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Service delivery and corruption in local authorities in Zimbabwe: A reflection of Chitungwiza municipality (2018-2023)

Emmanuel Sakarombe ^{1*}, Edson P Mutema ², Sharon RT Muzvidziwa-Chilunjika ³, Davidzo H Mufema-Mapuvire ⁴
¹⁻⁴ Lecturer Department of Governance and Public Management, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

* Corresponding Author: Emmanuel Sakarombe

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Abstract

The performance of local authorities in Zimbabwe have been complicated and service delivery is on the spot and highly suffering mainly due to corruption. This article concludes that corruption is worse than cancer and all other diseases combined together since it endangers the morals of an entire country. Indeed corruption is like sand on the wheel since it negatively affects service delivery of local authorities. Therefore there is need for political will and commitment by the top leadership in Zimbabwe like what is happening with the efforts by the new dispensations. The top leadership must set a good example with admiration to honesty, veracity and ability for hard work. The, Zimbabwean government, Ministry of Local Government, top officials in local authorities should establish effective and efficient anti-corruption oversight bodies or corruption watchdogs and can copy from other countries with vibrant anti-corruption institutions.

Keywords: Corruption, Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission

1. Introduction

Local authorities in the world have been suffering causing a decline in service delivery due to corruption. Lipset and Lenz (2000) ^[20, 21] argue that corruption is an ancient problem, it is as old as government itself. Indeed, there is sufficient evidence of corruption in local authorities in the world. Corruption had been a present feature in politics since time immemorial. Onwuka *et al.* (2009) argue that corruption is like a cancer that eats away the wealth creation potential of a country.

Since this research is concerned on providing an analysis of the implications of corruption on service delivery, it is therefore important to contextualize the word corruption, so as to understand the background of this study. In general corruption is mainly concerned the abuse of official positions for personal gain (Rose Ackerman, 2006). Melgar *et al.* (2010) considered corruption as a cultural phenomenon where perception of the individual matters a lot; “corruption is the abuse of public office for private gain” (Transparency International Report 2018: 1), or “monopoly plus discretion minus accountability” (United Nations Report 2017: 2). The above definitions show elements of a messy situation within countries and governments. Thus, Okoye (2016) states that “corruption is a monster and enemy to a country by which dishonest persons abuse and exploit public wealth”. It is worth to note that the African continent is considered as place in which most countries are found. This state of affairs has resulted in a general decline of municipal service delivery in most African countries, more specifically Zimbabwe’s urban local authorities. The choice of this study, Chitungwiza Municipality is regarded as the home of rampant corruption and poor service delivery. Some has regarded the Municipality as a paralyzed local authority in its Lazarus stage. Against such a backdrop, this study unpacks the implications of corruption and how it affects service delivery in local authorities.

2. Defining corruption

Corruption has been defined differently by academic scholars and it means differently to people practicing it. Bracking (2010) classified corruption as comprising of administrative corruption, petty corruption, grand corruption, political corruption among others. These researcher are of the view that whether ‘petty corruption’ or ‘grand corruption’, whether ‘administrative corruption’ or ‘political corruption’ as distinguished by scholars, what matters is that all forms of corruption costs heavily. The real cost of corruption is hard to be fathomed, but it is substantial. It is important to note that the effects of corruption is too heavy and degrading to the extent that most countries are on their knees.

According to UNDP Report (2006: 1) corruption is “misuse of public office, power or authority for private benefits through various means such as extortion, bribery, nepotism, influence peddling, fraud, speed money or embezzlement”. More similarly, Ijewereme (2015) defines corruption as the misuse of entrusted power or a dishonest use of one’s office or position for personal gain. It worth to note that corruption is any abuse of office for private benefits.

3. Understanding service delivery

Public service delivery is pertinent since it is an area where government can win the heart of its citizens when it fully delivers. Services can take both the form of tangibility and intangibility (Kayode *et al.* 2013). Johns (1999) argue that services are viewed mostly as intangible and the output of the same is an activity. In many countries service delivery is provided by local authorities and these include critical areas such as health, water, sanitation, communication, road, electricity and housing. Public service delivery normally establishes a triangular relationship between the policy makers that is the principal, service providers that is agents and the people (Carlson *et al.* 2005). Deduced from this is the fact that local authorities play an important role in providing service delivery.

Mainly in the marketing literature, service delivery has been linked with quality as assessed by a customer (Eshgi *et al.* 2008; Ghylin *et al.* 2008; Ladhari 2008). Of course, quality can never be a monopoly of one area and in fact it is the most sought after in any service delivery to the customers/consumers/citizens. Public service is largely viewed differently basing on individual perception pertaining delivery of a certain commodity.

4. Tracing corruption in Africa

It seems corruption is as old as human civilization (Haas 2017). In the context of Africa, corruption has been a recurrent feature. To date, corruption has become part of African culture. This situation has reduced the continent to become a nest or safe haven of thieves’ surviving in predatory states. Historically, “when specifically viewed within African history in mind, administrative corruption, though rampant across Africa today is an alien culture” (Lumumba 2014: 7). This researcher supports the view that corruption is an alien concept in Africa. One can argue that the concept of corruption can be traced from the colonial system and is an alien feature. However, Mupanduki (2017: 5) states that corruption in Africa has took different forms and re-emerged differently as per generations.

Pani and Mohanty (2007) state that it has been widely accepted that causes of corruption are country specific, hence it is very difficult to contain within a generalized list. More so, Caiden (2001) has observed that due to multi varieties of corrupt actions, multitudinous factors are responsible and no wonder it is difficult to classify them. Indeed, corruption is a phenomenon with many faces. This section presents an analyses of some of the causes of corruption.

From the earlier works of Rose-Ackerman (1978, 1994, 2004) [40]; Klitgaard (1998); Kauffman *et al.* (2003, 2005), causes of corruption can be summarized as power monopoly, discretion and lack of accountability and transparency. In the case of Zimbabwe, “with the economy in the doldrums, corruption has become an accepted and almost expected way of doing business especially in the public sector. If a civil servant still goes to work today it is not because of salary but

the opportunities to enhance his or her paltry income with corrupt acts using the organization’s resources” (Tizor 2009) [46]. It can be noted that in most African countries, corruption is now a normal daily activity. Nyoni (2017: 285) [35,36] posits that “the probability of finding a country where there is no corruption is synonymous to the probability of experiencing a cold day in Hell”.

Many authors agree that bureaucracy in addition within inefficient administrative and political structure is one of the most important cause of corruption (Dimant and Tosato 2017; Goel and Nelson 2010; Kaufman and Wei 1999). Less democratic environment and arrested freedom of the press also contribute to corruption (Tresman 2000; Bhattacharyya and Hodler 2015). This is because in a non/limited democracy, civic participation is poor and opportunities are less to name and shame the corruptors. Paldam (2002) and Saha *et al.* (2009) established that more economic freedom has a negative association with corruption. It means lower level of economic freedom can be a cause of corruption. Political instability of a country spells economic instability and so also promotes corruption. The said political instability provides enough leeway for the corruptors. Lederman *et al.* (2005) empirically supports that political stability lowers the incidences of corruption. Another cause which can be taken into consideration is poverty. Notwithstanding with the debate whether corruption leads to poverty or poverty leads to corruption, literature is available to show strongly that poverty is one of the many causes of corruption (Leys 1965; Mauro 1998; Justesen and Bjornskov 2014) [28]. Tanzi (1998) [45] in his economic analysis to corruption outlined factors such institutional regulations as the cause of corruption.

5. Implications of corruption on service delivery in local authorities

Corruption and lack of garbage collection

Corruption has become more like a cancer in most local authorities in Zimbabwe and has resulted in poor service delivery. Corruption has resulted to lack of collection of garbage since the funds which are meant to service garbage collection trucks are being diverting of public for personal gains hence leaving the council coffers dry and service deliver became non-existent”. The following picture in Fig 1 shows the level of poor service delivery in most local authorities in Zimbabwe.



Source: Primary Data

Fig 1: Uncollected garbage at Zengeza 4 in Chitungwiza

Corruption and water, sanitation and a state of poor service delivery

Mahachi (2016) states that corruption has resulted in poor

service delivery in local authorities especially in areas such as water and sanitation. Corrupt practices in local authorities have reduced Chitungwiza to be area of poor sanitation and unavailability of clean water". The situation in Chitungwiza is also experienced in most urban councils. Despite charging high rates most urban local authorities have failed dismally to render services due to embezzlement of funds by top local authorities' officials.

In the Sunday Mail of 18 April 2021 under the headline '*Harare, Chitungwiza running empty*' the reporters stated that swathes of Harare and Chitungwiza are now littered with ever-growing mounds of uncollected garbage, while rising incidents of water shortages and burst sewer pipes are raising the spectre of outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as cholera and typhoid. Fig 2 shows the flowing sewer in Chitungwiza.



Source: Primary data

Fig 2: Flowing sewer in Chitungwiza

Corruption and poor sanitation

The state of corruption in Zimbabwe has resulted in poor service delivery in every sector and local government on the areas largely affected, there is no clean water, sewer is flowing into homes, there is no sanitation to talk about, poor service delivery is the order of the day". This study discovered that there is indeed evidence that corruption negatively affects service delivery, as highlighted by UNDP (2018) that corruption is a cancer which destroys the original intentions of a public official to deliver public good and service provision.

6. Principal-Agent Theory

The principal-agent theory defines corruption as a series of interactions and relationships that exist within and outside public bodies. The major proponents of Principal-agent theory are Rose-Ackerman and Robert Klitgaard. This theory emphasises the rational choices that take place in individual incidents of corrupt behaviour. A principal-agent problem exists when one party to a relationship that is the principal requires a service of another party that is the agent but the principal lacks the necessary information to monitor the agent's performance in an effective way. The 'information asymmetry' that arises because the agent has more or better information than the principal creates a power imbalance between the two and makes it difficult for the principal to ensure the agent's compliance (Booth 2012). This will then lead to corrupt actions. It is important to note that, in most local authorities officials are working for self-interest resulting into corruption and it is difficult for the principals to monitor the agents always. In an analysis of how corruption affects service delivery, for example Mahachi

(2020) used the principal-agent theory to explain the causes of corruption.

7. Conclusion

This study conclude that corruption is worse than cancer and all other diseases combined together since it endangers the morals of an entire country. After an analysis of various factors the study describes corruption as sand on the wheel since it negatively affects service delivery. This study established the causes of corruption at multi levels and its impact on quality public service delivery in Zimbabwe. The researchers discovered that there are several measures that can be used in several efforts to reduce corruption in the public service of Zimbabwe.

8. Recommendations

Given the effects and implications of corruption on service delivery in local authorities, this researcher is concerned with what needs to be done? This is a Leninist type question which may appear to exaggerate the gravity of the impact of corruption on poor service delivery. Admittedly, it is a truism that although local authorities in Zimbabwe are not in a *Lazarus Moment*, there are cardinal policy fundamentals that need to be adopted in order to avoid the collapse and deterioration of service delivery in local municipalities in Zimbabwe.

- This study recommends that effective and corrupt free leadership plays an important role in curbing corruption. There is need for political will and commitment by the top leadership in Africa so as to fight corruption. The top leadership must set a good example with admiration to honesty, veracity and ability for hard work. The, Zimbabwean government, Ministry of Local Government, top officials in local authorities should establish effective and efficient anti-corruption oversight bodies or corruption watchdogs and can copy from other countries with vibrant anti-corruption institutions.
- The researchers also recommends that there is a need to have effective mechanisms on performance management based on result based approaches. This will make local authorities to have effective and efficient service delivery. Also there is need for improved accountability and transparency. Improvement in accountability and transparency is the second most effective way to corruption.
- This study recommends that Anti-Corruption institutions, should be independent and well-resourced so as to curb corruption.
- This study recommends that the Zimbabwean government should ensure the independence of ZACC. More so, there is a need of stiff punishment, for instance guilty officers should refund money.

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