

Legal and Practical Challenges in the Implementation of Public Right of Access to Public Leaders' Asset Declarations in Tanzania

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Received: 07 August 2025

Published: 02 June 2026

Abstract

Public right of access to leaders' asset declarations is key to democratic governance and public leaders' integrity and accountability. The Government of Tanzania constitutionalized and codified this right since 1995. Nonetheless, practical implementation of this right has remained insignificant. For instance, between 2003 and 2020, there were only 14 individual's inspection requests lodged. Except one request, all were denied without reasons and only one petition to the High Court was made to challenge the denial. The paper argues that, the ineffective implementation of this right is caused by legal and institutional weaknesses, limited public awareness, pervasive secrecy culture and inadequate political will. The paper recommends for comprehensive legal framework review, allocation of enough funds to the Ethics secretariat, continuous provision of public awareness and sensitization, regular capacity building and re-branding of the Ethics secretariat in order to change its negative public image.

Keywords: Asset declaration, accountability, ethics secretariat, legal framework, public leaders, public right of access, Tanzania.

1.0 Introduction

Public right of access to leaders' asset declarations is globally a cornerstone of democratic governance. It combats corruption in the public service and promotes public leaders' integrity and accountability (Ashukem, 2022; Han, 2021; Nwozor, 2010). It has been part of the legal system of Tanzania since 1995 when it was first introduced under the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977 (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977, Articles 18

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(b), 27, 70(1), 84 (5) and 132(5) (b), (d)), and later codified under the Public Leadership Code of Ethics Act, 1995 (PLCEA) (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1995, section 23). The constitutionalization and codification of this right in Tanzania is a sign of the government's commitment to public leaders' transparency, accountability and integrity (Hansard, 1995).

The political motivation behind asset declaration systems is protection of public interest that public officials are stewards of public trust and resources (Nyerere, 1977). It is a public non-confidential instrument designed to promote accountability and integrity in public office by compelling public leaders to submit asset declarations to responsible agencies and subsequently publish them for public scrutiny (Ashukem, 2022; Hanl, 2021; Tulu, 2020; Berger, 2017; Anechiarico and Jacobs, 1996). Nonetheless, the practical implementation of this right has remained insignificant (Mwaisaka, 2025; Mpambije, 2016). For instance, government reports show that between 1995 and 2002, there were no public requests to inspect asset declarations (Masilingi, 2025). Only 14 inspection requests were lodged between 2003 and 2020, and all were denied, save for one request (Presidents' Office Public Service Management and Good Governance, 2021).

A few studies conducted show that difficulties in public access to public leaders' asset declarations is common to all African countries, Tanzania inclusive (Mfikwa, 2018; Njama, 2018; Mpambije, 2016; Ashukem, 2022). In Tanzania, for instance, there have been several individual attempts to request access to public leaders' asset declarations but denied notwithstanding persistent follow ups (Mfikwa, 2018). The denial has been associated with: resistance by public leaders to declare their assets because of being afraid of anti-corruption effects and the potential for increased scrutiny of their conduct (Kayombo, 2020); weak legal framework (Tulu, 2020a and 2020b); ineffective enforcement mechanisms (Ngumbi and Owiny, 2020); inadequate political will (Oromu and Andrea, 2023; Ashukem, 2022); and political interference from the executive, inadequate laws and Ethics Secretariat's lack of independence (Njama, 2025).

Ineffective implementation of the public right of access to leaders' asset declarations encourages illicit enrichment; conflicts of interests; submission of incomplete and inaccurate or deceptive asset declarations. It further encourages unchecked corruption among public leaders in the country (Njama 2025; Presidents' Office Public Service Management and Good Governance, 2022; Simbachawene, 2024; Nkwame, 2024; Oromu and Andrea, 2023; Ashukem, 2022; Kayombo, 2020; Ngumbi and Owiny, 2020; Mfikwa, 2018; Njama, 2018).

This paper disseminates findings of a study conducted between 2020 and 2025 on the legal and practical challenges affecting the effective implementation of public right of access to leaders' asset declarations in Tanzania. The paper is organized into five sections: this introduction, methodology, legal framework of public right of access to leaders' asset declarations, findings and conclusion.

2.0 Methodology

The study out of which this paper emanates employed an exploratory descriptive design and a qualitative approach to gather qualitative data through documentary review and in-depth

interviews. Documentary review involved content analysis of both legal texts (primary sources) and non-legal texts (secondary sources). In-depth interviews (face-to-face and telephone) were conducted between October 2023 and June 2024 in Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Morogoro, and Zanzibar. Interview respondents involved staff from the Ethics Secretariat, public officials, Members of Parliament (MPs), judges from the High Court and Court of Appeal, District Executive Directors, retired MPs, representatives from political parties, the media, civil society organizations, NGOs, human rights advocates, and ordinary citizens. A total of 61 respondents were selected through purposive sampling. Data collected from in-depth interviews were analyzed by using thematic approach. Documentary data was analysed through content analysis. Both deductive and inductive reasoning along with rules of statutory interpretation (literal and purposive) were employed in the interpretation of legal texts. The findings therefrom are presented under item 4.0 *infra*. The next section examines the legal framework of asset declaration and public right of access to public leaders' asset declarations in Tanzania.

3.0 Legal Framework of Asset Declaration and Public Right of Access to Leaders' Asset Declarations in Tanzania

The legal framework of asset declaration and public right of access to public leaders' asset declarations in Tanzania can be examined at three levels. These levels are: the international legal framework, the African regional legal framework and the national legal framework as discussed in this section hereinafter.

3.1 International Legal Framework of Public Right of Access to Leaders' Asset Declarations

Public right of access to public leaders' asset declaration is one of the facets of the right to information provided under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 19 of the UDHR provides that everyone has the right to seek, receive and impart information. Tanzania is a state party to this instrument through her accession to it and the United Nations Charter. Even though the UDHR is non-binding, it marks the foundation of human rights in all member states including Tanzania. The right to information provided under Article 19 of the UDHR is reiterated under Article 19 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (UN General Assembly, 1948a; 1966b) which provides that every person has the right to seek, receive and impart information. Unlike the UDHR, the ICCPR is a binding instrument, of which Tanzania is a state party as she ratified it on 11th June, 1976. The enactment of the Bill of Rights into the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977, via the Fifth Constitutional Amendment Act, No. 15 of 1984 was part of implementation of her obligation under the ICCPR. Tanzania is, therefore, bound to observe the public right of access to public leaders' asset declaration as part of her obligation to give effect to the right to information provided under Article 19(2) of the ICCPR.

Furthermore, public right of access to public leaders' asset declaration is internationally implied under Article 5 of the International Code of Conduct for Public Officials) of 1996 (ICCPO). Under this Article, the ICCPO require public officials and their spouses to declare their financial and business interests and prohibits them from engaging in transactions that could result into conflicts of interest. This code is not legally binding but recommended by the UN General

Assembly as a tool against corruption without formal ratification or signature processes. Since it does not require formal ratification or signatory process, Tanzania may be said to be a state party basing on her membership to the UN charter. Thus, although ICCPO was adopted later, the establishment of the Public Leaders' Ethics Secretariat under Article 132 (1) of the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977 and the enactment of the Public Leadership Code of Ethics Act No.13 of 1995 reflects much of the ICCPO.

Moreover, public right of access to public leaders' asset declaration is internationally implied under the United Nations Convention against Corruption of 2003 (UNCAC) (UN General Assembly, 1996a; 2003b). Article 8(5) of TUNCAC requires every state party to devise a system to compel public officials to declare their assets in order to control corruption. In contrast to ICCPO, the UNCAC is a binding treaty. Tanzania ratified it on 25th May 2005. It may, therefore, be said that the enactment of the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Act No.11 of 2007 and the Anti-Money Laundering Act No. 12 of 2006 were influenced by Tanzania's obligation under the UNCAC. If Tanzania is to succeed in her initiatives to combat corruption, she ought to compel her public officials to declare their assets and ensure public right of access to the declared assets. This is a must even though the UNCAC does not expressly provide for the public right of access to leaders' asset declarations. This is true because, the rationale for asset declarations being to control corruption and illicit acquisition of wealth by public officials, public right of access to the declared assets is unescapable to enable public scrutiny. To meet her international obligation under Article 8(5) of the UNCAC, observance of the public right of access to public leaders' asset declaration in Tanzania is not a matter of choice but a must.

3.2 Regional Legal Framework of Public Right of Access to Leaders' Asset Declarations

At the African regional level, public right of access to leaders' asset declarations is, like the international level, embedded to and implied under the right to information under Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights of 1981 (AU General Assembly, 1981). This article provides that every person has the right to receive, express and disseminate information. It is also implied under Article 9 of the African Union Convention on Combating and Preventing Corruption of 2003 which requires state parties to take legislative and other measures to give effect to the right of access to any information required to assist in fighting against corruption. Moreover, it is inferable from Articles 6 and 13 of the African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration of 2011(AU General Assembly, 2003a; 2011b). The Charter requires public readers to make asset declarations at the beginning, during, and the end of public service.

However, as noted in this section, none of the regional instruments discussed mentions expressly the public right of access to leaders' asset declarations. It can only be inferred from the provisions regarding right of access to information. It is through the provisions on right of access to information that the discussed regional instruments may be said to form the basis and standards for domestic asset declaration and public right of access to public leaders' declarations law discussed in the next item.

3.3 National Legal Framework of Public Right of Access to Leaders' Asset Declarations

At the national level, the United Republic of Tanzania, 1977 lays the foundation for asset declaration and public right of access to public leaders' asset declarations in Tanzania. Article 18 (b) of the Constitution gives individuals the right to seek, receive and disseminate information regardless of national boundaries. This Article gives effect to the provisions of Article 19 of the UDHR and the ICCPR. Article 27 imposes a duty to citizens to protect resources and properties of the United Republic of Tanzania. Under Article 70(1) and Article 84 (5), the Constitution expressly imposes a duty on every Member of Parliament and the Speaker of the National Assembly to submit to respective authorities a formal statement regarding their property and the property of their spouse (s) upon and after assuming office. Failure to submit this statement disqualifies a person from being a member of parliament under Article 70(1).

Besides all, the Constitution establishes the Public Leaders' Ethics Secretariat Article 132 (1) to ensure compliance with public leaders' ethics. It also empowers the Parliament under Article 132(4) to enact a law stipulating basic rules of ethics for public leaders to be complied with by all persons holding public office. Moreover, Article 132(5) (b), (d), and (e) requires the law to be enacted by the Parliament to stipulate, among other things: persons holding certain public offices to make a formal declaration from time to time concerning their income, assets and liabilities; prescribe penalties which may be imposed for breaches of the code of ethics; and provide for procedure, powers and practice to be applied in order to ensure compliance with the code of ethics which shall be specified by such law.

The above noted Constitutional provisions lay a strong base for public leaders' integrity and accountability in Tanzania. Nonetheless, as it may be noted in the preceding discussion, the Constitution does not expressly provide for the public right of access to public leaders' asset declarations. It only establishes the Public ethics secretariat and vests into Parliament the power to enact a law that will provide for asset declaration and the procedure, powers and practice to be applied in order to ensure compliance with the code of ethics. Nevertheless, it does not provide that the law to be enacted by the Parliament should require the asset declarations to be open for public scrutiny. This makes the public right of access to public leaders asset declarations to remain at the mercy of parliament rather than a Constitutional right that can be vindicated in the High Court as a human right litigation. This waters down the efforts and spirit of the government to combat corruption and illicit acquisition of wealth by public leaders because, as noted under item 3.1 above, without public right of access to public leaders asset declarations, there can be no public scrutiny of corruption and illicit acquisition of wealth by public officials.

Moreover, the details of asset declarations and public right of access to public leaders' asset declaration are provided under the Public Leadership Code of Ethics Act of 1995 (PLCEA) made pursuant to Article 132(4) of the Constitution. More procedural details are provided under the Public Leadership Code of Ethics Act Regulations, 1996 made under section 32 of the PLCEA (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1996). Under sections 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 19, 23 and 30, the Act provides for, among other things the officers required to declare assets including those in senior leadership position across the executive, judiciary, and legislative branches. It also stipulates the powers of the president to modify the categories of officers required to make asset declaration and periodically update of ethical requirements. It further enumerates the

obligations for public leaders to arrange their official and private affairs in a manner that is subject to public scrutiny. Moreover, the Act requires elected and appointed public leaders to regularly declare their personal assets, liabilities, and those of their spouses or minor children. It prevents making false asset declarations.

Of most important, Section 19 of Act establishes the Ethics Secretariat pursuant to Article 132 of the Constitution to oversee the enforcement of the public leadership ethics in Tanzania. It further vests in Ethics Secretariat under this section: the duty to maintain and oversee public leaders' asset declarations; power to conduct physical verification of assets, provide advice and grant public access to asset declarations; duty to conduct awareness campaigns; receive anonymous public allegations about ethical breaches; and immunity against civil and criminal liability for actions taken in good faith. It also vests in the President under section 19(7) the responsibility of staffing the Ethics Secretariat and administering oath of secrecy to the personnel of the secretariat. However, the section does not define the number of the required staff and does not specify the required skills and competency of staff save for the Ethics commissioner only. This may compromise the quality, especially skills and integrity of the Ethics Secretariat staff.

Sections 23 (read together with Regulation 2 and 3) establishes the office of the Ethics Commissioner and requires him to: ensure all asset declarations by public leaders are properly recorded and maintained in the register of public leaders' interests, assets, and liabilities; to maintain in a Minister-approved format the asset Register and make it accessible for public inspection at reasonable times. Moreover, the Minister is permitted under 23(3) and 34(2) (a-b) to establish and publish formal procedures for public inspection of the register. It is in exercise of this power that the Minister promulgated the Public Leadership Code of Ethics (Declaration of Interest, Assets, and Liabilities) Regulation, 1996 (the Regulations).

The Regulations impose specific conditions for public inspection of leaders' asset declarations register under Regulations 6 and 7. Such conditions include the requirement of individuals to lodge legitimate complaints, obtain Commissioner's approval, and paying a nominal inspection fee of one thousand shillings. These conditions also provide important safeguards against misuse of information including fines not exceeding ten thousand shillings and imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years. Moreover, the Commissioner may refuse to grant permission for inspection or may require the complainant to furnish to him more information relating to the complaint if upon his assessment he is dissatisfied with the genuineness or the intention of the complaints. This discretion vested in the Commissioner needs to be used with caution for it is susceptible to abuse because there is no any mechanism that has been legally established to check the exercise of these power.

Apart from the PLCEA, there is the Local Government District Authorities (Councilors' Code of Conduct) Regulations, 2000 which extends asset declaration system and public right of access to leaders' asset declaration to local government levels. These regulations require council members who are public leaders under section 4 of the PLCEA to declare their assets and liabilities including those of their spouses and minor children and, submit them to the District Executive Directors. The regulations further require the declarations to be recorded in the Register of Council Members' Assets and Interests and be maintained by the Council executive Directors.

Accordingly, residents of the specific council are given the right to access this register upon requests in line with the PLCEA provisions (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2000, Regulation 20).

Moreover, the Code of Ethics and Conduct for Public Service (CECPS) requires public servants to declare their assets and that of their spouses and minor children upon demand by the employer (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2002, section 5). Yet, the Code does not specify the reasons for such requirements and the methods for accessing them. This suggests that this requirement is more of formality than a genuine accountability mechanism. Such shortcomings may cause inconsistencies in implementation and reduce the overall effectiveness of the code.

In the case of Zanzibar, asset declaration is provided under the Zanzibar Public Leaders Code of Ethics Act of 2015 which applies to all public leaders working under the Revolutionary government of Zanzibar (RGZ). Its implementation is overseen by the Zanzibar Public Leaders Code of Ethics Commission. By virtue of Section 4 (ii) (v) of the PLCEA and Section 4 and 15 of the ZPLCEA, the President of the Revolutionary government of Zanzibar and Second Vice President of Zanzibar are required to submit asset declarations to both the Ethics Secretariat and ZPLCEC without specifying precedence in conflicting situations. It also requires all public leaders under the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar to declare their assets.

Unlike the PLCEA, ZPLCEA treats the information confidential except with the court order or with ministerial consent (Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, 2015, section 22). This position differs from PLCEA. Whereas the PLCEA guarantees the public the right to inspect the Registers, ZPLCEA does not provide such right to the public save with the court order or with ministerial consent. This divergent framework within the same country may create legal confusion and jurisdictional challenges due to lack of clarity on precedence between ZPLCEA and the PLCEA for those servants who are bound by both legislation.

The Constitution, PLCEA and its Regulations basically provide for substantive right of public access to leaders asset declarations. The enforcement procedures of the said right are provided under sections 4, 5 and 6 (a– f) of the Basic Rights and Duties Enforcement Act (BRADEA). This BRADEA was enacted in 1994 pursuant to Article 30(3) of the Constitution and regulation 4 of the Basic Rights and Duties Enforcement (Practice and Procedure) Rules, 2014 (Government of the United Republic, 1994a; 2014b). The provisions of BRADEA were invoked in *the National Legal Assistance Organization and Others versus the Attorney General v. AG and the Public Leaders' Ethics Secretariat* where the petitioners challenge the constitutionality of Regulation 6 and 7 of the Public Leadership Code of Ethics (Declaration of Interests, Assets, and Liabilities) Regulation of 1996. However, at the time of writing this paper, there was no information on whether the case was or yet to be determined. Even though the authors sought information from the respective authorities, they could not succeed. It seemed, like the case was yet to be determined or was dismissed, but no records in either case were available. This delay of case determination reflects the argument by Justice Robert Makaramba, that the enforcement of human right in Tanzania is more complex and burdensome than executing murder cases (Makaramba, 2003).

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The implementations of public right of access to asset declarations in Tanzania encounters a number of challenges revolving around legal, institutional and practical challenges. The major challenges include weaknesses of the law; limited public awareness; Ethics Secretariat's limited operational coverage, financial resources and shortage of human resources; lack of political will and cultural factors. Each of these challenges is discussed in detail under this section.

4.1 Weakness of the law

Review of primary and secondary sources revealed a number of weaknesses in the legal framework of asset declaration law that inhibits the implementation of public right of access to asset declarations in Tanzania. One of the weaknesses noted is the unclear scope of application of the right. Regulation, 6 (1) (a) of the PLCEA Regulations, 1996 guarantees the right to inspect leaders' asset registers to any person. According to section 4 of the Interpretation of the Laws Act, the phrase any person means both natural individuals and legal entities (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2020). But in 2008, when four political parties: Tanzania Labour Party (TLP); Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA); the National Convention for Construction Reforms (NCCR); and the Civic United Front (CUF) requested to have access to asset declaration register, they were denied access to the register on grounds that they are not natural persons (This Day Reporter, 2008; the Guardian,2008).

The law does not also define clearly the criteria to determine the relevance, genuineness of a complaint and whether it has been in good faith. Regulation 6 (1) (b) of the PLCEA Regulation does not stipulate any measurable or objective criteria and procedural standards to guide the Ethics Commissioner in determining the genuineness, relevancy and good faith of the complaint. All is left to the Ethics Commissioner's discretion to permit or deny public inspection of the asset declarations register based on his assessment and satisfaction with the genuineness or otherwise of the complaint based on his wisdom, opinion, experience, or competence. Reliance on the Commissioner's discretionary powers makes it vulnerable to arbitrary decision-making and potential abuse which could disadvantage complainants or individuals.

Above all, section 4 (2) and (5) of BRADEA requires a person alleging that his right has been contravened or is likely to be contravened to support his application in the High Court by an affidavit. The Affidavit should state the extent to which the contravention has affected such person personally and that he has exhausted all available remedies under other written laws. The provisions of section 4 (2) and (5) of BRADEA may have negative implication to ordinary citizens who wishes to petition the High Court for enforcement of denied right of access to leaders asset declarations based on public interest and unable to prove personal injury. Generally a weakness of the law makes the realization and enforcement of public right of access to public leaders' asset declaration in Tanzania more of a myth than reality. The data displayed in findings in Table 1 below reveal a troubling pattern of rejected complaints based on the provisions of Regulation 6 (1) (b) of the PLCEA that vest in the Ethics Commissioner excessive discretionary power.

Table 1: Number of Public Requests (2003- 2020)

Number of requests lodged	Requester type	Subject of Request	Number of the request succeeded	Reason for not permitted
1	Media House	Prime Minister	Not succeeded	Not relevant
2	Ordinary citizen	District Executive Director (DED)	Not succeeded	There was no response from ES
3	Coalition of (4) Political Parties in Tanzania	(11), Senior Public leaders including (6) Members of the Parliament, (1) Permanent Secretary and 4 others	Not succeeded	Not Relevant and not made in good faith
4	Coalition of (4) Political Parties in Tanzania	Senior retired leader	Not succeeded	Not Relevant and not genuine
5	Coalition of (4) Political Parties in Tanzania	Specified Members of Parliament	Not succeeded	Not Relevant and not made in good faith
6	Ordinary citizen of Tanzania	Member of Parliament	Not succeeded	Not relevant
7	An ordinary person from Agenda Participation 2000	Member of Parliament	Not succeeded	There was no response from Secretariat
8	Media House in Tanzania	To access the Declarations of all Members of the Public submitted from (2010-2015) to enhance accountability	Not succeeded	Not relevant and not genuine
9	Ordinary citizen	District Commissioner	Not succeeded	Not relevant
10	Ordinary citizen	Regional Commissioner	Not succeeded	Not relevant
11	Ordinary citizen	Member of Parliament	Not succeeded	Not relevant
12	Ordinary citizen, the spouse of a deceased retired leader, and was interested to know his late husband's possessions for estate administration purposes.	Retired deceased Assistant Commissioner of Police	Not succeeded	Not comply with the PLCEA conditions

14	Ordinary citizen resident of Morogoro	Allegation of illicit enrichment and false declaration against Member of Parliament	Permitted to Access the declarations on 11th March, 2020	Succeeded
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Source: Synthesised by Authors from Government and Ethics Secretariat Reports (1996-2020)

Table 1 above shows a summary of inspection requests received by the secretariat from 2003 to 2020. The Ethics Secretariat received a total of 93 requests from public institution and ordinary citizen over 20 years. Out of the 93 requests received, only 14 requests came from members of the public and out of the said 14 requests, only one request was successful. The rest of requests from the public were denied on grounds of being irreverent, not genuine or not made on good faith based on the provisions of Regulation 6 (1) (b). No further explanations were provided on why they were irreverent, not genuine or not made on good faith. This suggests that the regulations are being used inappropriately to restrict public access to asset declarations.

Moreover, the PLCEA and its Regulations lack clear guidelines for lodging valid complaints. It does not specify how complaints should be submitted either in writing, orally, electronically, physically or by phone. There is no standardized format for submission hence causing procedural uncertainty, confusion and inconsistencies in complaints handling and processing. The procedural barriers and regulatory gaps ensued in 2002 when Rev. Christopher Mtikila alleged Mr. Frederick Sumaye, the then Prime Minister of illicit enrichment. Mtikila followed a two-step approach: he publicly disclosed the allegations on September 27, 2002, in Dar es Salaam and filed these complaints with the Ethics Commissioner requesting access to the Prime Ministers asset declarations. The Ethics Commissioner denied him access by citing lack of complaint as the basis for rejection.

Challenges of lodging valid complaint also ensued in the case of Global Publishers & General Enterprises Limited in 2025. The Company sought to access asset declarations of Members of Parliament (MPs) for the 2010-2015 period arguing that MPs' as elected representatives are accountable to the people and, therefore, their asset declarations should be accessible to ensure transparent and honest conduct in office. This request was summarily rejected for want of formal complaint (The Guardian, 2015).

Furthermore, the law does not state the permissible methods for inspecting the register. Section 23(2) of the PLCEA and Regulation 6(1) of the PLCEA Regulations only mention 'inspection' but does not specify how it can be implemented whether by accessing certified copies, duplicates, photocopies, notes, printed forms or other formats. Even the time limit for processing complaints is also not provided. The absence of time limit for processing complaints can cause significant delays and uncertainty for applicants hence limiting the implementation of the public right of access to public leaders asset declarations.

Above all, there are several legislation which are either contradictory or having loopholes that if applied may defeat the purpose of asset declaration and the public right of access to leaders' asset declarations. For instance, the ZPLCEA treats the declared information confidential except with the court order or with ministerial consent different from the PLCEA. Sections 2, 4, 5 and 6 of the National Security Act, Cap 47, grants absolute discretion to the government to define what should be disclosed or withheld from access by members of the public and prioritizes national

security over public disclosure (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2023). This restricts the circulation of information which is in the custody of the State. Section 18 of the Public Service Act, Cap 298, prohibits public service employees from disclosing information obtained through their duties without written permission from the President. The Act makes it an offence punishable by imprisonment of a term up to 20 years for individuals to divulge or receive such information (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2023). This law fosters fear and caution among public employees, causing them to hesitate or withhold information to avoid potential legal or criminal repercussions.

Likewise, section 16 of the CyberCrime Act, Cap 443, criminalizes publication of false information and inaccuracy data (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2023); and section 6(2) and 12 of the Access to Information Act, Cap149, gives exceptions and allows information holders some flexibility to disclose or not to disclose documents or information beyond what is legally required (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2023). Furthermore, sections 4, 17, 24 and 22-30 of the Persona Data Protection Act, Cap 44, identifies sensitive personal data to include information about criminal records, financial transactions and imposes strict security measures on public institutions to ensure personal data is protected and places several restrictions on accessing, disclosing and using personal data (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2023).

4.2 Secretariat's Limited Operational Coverage

Review of documents revealed that, the Public Leaders' Ethics Secretariat has decentralized its functions into eight zonal offices in Mainland Tanzania. They include Southern Highlands Zone, which caters for Mbeya, Iringa, Katavi, Njombe and Rukwa Regions; Southern Zone, which caters for Mtwara, Lindi and Ruvuma Regions; Central Zone, which caters for Dodoma and Singida Regions; Northern Zone, which caters for Arusha, Kilimanjaro and Manyara Regions; Western Zone which caters for Tabora, Kigoma, Simiyu and Shinyanga Regions; Lake Zone, which caters for Mwanza, Mara, Geita and Kagera Regions; and the Eastern Zone, which caters for Tanga and Morogoro Region and Special Zone Cater for Dar es salaam, Coast region and Zanzibar. The intention of decentralizing the Secretariat's service to zones was to bring services closer to citizens (Presidents' Office, Public Leaders 'Ethics Secretariat, 2017).

Under this current decentralized structure, the Ethics Secretariat operates in eight regions out of 26 administrative regions in Mainland Tanzania. Its offices are located in Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, Dodoma, Mwanza, Mtwara, Tabora, Arusha, and Mbeya only, notwithstanding its administrative and oversight functions cutting across Tanzania (Presidents' Office, Public Leaders 'Ethics Secretariat, 2018). The Secretariat's limited geographic reach makes public leaders and citizens struggle to access the Secretariat's services at one hand, and on the other hand, failure of the Secretariat itself to effectively monitor and enforce leadership ethics among the growing number of public leaders nationwide (President's Office, Ethics Secretariat, 2023).

The Ethics Secretariat's limited operational coverage creates significant physical access barriers, particularly for citizens in remote and economically disadvantaged areas. One of the interviewees in Malinyi District in Morogoro region, explained his experience in attempting to access leaders' asset registers in May and June 2020 as follows:

It took me a number of go and return trips from Malinyi to Dar es Salaam special zone for lodging a complaint and making follow ups of request as here was no Ethics Secretariat Office in Morogoro. It cost a lot of my time and funds to persuade this and I could not succeed.

Despite the Ethics Secretariat's decentralization of most activities, the critical function of granting permission to access public leaders' asset declarations remains strictly centralized, with the Commissioner alone mandated to authorize such requests. Ethics Secretariat staff explained that all requests received through zone offices must be channeled to headquarters in Dodoma for the Commissioner's personal approval. This creates an administrative bottleneck that delays the process, as citizens seeking access may only inspect the asset registers at their respective zone offices after receiving this centralized authorization. This interview results reflects the position of the law as discussed under item 3.3 above.

Furthermore, absence of an Ethics Secretariat office in Zanzibar also creates a significant administrative gap despite section 3 of the PLCEA extending the Secretariat's statutory jurisdiction to Zanzibar for public officials working under the union government. This omission carries profound implications for governance and accountability, as it compels Zanzibar citizens to undertake costly and time-consuming to travel to mainland Tanzania to access essential services such as lodging complaints against public officials or reviewing leaders' asset declarations. Interviews with Ethics Secretariat staff confirmed that currently they have no office in Zanzibar. Therefore, people from Zanzibar have to travel all along to Dar es Salaam if they wish to lodge complaints against public officials or scrutinize leaders' asset declaration.

4.3 Limited Public Awareness

The study examined the public awareness of the right to access leaders' asset declarations in Tanzania by assessing through in depth interviews their knowledge on the existence of the right, enforcement mechanisms, and the institutions responsible for its implementation. Thirty (30) ordinary citizens were asked if they are aware of the existence of the right, enforcement mechanisms, and the institutions responsible for its implementations. The study revealed significant gaps in public awareness on the right to access leaders' asset declarations in Tanzania as summarized under Table 2 below.

Table 2: Citizen’s Awareness of the Right

Category of Response	Number of response	Percentage
Yes	9	30%
No	21	70%
Do not know	0	0%
Total	30	100%

Source: In-depth Interviews with Ordinary Citizens, 2023

Table 2 above depicts that only nine (30%) out of 30 respondents were aware of the existence of the right, enforcement mechanisms, and the institutions responsible for its implementations. 21 (70%) out of 30 respondents were unaware. This highlights a significant knowledge gap among citizens. One may, however, ask why so limited public awareness? Several reasons may be given

but the most significant challenge that the study noted is limited coverage as displayed under Table 3 below which illustrates the coverage of the ethics briefing by the Secretariat between 2019 and 2023.

Table 3: Coverage of the Ethics Briefing by the Secretariat from the 2019 to 2023

Year	Category of individuals		
	Public leaders	Public Servants	Ordinary People
2019/2020	2732	5,552	3545
2021/2022	1380	5129	1,386
2022/2023	1,561	4,423	3,264
2023/2024	13,468		

Source: Budget Speeches between 2019/ 2020 and 2023/2024.

Table 3 above shows a very limited coverage of ethics briefing by the Secretariat. One cannot imagine in a country with above 64 million people, only 44,440 people have been reached in a duration of five years and out them ordinary people are less than 10,0000. The inability of the secretariat to disseminate awareness programmes to a wider population may be contributed by limited resources as discussed in the subsequent section 4.4 below. Limited public awareness of the public right of access to public leaders asset declaration and its enforcement institutions may be one of the significant hindrances to effective implementation of the right for an individual cannot demand what he is not aware of being his right.

4.4 Ethics Secretariat Limited Financial Capacity

It has been noted under item 4.3 above that one of the duties and responsibilities of the Ethics Secretariat is to conduct awareness campaigns countrywide. This requires sufficient financial resources to recruit skilled staff to meet other travelling, accommodation and administrative cost. Nonetheless, the study revealed that the Ethics Secretariat faces significant financial constraints in executing its constitutional and statutory functions. Analysis of budgetary allocations from fiscal years 2019/2020 to 2024/2025 shows unpredictable and often inadequate funding as displayed under Table 4 below.

Table 4: Status of Approved Budget for the Ethics Secretariat between 2019 and 2025

Year	Approved budget	Disbursed Budget
2019/2020	9,999,946,000	4,649,426,253
2020/2021	9,471,110,000	Not documented
2021/2022	9, 216,921,000	5,273,418,955 by March 2022
2022/2023	12,730,049,000	6,700,542,089.33 by March 2023
2023/2024	12,763, 016,000	9,357,430,675.20 by March 2024
2024/2025	13,142,650, 000.	It is ongoing budget

Source: Budget Speeches between 2019/20 and 2024/25

As illustrated in Table 4 above, the secretariat budget fluctuated, dropping from 9,999,946,000 Tanzanian shillings in 2019/2020 to 9,216,921,000 in 2021/2022. Only in 2022/23-2024/25 that there was an increase though disbursed funds are not shown and the increase does not seem to be proportional to the expansion of leaders from 4,000 in 2001 to 15,893 by March 2024 (Presidents Office, 2022a; 2023b; 2024c). Let alone the budget decrease, Table 4 above shows a great

disparity between the approved budget and the disbursed funds. Such disparities severely impacts the Secretariat's core activities, particularly physical verification of asset declarations and conducting awareness campaigns countrywide as demonstrated under Table 5 bellow.

Table 5: Planned Physically Verification vis-à-vis Actual verified Assets (2018-2024)

Year	Planned for verification	Actual verified	%
2018/2019	2000	448	22%
2019/2020	2000	537	27%
2020/2021	2000	536	27%
2021/2022	2000	425	21%
2022/2023	2000	592	27%
2023/2024	820	470	57.31%
Total	10,820	3,008	27.80%

Source: Good Governance Minister’s Budget Speeches between 2019 and 2024.

Table 5 above shows that, over six consecutive fiscal years, only 3,008 (27.80%) out of 10,820 planned asset declarations were verified. This shows a critical limitation in the Secretariat's operational capacity as data reveals a substantial gap between planned and actual physical verification of declarations. Even in the 2024/2025 fiscal year, the Secretariat aimed to physically verify only 650 out of 15,893 asset declarations (Presidents ‘Office Ethics Secretariat, 2023).

The discrepancy demonstrates the organization’s inability to execute its core activities effectively. This suggests systemic challenges in resource allocation, planning, and implementation of the secretariats’ primary mandates as required by Section 19(2) (d) of the PLCEA. Even the Ethics Commissioner’s reports cement that inadequate financial resources constraints the Secretariat's ability to conduct physical verification of declared properties, leading to solely reliance on the documentation and explanations provided by the leaders (Presidents’ Office Ethics Secretariat, 2020). Inadequate financial resources also affects training and capacity building of ethics secretariat staff and availability of permanent secretariat office buildings as discussed in the next two items.

4.5 Insufficient Capacity Building of Ethics Secretariat Staff

Article 6 of the UNCAC requires each State Party to provide relevant staff training to ensure effective performance of their constitutional and statutory duties. However, the study revealed insufficient training and capacity building of Ethics Secretariat staff. Inability to effectively implement the public's right to access declarations has partly been associated with inadequate training and understanding of the legal requirements by the secretariat staff (Oromu & Andrea, 2023; Presidents’ Office, Ethics Secretariat, 2020). This deficiency leads to significant operational challenges, including delays in processing access requests, inconsistent practices across the Secretariat's zone offices, and ineffective enforcement of declarations requirements. This was also noted by the Ethics Commissioner in January, 2025. The Ethics Commissioner emphasized the importance of regular training for Ethics staff but he noted that such training is rarely conducted due to limited financial resources (Presidents’ Office Ethics Secretariat, 2025). Interview with senior Ethics Secretariat staff in Dodoma confirmed lack of regular in-service

training for staff, as one of the challenges that hampers the Ethics Secretariat staff ability to perform their responsibilities effectively as she argued;

I have been working with the Ethics Secretariat for more than fifteen years performing duties related to ethics enforcement and promotion, but I've never attended any training on asset declaration systems or the specifics of the public's right of access to leaders' asset declarations.

The quoted interview response speaks for itself. One cannot imagine such a senior staff having worked for more than 15 years without any capacity building training. This implies that secretariat staff discharge their duties based on their wisdom and experience rather than skills development. Even where limited capacity building is provided, it does not prioritize on public access to asset declarations. For instance, five (83%) out of six Ethics Secretariat staff interviewed revealed that public access to asset declarations is not the priority of the secretariat. This oversight suggests the institutions' failure to recognize the importance of public access to asset declarations which undermines efforts to promote accountability and transparency. They further argued that there are inconsistent practices across different ethics secretariat offices because of insufficient training on the public right of access to asset declarations. This institutional neglect of the right has resulted in misinformation being provided to the public, inconsistent application of the law across different offices and a general reluctance to process access requests.

4.6 Secretariats Shortage of own Permanent Offices

As noted under item 4.4 above, limited financial capacity also affects the ethics secretariat infrastructural capacity. This was also acknowledged by the Minister for Public Service and Good Governance report, of March 2023. The report notes that the Ethics Secretariat faces operational challenges due to insufficient permanent offices. It owns only two buildings in Dar es Salaam and Mtwara while other offices including the head office in Dodoma operate from rented offices (Presidents' Office, Public Service Management and Good Governance, 2023).

Shortage of offices was also reported by the Ethics Secretariat's Implementation Report (Presidents' Office, Public Leaders Ethics Secretariat, 2017). Operating from rented offices inhibits Ethics Secretariat implementation of public right of access to asset declarations in many ways including document security and confidentiality, inefficient processing of access requests, and attenuated public accessibility as office relocations makes it difficult for individuals to locate them.

4.7 Pervasive Secrecy Culture and Values Diversity

Cultural diversity adds another layer of complexity, as different societies within Tanzania have unique norms and values which influence perceptions surrounding the right of access to asset declarations. Tanzania, public officials are reluctant to declare assets and/or make their assets publicly known, particularly in communities grappling with widespread poverty. This reluctance stems from two main concerns: firstly, individuals fear pressure from family or community members who may seek financial assistance, potentially leading to family disputes. Secondly, affluent individuals within economically disadvantaged societies are often stigmatized as corrupt

or dishonest and therefore, political adversaries may exploit asset declaration information as a weapon to tarnish reputations or even impeach their political opponents (Edward, 2024).

Public right of access to leaders asset declarations in Tanzania is also restricted by pervasive culture of secrecy within Tanzanian public institutions. This culture has been legitimized through parliamentary legislation including the National Security Act, Public Service Act, and the Cyber Crime Act, and the Personal Data Protection Act as discussed in item 3.3 above. These laws create a privacy-transparency dilemma by prohibiting, limiting or criminalizing the disclosure or possession of what is designated as classified information. This pervasive culture of secrecy within Tanzanian public institutions has been criticized for causing fear and hesitancy in responding to public requests regarding access to public information (Misa, 2017). This may weaken the accountability mechanisms and inadvertently create an environment for corruption or conflicts of interest to perpetually flourish undetected.

4.8 Inadequate Political Will

The study also noted that implementation of public right of access to asset declarations in Tanzania is hindered by lack of political will and resistance from policymakers, lawmakers, and decision-makers who are subject to asset declaration obligations and have conflicts of interest. Reports and academic studies show a deep-seated reluctance among Tanzanian leaders to timely and accurately declare their assets despite government's commitments to enforce the same (Mpambije2016; Njama, 2018; Kayombo, 2020; Oromu & Andrea, 2023). This explains why there has been consistent reluctance among leaders to truthfully and timely declare their assets. For instance, in 2019, just 2,369 out of 13,369 (17%) of leaders had declared their assets by the set deadline (Uhuru, 30th December, 2019).

There have been, however, a significant improvement in asset declaration compliance between 2009/2010 and 2019/2020 with average rate of submission raising from an average of 77% to 96% in the past five years (Presidents' Office, Ethics Secretariat, 2024) . This trend reached a peak of 15,756 out of 15,893(99%) submission rate in December 2023(Presidents 'Office, Public Service Management and Good Governance, 2024). Despite this improvement in asset declarations, the study revealed widespread false asset declarations among public leaders (Presidents' Office, Public Leaders Ethics Secretariat, 2024). Interview responses also revealed lack of political will to implement the public right of access to public leaders asset declarations. For instance a significant 37(61%) out of 60 respondents indicated that there is inadequate political will to implement the right of access to public leaders' asset declarations because those responsible for ensuring its enforcement are the very ones affected by the law, hence, creating a conflict of interest.

In some cases, presidential intervention has been necessary to compel compliance. This suggesting that many leaders submit their declarations more out of fear of penalties than from a genuine commitment to integrity and accountability (the Citizen, 2nd March 2016; the Gardian, 30th December,2017). This finding is in line with literature which state that implementation of asset declaration systems in Tanzania, faces significant resistance from public officials because of their perception that these requirements infringe upon their property rights (Nyerere, 1995; Anechiarico and Jacobs, 1996; Trip, 1997). Even members of the National Assembly perceive

the system as a targeted restriction on their property ownership hence making them reluctant to comply with the asset declaration obligations (Msekwa, 1997).

4.9 Unpleasant Reputation of the Ethics Secretariat

The study revealed that the Ethics Secretariat faces a significant reputation crisis manifested through widespread skepticism and negative perceptions among stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental. This impairs the Secretariat's ability to implement the public right of access to public leaders' asset declarations right effectively. Bad institutional image makes citizens question the Ethics Secretariat credibility as an oversight body (the Citizens, March, 2nd 2017).

Multiple scholarly studies spanning from 2008 to 2023 collectively highlight reputational crisis that negatively impacts the execution of its mandates and implementation of the public right of access to public leader's asset declarations in Tanzania (Kassim & Mutakyawa 2008; Tanzania Governance Review Report, 2013; Mpambije 2016; the Ethics Secretariat's Baseline Survey, 2016; Njama, 2018; Oronu and Andrea, 2023). This bad reputational image of the Ethics Secretariat may have negative implications on the implementation of the public right of access to public leaders' asset declarations because citizens are discouraged from petitioning for access, believing that they will not succeed.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper examined the legal and practical challenges hindering the implementation of the public right of access to leaders' asset declarations as one of the objectives of the study conducted to examine the law and practice in the implementation of the public right of access to public leaders' asset declarations in Tanzania. Review of primary and secondary sources and in-depth interviews revealed a number of challenges that restrict the implementation of the right within and outside the legal ambit. It has been noted in this paper that legal and institutional weaknesses hinder public right of access to public leaders' asset declarations. The legal framework does not clearly define: the scope of application of the right; the criteria to determine the relevance, genuineness of a complaint and whether it has been made in good faith. It also does not clearly stipulate the permissible methods for inspecting the register and provide clear guidelines for lodging valid complaints. The law does not state how complaints should be submitted whether in writing, orally, electronically, physically or by phone. Additionally, the legal framework vests in the Ethics Commissioner too much discretionary power to permit or deny public inspection of the asset declarations register based on his assessment and satisfaction with the genuineness or otherwise of the complaint, relying on his wisdom, opinion, experience, or competence.

Moreover, it has been noted in this paper that there are several laws that are either contradictory or have loopholes, which, if applied, may defeat the purpose of asset declaration and the public's right of access to leaders' asset declarations. Apart from legal weakness, this paper has also noted a number of institutional and practical challenges in the implementation of public right of access to public leader's asset declarations. These challenges include secretariat's limited operational coverage, limited public awareness, secretariat's limited financial capacity, insufficient capacity building of Ethics Secretariat Staff, Secretariats shortage of own permanent

office buildings, pervasive secrecy culture and values diversity, inadequate political will, and unpleasant reputation of the Ethics Secretariat among the public.

The authors recommend for comprehensive review of the legal framework to address the noted weaknesses; allocation and disbursement of enough funds to the Ethics secretariat that it can effectively discharge its duties and construct its own office buildings in every region and districts; continuous provision of public awareness and capacity building of the secretariat staff; continuous sensitization of the public and leaders to change secrecy culture and reluctance to implement public right of access to public leaders asset declarations; and adherence to ethics by the Ethics secretariat itself to change the negative reputational image of the Ethics Secretariat among the public.

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