

CORRUPTION IN ZIMBABWEAN URBAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES: A CASE OF GWERU CITY COUNCIL

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to analyze the causes of corruption, anti corruption measures that have been put in place, the challenges that have been faced in the implementation of these strategies and what can be done to improve them. Public sector officials have been seen engaging in corrupt activities and meeting their private gain at the expense of service delivery. Corruption is caused by a variety of factors, if they are not addressed corruption will not be successfully arrested and society will continue to suffer. Forms of corruption which include bribery, nepotism, gross mismanagement of council funds and misuse of council assets, selling of council assets at low rates and the bribing of council workers, have impacted negatively on service delivery. The research was conducted at Gweru City Council and questionnaires and interviews were used to elicit data from the informants. The anti corruption measures revealed include internal and external auditing, punishing of offenders, whistle blowing, use of the code of ethics among other strategies. However, these strategies have not been fully implemented to make them totally effective. The recommendations are that codes of conduct and strong independent oversight bodies should be put in place, improvement of remuneration, internal and external auditing will help curb corrupt practices, penalties should be stiffer but not discriminatory and whistleblowers should report cases of corruption without fear, the media should investigate, report and expose corruption without undermining the credibility of anti corruption efforts. Civil society organizations should be allowed to access and question council information and decisions.

Keywords: Corruption, causes, consequences, service delivery

INTRODUCTION

Developing countries are plagued by corruption, it has been and continues to be one of the greatest causes of poverty in developing countries and its impact on service delivery is evident. Palmier (1985) views corruption as the use of public office for private advantage. It is a very serious crime that can undermine social and economic development in all nations and it is hindering efforts that nations are making towards achieving the MDGs. Corruption is a feature of life in almost all societies, but it can be systematic in public institutions in developing countries, if not systematic in society as a whole Doig & Riley (1998). It is everywhere in the African governance system and people having come to accept it is as common practice. Werner (2006) asserts that, corruption alters its character in response to changing socio-economic, cultural and political factors. As these factors affect corruption so does corruption affect them. It poses a serious threat to public administration, and has often resulted in inefficient provision of services. In Zimbabwe the urban local authorities have of late become notorious for poor service delivery and hyper corruption, Wafawarova (2011). In Southern Africa, Zimbabwe is rated as the country with the most cases of corruption. According to a survey carried out by the Southern African Forum against Corruption (SAFAC) (2002), approximately 62% of Zimbabweans believed that all or most of their

public officials were involved in corruption. In 2011, Zimbabwe had a Corruption Perception Index (CPI) score of 2.2 and an overall rank of 154 out of 182 countries assessed. In 2012, the CPI was presented on a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 being the most corrupt and 100 being the least corrupt, Zimbabwe was one of the countries assessed and it scored 20, on the CPI score, Transparency International Zimbabwe TI-Z (2012).

Officials in the public sector who have been seen to engage in corrupt activities are meeting their private gain at the expense of the public offices that they occupy. The costs of corruption are not measured just in the amounts of money that are squandered or the stolen government resources, but in the absence of basic services that could have been provided with that money and would have certainly benefitted the lives of families and communities (UN Secretary General 2012).

TYPES OF CORRUPTION

Al-Shuaibi (2008) states that there are two main types of corruption: internal corruption and trans-border corruption. Internal corruption is classified as that which occurs within the organizations while trans-border corruption takes place across territorial borders including international organizations thereby resulting in Global Corruption. This research will focus on internal corruption. Langseth (1999) states three specific examples of corruption, the researcher views them as forms of internal corruption, and they are: administrative, grand and state capture corruption.

Corruption can also be categorized in other ways besides the ones mentioned above. According to Grey (1998), a distinction can be made between benefits that are paid willingly (bribery) and payments that are extracted from unwilling clients (extortion). Another way to categorize it is to differentiate between bribes paid for what a client has a legal right to receive for example paying for speeding up the process of water reconnections and bribes paid to receive benefits belonging to others. Furthermore, corruption includes unfairly amending election results and processes or silencing whistle blowers.

Causes of Corruption

Corruption is caused by a variety of factors. If these factors or loopholes are not addressed corruption will not be curbed successfully and society will continue to suffer Frimpong (1997). The contributing factors are numerous amongst them are the following: when potential benefits of corruption are high, it follows then that public officials will engage in corrupt activities, other factors include policies, programs and activities that are poorly conceived and managed, failing institutions, poverty, inadequate remuneration, and a lack of accountability and transparency, a lack of political commitment and resources as well as lack of or inadequate anti corruption measures. According to Kotter (2007), if public officials know that they are not being monitored they are prone to engage in corrupt activities. Wafawarova (2011) states that there are some MPs, councillors and government bureaucrats who think that they should make the most out of the present political arrangement because there is no guarantee they will retain their positions when a new government is elected into office in the next elections. That explains the many corruption cases in local authorities. The Zimbabwean local government legislation allows the Minister of Local Government, Urban and Rural Development to interfere with the day-to-day running of local authorities this has been seen to fuel corruption. The public tends to accept corruption as normal and will not frown down upon corrupt activities. People have a tendency of resorting to paying bribes due to the complex procedures that they have to go through so that they can get the services that they need without delays. A research by Mhlahlo (2007) revealed that within a period of 6

months, 64% of those who had applied and paid for new water connections had not been connected. It was discovered that there was a waiting list that dated back to the year 2000.

EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION

In addition to impacting negatively on service delivery, corruption undermines the credibility of democratic institutions and counteracts good governance. Mauro (1997) states that corruption has negative effects on investment and it lowers economic growth. In the public sector, bribes induce officials to contrive new rules and delays in order to manufacture crises. Bribes can influence the choice of private parties to supply public goods and services at the exact terms of those who supply contracts. In Zimbabwe people are often simply told, "Sit there while we try to sort out your problem" and they are made to wait until business closes down, and then they are told to come back on the next day and the day after that. The waiting often only ends after a bribe has been paid. For instance most departments in local authorities such as the engineering department take long to approve plans hence council officials are given bribes in order to speed up the process.

Robert et al (1991) insinuate that buying contracts can be called "kick backs" that is when local authorities officials may use their bargaining power with contractors and their discretion in awarding contracts to obtain a fee or service charge for arranging the contracts. Tenders have been awarded to unqualified or inadequately qualified constructors, which leads to poor workmanship. Bribes can be used to reduce the amount of taxes or other fees collected by the government; the bribes may be demanded or offered for the issuance of licenses that convey an exclusive right such as a land development concession or exploitation of natural resources. Therefore, corruption impedes a state of its available resources to progressively achieve the full realization of socio economic rights because funds may be mismanaged, misused and misappropriated. Wafawarova (2011) mentions that corruption has a negative impact on socio economic rights as it deny development and quality to the most vulnerable members of society. He also states that this is harmful in developing countries, which have fewer resources and these are more vulnerable if these resources are wasted or not used effectively and adequately. Corruption reduces the effectiveness of public administration and impedes a local authority's ability to use its available resources to progressively achieve the full realization of better service delivery. Women have been seen to suffer as corruption makes it difficult for some of them to access resources and services in order to sustain their lives as they are vulnerable to sexual extortion.

Anti Corruption Strategies

Jeremy (1997) argues that corruption differs considerably in developing countries therefore the policies required to reduce corruption vary from one country to the other. Reducing corruption effectively requires a precise understanding of its causes and consequences because eradicating it is neither simple nor straightforward, Dong & Torgler (2011), it is thus important to examine the specifics of corruption and anti-corruption efforts including questions of the social environment, culture, organization and the effectiveness of campaigns, while also considering the more universalist strategies that have been developed in recent times. Furthermore, if corruption is to be combated, transparency and accountability are required at all levels.

December 9 of every year, was designated by the United Nations General Assembly as International Anti-Corruption Day, this was meant to raise awareness of corruption and what the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNAC) is doing to fight against corruption and prevent it. Various states and competent regional economic integration

organizations have signed and ratified the (UNAC). This convention is the first legally binding, international anti-corruption instrument that provides a chance to fight globally against corruption. The UNAC has a peer review mechanism to ensure its successful implementation; the review mechanism is a global and inclusive process without marginalization or rankings.

According to Chipangura (2012) the Anti Corruption Commission of Zimbabwe (ACCZ) was formed in 2009 to combat corruption and its members are appointed by the President in consultation with the Parliament Committee on Standing Rules and Orders. The ACCZ has duties that include investigating and combating cases of corruption and abuse of power both in public and private sectors. In addition to the ACCZ, there is the Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI-Z), which is a non profit, non partisan, systems oriented local chapter of the international movement against corruption. The TI-Z aims to fight corruption and related vices through networks of integrity in line with the Global Strategy.

In addition to the ACCZ there are other measures that are being used such as internal and external auditing as outlined in the Urban Councils Act 29:15 Section 304 and the Rural District Councils Act 29:13 Section 70. The Code of Ethics, whistle blowing and the media can be engaged in the fight against corruption and enforcing government legislation.

However, challenges have been faced in the implementation of anti corruption strategies such as lack of political will by elites across the political spectrum to deal with corruption and the inefficiency of the ACCZ. Furthermore, undemocratic government legislation and the attitude of the public itself hamper anti corruption efforts.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted at Gweru City Council; Gweru is located in the Midlands Province 275 km away from the capital of Zimbabwe, Harare. Questionnaires and interviews were used to elicit data from the informants who consisted of employees and top management officials, councilors, the District Administrator and a representative from the Gweru Residents' Association.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents revealed that anti corruption strategies have not been fully implemented to make them totally effective. The anti corruption measures mentioned include internal and external auditing, punishing of offenders, whistle blowing, use of the code of ethics among other strategies.

The respondents revealed that there were challenges that rendered anti corruption strategies ineffective, some of the responses include lack of political will, attitude of the public, undemocratic local government, poor monitoring of workers, inefficiency of the ACCZ, weak and greedy political leaders. Wafawarova (2011) says if anything, there is lack of political will by elites across the political spectrum to deal with corruption in concrete ways. The battle against corruption has been lost to partisan politics and the persistence of political clientelism in which Zanu PF and MDC politicians seek to perpetuate their stay in office through appropriation of public resources not for public good but for political survival.

The District Administrator (DA) revealed that cases of corruption had not reduced and service delivery had not improved with the implementation of anti-corruption strategies. As seen in Bailey's (2006) argument that, corruption erodes the institutional capacity of government and local authorities as procedures are disregarded, resources are siphoned off

and officials are hired or promoted without regard to performance. This all has a negative bearing on service delivery.

Forms of corruption cited by the respondents include bribery, embezzlement, nepotism and misuse of council assets, selling of council assets like stands and vehicles to some council officials at very low values and the bribing of council workers for illegal water reconnections. The DA pointed out that there is gross mismanagement of council funds and this has impacted on service delivery, as a result costs of public services are inflated to make up for the mismanaged funds. The council is being deprived of the money that it could use to fund and improve its service delivery projects.

The respondents gave reasons like poor supervisory mechanisms, greediness, poor remuneration, lack of motivation and culture as some of the causes for corruption. Informants indicated that even though salaries were increased in 2009, the salaries appear inadequate for the workers. However, a councilor indicated that no amount can ever really be enough as most of the corruption cases are prompted by greediness thus making it difficult to eradicate it totally.

The member from the Gweru Ratepayers' Association and other respondents pointed out that service delivery has been affected as the ratepayers in some cases resist payment of rates because they believe that the money they are paying is being mismanaged. It was noted that ratepayers distrust the council because of the corruption cases that have been exposed over time. This draws back service delivery as funding is reduced.

Anti Corruption Measures That Have Been Used

At one point an Anti Corruption Commission of Zimbabwe (ACCZ) probe team was sent to the council after cases of corruption were reported and a report was submitted to the Ministry of Local Government Rural and Urban Development for further investigation. Offenders were punished so as to set an example to would be offenders. However there are cases where even if the corrupt officials are caught and dismissed, in the end they are reinstated according to the directives of the minister who is vested with power by the local government legislation.

The councilors said the code of ethics is being used in the council as it involves the declaration of conflict of interests thus reducing cases of corruption. They also pointed out that internal and external auditing has been used as anti corruption strategies. Multiple signatories on financial documents and pre-auditing of payments before payments are in place to curb corrupt efforts.

The respondent from the Gweru Residents' Association also pointed out that whistle blowing by members of his organization and the public at large is also a measure that has been employed to curb corruption.

The DA said that the constant reference to the Local Government legislation in all council activities has been used as another way of reducing corrupt activities. The media, though it has not been used per se by the council but by whistleblowers within the council, is another measure used to curb corruption in the council. The respondents opined that constant supervision of employees, constant writing and submission of reports and the consultation principle from the budgeting meetings to the consultation of councilors in council meetings before some decisions which involve large funds of money are made also reduce cases of corruption. However, they were of the opinion that the officials who are supposed to spearhead the implementation of anti corruption strategies are the ones who are mostly engaged in the corruption activities and this defeats the whole purpose of curbing corruption. The respondents argued that this is due to the uncertainty of political careers of the elected

officials. Therefore they feel an urge to enrich themselves before their term of office expires. As evidenced by Mushamba (2010) who says that there are some MPs, councilors and government bureaucrats who think that they should make the most out of the present political arrangement because there is no guarantee they will retain their positions when a new government is elected into office in the next elections, the officials have the intention of making the most out of their public positions. Chiremba (2010) in Mangizvo and Kapungu (2010) says that an instituted probe into Kadoma City Council showed that, apart from exorbitant salaries for council managers, councilors were illegally granted loans from ratepayers' money.

Another challenge highlighted by the DA is that implementation of the anti corruption strategies in local authorities is complex and there are delays in the implementation of these strategies and this creates loopholes, thus corruption.

The attitude of the public dampens anti corruption efforts because the public keeps offering bribes to officials and workers to speed up various processes or to get services thus making it difficult to eradicate it. Lack of political will was mentioned as another challenge to curbing corruption. The battle against corruption has been lost to party politics.

CONCLUSION

Several factors have attributed to the incidences of corruption in Gweru City Council which include greed and opportunity. There are already anti corruption strategies in place which include internal and external auditing, enforcement of the local government legislation and investigations by the ACCZ and other special committees from the ministry. However, corruption is still taking place because anti corruption strategies are complex and there are delays in their implementation. Respondents revealed that the individuals who are supposed to implement anti corruption strategies in local authorities are the ones who are actually involved in most of the corruption cases this includes top management. Even though anti corruption strategies are in place, efforts are defeated due to the attitudes of the public. The public is accustomed to corruption that they have no problem offering bribes to council officials to get services to which they have a democratic right, unfortunately only those who can afford to pay bribes can get services on time.

The existence of such shortcomings compromises service delivery. These shortcomings also endanger the lives of the citizens as the money, which should be used to finance departments like engineering or health for effective service delivery, lines some officials' pockets. There are still challenges or shortcomings to these anti corruption strategies which have rendered them ineffective to curb corruption in totality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government has to put in place codes of conduct and strong independent oversight bodies this can help ensure that the acceptable standards of behavior are respected in the local authorities. The improvement of remuneration can also be used to reduce cases of corruption.

Stiffer anti corruption laws and cases should be brought to judges and magistrates for unbiased resolving. Processes should be established for continuous monitoring of employees to quickly identify corrupt activities and loop holes which create opportunities, frequent visits by external auditors will help curb corrupt practices. It is not enough to remove corrupt officials without also removing opportunities and ensuring that honest law abiding officials are being appointed to positions of trust.

The constant supervision of workers can also reduce cases of bribery and the misuse of council assets, penalties should be stiffer but not discriminatory, anyone who commits a crime should face the jail time despite political party affiliation or status. Structures should be established to allow for whistleblowers to report cases of corruption without fear of victimization or discrimination.

The media is an integrity pillar. Freedom and integrity of the media should be protected and reserved so it can investigate report and expose corruption without undermining the credibility of anti corruption efforts. Civil society organizations like the Gweru Residents' Association play a crucial role against corruption in terms of monitoring, raising public awareness, research and prevention. They should be allowed to access and question council information and decisions that affect them and their concerns should be taken on board and finally bureaucratic procedures should be streamlined.

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