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LOCAL AUTHORITIES' PERFORMANCE IN ZIMBABWE-A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

There has been a global uproar recently as local authority service delivery has fallen short of ratepayer expectations, despite the fact that local authority performance, particularly service delivery, is seen as a major motivator of nations towards global sustainability and competitiveness. The current study was therefore founded on the requirement to reduce the gap between ratepayers' expectations and the performance of the corresponding local authorities in Zimbabwe. For this investigation, we used the search engines Scopus, Google Scholar and Web of Science (WoS). The review took into account empirical studies up until June 2022. Because the emphasis was on the performance of local governments, the initial search used variants of the terms 'efficiency,' 'performance assessment,' 'local government,' and 'local authority.' The databases produced more than 250 books, articles, and unpublished research papers when these keywords were used. We disregarded conference presentations and dissertations to reduce the overall number of results. The results were then qualitatively screened to make sure they answered the research topic. We ultimately collected 78 studies. The review provides a contextualized view of earlier research in discourses, techniques, and frameworks that draw attention to the difficulties local authorities have in performing their functions, with a focus on service delivery and strategic growth toward sustainable futures. As we go on with our empirical inquiry, the systematic review technique has been a helpful organised way to provide a preliminary source of knowledge in local authority performance assessment and more generally. Future research has a number of prospective directions that have been identified.

KEYWORDS: Local Authority; Service Delivery; Performance

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The study was firmly premised on the need to bridge the gap between Zimbabwean ratepayers' expectations and the performance of the country's different local authorities. This may be done by



constantly enhancing the local authorities' organisational effectiveness. Even though many scholars regard local government performance, particularly service delivery, as a powerful driver of nations' global competitiveness and sustainability, there has been a global outcry in recent years as local government service delivery falls short of ratepayers' expectations. As a result, the issue is not unique to Zimbabwe. According to Fan, Ouyang, Nguyen, Park, and Chen (2019), municipalities may act as catalysts for economic emancipation in developing and emerging economies. As a result, service delivery by local governments is vital in any economy. The provision of services such as waste collection, water supply, and health care is intrinsically tied to the well-being of residents (Marumahoko, Afolab, Sadie, and Nhede, 2020).

Local governments have been criticised for poor service delivery that falls short of residents' requests and expectations. Ratepayers are always criticising or protesting that local governments do not do enough to provide the services that they are required to provide. The Ministry of Local Government, Public Works, and National Housing has also expressed unhappiness with local governments' overall inability to meet their service delivery obligations (The Herald, 20 August 2013). According to popular belief, this critique is not without merit. Local governments have not always been able to provide the services that their constituents require. Many roads have been in disrepair for many years, and municipal clinics and schools have been without enough resources for extended periods of time (Mironga & Mironga, 2022). Despite this, local governments have continued to collect rates from the public. Many of them have also made significant contributions to the strategic plans they have developed to improve service delivery.

Rural local governments have used a variety of performance management systems in recent years to enhance the performance of their workforces and, as a result, service delivery (Abane & Brenya, 2021). In the Zimbabwean context, this has occurred either on the initiative of local governments or because of orders issued by the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works, and National Housing. Local government performance management may be thought of as a subset of central government performance management. In the early 1990s, the central government created a performance management system (Musingafi et al, 2013:23). Poor service delivery, on the other hand, has remained and been exacerbated in recent years as the country's economic situation has deteriorated. According to Haque, Mehta and Kumar (2019), municipal governments' key prioritised functions include water supply for residential, commercial, or industrial locations, housing and transportation facilities, drainage, sewer, road, and bridge construction and maintenance among others.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Effective service delivery by local governments is the pulse of all organisations and the people of any nation. Unfortunately, service performance is now poor, and key stakeholders are dissatisfied.



Residents, pressure groups, and a range of other stakeholders have all expressed their dissatisfaction bemoaning a massive decline in service provision. A thorough analysis of the literature reveals that the gap between service delivery and ratepayers' expectations of the same is caused by a number of variables ranging from economic, social and political factors, emphasising the necessity of the current study in documenting the causes of the existing expectation gap in the Zimbabwean context.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The research sought to document causes of the current gap between Local Authorities' service delivery and ratepayers' expectations in the Zimbabwean context.

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEFINED

Reddy (1999) defines Local Government (LG) as the level of government created to bring government to the local populace and to give citizens a sense of participation in the political processes that influence their lives. Wilson and Game (1994) emphasize the social and political roles of LG. According to Wilson and Game (1994), LG is a large geographically defined multi-functional organisation, pursuing a variety of social, political, and economic objectives, either through the direct provision or through the sponsorship, indirect funding, regulation or monitoring of an extensive range of services to its local community.

According to Van der Waldt (2007), Local Government is a form of decentralized, representative institution with general and specific powers devolved upon it and delegated to it by central or provincial government in a restricted geographical area within a nation or state. In Zimbabwe local government authorities are corporate bodies that may sue or be sued in their own right (Murimoga and Musingafi, 2014,). The definitions above imply that local governments enjoy reasonable degrees of autonomy to control in certain areas of their operations and that they have government attributes as they are creations of the state to which they are subject.

For this research, Local Government shall be defined as a largely self-financing decentralized tier of government constituted by law, with defined powers over a defined geographical area, and a governing body that is democratically elected and charged with a service delivery mandate. This definition portrays local governments not only as administrative units empowered by law to administer particular localities, but also as decentralized political, geographical, social and economic entities that function on democratic basis in pursuit of their mandate to deliver services to citizens. The definition indicates that local governments have multi-dimensional functions that include the social, economic, geographic, legal and administrative dimensions, (Murimoga and Musingafi, 2014).

According to Shah and Shah (2006) local government refers to specific entities and institutions created



in four main ways. Firstly, in countries like Italy, India, Japan, Denmark, Brazil, and France, national constitutions create local governments, seconded by state constitutions as in USA and Australia, (Musingafi, 2012) Thirdly, as in other nations such as the New Zealand and United Kingdom a regular legislation of a higher level of central government is used. Lastly local government can be created through executive order as in the case of China. The main purpose of local government is to provide a diverse array of specialized amenities to a small geographically outlined and specified area.

Chakaipa (2010) defines local government as a democratically established and devolved echelon of government tasked with the delivery of services mandate, is comprised of legal organisations with defined authority that are equipped with enforcing rules over a specific area within national legislation's bounds and are mostly self-financing. Local government according to Musingafi (2012) is the establishment of democratically elected and participatory arrangements that are based on the constitution that can connect with people's needs at the grass-roots level ensuring the provision and the long-term preservation of infrastructure and key, essential services. Local government, as stated by Murimoga and Musingafi (2014) is the creation of a lower tier of government having the mission of engaging in responsibilities that the central government is unable to properly carry out because it is too far away from the people. As the level of government closest to the people, local government has the capability to respond to and and better enunciate local requirements. Murimoga and Musingafi (2014) go on to say that when it comes to carrying out its mandate, local governments are better positioned to take advantage of opportunities that arise from local effort and knowledge. In Zimbabwe, local government competencies have a significant impact on local people's daily lives.

Nkomo (2017) posits that every country's local government is an important feature and adequate investment must be made in this tier to ensure sustainable development. It should be an accountable government which is based on active citizen participation in the process of decision-making as well as the provision of excellent and first-class services. Local government is nearest to the public as it communicates to establishments, organisations and practices of service delivery which take place within the geographical vicinity of residents (Nkomo, 2017).

5. Role of Local Authorities in National Development

Singh (2022) asserts that local authorities play a significant role in spurring sustainable economic growth and development and provide and maintain infrastructure for water and sanitation housing, waste disposal, road rehabilitation, public lighting, and services such as basic health and education which are all critical in the promotion of economic and social well-being (Government of Zimbabwe and World Bank 2017). Moreover, Singh (2022) postulates that to perform these functions adequately, local authorities also rely on central government to provide complementary infrastructure in areas that are beyond the jurisdiction of local authorities.



Local governance has drawn considerable attention and gained importance due to its democratisation processes as well as its involvement of citizens in the process of decision- making (Haque, 2012,). Singh (2009) argues that democracy at the local level is critical for better functioning democracy at national level. Four distinct reasons put forward in order to create awareness about the vitality of local government are the following: training platforms so that multitudes of people are politically educated; training foundations for the development of strong political leadership; a system that ensures accountability of government is maintained; and responsiveness and efficiency (Haque, 2012).

Local governments serve as training platforms for political leadership in the sense that it is an education for democracy and a reservoir for national leadership. Local government can provide a platform for electors who can vote in relation to issues pertaining to their own localities. In addition, the councillors that are voted for will have an opportunity to gain experience in the art of responsible leadership (Singh, 2009). The importance of local government has been shown by many scholars, such as Mill (1861) and Tocqueville, Reeve and Spencer (1839), who refer to local government as a school for democracy where citizens are imparted political and popular education regarding issues of local and national importance. For instance, Mill (1861) asserts that the best form of government for a people at a given time is the one that best improves the virtue and intelligence of the people under its jurisdiction and organising such good qualities of the people as currently exist to promote as far as possible the long-run common good (Miller, 2006). Local government develops qualities of initiative, tolerance and compromise that are essential for the working of a democracy. It relieves congestion at centres as well as checks the increasing power of a bureaucracy. In addition, it aids in distribution and political decentralisation and opens an outlet for articulation of smaller groups in a large society (Singh, 2009).

5.1 Political education

Local government is a fundamental source of training for citizens about mobilisation and political education because it offers a platform for citizen participation in government affairs. (Haque, 2012). Participation in local government affairs teaches citizens about the role of political debate, the selection of representatives and the nature of policies, plans and budgets in a democracy (Islander, 2015).

The fundamental objectives of local government are more clearly explained by Marshall (1965) and Holm (1989), who argue that through local government, citizens learn to make choices about decisions that can affect their lives in their communities (Haque, 2012). Citizens learn to identify the inaccurate demagogue, avoid voting for incompetent and corrupt representatives, understand issues pertaining to revenue and expenditure, and debate agendas in a more effective and healthy manner while also learning to think for the future (Haque, 2012). According to Newton and Van Deth (2005), local



government is citizens' training ground for democracy.

5.2 Political leadership education

Local governments are well placed to mobilize people politically through political education, political enlightenment, and political actions (Omowunmi, 2016). Local governments are also appropriate institutions for promoting democracy at the local level. The process of political recruitment is institutionalized through their mobilisation processes, and the institution can then help to train people for higher responsibilities (Omowunmi, 2016). The foundation for political leadership is shaped in training provided by local government, particularly for those individuals who intend to further their career in national politics. According to Singh (2009), participation through voting provides political education to citizens as well as serving as a training ground for emerging political leaders who may eventually take up state or national-level leadership positions. It is the best way of bringing the government closer to the people, such that citizens have an intimate contact with persons responsible for decisions. Thus, local knowledge is regarded as an essential ingredient if politicians want to succeed in their political career. However, Haque (2012) argues that although this reason provides certain advantages, it cannot be entirely conceived that lawmakers with experience in politics of local government are better national legislators than those who lack it.

5.3 Fostering accountability

Local government ensures the decentralisation of power, which leads to a reduction in the powers of bureaucrats (Singh, 2009). Therefore, local government is viewed as a defence mechanism against the exercise of subjective power by government (Haque, 2012). A concentration of executive powers in a few hands can be unhealthy for progress (Singh, 2009; Haque, 2012). In this view, accountability becomes a fundamental prerequisite for preventing the abuse of political power by government and directing such power towards promoting the rights of citizens (Okeke and Agub, 2016). Thus, the oppression caused by the power constrained at centralisation is discouraged by means of local government. Smith et al. (1988) opine that a greater level of accountability can be restored by means of local democracy, as accountability becomes more visible in local government. In local governance, accountability therefore involves the checking and balancing of potential abuse of power by public officials, which limits the potential for corruption of public offices and officials (Abubaka, 2010). From this perspective, open discussions by the committees of local authorities in public meetings can scare civil servants or central politicians in a number of ways (Haque, 2012).

In most less developed countries, infrastructure is vital for establishing the communication chain between the people and the central government. In most developed countries, the most flexible tool and most reliable instrument that promotes and facilitates good governance and accountability with the public is local government (Haque, 2012). Through local government formation, powers are



determined and vested in the hands of the public to a certain extent, thereby making the notion of government of the people, by the people and for the people a more realistic one (Havenga, 2006).

5.4 Responsiveness and efficiency

Local government institutions can increase the efficiency and responsiveness of government. According to Olowu (2012), elected local governments offer the most efficient way of handling the discrepancy between needs and demands in the community as well as handling the production of public benefits. Locally elected leaders know their constituents better than authorities at the national level and should be well positioned to provide the public services local residents want. Physical proximity makes it easier for citizens to hold local officials accountable for their performance (Olowu, 2012). According to Sikander (2015), responsiveness of government is improved because local representatives are best placed to know the exact nature of local needs and how they can be met in a cost-effective way.

6. Local Authorities' Performance

Local governments, according to Dutta and Fischer (2021), can only function properly if national infrastructure is in good shape. However, due to insufficient infrastructure investment at the local authority level, most of Zimbabwe's key infrastructure is now in ruin. Cities and towns in Africa are increasing at a pace of 5% per year on average, putting a burden on the functioning of local governments at a time when local governments are already stretched to meet increased demand (Güneralp, Reba, Hales, Wentz & Seto, 2020).

Basic retail, social, health, education, and infrastructure services are critical foundations for daily activities and preserving people's quality of life, as well as the local economic base in rural and small towns (Campos-Silva, Peres, Hawes, Haugaasen, Freitas, Ladle and Lopes, 2021). The Zimbabwean constitution compels towns to prioritize the basic needs of residents and to provide them with at least a basic level of municipal services (Bordvik, 2022). Municipalities should also foster the growth of small communities (Tripathi, 2021). To enhance public service delivery, particularly at the local level, the present government must address service delivery barriers in a more coordinated and proactive manner, concentrating on macro-goals to strengthen the country's infrastructure and guarantee that all residents benefit (Ham & Smith, 2010).

7. Local Authorities performance-A systematic review

For this research article, the researchers utilized the search engines such as Scopus, Google Scholar and Web of Science (WoS) in order to come up with a holistic systematic review. To minimise the possibility of finding publications that were irrelevant to the topic, the search was confined to the Social Sciences and Humanities section in Scopus and the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) in



WoS. In addition, we limited our literature search to the English language. We included empirical research up to and including June 2022. Keyword combinations such as ‘efficiency,’ ‘performance measurement,’ ‘local government,’ and ‘local authority’ were employed since the first search focused on the performance of local governments. The databases returned over 250 books, journals, and unpublished working papers when we used these keywords. We removed conference presentations and dissertations to reduce the overall number of results. The obtained findings were then evaluated subjectively to ensure that they addressed the research topic. We included studies that presented empirical data on local government performance and efficiency. Finally, 78 studies were gathered.

8. Local Authorities Performance indicators

There are many variables which can be used as performance indicators by Local Authorities. The choice of variables depended mainly on the specific facilities and services provided by local governments in each of the respective countries as well as the availability of data. As a result, several factors are not applicable in every nation. The following variables will be explained in detail;

8.1 Input variables

In this study, we look at the most often utilized input variables in prior studies. Input selection may change among nations due to differences in accounting systems and local government features. Furthermore, due to a lack of price and physical unit data, most research relied on cost-based input factors. Because of their non-market nature, public sector products and services are typically unpriced (Kinder & Stenvall, 2021).

Financial expenses were the first input category identified by the literature research. This category’s input variables are drawn from local public accounts or budget expenditures. Total spending, current spending, capital spending, and financial spending are all included. In local government efficiency studies, overall expenditures are a common proxy for the whole cost of service providing (26 papers). It is primarily composed of several spending categories, including capital, current (or operational), and also financial expenses. Other total cost techniques have been employed as well. Because personnel costs are handled separately, several research examined total local government spending minus personnel costs.

In contrast, the most generally utilised input indicators to assess the costs paid by local governments in delivering local services are current expenditures or operating expenses. They ignore capital expenditures since they are very changeable as a result of huge infrastructure investments. Other studies, too, have used a municipality’s total net current expenditures. This includes all current-year spending less interest and amortisation payments on local government debt. Again, capital budget spending is removed since it mostly applies to big investment operations that increase overall



expenditures in the year they occur. Furthermore, several studies defined current expenditures as spending whereby government outputs could be seen. They gather data on the expenditures or costs of various municipal services. Local government personnel expenses can be determined using the number of employees, total personnel costs, or wages and salaries.

Loans and interest payments are examples of capital or financial costs. Incorporating capital expenditures includes taking into account ongoing investment expenditures made by local entities, such as repair of municipal facilities and equipment. Furthermore, some studies utilised municipally owned building surface as a surrogate for capital stocks, whereas others used fixed asset accumulation as a proxy for capital inputs.

8.2 Output variables

Measuring local government performance is challenging due to the challenges of obtaining data and measuring local services (Lionardo, 2022). Indeed, even when measuring performance using data from the same country, different studies use different outcome criteria. Furthermore, the number of output variables assessed in various research varies since some studies aggregate a wide number of municipal services into a global index, whilst others investigate a subset of specialized local services.

8.3 Global output indicator

A list of services and facilities that municipalities are expected to provide is called the global output indicator (such as infrastructure, health, roads, education, waste collection, water supply, sports and culture, etc.). Because local government services differ and do not all have the same financial weight, the global output index weights each output differently.

Furthermore, a number of studies have used official measurements of local service performance by governmental agencies such as the annual aggregate output statistic. This aggregate measure is generated by multiplying the weighted average of the individual service sector production measures by the average spending proportions. Furthermore, Andrews and Entwistle (2015) performed research in the United Kingdom utilising the Audit Commission's annual examination of local government performance (Comprehensive Performance Assessment, CPA) (a central government regulatory agency).

8.3.1 Administrative services

Some studies on the other hand, have employed more direct outcomes to quantify the delivery of administrative services. Arcelus et al. (2015), for example, measured the supply of administrative services using an indicator developed by the Navarre government's Local Administration. Furthermore, Aucoin (1990) characterised administrative activities as central administration



administrative expenditures and sectoral administration of various services.

8.3.2 Municipal roads

Municipal road length represents local road maintenance services (such as paving or street cleaning), traffic, urban transportation, and municipality access (in kilometers). Municipal road size in hectares was used by Stastna (2015) and urban infrastructure development was utilized by Lo Storto (2013).

8.3.3 Waste collection

Waste collection and treatment in municipalities are frequently measured in tons, quintals, or kilograms of waste collected. Furthermore, several studies identified waste creation in kilograms as an adverse consequence in their investigation.

8.3.4 Sewerage system

The number of residences getting sewerage services or sewerage connections can be used to calculate the sewage network and residual water purification. Tempelhoff (2021) on the other hand, calculated the sewage penetration rate as the proportion of sewage-infested houses out of total households.

8.3.5 Water supply

Water supply has been affected by a number of reasons. The number of properties or users obtaining water services has been utilized in several research. Pomianowski, Johra, Marszal-Pomianowska and Zhang (2020) on the other hand, defined the water provision penetration rate as the fraction of residences having water supply divided by the total number of households.

8.3.6 Health

Few researches have attempted to quantify basic municipal health services. Pacheco et al. (2014) counted the number of health facilities, whereas Kutlar and Bakirci (2012) counted hospital beds.

8.9 Conclusions

In this work, we provided a complete examination of the current studies on local government performance from a worldwide viewpoint. We also defined Local Authorities and analysed the various functions they perform. We discovered 78 empirical publications on the subject, making this the most complete list of references on the subject to date. We detailed the input and output variables, as well as the methodologies used in previous research. Because the performance results are highly reliant on variable selection and methodology, this work provides an ideal basis for academics interested in municipal government performance.

The bulk of prior studies used cross-sectional data. A few papers use cross-sectional efficiency



methodologies and contain data with an underlying panel structure, but they do not take use of intertemporal variance. Time period analysis informs management and policymakers on the efficiency effect of long-term activities. To assess the change of local government efficiency over time, further research in dynamic efficiency analysis is required.

The review established that numerous input and output criteria may be utilised to evaluate local government performance. Because it is difficult to collect data and analyse local services, identifying the inputs and outputs of local governments is a complex task. The availability of data, as well as the specific services and facilities that each nation's local governments must provide, determine variable selection. Furthermore, the number of outcome variables reported in prior studies varies significantly. Some studies include a variety of municipal services into a single worldwide index, whilst others focus on a subset of specialized local services.

Based on our review of the literature, we identify many areas for additional investigation. The study interprets its findings causally, dismissing data endogeneity issues as a third research route (e.g., arising from selection bias, unobserved heterogeneity, or reversed causality). Endogenous data has gained minimal attention in the literature on local government performance. More research is needed based on findings from quasi-experimental methodologies.

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