPs in Tanzania is not that different from what it is in the rest of the region. In fact, by removing the Zambian case the percentage of opposition MPs serving in PACs drop from 35.7 per cent to 21.3.

In addition, the information collected from Eastern Africa shows that two-thirds of the Eastern African PACs are chaired by an opposition MP—a value which is very much in line with the world average. Tanzania is not an exception to this rule as it is one among the countries where the PAC is chaired by an opposition member.

Finally, the data presented in table 1 reveal that the Tanzania’s PAC is well below the rest of the region in terms of staff support. In fact, while Eastern African PACs (excluding Tanzania) have
on average 4 staff members at their disposal, the Tanzanian PAC can rely on the support of just 2 staff members.

**Activity**

Data were collected on two sets of PAC activities. The number of meetings held and, more importantly, the number of hearings held. The evidence presented in Figures 2 and 3 is that the Tanzanian PAC is the second most active in terms of meetings held and is the most active in terms of hearings held. This implies that when one considers the ability of PAC to summon witnesses to testify thereby holding the executive to account Tanzania’s PAC is the single most effective overseer in Eastern Africa.

**Figure 1. PAC meeting in Eastern Africa**

**Figure 2. Number of Hearings in Eastern Africa**
To some extent, as we can see from fig. 3, the number of hearings held by PACs in the East Africa region is affected by the size of the PAC (and also by the size of the legislature).

**Figure 3. Number of hearings and PAC size**

In other words, bigger PACs meet more often and hold more hearings, though the relationship between size and either level of activity is not statistically significant. To a larger extent, the number of hearings held by Eastern African PAC reflects their effectiveness, and the evidence points to the fact that the Tanzanian PAC is more effective than its regional counterparts.
Conclusions

The literature (McGee, 2002; Pelizzo, 2011; Stapenhurst, Pelizzo and Jacobs, 2013) has consistently argued that a larger and better trained staff improves the performance of PACs. It follows that if the Tanzanian PAC were given more staff support and if its staff support were given more and better training, the Tanzanian PAC would outperform (in terms of meetings and hearings held, completed inquiries and reports produced) regional PACs by an even wider margin and could establish itself as one of the most evident success stories worldwide.

Bibliography


