

Opinions of Residents on Local Government Practices and Service Priorities Vis-A-Vis Actual Delivery by Local Authorities; A Case of Bindura, Zimbabwe

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Abstract- This is part of a broad research that sought to find out the participation of residents of local authorities in local government issues. This paper looks at the opinions of residents on local government practices and service priorities vis-à-vis actual delivery by the local authority. The study was carried out against a background of a perception that during the last decade service delivery by local authorities in Zimbabwe has declined drastically. Although many factors could be attributed to this decline, it can be argued that people's participation in the local governance processes has also reduced drastically resulting in misplaced priorities by the local authorities. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches focusing on Bindura Municipality as the study location, to investigate the level of participation of Bindura residents in local governance decisions. The study used quota sampling method where research participants were drawn from high, middle and low density suburbs. Fifteen participants were drawn from each type of the suburbs in Bindura. The study sample consisted of Bindura residents, councilors and residents associations representatives. The research used questionnaires as research instruments. The study found that the residents felt service delivery was being compromised by poor management where there was poor leadership, demoralized staff, incompetent personnel and lack of supervision. The study also found that service delivery was compromised by corruption, insufficient funding and politicization of development initiatives. The study recommends that civic education be used to conscientise residents on ways of dealing with vices in local government issues, political parties be engaged so that they do not stifle development initiatives and campaigns be made to encourage residents to pay their rates.

Index Terms- Opinions, local government practices, service priorities, service delivery, local authorities.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwe governance system provides citizens with the opportunity to elect their representative in local government structures. This opportunity facilitates a link between residents and their local authority and thus, it is expected that the elected councilor, as the people's representative in a given ward, would present issues and people's priorities to the local authorities on behalf of the residents. This process however can only be effective when the residents have the opportunity to present their submissions to their representative, in most cases through

consultative meetings. When residents have positive opinions towards their representative and the services they get from their local authority they are most likely to actively take part in initiatives that would have been organized. On the other hand if they do not have confidence the initiatives are likely to be met with apathy. The opinions of residents are therefore very important in determining whether residents will take part in local government programmes or not.

II. RESEARCH QUESTION

What are residents' opinions on local governance and service priorities vis-à-vis actual service delivery by the local authority?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Local Governance

In recent years, Governments have progressively sought to engage citizens in the governance of their communities and neighbourhoods. Increasing participation at the community level, it is argued, is good for improving and targeting local service delivery, empowering communities, raising local accountability and developing cohesive communities in pursuit of citizen well-being and better governance (Rai, 2008)

Local government is a product of devolution as a dimension of decentralisation. Gomme (1987:1) defines local government as,

...that part of the whole government of a nation or state which is administered by authorities subordinate to state authority, but elected independently of control by the state authority, by qualified persons resident or having property in certain localities which have been formed by communities having a common interest and common history (Gomme, 1987 in Chikerema, 2013:87).

Meyer (1978:10) defines local government as,

...local democratic governing unity within the unitary democratic system of a country, which are subordinate members of the government vested with prescribed, controlled governmental powers and sources of income to render specific local services and develop, control and regulate the geographic, social and economic environment of defined local area (Meyer, 1978 in Chikerema, 2013:87).

One has to note that whilst local governments are actually not independent of central government control, they enjoy only

relative autonomy due to the division of responsibilities for services between central and local government and it should be captured that the division of these responsibilities is a political or policy issue. According to Mawhood (1993:66) local government is the third tier or level of government deliberately created to bring government closer to the grassroots population and gives these grassroots structures give a sense of involvement in the political processes that control their daily lives. Chikerema (2013) asserts that the existence of local government has always been defended on the basis that it is a crucial aspect of the process of democratisation and intensification of mass participation in the decision making process. It is furthermore argued that no political system is considered to be complete and democratic if it does not have a system of local government.

In traditional representative democracy, elected representatives are the ones expected to make decisions on behalf of the people, who in turn hold them accountable at times of elections. Decisions and policies in turn are carried out by rational bureaucracies, occupied by specialists whose expertise is the basis of their legitimacy. In more participatory approaches, both the elected and the bureaucratic forms of representation and legitimacy are challenged, as communities and their leaders are invited into (or demand) more direct forms of engagement. Conflicts emerge over who speaks for whom, and with what authority, and about the appropriate relationship between the 'governors' and the 'governed' (Goventa, 2004). However, the principles of citizen engagement being advocated across government departments are increasingly being incorporated into local government and partnership strategies for local service delivery, community cohesion, race equality, neighbourhood renewal and devolving power at a local level (Rai, 2008).

The Key Elements of Local Government

The key issue in the decentralization process is the political role of the local government. The role of the local government is to mobilize and increase people's participation in development of their local areas. At Zimbabwe independence in 1980 there was a strong reaction against the colonial experience and therefore the need was to demonstrate the good intention of the new government in representing the rural and urban communities, by involving them in development planning and decision-making at the village, ward and rural district/municipal levels (Masuko, Undated). In affirming this point, the Ugandan Ministry of Local Government (Online) states that the key elements of the decentralisation policy, according to the Local Governments Act 1997, include; "...the devolution of powers, functions and services to the people at appropriate levels where they can best manage and direct their affairs; empowerment of the people to participate in and take decisions on all matters affecting their lives" (Ministry of Local Government, online).

Urban local government plays a pivotal role in providing services that enhance the well-being of urban citizens and development. These basic services include refuse and sewage disposal, water supply, primary health and education (Madzivanyika, 2011). Service provision is when the organisation or institution involved is responsible for the quality and quantity of the services and ensures that it is financed and executed. Service production encompasses factors that go into

delivering that service when the quantity and quality have been decided (ibid).

Local governments make five important contributions to local economic development according to Oluwo (2009). First, they are assigned with the authority to provide the main local basic services that facilitate private economic production; second, as a result of this first role, they set standards for other institutional actors to operate within their respective communities; thirdly, they may contract other institutions or actors to produce basic local services; fourthly, they also serve as agents of central government for the delivery and management of a wide variety of services; and finally, as a result of all the above they contribute greatly to the integration of different types of local and public services and hence, to integrated local development. The study will seek to establish the level to which the Bindura local authority and elected councilors are executing their roles. According to Olowu (ibid) local governments by dint of their relative proximity to the people should at least theoretically be more accountable than national entities. The focus of the discussion will be opinions of citizens in the local authority's ability in developing their areas and the conditions essential for fulfilling the obligations.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study used the mixed method approach that is both qualitative and quantitative. According to Fielding and Fielding (2006) the logic behind these two approaches is the same in that while quantitative research may be used to test theory, it can also be used to explore an area or generating hypothesis or a theory. On the other hand, qualitative research is presented as the most appropriate approach for theory generation - it can be used for testing hypothesis and theories. The other advantage of using the approach is that simultaneous mixed method design may permit the transformation of the qualitative data to quantitative numerical data and incorporation into the quantitative data set.

The survey design was preferred for this study on the basis of its strengths and appropriateness to the nature of the study. The study required that original information needed be sought from mainly the intended beneficiaries, that is residents of Bindura who are most affected by service delivery in the town. In order to get reliable statistical results that could confidently be generalized, it was important to sample a fairly large number of respondents to make sure they were representative of the population.

The other reason for selecting the survey was the fact that they are suitable for studying characteristics, opinions, attitudes and experiences of a population gives them relevance to the nature of the study. .

The study sample consisted of three councilors, three representatives of residents' association and forty-five residents. The study used quota sampling method where research participants were drawn from high, middle and low density suburbs. Fifteen participants were drawn from each type of the suburbs in Bindura. The study participants from each of the quota were selected using the random sampling technique. The research used questionnaires as research instruments. Questionnaires were chosen because they allow the respondents to answer questions at their own convenient times, are relatively

easy to analyse and reduce bias through uniform presentation of questions. Simple descriptive statistics were used to present data.

The questions sought to assess the level of service delivery on the basis of the respondents' opinion. The respondents were asked to rate service delivery on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 indicating 'poor' and 10 representing excellent.

V. RESULTS

Residents rating of service delivery and opinion on priorities

Table 1: Bindura Municipality service delivery score by residents

N=45

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Score	13	5	16	7	3	0	0	0	0	1
Percent	28.9%	11.1%	35.6%	15.6%	6.6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2.2%

The presentation in table 1 shows that 35.6 per cent of the respondents scored 3 on service delivery. A score of 1 was given by 28.9 per cent of the respondents. On the other extreme, no

respondents gave a score for 6, 7, 8 and 9, while 1 respondent (2.2%) gave a score of 10.

Table 2: Bindura Municipality service delivery score by Residents Association members

N=3

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Score	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Percent	66.67%	33.33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 2 indicates that 66.67 percent of the residents' association members gave a score of 1 for service delivery while 1 or 33.33 percent gave a score of 2.

Table 3: Bindura Municipality services delivery scores by councilors

N=3

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Score	0	0	1	2	0	0	7	0	0	0
Percent	0%	0%	25%	50%	0%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%

Table 3 reveals that 50 per cent of the councilors' respondents gave a score of 4, 25 per cent gave a score of 3 and the other 25 per cent awarded a score of 7 to council for service delivery. during the 5 year period.

Table 4: Bindura Municipality service priorities based on residents opinion

N=45

	Service Description	Frequency
1.	Refuse disposal	34
2.	Road construction and rehabilitation	31
3.	Water supply	29
4.	Sewer maintenance	20
5.	Street lighting	4
5.	Downward review of rates	2
6.	Downward review of water charges	2
7.	Electricity supply	1
8.	Servicing of new stands	1
9.	Transport and communication	1
10.	Fire services	1
11.	Construction of schools	1
12.	Recreational facilities (Play centre for children)	1
13.	Library	1
14.	No response	3

Table 4 reveals that 34 respondents prioritised refuse disposal as their service priority issue. Roads construction and rehabilitation followed with 31 responses. The third service priority issue according to the respondents was water supply with 29 responses. Sewer maintenance received a significant 20 responses even though it did not fall within the top three priorities.

An analysis of the findings in tables 1, 2 and 3 reveal that almost all the responses are skewed towards a rating of 1 (poor), while there are no scores between the scale 6 and 9 for Table 1. It would appear that the 3 rating was the mode with a score of 16 while on the other extreme end the rating of 10 had just 1 score. The fact that 97.8 per cent of the respondents gave a score from 5 and below perhaps means that a significant majority of respondents feel that the local authority is not performing to their expectations. Members of residents association confirm this position with scores of 1 and 2 while the majority of councillors also rate the service delivery at 4 and below. This perhaps means that there is a general consensus among the actors as to the level of council's performance over the 5 year period.

Table 4 further reveals the priorities of respondents in terms of service delivery. The top three priorities are indicated as refuse disposal (34) roads construction and rehabilitation (31) and water supply (29). Sewer maintenance is another significant priority as revealed by 20 respondents.

Opinions on reasons for poor service delivery.

Table 5: Reasons for poor service delivery according to residents' opinions. N=45

Clusters	Categories
1. Poor Management (Maladministration) (23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incompetent personnel (3) • Poor leadership (9) • Insensitivity to residents needs (4) • Demoralised personnel (3) • Lack of supervision (3) • Bureaucracy (1)
2. Corruption (20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misappropriation of funds (12) • Poor prioritization of needs (6) • Unrealistic salaries for top management (2)
3. Insufficient funding (19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funds (12) • Lack of equipment and other resources (5) • Residents not paying rates (2)
4. Politicization of development initiatives (13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political interference in council affairs (8). • Political sabotage (3) • Politicization of issues (2)

The responses by residents were presented in 4 clusters. According to Table 5, 23 respondents felt that 'poor management' was the major reason for poor service delivery. The second highly rate reason for poor service delivery was 'corruption' (20 respondents). Other respondents (19) viewed insufficient funding as the major cause of service delivery. Political power struggle was also given as a reason for poor service delivery by 13 respondents.

Table 6: Residents Association and Councillors' reasons for their rating of council N=6

Clusters	Categorization
1. Poorly performed services (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sewer systems never attended (2) • Pot holes not attended (2) • No service was provided except a slight improvement in water supply (2)
2. Political interference (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister's interference (1)
3. Poor management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mismanagement (2)

(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unqualified staff (2) • Poor cooperation and coordination (2)
4. Improvement in service delivery (2).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchasing of service vehicles (1) • Non-partisan land allocation (1)

Table 6 shows slightly different categories but with a lot of similarities in the reasons provided. Poor management however appears at the top as in Table 6 with 9 responses. A major difference though is the cluster of positive reasons for the rating such as procurement of service vehicles and non-partisan land allocation. This could be due to the fact that counselors were actively involved in both issues.

Information above reveals that the majority of respondents strongly felt that poor management was the reason behind poor service delivery. A number of factors may also come into the picture on the issue of maladministration which include other reasons raised, for instance political power struggle (13) and insufficient funding (19).

VI. DISCUSSION

The fact that 97.8 per cent of the respondents gave a score from 5 and below perhaps means that a significant majority of respondents feel that the local authority is not performing to their expectations. Members of residents association confirm this position with scores of 1 and 2 while the majority of councillors also rate the service delivery at 4 and below. This perhaps means that there is a general consensus among the actors as to the level of council's performance over the 5 year period. This could also explain the reason for low participation in local governance. Perhaps when people view that nothing is coming out of the processes then they feel used and develop apathetic attitudes.

Study findings show that top three priorities of residents of Bindura were refuse disposal, road construction and rehabilitation and water supply. A significant number of respondents (20) also revealed that sewer maintenance was a priority. This could translate to the fact that water and sanitation was the top priority in Bindura as issues of water, refuse disposal and sewer systems cannot be separated in terms of service delivery. Madzivanyika (2011) affirms that the urban reality in much of Africa is that millions of people do not benefit from services due to ineffective urban local governments. Observations made reveal that priorities as indicated by the respondents have not been properly addressed, pot holes are still a common feature, refuse is dumped everywhere while water is not available in some parts of the town and in other parts water can only be accessed for about 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the evening. In some instances raw sewer can be seen flowing along roads. To stress the effects of poor service delivery on residents, Bhuiyan (2010) in Madzivanyika, (2011) posit that it is widely acknowledged that the provision of safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation and housing, poor health services and waste pollution has created unhealthy and unsafe environments for urban populations and reduced the quality of human life. The conclusion that can be made is that service

provision still falls short of addressing residents' needs and proves the finding that people's participation has not been valued and given due recognition.

The study findings revealed that maladministration was the major cause of poor service delivery according to residents' opinions. A number of factors may also come into the picture on the issue of maladministration which include other reasons raised, for instance political power struggle (13) and insufficient funding (19). These can be considered as limiting factors that may hinder effective management of the town's affairs if the opinions can be proved to be true. It is also evident that some residents are also to blame for failing to pay council dues. This scenario creates a vicious cycle where poor service delivery results in lack of confidence by residents; which results in low participation in local governance; that results in political pressure to remove leadership or failure to pay for services as a way of getting back at the leadership. The finding concurs with Rai (2008:19)'s findings which stated that, "participants believed that many citizens from their communities had little faith or trust in the agenda and process of governance, and felt there was little point in engaging". When residents have no trust in the way their affairs are they show by not participating in subsequent activities of the concerned organization.

The researchers would also want to argue that corruption may have a direct effect on service delivery. The following anecdotes from residents attempt to clarify this assertion:

- *Road projects were not completed after payment had been made.*
- *Maintenance of roads was sub-standard.*

Insufficient funding perhaps could also be attributed to corruption. All the mentioned reasons for poor service delivery may be interlinked and eventually result in poor service delivery and the loss of confidence in the management of the town's affairs. This is consistent with Mutizwa-Mangiza et al., (1996; Blair 1998) in Geventa and Valderrama, 1999:10) who argue that a common barrier for citizen participation in decision-making found in most of the studies was the control of financial resources by higher levels of authority and the meagre resources available for local activities. A study consistent with existing literature posits that a number of activities approved in the budget to be funded from locally raised revenue end up unfunded (Kasozi -Mulindwa, 2013:127). This perhaps has the effect of reducing levels of participation due to disheartened residents. The residents feel betrayed especially if they consider they would have participated in pre-budget meetings where they would have put forward their opinions.

The study shows that incompetent council personnel are also to blame for poor service delivery. The issue of incompetent staff can be attributed to corruption where positions are filled according to political affiliation and not on merit. To affirm this finding, Geventa and Valderrama (1999:10) states that the inability of local government officers to translate local needs into technical proposals of high quality standards provided an excuse for bureaucrats in higher levels of the administration to disregard district plan on those situations where local citizens have provided their input. Another related finding by Kasozi-Mulindwa (2013) has revealed that technical officers are not transparent and accountable, and this has negatively affected citizen participation in local governance. Kasozi-Mulindwa

further states that citizens' input does not influence the final development plan, as the final document is prepared by the planning unit and the technical planning committee. There is need for the technical unit that plans to consider the wishes of the residents when making their plans.

The respondents indicated that insensitive decisions by the local authority negatively impacted on service delivery. Similar findings by Kasozi-Mulindwa (2013) indicate that evidence from the case study shows that these conferences are used as a political platform by the chairpersons to communicate what they have been able to do and what they intend to do, rather than as a mechanism for collecting input from participants to inform budget decisions. Goventa and Valderrama (1999) argues that the control of the structure and processes for participation - defining spaces, actors, agendas, procedures - is usually in the hands governmental institutions and can become a barrier for effective involvement of citizens. The respondents stated that their input into the participatory budget processes was not considered confirming evidence that ordinary citizens do not participate in allocating public resources. This is supported by the established evidence that failure to influence budget decisions has led to cynicism on the part of citizens that participation is not worthwhile (Kasozi-Mulindwa, 2013). The residents feel that at times they are called to just rubber stamp what the local authority officials will have decided already..

The study findings established that residents associations and councilors were also not happy with council's service delivery. They also provided similar reasons with residents for poor service delivery which include poor management and politicization of decision-making processes. The following anecdotes are evidence of this finding:

- *Time was spent on petty issues*
- *No service was provided except a slight improvement in water supply*
- *Poor cooperation and coordination between councillors and management.*
- *Ignoring the Urban Councils Act*
- *Minister's interference in local governance*

The finding shows that the issue of political interference in local governance is a major hindrance to effective participation in local governance confirming earlier findings from evidence by residents. This is in conformity with the findings by Kisakye (1993) in Kasozi-Mulindwa (2013) that in Africa, political leaders base their decisions on their vested interests. They do not put people first as they claim to do.

VII. CONCLUSION

Thus it can be concluded that Bindura Municipality, according to existing literature, is practicing a 'manipulative' form of participation where 'the people are asked what they think and those with authority/power listen but they do not tell them what influence they have on the final say' (Hart, 1992 in CIVCOM, 2003). The established fact is that all major actors in local governance in Bindura were not satisfied with the levels of service delivery. In summary, the study findings indicate that participation is more political than technical, and power relationships amongst key players in the process are important in

understanding the outcomes of the participatory process. The residents are not satisfied with local government practices and the service delivery

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations for the improvement of service delivery and general local government practices:

- There should be no political interference in the delivery of local government services.
- There is need for councilors to seriously consider the wishes of residents and implement what will have been discussed in meetings.
- The technical staff that has the function of planning should take into consideration the wishes of the residents.
- Councilors have to explain to report to residents constrains that would have been faced in implementing their resolutions so that they do not feel like they are wasting time on useless initiatives.
- There is need to hire staff on the basis of merit rather than on political lines so that service delivery is not compromised.
- There is need to embark on civic education so as to conscientise the residents on ways of dealing with local government issues.
- Major political parties have to be engaged so as to dissuade them from stifling development initiatives.

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