From policy commitment to institutional practice: Gender mainstreaming and perceived service delivery in a Tanzanian urban ward

Carren Mahemba Kavalambi[1]
Lucy W. Massoi[2]

[1]carren.kavalambi23@mustudent.ac.tz
[2]lucy.massoi@mzumbe.ac.tz

[2]https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7125-0758

[1,2]School of Public Administration and Management, Mzumbe University, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Gender mainstreaming is embedded in Tanzania's national policy framework, yet little is known about how formal commitments are translated into everyday administrative practice at ward level. Drawing on neo-institutional theory, particularly policy–practice decoupling, this article examines the perceived implementation of gender mainstreaming in Mbezi Ward, Ubungo Municipal Council. The study used an exploratory descriptive case-study design and a structured questionnaire completed by 46 ward employees and officials. Responses were analysed using frequencies and percentages and interpreted against the National Gender and Women Development Policy 2023 and its 2023–2033 Implementation Strategy. Respondents reported comparatively strong recognition of gender-equality policy and gender-responsive recruitment. Perceptions were less favourable regarding training, promotion, equal treatment and women's leadership opportunities. Seventy-four per cent considered monitoring weak. Only 41.3% perceived gender equality as improving service delivery, while 32.6% remained neutral. The findings indicate selective institutionalisation: visible and procedural commitments coexist with weak monitoring, restricted perceived leadership opportunities and uncertain service-delivery outcomes. Because the study relies on employee perceptions from one ward, it does not establish causal effects on service delivery. It nevertheless shows where implementation weakens between formal adoption, operational enactment and outcome coupling. Stronger monitoring, clearer leadership pathways, practical staff capacity-building and gender-responsive performance information are required to deepen institutionalisation.

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming; Local Governance; Policy-Practice Decoupling; Service Delivery; Women's Leadership; Tanzania

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, gender mainstreaming has become a prominent strategy for advancing gender equality in public policy and administration (Kataeva et al., 2024). It involves assessing the implications of planned actions for women and men and integrating their concerns and experiences into policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation across institutional levels (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1997). Gender equality is thus treated as part of routine institutional practice rather than confined to separate programmes. Recent reviews nevertheless show that the transformative ambitions of gender mainstreaming are frequently weakened during implementation (Moser & Moser, 2005; Caywood & Darmstadt, 2024; St Denny & Cairney, 2026). The central difficulty is therefore not simply securing formal commitment but translating that commitment into routine organisational practice.

Gender equality may be recognised in policies, plans and administrative procedures while remaining weakly reflected in budgets, staffing decisions, leadership pathways and accountability systems (Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Walby, 2005). Organisations may also reproduce gender inequalities through established rules, norms and practices, even when they formally embrace equality (Benschop & Verloo, 2006). For instance, inclusive recruitment may not translate into equal opportunities for women's professional development, promotion and leadership. Research across organisational sectors identifies career barriers, gender stereotypes, limited mentoring and inflexible working environments as persistent constraints on women's progression (Kalaitzi et al., 2017). These patterns direct attention beyond policy adoption and numerical representation to how institutions distribute opportunity, authority and influence.

The resulting policy–practice gap is especially significant in decentralised government, where implementation is shaped by local participation, administrative authority and planning arrangements (Massoi & Norman, 2009; Kapelela et al., 2025). Wards occupy an important position between national policy and citizens' everyday encounters with public institutions through their roles in planning, coordination and service facilitation. At the same time, they operate within

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layered administrative relationships and may have limited authority over staffing, budgets and performance systems (Kessy, 2023). Examining gender mainstreaming at this level therefore requires attention to workplace practices, leadership opportunities, monitoring and links to public-service outcomes. Employee motivation, teamwork and inclusive decision-making may support service delivery, but they cannot by themselves demonstrate improvements in citizens' access, satisfaction or service quality (Guthridge et al., 2022; Kessy, 2023; Caywood & Darmstadt, 2024).

At the regional level, the East African Community Gender Policy calls on Partner States to mainstream gender across governance, participation, institutional planning, resource allocation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (East African Community, 2018). This regional direction is reinforced by the United Nations Development Programme's Tanzania Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2027, which emphasises institutional transformation, staff capacity, supportive organisational environments and the integration of gender into programme design, implementation, monitoring and reporting (United Nations Development Programme, 2022).

In Tanzania, the National Gender and Women Development Policy 2023 provides the current framework for institutionalising gender equality. It assigns responsibilities to ministries, regional secretariats and local government authorities and prioritises women's participation in leadership and decision-making, gender-responsive planning and budgeting, gender statistics, monitoring and evaluation (United Republic of Tanzania, 2023a). The accompanying Implementation Strategy for 2023–2033 establishes a 50:50 participation target for leadership and decision-making by 2033. It also calls for awareness programmes, baseline information, indicators, periodic reviews and institutional reporting (United Republic of Tanzania, 2023b). The effectiveness of this framework ultimately depends on how these national commitments are understood and enacted within local institutions. Tanzanian studies reveal persistent weaknesses in this process. Gender considerations may diminish between national policy and district or ward planning when gender-analysis skills, budgets, indicators and reporting mechanisms are limited (Ampaire et al., 2020). Gender has also been integrated unevenly into sectoral policies, sometimes reflecting international discourse more clearly than domestic implementation practice (Kironde et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2023). Studies of local government authorities identify similar weaknesses in mainstreaming, planning and budgeting, while recent research shows that increased representation does not necessarily secure women's substantive participation and influence (Koda & Mtasingwa, 2021; Mujwahuzi et al., 2018; Genda, 2024). Nevertheless, research has concentrated largely on national and sectoral policies, district planning or comparisons across local authorities. Less is known about how employees within a single ward perceive gender mainstreaming across recruitment, training, promotion, leadership, monitoring and service delivery.

Against this background, this article examines the perceived implementation of gender mainstreaming in Mbezi Ward, Ubungo Municipal Council. It argues that gender mainstreaming is selectively institutionalised: formal policy recognition and gender-responsive recruitment coexist with weak monitoring, limited perceived opportunities for women's leadership and uncertainty about service-delivery outcomes. The term *perceived* is used deliberately because the evidence consists primarily of employees' and officials' assessments rather than independently verified administrative performance or citizen-level service data. The article contributes a three-part framework that traces implementation across (1) formal adoption, (2) operational enactment and (3) outcome coupling. Formal adoption concerns policy recognition. Operational enactment concerns recruitment, training, promotion, equal treatment and leadership, while outcome coupling concerns whether these practices are connected to motivation, decision-making and service delivery through credible monitoring evidence. This framework moves the analysis beyond asking whether gender mainstreaming has been adopted to identifying where implementation strengthens or weakens.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Tanzania has an established policy framework for institutionalising gender equality in public administration. The National Gender and Women Development Policy 2023 assigns implementation responsibilities to local government authorities, while its 2023–2033 Implementation Strategy sets a 50:50 participation target for leadership and decision-making and requires indicators, baseline information and periodic reporting (United Republic of Tanzania, 2023a, 2023b). Wards are expected to translate these commitments into administrative practice through local planning, coordination and service facilitation (Kessy, 2023). Research indicates, however, that this translation remains uneven. Gender considerations often diminish between national policy and district or ward planning where gender-analysis skills, budgets, indicators and reporting mechanisms are limited (Ampaire et al., 2020). Studies of local government authorities have also identified persistent gaps in gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting (Mujwahuzi et al., 2018; Koda & Mtasingwa, 2021), while increased numerical representation has not necessarily translated into substantive influence for women in decision-making (Makalanga, 2023; Genda, 2024). Where such gaps persist, formal commitments may confer institutional legitimacy without altering how opportunity, authority and accountability are distributed (Espersson, 2026; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

These gaps have direct practical consequences. If access to training, promotion and leadership remains uneven after recruitment, progress towards the 2033 leadership target is likely to be constrained. Limited monitoring further makes it difficult to determine whether gender commitments shape everyday workplace practice or are associated with improvements in service delivery. Existing Tanzanian research has concentrated on national and sectoral policies,

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district planning and comparisons across local authorities (Mujwahuzi et al., 2018; Ampaire et al., 2020; Kironde et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2023). Limited evidence exists on the extent to which elements of gender mainstreaming are reflected in everyday ward administration and how employees perceive their connection to service delivery. Using Mbezi Ward as an exploratory case, this article examines employees' and officials' perceptions of institutional practice and identifies gaps that remain between policy commitment and implementation.

1.2 Research Objectives

i. To assess how employees and officials perceive the implementation of gender mainstreaming in workplace practices.
ii. To examine how employees and officials perceive gender mainstreaming's contribution to organisational conditions associated with service delivery.
iii. To identify institutional factors which appear to constrain the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Neo-Institutional Theory and Policy-Practice Decoupling

Neo-institutional theory explains why organisations may adopt formally legitimate structures without integrating them fully into routine practice. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that formal rules can secure legitimacy while remaining loosely coupled to organisational action. This article conceptualises institutional decoupling as the disconnection between formally adopted gender commitments and their consistent enactment in routine organisational practices and outcomes. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify coercive, normative and mimetic pressures that encourage institutional conformity, while Scott (2008) locates these pressures within regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive pillars. Applied to gender mainstreaming, neo-institutional theory shifts attention from the existence of policy commitments to whether those commitments influence everyday decisions, opportunities and accountability. Gender mainstreaming generates strong pressures for visible compliance. National policies and reporting requirements exert coercive pressure; professional standards and training create normative expectations; and gender desks, focal persons and reporting templates diffuse as recognised organisational models. Yet adoption does not necessarily redistribute authority or alter established routines. Recruitment procedures may appear gender-responsive while access to training, promotion, leadership and decision-making remains discretionary and uneven. Decoupling therefore provides a more precise explanation than treating implementation as simply present or absent (Paterson & Scala, 2025; St Denny & Cairney, 2026).

Recent evidence strengthens this interpretation. Espersson (2026) finds that municipalities and regions can sustain discrepancies among organisational talk, decisions and action, particularly where political endorsement is not matched by managerial support and systematic follow-up. Similarly, St Denny and Cairney's (2026) systematic review shows that gender-mainstreaming ambitions are frequently diluted during policymaking because transformative objectives are not connected to workable implementation processes. Caywood and Darmstadt (2024) similarly identify weak leadership, organisational culture and inadequate monitoring as persistent obstacles to institutionalising gender mainstreaming. These studies suggest that policy–practice gaps are produced not only by resistance, but also by ambiguous responsibility, competing priorities and weak implementation capacity. This article applies decoupling as a graduated rather than binary condition. It argues that gender mainstreaming may become embedded in visible and rule-bound practices while remaining weak in areas involving discretion, authority and accountability. The analysis therefore examines where institutionalisation is comparatively strong and where the connections between policy and practice weaken.

2.1.2 Selective Institutionalisation

Building on policy–practice decoupling, this article conceptualises *selective institutionalisation* as a pattern of uneven implementation in which some elements of a gender-equality commitment become embedded in organisational practice while others remain weakly enacted. Rather than treating policy and practice as either fully connected or completely separate, the concept draws attention to variation across organisational activities. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that formal gender commitments can coexist with uneven implementation (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2019; Espersson, 2026; St Denny & Cairney, 2026). Visible and rule-bound practices, such as policy recognition and formal recruitment procedures, may become established more readily than practices involving discretion and power. Promotion, leadership appointments, resource allocation and agenda setting may therefore remain uneven even where an organisation formally recognises gender equality. The relevant question is not simply whether gender mainstreaming exists, but where it becomes embedded and where implementation weakens. Selective institutionalisation does not imply deliberate deception. Ward administrations may recognise national commitments while operating with limited staffing authority, expertise, resources and performance information. Such conditions can produce an

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organisational gap between policy and practice. Nevertheless, this gap remains consequential because formal recognition alone cannot demonstrate whether gender commitments influence workplace opportunities or public-service outcomes. The concept therefore captures variation in the depth of implementation without presuming either complete compliance or complete policy failure.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 From Policy Commitment to Institutional Practice

Empirical research consistently shows that formal commitment to gender mainstreaming does not necessarily transform institutional practice. Early assessments associated this gap with diffuse responsibility, inadequate resources and weak accountability, particularly when gender mainstreaming was absorbed into routine administration without challenging established priorities and power relations (Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Moser, 2005; Moser & Moser, 2005; Walby, 2005). The central implementation problem is therefore not the absence of gender commitments alone, but the weakness of the mechanisms through which those commitments influence staffing, budgeting, decision-making and organisational accountability. Recent reviews show that this implementation gap persists. Guthridge et al. (2022) find that interventions often improve awareness or inclusion without transforming wider structures. Caywood and Darmstadt's (2024) mapping review likewise identifies conceptual ambiguity, weak leadership, organisational culture and inadequate monitoring as recurring limitations. St Denny and Cairney (2026) show that transformative outcomes are more likely when gender analysis is integrated throughout the policy process and supported by coordination, resources, accountability and institutional learning. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that policy adoption is necessary but insufficient; institutional change depends on whether gender commitments are connected to authority, resources, implementation routines and mechanisms for assessing results.

2.2.2 Workplace Opportunity and Leadership

Gender-responsive recruitment may widen women's entry into organisations, but substantive inclusion also depends on access to training, transparent promotion and positions carrying decision-making authority. Numerical representation alone cannot demonstrate influence where women have limited agenda-setting power, access to information or participation in consequential committees. Gender mainstreaming must therefore be assessed across the organisational pathway rather than inferred from recruitment or representation alone.

Research across healthcare, academia and business identifies restricted career advancement, gender stereotypes, work–life pressures, limited mentoring and inflexible working environments as recurring barriers to women's leadership (Kalaitzi et al., 2017). Although the prevalence of these barriers varies across sectors, they show how organisational practices and broader social expectations can narrow women's progression after recruitment.

Tanzanian studies reveal a similar distinction between representation and substantive influence. Makalanga (2023) found that although the quota system increased women's representation in local government structures, financial, electoral and gender-related barriers continued to constrain their effective participation. Misafi (2014) likewise found that women's presence in decentralised governance did not necessarily translate into influence over agendas, decisions or service delivery, with pastoral women experiencing greater constraints than non-pastoral women. Mutarubukwa and Mazana (2017) identify organisational cultures, negative attitudes, limited networking and inadequate mentoring as constraints on women leaders in government. Killian and Hyle (2020) also show that participatory arrangements can formally include women while leaving their voice and access to benefits restricted. Together, these studies show that women's presence does not necessarily redistribute institutional authority or influence. This distinction is directly relevant to the present study's examination of recruitment, training, promotion and leadership opportunities within the ward administration.

2.2.3 Gender Mainstreaming and Service-Delivery Outcomes

The relationship between workplace inclusion and service delivery should not be assumed. Gender equality may improve perceived fairness, motivation and teamwork, while inclusive deliberation may broaden the knowledge informing decisions. These are plausible organisational pathways, but service delivery is also shaped by mandates, finance, staffing, infrastructure and citizen demand. Evidence of internal inclusion therefore does not by itself establish improvements in access, timeliness, responsiveness, quality or satisfaction. A gender-responsive assessment must distinguish three levels: employment practices within the organisation, participation in governance and planning, and citizen-facing outcomes. Movement from one level to another requires authority, resources, gender-responsive service analysis and feedback. Guthridge et al. (2022) show that gender-equality interventions frequently produce partial or intermediate improvements without transforming broader institutional outcomes, while Caywood and Darmstadt (2024) identify weak evaluation as a persistent limitation in the evidence base. Because the present study relies on employee perceptions rather than citizen data or administrative performance indicators, it assesses perceived organisational contribution, not causal effects on service delivery. Employee assessments can reveal how institutional practices are understood internally, but they cannot establish whether citizens experience corresponding improvements in services.

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2.2.4 Institutional Constraints and Monitoring

Implementation commonly weakens where policy awareness, gender expertise, coordination, budgets and sex-disaggregated data are limited. Monitoring is especially important because it connects activities to results by specifying responsibilities, baselines, indicators, review cycles and corrective action. Without these mechanisms, institutions may report participation or training while remaining unable to determine whether women and men receive comparable opportunities or experience services differently. Recent African research confirms these constraints across local and sectoral institutions. Khonjelwayo and Zondi's (2025) study of iMpendle Local Municipality in South Africa found that implementation was constrained by limited human and financial resources, weak knowledge of the policy framework, inadequate monitoring and the absence of a clear change-management approach. Evidence from Namibia similarly identifies gaps in training, gender-responsive budgeting, monitoring and accountability despite formal policy commitments (Munyayi et al., 2026). Although the two studies examine different national and sectoral settings, both locate the policy–practice gap in weak implementation capacity and accountability rather than in the complete absence of gender policies. This comparison reinforces the importance of examining how responsibilities, resources and monitoring are connected at the local level.

2.2.5 Gender Mainstreaming in Tanzania and the Study Gap

Research in Tanzania points to a persistent problem of translating national gender commitments into subnational practice. Ampaire et al. (2020) found that gender was more visible in national policy than in sampled district and ward plans, where gender-analysis skills, budgets, indicators and reporting mechanisms were weak. This uneven translation is also evident across sectoral policies. Kironde et al. (2022), in their analysis of Tanzania's climate and water policies, found that although gender considerations were formally recognised, some policy instruments lacked clearly assigned responsibilities, gender-sensitive indicators and adequate mechanisms for implementation and monitoring. Their findings demonstrate that incorporating gender language into policy documents does not necessarily provide the institutional arrangements required to operationalise it. Smith et al. (2023) reach a related conclusion in their analysis of Tanzania's climate-smart agricultural policy. They found that gender-mainstreaming discourse had been incorporated into policy, but its translation into practice was weakened by limited attention to local inequalities, insufficient institutional capacity and inadequate resources at national and local levels. They describe this pattern as the reproduction of internationally legitimate discourse without corresponding implementation capacity. Similar patterns have been observed within Tanzanian higher learning institutions, where formal gender policies and awareness coexist with limited expertise, inadequate training, understaffed gender structures, funding constraints and ad hoc implementation activities (Moses et al., 2024).

While these studies examine different sectors, their findings reveal a broader institutional problem: national gender commitments may lose practical substance as they move towards implementation. Studies of local government support this interpretation. Mujwahuzi et al. (2018) reported limited implementation of gender-mainstreaming strategies across two Tanzanian local government authorities. Koda and Mtasingwa (2021) similarly show how formal planning and budgeting systems may marginalise differentiated needs when officials and communities have limited knowledge of gender-responsive budgeting and women participate unequally in setting priorities. Together with Ampaire et al. (2020), these studies demonstrate that decentralised administrative structures do not automatically translate national gender commitments into local priorities, resources and accountable practices. The literature therefore establishes three recurring patterns: formal commitments travel more readily than operational capacity; numerical inclusion does not guarantee leadership influence; and weak monitoring obscures the relationship between gender mainstreaming and service outcomes. However, ward-level organisational practice remains less examined than national frameworks, sectoral policies and district planning. Existing Tanzanian studies have not examined, within a single ward administration, how employees perceive gender mainstreaming across policy recognition, recruitment, training, promotion, leadership, monitoring and service delivery. They also provide limited evidence distinguishing perceived workplace benefits from independently measured service outcomes. This article addresses that gap by applying an institutional-decoupling lens to identify where gender mainstreaming appears established, contested or weakly connected within a Tanzanian urban ward.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted an exploratory descriptive case-study design to examine how employees and officials perceived the implementation of gender mainstreaming within a ward administration. The design enabled a context-sensitive examination of the relationship between formal policy commitments and organisational practices within their real-world institutional setting (Yin, 2018). The study focused on respondents' reported experiences and perceptions; consequently, its findings are interpreted as exploratory evidence from a single organisational case rather than as statistically generalisable or causal conclusions.

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3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Mbezi Ward, Ubungo Municipal Council, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Mbezi is a rapidly urbanising ward situated in the western part of Dar es Salaam and connected to other parts of the city through major transport corridors, including Morogoro Road. According to the 2022 Population and Housing Census, the ward had a population of approximately 143,803 people (United Republic of Tanzania, 2022). Wards are administered by a Ward Executive Officer and an elected councillor, supported by Mtaa executive officers and ten-cell leaders. Mbezi Ward was selected as an information-rich case because its population growth, expanding settlements and increasing demand for public services provide a relevant institutional setting for examining how gender-mainstreaming commitments are understood and implemented at the local level. Its administrative structure also provided access to employees and officials involved in planning, administration and service-related activities.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised 60 employees, administrative officers, committee members and support staff associated with Mbezi Ward and its local governance structures. These groups were relevant to the study because their responsibilities and institutional experience placed them in a position to assess workplace practices, leadership opportunities, gender-mainstreaming implementation and organisational conditions associated with service delivery.

3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

A planned sample of 52 participants was calculated from the target population of 60 using Yamane's (1967) formula, $n = N/[1 + N(e^2)]$, where n represents the sample size, N is the target population and e is the level of precision. Using N = 60 and e = 0.05 produced a planned sample of approximately 52 participants. Of those approached, 46 completed and returned the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 88.5%. Participants were recruited using non-probability sampling. Employees and officials with responsibilities relevant to planning, administration and service delivery were purposively approached, while participation also depended on their availability and willingness to take part during the data-collection period (Etikan et al., 2016). Because participant selection was non-probabilistic, the Yamane calculation served only as a sample-planning guide; it does not establish statistical representativeness or a probabilistic margin of error. The findings are therefore interpreted as specific to the organisational case studied.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered in person to employees and officials within Mbezi Ward. A standardised questionnaire enabled comparable information to be collected across participants (Kothari & Garg, 2024). The instrument contained demographic questions, five-point agreement-scale items and two open-ended questions. The closed-ended items examined respondents' perceptions of gender-policy implementation, recruitment, access to training, promotion, equal treatment, women's leadership opportunities, employee motivation, teamwork, decision-making, service delivery and institutional constraints. Response categories ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The open-ended questions invited respondents to identify challenges affecting gender equality within the organisation and suggest possible improvements. These responses provided contextual explanations for the patterns observed in the closed-ended data. The available qualitative material consisted of short open-ended questionnaire responses and was therefore treated as supplementary contextual evidence rather than as a separate qualitative dataset.

3.6 Data Analysis

Closed-ended responses were coded and analysed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarise the distribution of responses for each questionnaire item. For concise presentation, strongly agree and agree responses were combined as agreement, while disagree and strongly disagree responses were combined as disagreement. Neutral responses were retained as a separate category. Responses to the open-ended questions were reviewed, coded and organised thematically according to recurring issues concerning workplace practices, leadership opportunities, organisational outcomes and implementation constraints (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was a limited thematic organisation of supplementary responses rather than a separate qualitative analysis. Selected comments were anonymised and used to contextualise the quantitative patterns. The findings were subsequently interpreted using the study's three analytical dimensions: formal adoption, operational enactment and outcome coupling. Tanzania's National Gender and Women Development Policy 2023 and its 2023–2033 Implementation Strategy provided the national policy benchmark (United Republic of Tanzania, 2023a, 2023b). Employee perceptions were not treated as evidence of independently measured changes in citizen-facing service delivery.

3.7 Instrument Validity and Procedural Reliability

The questionnaire was reviewed by the research supervisor to assess its clarity, relevance and alignment with the research objectives. It was also piloted with a small group of respondents, after which unclear items were revised before the principal data collection (Clark et al., 2021). Content coverage was supported by organising the questionnaire

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around the principal study variables: gender-mainstreaming practices, workplace opportunity, organisational conditions associated with service delivery and implementation constraints. Procedural consistency was promoted using the same structured questionnaire, response scale and administration instructions for all participants. The questionnaire items were analysed individually rather than combined into a composite measurement scale. Consequently, no Cronbach's alpha coefficient is reported, and reliability is understood here in terms of consistency in instrument administration rather than the internal consistency of a multi-item scale.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Permission to undertake the study was obtained from the relevant authorities in Mbezi Ward. Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were informed that they could decline to answer questions or withdraw without penalty. The questionnaire did not require respondents to provide their names or other direct personal identifiers. Confidentiality was maintained by restricting the information to academic use and reporting the quantitative results in aggregate form. Open-ended responses were assigned anonymous participant codes to avoid associating individual statements with identifiable employees or official positions. Data collection was arranged at times intended to minimise disruption to participants' official responsibilities.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 46 respondents. The sample was almost evenly distributed by gender, with men comprising 52.2% and women 47.8%. Respondents aged 31–40 years constituted the largest age group (39.1%), while 73.9% held either a diploma or degree. Most respondents (71.7%) had worked for three years or less. The relatively limited work experience of much of the sample should be considered when interpreting perceptions of promotion and leadership opportunities.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 46)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	24	52.2
	Female	22	47.8
Age	20–30 years	12	26.1
	31–40 years	18	39.1
	41–50 years	10	21.7
	Above 50 years	6	13.0
Education level	Certificate	8	17.4
	Diploma	18	39.1
	Degree	16	34.8
	Postgraduate	4	8.7
Work experience	Less than 1 year	18	39.1
	1–3 years	15	32.6
	4–6 years	11	23.9
	Above 6 years	2	4.3

4.2 Perceived Workplace Implementation

Respondents assessed the visible and procedural elements of gender-mainstreaming implementation comparatively positively. Nearly seven in ten agreed that gender-equality policies were clearly implemented (69.6%) and that recruitment promoted gender equality (69.6%). These were the strongest results among the four implementation indicators. Perceptions were less favourable regarding staff development and career progression. Although 54.3% agreed that women and men had equal access to training, 32.6% disagreed. Fewer than half (47.8%) agreed that promotion practices reflected gender fairness, while 32.6% remained neutral. The findings therefore show that positive perceptions weakened as implementation moved from formal policy recognition and recruitment towards training and promotion as summarised in Table 2.

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Table 2

Perceived workplace implementation (n = 46)

Statements	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %
Gender equality policies clearly implemented	69.6	8.7	21.7
Recruitment promotes gender equality	69.6	15.2	15.2
Equal access to training	54.3	13.0	32.6
Promotion reflects gender fairness	47.8	32.6	19.6

The pattern presented in Table 2 indicates selective institutionalisation rather than uniform implementation. Policy recognition and recruitment are comparatively visible and rule-bound practices, whereas training and promotion involve greater organisational discretion. This supports the neo-institutional argument that formal commitments may be adopted without becoming consistently integrated into everyday organisational practices (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Espersson, 2026). It also corresponds with evidence that women's career progression may remain constrained after organisational entry through unequal access to professional development and advancement opportunities (Kalaitzi et al., 2017).

4.3 Perceived Organisational and Service-Delivery Outcomes

Respondents assessed internal organisational outcomes more positively than external service-delivery outcomes. A majority agreed that gender equality improved employee motivation (60.9%) and enhanced teamwork and cooperation (58.7%). Nevertheless, 30.4% remained neutral on each measure, indicating that these perceived organisational benefits were not experienced consistently across the sample. Perceptions were more divided regarding decision-making and service delivery. Fewer than half agreed that gender inclusion improved decision-making (47.8%), while 28.3% were neutral and 23.9% disagreed. Only 41.3% agreed that gender equality improved service delivery, compared with 32.6% who were neutral and 26.1% who disagreed. Service delivery therefore received the lowest level of agreement among the four outcome indicators. Table 3 presents this progression from comparatively positive perceptions of internal organisational outcomes to greater uncertainty about decision-making and service delivery.

Table 3

Perceived organisational and service-delivery outcomes (n = 46)

Statements	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %
Improves employee motivation	60.9	30.4	8.7
Enhances teamwork and cooperation	58.7	30.4	10.9
Improves decision-making	47.8	28.3	23.9
Improves service delivery	41.3	32.6	26.1

As shown in Table 3, declining agreement from motivation and teamwork to decision-making and service delivery indicates weak outcome coupling. Respondents associated gender equality more readily with internal workplace conditions than with citizen-facing outcomes. This pattern corresponds with evidence that gender-equality interventions frequently produce partial or intermediate organisational benefits without demonstrating wider institutional transformation (Guthridge et al., 2022). It also reflects persistent weaknesses in the monitoring and evaluation of gender-mainstreaming outcomes (Caywood & Darmstadt, 2024). The findings should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that gender mainstreaming improved service delivery in Mbezi Ward. They show only that some employees perceived a positive connection. Establishing an actual service-delivery effect would require administrative performance indicators or citizen-level evidence concerning service access, responsiveness, quality and satisfaction. The results consequently support the study's argument that formal and operational gender-mainstreaming practices may remain weakly connected to measurable organisational and public-service outcomes.

4.4 Institutional Constraints on Implementation

Respondents reported markedly different experiences of workplace equality, leadership opportunity and the institutional conditions supporting gender mainstreaming. Table 4 brings these results together, covering both workplace conditions and perceived implementation constraints.

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Table 4

Perceived institutional constraints and workplace conditions (n = 46)

Statements	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Employees are treated fairly regardless of gender	65.2	19.6	15.2
Employees are treated equally regardless of gender	39.1	34.8	26.1
Women have equal leadership opportunities	15.2	37.0	47.8
Cultural beliefs affect implementation	37.0	32.6	30.4
Lack of awareness affects implementation	58.7	28.3	13.0
Resources are insufficient	32.6	43.5	23.9
Monitoring is weak	73.9	23.9	2.2

The most pronounced disparity concerned women's leadership opportunities. Only 15.2% agreed that women had equal opportunities to assume leadership positions, while 47.8% disagreed and 37.0% remained neutral. This result indicates that formal recognition of gender equality was not matched by similarly positive perceptions of women's access to organisational authority. It also presents a significant challenge to Tanzania's policy objective of creating an enabling environment for women's participation and attaining equal representation in leadership and decision-making by 2033 (United Republic of Tanzania, 2023b). This finding is consistent with Tanzanian evidence showing that formal participation does not necessarily provide women with substantive influence or authority (Killian & Hyle, 2020). Organisational culture, limited mentoring and restricted professional networks have also been identified as constraints on women's leadership progression within Tanzanian government institutions (Mutarubukwa & Mazana, 2017).

Responses differed between the two closely related statements. Although 65.2% of respondents felt that employees were treated fairly regardless of gender, only 39.1% felt they received equal treatment. This difference may reflect different understandings of fairness and equality, though the similarity between the questionnaire items may also have shaped responses. The findings should therefore be interpreted cautiously. Positive perceptions of general fairness do not, on their own, show that women and men have equal access to institutional opportunities.

Weak monitoring was the clearest implementation constraint. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73.9%) agreed that monitoring of gender-mainstreaming practices was weak, while 23.9% were neutral and only 2.2% disagreed. Limited awareness was another prominent concern, identified by 58.7% of respondents. These findings correspond with Tanzanian evidence linking weak subnational implementation to limited gender-analysis capacity, indicators and reporting mechanisms (Ampaire et al., 2020). Similar implementation weaknesses have been identified in Tanzanian local government authorities, where formal gender-mainstreaming strategies have not always been matched by effective institutional implementation (Mujwahuzi et al., 2018). Limited gender-responsive budgeting knowledge and unequal participation in priority setting may further weaken the translation of formal commitments into resource-allocation decisions (Koda & Mtasingwa, 2021).

The findings further indicate that awareness-building alone would be insufficient. Although 58.7% regarded limited awareness as an implementation constraint, knowledge must be connected to clearly assigned responsibilities, monitoring indicators and routine performance processes. Capacity-building should therefore focus not only on general sensitisation but also on the practical application of gender analysis in planning, staffing, budgeting and reporting. Perceptions concerning resources and cultural beliefs were less conclusive. Only 32.6% agreed that resources were insufficient, while 43.5% were neutral. Similarly, 37.0% agreed that cultural beliefs affected implementation, compared with 32.6% who were neutral and 30.4% who disagreed. These distributions identify resources and cultural beliefs as possible areas for further investigation, but they do not establish them as dominant causes of implementation weakness.

4.5 Selective Institutionalisation of Gender Mainstreaming

Taken together, the findings indicate neither complete policy failure nor full institutionalisation. Respondents reported comparatively strong policy recognition and positive perceptions of recruitment, but considerably weaker perceptions of promotion, women's leadership opportunities, monitoring and service-delivery outcomes. This uneven pattern is consistent with selective institutionalisation: some components of gender mainstreaming appear more firmly embedded than others.

Across Tables 2–4, several indicators recorded considerable levels of neutrality. The proportion selecting the neutral response reached 30.4% for motivation and teamwork, 32.6% for promotion and service delivery, 34.8% for equal treatment, 37.0% for women's leadership opportunities and 43.5% for resource adequacy. These responses should not automatically be treated as indicating the absence of an opinion. They may reflect uncertainty, uneven experience, limited access to organisational information or reluctance to evaluate institutional practices. Because the questionnaire did not investigate why respondents selected the neutral category, these interpretations remain provisional. Nevertheless, the prevalence of neutral responses cautions against overstating either successful implementation or complete policy failure.

Institutional decoupling provides a useful explanation for this broader pattern. Mbezi Ward appears to have recognised gender-equality commitments, but the connections between those commitments and everyday organisational

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practice remain uneven. This corresponds with the neo-institutional argument that formal structures may secure legitimacy without becoming fully integrated into routine organisational action (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Recent research similarly shows that gender-mainstreaming commitments may remain disconnected from managerial support, operational capacity and systematic follow-up (Espersson, 2026; St Denny & Cairney, 2026). Weak monitoring is particularly consequential because it limits the institution's ability to establish whether formal commitments influence workplace opportunities, organisational decisions and citizen-facing services.

The findings also demonstrate why favourable perceptions of recruitment cannot serve as evidence of complete gender mainstreaming. Recruitment concerns organisational entry, whereas training, promotion and leadership concern the distribution of opportunity and authority after entry. The decline in agreement from recruitment to promotion and leadership indicates a narrowing perceived opportunity pathway. The particularly low assessment of women's leadership opportunities is important because leadership influences agenda setting, representation and the authority to translate policy commitments into institutional practice.

Perceived effects on employee motivation and teamwork were more positive than those on decision-making and service delivery. Respondents may therefore experience gender inclusion more clearly as an internal workplace value than as a contributor to citizen-facing outcomes. Connecting workplace inclusion to public-service outcomes would require gender-responsive service analysis, meaningful participation in decision-making, adequate institutional authority, citizen feedback and systematic performance monitoring. The present findings cannot establish that this causal chain exists; the analysis identifies the organisational points at which the connection appears uncertain.

Tanzania's 2023–2033 Implementation Strategy envisages gender-responsive monitoring across ministries, regional secretariats and local government authorities, supported by baseline information, indicators and periodic reporting (United Republic of Tanzania, 2023b). The strong perception that monitoring was weak suggests that these national requirements were not yet sufficiently visible in ward-level practice during the study period. Because the strategy extends to 2033, this finding represents an early local implementation signal rather than a final assessment of the national policy. Table 5 consolidates these findings by mapping the principal indicators onto the three dimensions of the analytical framework.

Table 5

Mapping of findings onto the analytical framework

Analytical dimension	**Representative indicator**	**Result**	**Interpretation**
Formal adoption	Gender-equality policies clearly implemented	69.6% agree	Comparatively strong perceived policy recognition
Operational enactment	Recruitment promotes gender equality	69.6% agree	Strongest-rated workplace practice
Operational enactment	Equal access to training	54.3% agree	Moderately positive, but less favourable than recruitment
Operational enactment	Promotion reflects gender fairness	47.8% agree	Mixed perceptions of fairness in career progression
Operational enactment	Employees treated equally regardless of gender	39.1% agree	Considerable uncertainty about equal treatment
Operational enactment	Women have equal leadership opportunities	15.2% agree	Weakest point in the perceived opportunity pathway
Outcome coupling	Gender equality improves employee motivation	60.9% agree	Strongest perceived internal organisational outcome
Outcome coupling	Gender equality enhances teamwork and cooperation	58.7% agree	Relatively positive perceived internal effect
Outcome coupling	Gender equality improves decision-making	47.8% agree	Mixed perceptions of influence on organisational decisions
Outcome coupling	Gender equality improves service delivery	41.3% agree	Uncertain perceived connection to service outcomes
Outcome coupling	Monitoring of gender-mainstreaming practices is weak	73.9% agree	Weak monitoring limits credible assessment of outcomes

Note: Percentages are drawn from Tables 2–4. Formal adoption, operational enactment and outcome coupling are defined in the Introduction and developed through the discussion of institutional decoupling and selective institutionalisation in Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.

Overall, Table 5 shows that formal adoption is comparatively strong, operational enactment weakens along the opportunity pathway, and outcome coupling remains uncertain in the context of limited monitoring.

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V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming in Mbezi Ward is best understood as selectively institutionalised. Respondents widely recognised formal policy commitments and gender-responsive recruitment, and associated gender equality with motivation and teamwork. However, these positive perceptions did not extend consistently to promotion, women's leadership, monitoring or service-delivery outcomes. The strongest shared judgement concerned weak monitoring, while perceptions of service-delivery effects remained mixed. The central policy challenge is therefore not simply to strengthen commitment but to connect it to authority, opportunity, evidence and accountability. These conclusions should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. The research examined a single urban ward using a small, non-probability sample and therefore provides case-specific rather than statistically generalisable findings. It relied on individual perception items and brief open-ended questionnaire responses. Moreover, service delivery was assessed through employee perceptions rather than citizen experiences or administrative performance indicators. The study therefore offers an exploratory institutional diagnosis rather than evidence of causal effects or verified policy compliance. The analysis also treated gender largely as a binary category and did not examine how it intersected with age, education, disability, socioeconomic position or other forms of inequality. This limits the study's ability to establish whether institutional practices were experienced differently by people occupying multiple and overlapping social positions (Christoffersen, 2021). Future studies should use comparative and intersectional designs to examine variations in experiences of recruitment, promotion, leadership and service delivery.

5.2 Recommendations

First, the municipality can support the ward administration by translating the National Gender and Women Development Policy 2023 and its Implementation Strategy into practical ward-level measures. Effective implementation will require leadership commitment, clearly assigned responsibilities, priority activities, staff capacity and workable monitoring arrangements. These measures can be incorporated into existing planning, human-resource management and performance-review processes rather than organised through parallel structures. *Second*, a stronger monitoring system would look beyond the number of women and men participating in activities. It would track access to training, promotion applications and outcomes, representation in substantive leadership and committee roles, participation in planning, gender-responsive budget allocations and sex-disaggregated feedback from service users. Periodic reviews could identify progress, explain persistent gaps and guide corrective action.

Third, particular attention is needed along the pathway from recruitment to promotion and leadership. Clear eligibility criteria, transparent communication of opportunities, mentoring, acting appointments and succession planning could help identify and address the points at which women's advancement narrows. Periodic review of committee composition could also assess women's participation and influence rather than numerical representation alone. Such measures would contribute towards the 50:50 leadership and decision-making target. *Fourth*, capacity-building will be most useful when it is continuous, practical and connected to employees' responsibilities. Employees and officials need guidance on applying gender analysis to staffing, planning, budgeting, community participation, service assessment and reporting. Linking this training to assigned duties, available resources and measurable expectations would help translate learning into routine practice. *Fifth*, assessing service delivery requires evidence beyond employee perceptions. Administrative records and feedback from women and men using ward services would provide a stronger basis for evaluating access, responsiveness, satisfaction and service quality. Further research across several wards could combine these sources and examine whether experiences differ by gender, age, disability, employment position and work experience.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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