

Governance and Urban Service Delivery in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

It is contended that service delivery is the core function of developmental local government. The provision of services such as waste management, water and health services is closely associated with the well-being of urban dwellers. In the period leading to the adoption of Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution, many people supported the devolution of services and functions to local government. It was a major victory when local government was elevated and given constitutional protection. There was great expectation that service delivery would improve in the cities, towns and smaller urban centres. Seven years later, that expectation appears not to have been realised. Instead, indications are that urban service delivery is experiencing a downward spiral. Using open-ended questionnaires, closed-ended questionnaires and the focus group discussions research methods, the article investigates the drivers of inadequate service provision in four urban areas in Zimbabwe. The paper also proffers suggestions for improving service delivery. The results of the study underscore that the causes of insufficient service provision are multi-pronged and not necessarily limited to inefficiency and ineffectiveness on the part of urban councils. In fact, a major recurring finding is that national government policies are big factors contributing towards the decline of urban service delivery.

Keywords: Governance; Service delivery; Urban Councils; Service Consumers; Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

In their capacity as the third and lowest sphere of government and the one that functions closest to local communities, municipal governments have often been described as comprising the sphere of government that executes those development and service delivery functions that national government is too far removed to carry out effectively and efficiently. The services delivered by urban local authorities include sanitation, waste management, road construction and maintenance and provision of primary health care. In many ways, service provision is the standard against which the relevance of local government as a tier of government is assessed. Yet many local authorities are failing to provide these services, begging the question of whether they should forfeit their right to exist. The failure of service delivery in urban areas in Zimbabwe can be seen from infrequent water provision, burst water and sewer pipes, faecal contamination of major water sources, deterioration in road networks, the non-functioning of traffic lights, non-collection of refuse, uncompleted capital projects and service delivery protests, among other factors.

The Report of the Auditor-General (2019: 5) on local authorities presented to the Parliament of Zimbabwe for the financial year ended 31 December 2018 paints a grim picture of inadequate service provision in the country's cities, towns and smaller urban settings. It depicts a pitiful picture of service delivery characterised by, among other things, paralysis, massive strain, poor and non-existent water provision, intermittent refuse collection and dilapidated service delivery infrastructure. The issue of inadequate service delivery was topical throughout 2019 and even courted international news headlines. On 17 July 2019, US-based pay television news channel, CNN, reported that over two million residents of the City of Harare were accessing water once a week. In the same vein, on 31 July 2019, The New York Times reported that the City of Bulawayo had gone for over two weeks without water. On 20 August 2019, online news agency, Pindula, reported that Norton legislator, Temba Mliswa, had taken Norton Town Council to court over alleged poor service delivery. The newspaper quoted the legislator saying "you have to make court applications as that is the language which they can understand. How can they (Norton Town Council) continue collecting rates when they are not providing water or the requisite service delivery?" (Pindula 2019, p.1). On 3 September, The Herald (a Zimbabwe

state-owned daily newspaper) reported that Chitungwiza residents ‘besieged town council offices, manhandled and assaulted mayor councillor Lovemore Maiko over poor service delivery’. Poor service provision is not confined to Harare, Bulawayo, Chitungwiza and Norton. It is a feature that cuts across all 32 cities and towns in Zimbabwe.

The article assesses the state of urban service delivery in post-Mugabe Zimbabwe. Towards the end of 2017, President Robert Mugabe who had ruled Zimbabwe for close to four decades resigned his office, following bruising factional fighting in which he lost control of the country and the ruling ZANU-PF party to a clique supported by elements in the military. The ruling party chose Emmerson Mnangagwa, a long-time ally of Mugabe and his vice-president until November 2017 when he was dismissed, to finish off Mugabe’s term. Mnangagwa narrowly won the presidential election held on 30 July 2018. In his inauguration speech, the new president promised to turnaround the socio-economic fortunes of the country, make Zimbabwe a prosperous and upper middle income society by 2030 and to improve service delivery. Against that background, the article attempts to gauge the state of urban service provision since the advent of the so-called Second Republic. In this regard, it mainly uses survey methodology to ascertain progress. It is hoped that the study will assist improve policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local public service delivery.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

For proper understanding of the issues of focus of this study, it is imperative to explain what each term means. We start with Urban local government. According to Aijaz (2007:1), urban local governments are institutions that are ‘constituted for the maintenance and planned development of urban areas’. In Zimbabwe, they include municipalities, town councils and local boards. Primary accountability for the provision of basic services generally rests with subnational entities, even when service provision is outsourced. Local governments units are better placed to deliver services as they are situated nearest to the people. It is also claimed that people need to live within the vicinity of local institutions they are familiar with. The needs and preferences of taxpayers are satisfied at the lowest possible cost. Placing financing, regulation, and service provision in the level of government

closest to the people enhances accountability.

Closely related, we examined subsidiarity principle applicable in relation to the functional division between local and central governments. The principle of subsidiarity posits that government functions should be made as close as possible to the people who are affected by them. The exceptions are when local government fails to cope with such tasks and the performance of such functions by a higher sphere of government would be more efficient. According to De Visser, the principle of subsidiarity protects subnational entities against ‘undue interference by national government’ (2008: 1). The principle of devolution is one of the founding values of Zimbabwe’s 2013 Constitution.

Service delivery is a phrase used to describe the distribution of basic resources citizens depend on, such as water, sanitation, municipal roads and transport-related infrastructure, housing-related infrastructure and low-cost housing, refuse removal, street lighting, municipal health care, and primary education. It is often said that such services are the ‘most tangible interactions citizens have with their government’ (Dudley et al. 2015: 1). According to section 1.1.1 of the South African White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, or the Batho Pele White Paper of 1997 (Notice No. 1459 of 1997), ‘public services are not a privilege in a civilised and democratic society, they are a legitimate expectation’.

Lastly, service consumers are often used to refer to those who pay for and derive benefits from provision of service. They are also known as service users. The service consumers/users include city dwellers, factories, businesses, nongovernmental organisations and government agencies. They require various services from urban local authorities and pay for such services either directly or indirectly by way of taxes. To ensure sustainability, consumers pay for the services on a monthly basis. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that services are delivered to urban communities.

Structural functionalism interprets society as a structure with interconnected components, with each structure performing a role function (Gabriel and Powell 1988: 3). It emphasises the whole system as the unit of analysis. It assumes that certain functions are preconditions for the maintenance of the whole system; and furthermore, it underscores the functional interdependence of diverse structures within the entire system (Duba 1992: 4). Structural-functional analysis determines the contribution of a structure in maintaining the system in which it operates (Bill 1973: 202-203). Almond and Powell (1966:19-20) consider these

interactions to be roles rather than just persons. The various components of a local service delivery system must work together to be efficient and effective in service provision. The failure of one component of the system affects decentralisation of service provision. According to Agba, Akwara and Idu (2013: 456), structural functional analysis is applicable to public service delivery by local authorities.

The structure of urban local government in Zimbabwe and how it operates has implications for the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. At the apex of a typical urban local authority is full council which is chaired by a ceremonial mayor who is either elected or appointed. The full council is made up of all councillors and is the policy-making organ of a local authority. It is assisted by several committees. The mandatory committees are: finance committee, health and housing committee, environmental management committee and audit committee (Chakaipa 2010: 39). Urban councils may also create additional committees to assist in the realisation of their functions. Committees recommend decisions to full council for resolution. The councillors serve five-year terms, which are renewable provided they are voted back into office at the end of the term. The city dwellers elect councillors to ensure that the public services they need are provided. The councillors are accountable for service delivery and must accept responsibility for such failure. It is the duty of council to ensure that such services are provided effectively, efficiently and cost effectively. In this regard, city dwellers have a right to demand explanations from their councillors if services are not provided satisfactorily.

Under the committees is the administrative component of the urban local authorities, which is headed by the Town Clerk (Chakaipa 2010: 41). As chief accounting officer, it is the duty of the Town Clerk to implement full council resolutions and report to council. In doing so, the Town Clerk is assisted by the heads of departments that correspond with the committees of council. The heads of departments are responsible for facilitating the realisation of service delivery. Those who consume services-city dwellers, ratepayers, government agencies, industries, factories and nongovernmental organisations are also a vital component of the institutions that provide services. This relates to their important role in sustaining service provision. Through rates on property and land; fees charged; penalties and fines; license fees, supplementary charges; plan approval and development fees; lease and sale of land and rental fees, consumers are in fact at the centre of urban service delivery. The role of national government

in service delivery at the local level is not just confined to intergovernmental fiscal support. National government through the Ministry of Local Government, which is accountable to parliament, also plays roles including facilitation; advice; monitoring; oversight; directing; promotion; and capacity building (Chakaipa 2010: 33). The Ministry achieves these roles through its Department of Urban Local Authorities. The Local Government Board, a unit of the Department of Urban Councils, is responsible for employing the departmental heads, including town clerks of urban local authorities.

The Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Local Government, Rural and Urban Development is also another important body mandated, among other things, with the realisation of efficient and effective urban service delivery (Chakaipa 2010: 54). It achieves this by examining the expenditure, administration and policies of the Ministry of Local Government and other matters falling under their jurisdictions as Parliament may by resolution determine. Often, the Committee has gone on fact-finding missions with the objective of assessing the state of service delivery in urban councils and then submitting a report to parliament. The Minister of Local Government is accountable to the committee and parliament, for among other things, the decentralisation and provision of service delivery in urban areas. In this regard, Parliament often summons the Minister to answer questions on government policies on urban service provision and accountability the role of urban councils in service delivery.

Bringing together the 32 urban councils in Zimbabwe, the Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ), is a voluntary gathering of urban local authorities that are at the frontline of service provision in the cities and towns across the country (Chakaipa 2010: 56). Although it is not provided for in legislation, since 1923 it has been facilitating for efficient and effective service provision through its forums: the Town Clerks Forum, Engineers Forum Groups, Women in Local Government Forum, Director of Housing and Community Services Forum, the Directors of Finance Forum and the Chamber Secretaries Forum.

Over the years, Residents' Associations have also become a crucial feature of urban councils facilitating accountability in service delivery (Musekiwa and Chatiza 2015: 120). Like UCAZ, the Residents Associations are not provided for in the legislation regulating the activities of urban councils. Rather, they are voluntary bodies representing and advocating for ratepayers within the

jurisdiction of the 32 urban local authorities. Often treated as an irritant by both Ministry and urban councils, the associations are increasingly pushing the boundaries of local democracy and, at times, appearing to question the effectiveness of councillors as elected political authorities. They are most visible during budget consultation times and when urban councils appear to falter in their constitutional and legislative mandate of service delivery.

3. Beyond Governance: Constitutional and Legislative Provisions on Municipal Service Delivery

Local government was granted a constitutional status in the 2013 Constitution. Prior to 2013, local authorities did not enjoy constitutional legal standing. They derived their legal standing from Acts of Parliament which the ruling party was able to change with a simple majority. That changed with enactment of the 2013 Constitution, which elevated the status of local government. Section 5 of the 2013 Constitution provides that “the tiers of government in Zimbabwe are (a) the national government, (b) provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities” (sections 268 and 269 read together with section 267 of the 2013 Constitution). Section 5 (c) of the Constitution provides that local governments “represent and manage the affairs of people in urban areas” and rural local government “represents and manage the affairs in rural areas” (Section 5(c) of the 2013 Constitution). Chapter 14, Section 264 (1) of the Constitution gives legal status to local government by advocating for the devolution of power to ‘provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities which are competent to carry out those responsibilities efficiently and effectively.’ The Preamble to Chapter 14 provides for the ‘democratic participation in government by all citizens and communities of Zimbabwe;’ ‘the participation of local communities in the determination of development priorities within their areas’ and ‘devolution of power and responsibilities to lower tiers of government in Zimbabwe.’ Section 264(2) states that the objectives of devolution of governmental powers and responsibilities are:

- (a) to give powers of local governance to the people and enhance their participation in the exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions affecting them;

- (b) to promote democratic, effective, transparent, accountable and coherent government in Zimbabwe as a whole;
- (c) to preserve and foster the peace, national unity and indivisibility of Zimbabwe;
- (d) to recognise the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development;
- (e) to ensure equitable sharing of local and national resources; and
- (f) to transfer responsibilities and resources from the national government in order to establish a sound financial base for each provincial and metropolitan council and local authority.

Seven years after adoption of the 2013 Constitution, the national government is yet to enact legislation which clarify the parameters of urban councils. In the interim, the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15), a legislation that has been in existence for over two decades, primarily defines the legal parameters of urban local government. Among other things, it provides for establishment of urban local authorities and matters incidental thereto; proceedings and committees of councils; appointment and conditions of service of departmental heads; powers and functions of urban councils; by-laws and regulations; valuation and assessment of property for rating; and financial resources, audit, loans and accounts. There are 54 service delivery functions outlined in the Second Schedule of the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15). The Regional, Town and Country Planning Act (Chapter 29:12) is another principal legislation that defines the powers and functions of urban local authorities. Other legislations include the Public Health Act (Chapter 15:05) and the Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27).

4. Brief overview of urban local government in Zimbabwe

Urban councils have been a feature of Zimbabwean local government for over a century. The first structure that resembled present day urban councils was set up to cater for the needs of white settlers in 1891. It was a Board of Management, comprised of four elected members and three members appointed by the British South Africa Company. It ran the affairs of Salisbury (Harare) as an emerging urban settlement. In 1892, a Sanitary Board took over the mandate of running

Salisbury. It was known as the sanitary board and as its name suggests, its mandate of service provision was, in those early days, predominantly skewed towards environmental management issues, especially refuse removal, sanitation and water supply (Marumahoko and Fessha 2011: 40). In 1897, Salisbury and Bulawayo were granted municipal status. In those days, urban local government was established along racial segregation. This facilitated preferential distribution of infrastructure and services to the white communities. Initially members of the black community were excluded from municipal service provision. With time, however, the national government established Advisory Boards, which were unviable local government units meant to cater for the service delivery needs of a growing urban black community. In 1980, the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Robert Gabriel Mugabe made a number of changes to the local government structures with the objective of making the local government system more democratic, participative and inclusive. The national government also organised urban local authorities based on size and functions as Table 1 below illustrates.

Table 1: Organisation of urban councils in Zimbabwe

Level 1 Cities	Level 2 Municipalities	Level 3 Town councils	Level 4 Local boards	Total
Harare	Redcliff	Chiredzi	Ruwa	
Bulawayo	Beitbridge	Chipinge	Chirundu	
Gweru	Chegutu	Lupane	Epworth	
Masvingo	Chitungwiza	Plumtree	Hwange	
Kadoma	Victoria Falls	Norton		
KweKwe	Chinhoyi	Shurugwi		
Mutare	Gwanda	Zvishavane		
	Marondera	Gokwe		
	Bindura	Rusape		
		Karoi		
		Chipinge		
		Mvurwi		
7	9	12	4	32

Source: Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe

In the first two decades into independence, one of the crucial objectives of urban local authorities was addressing disparities in service delivery brought about by decades of segregation policies. In the 2000s, however, momentum was lost and progress stalled. This may have been linked to a number of factors, including political and socio-economic deterioration, international isolation, hyperinflation, economic woes and shrinking of local government revenue to support service delivery (Bland 2011: 340). Although it saw tensions rise, the creation of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 was seemingly good news for the politics of accountability in service delivery. It created a window of opportunity for urban voters disenchanted with the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic-Front (ZANU-PF) to entrust the worker-backed MDC party with their aspirations for better service delivery (Kamete 2006: 255).

The changes in the political landscape made urban local authorities a point of intense political contestation. The failure of the governing party to retain urban local authorities was a bitter pill for the ZANU-PF government. With rural voters remaining faithful to the governing party and urban voters opting to embrace the MDC, local government was polarised along political party lines, to the detriment of service delivery. Ignatius Chombo, the ZANU-PF Minister of Local Government pushed back on the rejection of the ruling party in the urban areas the best he could. Some of the strategies the Minister used to win back support seemingly border on blackmail, manipulation and vote buying. For example, shortly before the 2013 watershed elections, Minister Chombo directed urban local authorities to 'write off debts in respect of rentals, unit tax, development levy, refuse charges and water and sewer fees' (Ministry of Local Government 2013: 2). Although the debt cancellation was welcomed by heavily indebted service consumers, it nevertheless did not translate into more votes for the ZANU-PF in the urban local government elections. The urban councils, as was the case in 2000 and 2008, fell to the opposition MDC, much to the frustration of the Minister and the consternation of the governing party. The decision to write off debts nearly crippled service delivery and some urban local authorities never recovered. To get a sense of the contribution to the subnational budgets of some of the debts that were written off, picture this. In 2007, the City of Masvingo raised 24 percent of its revenue from water sales (Coutinho 2010: 74). The City of Harare budgeted to raise '44 percent of its 2010 revenue from water income' (Coutinho 2010: 74).

Furthermore, Coutinho contends that ‘sewerage charges and refuse removal fees constitute between 5 percent to 10 percent of total revenue’ (2010: 74). The loss of the revenue and its impact on service delivery is staggering.

The year 2013 saw the constitutional elevation of local government. It was widely expected that ministerial encroachment would be kept to a minimum. This turned out to be wishful thinking. As in the period before and during power sharing, the ZANU-PF government continued to treat urban councils as an irritant. Its rejection by urban voters in the contentious elections held in 2013 and 2018 seemingly eroded the already fragile relations between national government and urban local authorities, to the detriment of service delivery. The so-called Second Republic, just like the First Republic under Mugabe’s reign, continues to be characterised by deplorable urban service delivery. This, among other things is evidenced by obsolete service delivery infrastructure, uncompleted capital projects, poor water supply and sanitation programmes and infrequent refuse collection.

5. Discussions and debates on urban public service delivery

Based on literature review, the causes of inadequate urban service delivery in Zimbabwe appear to fall into two broad explanations. The first general explanation appears to attribute urban service delivery failure to the actions and policies of the national government. The second explanation seemingly points to the inefficiencies, inadequacies and insufficiencies of the processes of local public service delivery. The explanations are not mutually exclusive. One of the issues blamed for inadequate service delivery is the Minister of Local Government’s abuse of powers in the inconveniently amended Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15) to undermine service delivery in opposition controlled cities and towns. In this regard, it is often claimed that the Minister uses certain provisions in the Act to interfere with local urban processes, including those which are the outcome of exhaustive public consultation (Marumahoko, Chigwata and Nhede 2018: 208). For example, the Minister could, make directives to councils (section 315 of the Urban Councils Act), rescind the decisions and resolutions of councils (section 314 of the Urban Councils Act), dismiss local authorities and replace them with Government-appointed Commissions (section 80 of the Urban Councils Act), appoint the Local Government Board (section 132 of Amendment 1 of 2008),

appoint special interest councillors (section 4A of the Urban Councils Act) and have unfettered access to the minutes of the proceedings of councils (section 91 of the Urban Councils Act).

Service delivery is also constrained by political wrangling at many levels of the local government service delivery structure and system. There is political squabbling between the Ministry of Local Government and urban local authorities. There is also infighting between elected political authorities (councillors) and administrative authorities (the bureaucracy) within urban local authorities (Centre for Community Development in Zimbabwe 2009: 7). The power struggle between the Minister of Local Government and opposition controlled cities and towns came to the fore in 2008. The ZANU-PF governing party made a politically motivated decision to amend the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15) which undermined local service delivery under opposition run cities and towns. In this regard, it passed the Urban Councils Amendment Act No 1 of 2008 which abolished the Executive Mayoral System which was credited with facilitating for mayors to engage in service delivery issues on a day-to-day basis. It was replaced by the ineffective Ceremonial Mayoral System which facilitates for national government to meddle in service provision. In addition, the amendment facilitated for the Minister of Local Government to appoint 25 percent of the councillors of urban local authorities under the guise of bringing in specialists or so-called special interest councillors. This way, the Minister brought back governing party candidates who had lost local government elections.

Service delivery marginally improved between 2009 and 2013 when ZANU-PF and MDC entered a power sharing agreement that was supported by the Southern African Development Community and guaranteed by the African Union (Bland 2011: 340). Nevertheless, Ignatius Chombo, the ZANU-PF Minister of Local Government continued to undermine urban service delivery and the will of the people by waging a systematic onslaught on local government democracy. This was achieved through politically motivated suspensions and dismissal of democratically elected opposition councillors and mayors as well as partisan appointments (Chigwata, Marumahoko and Madhekeni 2019: 57). A pattern emerged in which opposition councillors and mayors were replaced with centrally appointed Commissions (Jonga and Chirisa 2009: 167). The dismissals were preceded by the flimsy accusations of corruption, mismanagement and poor service delivery. In some cities, the arbitrary takeover of MDC run cities commenced with ZANU-PF organising its supporters to demonstrate against

certain mayors for alleged poor service delivery. The next stage would be for the so-called governing party supporters to lock out the targeted mayor and bar him/her from accessing council offices and undertaking civic duties. Usually this was accompanied by demands for the resignation of the mayor. The Minister of Local Government would point to the 'disgruntlement' as an excuse to intervene on the pretext of trying to rescue the situation and restore service delivery (Sithole 2004: 1). Another ploy was for the national government to use its utility arm, the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), to cut off water for a bill central government actually owes a local authority and then justify takeover on the pretext of restoring water provision (Mukaro and Matikinye 2007: 1).

The other ploy involved denying urban local authorities borrowing powers with the intention of undermining service delivery. Yet another tactic was for the government to withhold intergovernmental fiscal support in the hope that service delivery would deteriorate. When it does, the national government would then arbitrarily takeover and boost the image of the ruling party by creating the impression that it was more sensitive to the needs of local communities. It would direct National Treasury to give the imposed leadership comprised mostly of its supporters' money to purchase new service delivery equipment. In 2007, within days of the arbitrary takeover of the management of civic affairs in Chitungwiza, the national government 'pulled out US\$5 billion from a hat to finance the purchase of motors for sewage pumps as a measure to arrest deteriorating services' (Mukaro and Matikinye 2007: 1). Another tactic, according to Mukaro and Matikinye (2007: 1) was delaying the approval of local authority budgets in the hope of crippling service provision operations. In 2007, Bulawayo mayor Japhet Ndabeni-Ncube whose administration was owed millions of dollars accused national government of inordinate delays in paying for services delivered to the police, army and other government institutions in the hope of worsening service delivery and use that as an excuse for a takeover (Sithole 2007:1).

Table 2: MDC mayors dismissed and harassed since 2000

Name of mayor dismissed/harassed	City	Year
Elias Mudzuri (D)	Harare	2003
Misheck Kagurabadza (D)	Mutare	2005
Gilbert Shoko (D)	Chitungwiza	2006
Francis Dhlakama (H)	Chegutu	2006
Abel Chaimiti (H)	Masvingo	2006
Japhet Ndabeni-Ncube (H)	Bulawayo	2006
Israel Marange (DC)	Chitungwizaw	2010
Claudius Nyamhondoro (H)	Chinhoyi	2011
Brian James (D)	Mutare	2012
Lionel De Necker (D)	Gwanda	2012
Hamutendi Kombayi (H)	Gweru	2015
Bernard Manyenyeni (H)	Harare	2016
Philip Mutoti (DC)	Chitungwiza	2018
Note: D-Dismissed DC-Dismissed and Convicted, H-Harassed		
Source: Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe		

It has long been accepted that poor infrastructure and equipment are formidable impediments to sustainable service delivery in urban Zimbabwe. A point is repeatedly made that the past three decades were characterised by marked decline in public sector investment for new urban service delivery infrastructure and equipment (Government of Zimbabwe 2004: 8). In the past, donor funding and public sector investment were credited with the maintenance and expansion of key service delivery infrastructure such as water provision, sewerage works and roads. The withdrawal of the support left urban local authorities to their own devices. At the same time, a decline in economic growth impacted productive employment opportunities and the ability of urban dwellers to pay for local government services.

In 2001 service delivery nose-dived when national government took away some revenue generating functions from urban local authorities and gave them to the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), a state run enterprise, worsening an already fragile service delivery system. The decision was taken without the consent of urban local authorities. Neither were urban local

authorities consulted. The water function reverted back to urban local authorities in 2009. However, by then, most water supply equipment had either deteriorated or malfunctioned, diminishing the prospects for a sustainable service. The vehicle licensing function was handed to the Zimbabwe National Roads Authority (ZINARA) in the same way water supply was handed to ZINWA. The handover was uninformed and it was done without first assessing the prejudice to urban service delivery. The functions generated a third of the total revenue of urban local authorities. In some countries, Ministers of Local Government protect the revenue powers of local government, understanding fully well that national government is too far removed from the people to provide for local needs. In this case, however, the loss of water provision and vehicle licensing to inefficient state run enterprises had the fingerprints of the Minister of Local Government who is supposed to protect the sources of revenue and by extension, local service delivery.

As the country embraced 2013 there was great expectation that adoption of a new Constitution would bring back urban service delivery from the brink. After three years of excruciating negotiations, the country adopted the 2013 Constitution which provides for the equitable distribution of revenue collected nationally among the three spheres of government. It was easier said than done. It is now seven years after unveiling the Constitution and the division of revenue is still to be implemented, with National Treasury blaming poor revenue collection by the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA). In fact, national government appears to be acquiescing with nostalgia to the old arrangement where nationally collected revenue was not shared but was dispensed at the discretion of the State. By not complying, national government is in breach of the Constitution. This is impeding service provision. The procrastination is complicating service delivery. It comes against a surge in unfunded mandates. An unfunded mandate is a regulation that call for subnational government to implement certain policies without adequate funding by national government. Urban local authorities have struggled to subsidise national government in the provision of primary school education and primary health services (Marumahoko and Fessha 2011: 51). The unfunded mandates are public interest services with national significance. The national government is also failing in its obligation to support primary health services at the local level despite the commitment it made to urban local authorities in the 1980s. It promised to contribute 100% towards the delivery of

primary health services decentralised to urban local authorities. The Table below paints a grim picture of the extent of neglect.

Table 3: Government's declining health contribution to Gweru City Council from 1980-2003

Year of disbursement	Total recurrent expenditure (Z\$)	Grant received (Z\$)	% Grant entitlement received
(19)80/81	366 827	305 053	83%
81/82	575 791	490 884	85%
82/83	811 309	500 000	61%
83/84	767 553	205 000	26%
84/85	802 792	410 000	51%
85/86	1 175 855	430 000	36%
90/91	2 870 991	900 000	31%
91/92	3 613 201	900 000	24%
92/93	4 124 188	860 000	20%
93/94	5 322 890	721 971	13%
94/95	6 286 832	855 460	13%
95/96	8 233 746	266 900	3%
96/97	10 691 071	400 846	3%
97/98	18 859 312	850 132	4%
1999	17 703 761	1 395 613	7%
Jan-July 2000	16 211 713	1 333 332	8%
2001	60 181 897	5 322 082	9%
2002	114 004 950	9 018 990	8%
2003	402 932 480	18 310 540	5%
Source: Ministry of Local Government			

According to Coutinho (2010: 73), urban local authorities are also hampered in their service delivery operations by inefficiencies in revenue collection. This is an institutional weakness for which blame is pointed back at urban local authorities. The catalogue of inefficiencies include poor databases, the use of outdated valuation rolls as a basis for determining rates on property and land, and poor financial accounting systems (Coutinho 2010: 73). In the same vein, it

is often claimed that urban local authorities do not do a good job of capturing “new properties onto their valuation rolls (Coutinho 2010: 73)”. The degeneration is exacerbated by the fact that urban councils do not levy rates on government buildings and state land (Marumahoko and Fessha 2011: 47).

In 2009 the Centre for Community Development in Zimbabwe (CCDZ) studied the prospects for local government reforms. Some of its findings are relevant to this paper, ten years later. The CCDZ concluded that the major obstacles to effective service delivery for both rural and urban local government include:

Lack of knowledge and capacity, gender imbalance, lack of transparency, corruption and abuse of power, power struggles between democratically elected Councillors and the local authority bureaucrats, conflicts between Councillors from different political backgrounds, political pressure and meddling by central government, the imposition of ‘Special Interest Councillors’, interference by Traditional Leaders and Youth Officers, top-down decision-making, distorted priorities, conflict of interests between personal gain and public interest and inadequate participation in local government issues by ordinary Zimbabweans. Closely linked to this is the exclusion of important and marginalised groups, gender imbalance, manipulation of vulnerable groups, exclusion of the youth, ignorance and apathy on the part of citizens (2009: 5).

6. What does the research data reveal?

The article sought to elicit the views of the service consumers, service providers (urban local authorities), government officials, residents’ associations, the Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ) and ordinary people on the causes of poor service provision in Zimbabwe’s cities, towns and other urban settings. The open-ended and closed-ended question questionnaires were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The sampled respondents were intended to be a true representative of the consumers of the services of urban councils. Multi-stage sampling was used. Out of the 32 urban councils, four were purposively selected for the research, i.e. Bulawayo City Council, Chitungwiza Municipality, Zvishavane Town Council and Epworth Local Board. The researchers distributed 120 closed-ended questionnaires to respondents who included senior officials

from the Ministry of Local Government, employees from urban local authorities, and service consumers. Of the 120 questionnaires, 100 were returned usable. The researchers interviewed senior government officials, town clerks, departmental heads of the four urban local authorities and general employees and service users. The random selection method was used to select general employees and service consumers. The main questions that the study sought to answer were: What factors impact public service delivery in Zimbabwean urban councils? What are the recommendations for improving service delivery? From the onset, it was assumed that male and female respondents might have different perspectives about the issues being researched.

In addition to the survey data, focus group discussions (FGDs) were undertaken with the participants. The main purpose of the FGDs was to draw upon the respondents' reactions, experiences, beliefs, feelings and attitudes on public service delivery in urban areas. The use of the FGDs facilitated for the researchers to elicit a multiplicity of views and attitudes on service delivery within a group context in a short period of time. Representatives of Urban Councils Association and Residents Associations also participated in the FGDs. This way, the researchers drew participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to explore the degree of dissension and consensus on service provision. Each group comprised between 5 and 10 participants and the discussions lasted up to 60 minutes at most. The discussions were held in neutral places such as schools and under trees in order to avoid either positive or negative association with certain settings among the participants. In-depth interviews were used to capture the views of senior managers of urban councils.

The research questions were designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative data. This enabled the researchers to have a comprehensive view of the state of public service delivery in urban centres. The first element of the research project was a pilot survey which was carried out in order to highlight some of the salient features in the study instruments. The information was collected within the shortest possible time without compromising the quality of data. Various methods were put in place to ascertain data validity and reliability. Firstly, quality control was maintained by ensuring that all questionnaires completed by research assistants were filled in correctly. In this regard, the researchers randomly drew a 5% sample of questionnaires which were completed on a daily basis. The researchers would then visit the interviewees of this random selection

for verification purposes. Any discrepancies were quickly corrected during the fieldwork period. Secondly, the questionnaires were designed in such a way that some of the questions were used as a validity check to verify the authenticity of the responses. After the fieldwork, the first step was to code open-ended questions for all the questionnaires. Frequency counts were used for the bulk of the analysis. The data was controlled by urban council, and whenever necessary, by gender or age. The results draw from both qualitative and quantitative data.

The discussion of findings uses quantitative data to show the levels of particular indices, while qualitative data is used to explain those indices. The analysis focuses on the state of service delivery in four urban local authorities, City of Bulawayo, Chitungwiza Municipality, Zvishavane Town Council and Epworth Local Board. The urban councils are representative of the 32 urban local authorities. In addition, they represent the four levels of urban local authorities in Zimbabwe. The article elicited the views of a cross section of employees of urban local authorities and service consumers/users. The results are presented in Tables 3 and 4 below. Although the findings are presented within the context of the four urban local authorities, they nevertheless provide a national picture of urban service delivery in Zimbabwe in the post-Mugabe era.

7. Demographic characteristics of respondents

As the Table 2 below outlines, the majority of the respondents sampled were female. Males comprised less than 50 percent of the sample across all four urban areas. The gender distribution reflected the national broader picture. The age distribution also closely matches the larger national picture where the 18-39 age group constitutes the majority. The study revealed high levels of literacy among the respondents, with over 90 percent literacy of the respondents reporting that they were literate, although the literacy rate for Zvishavane and Epworth was lower than that of Bulawayo and Chitungwiza. The respondents were also questioned about their occupations. It was interesting to note that well over seventy percent of the respondents reported informal employment as their occupation. This data seems to reflect the national broader picture where unemployment is staggering. On the subject of marital status, most respondents indicated that they were married, perhaps indicating the importance attached to family.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondents' demographic characteristics by urban area

	Bulawayo	Chitungwiza	Zvishavane	Epworth
GENDER				
Male	49	40	30	47
Female	51	60	70	53
Total	100	100	100	100
AGE				
18-39	58	85	72	54
40+	42	15	28	46
Total	100	100	100	100
LITERACY				
Yes	100	100	90	90
no	0	0	10	10
Total	100	100	100	100
OCCUPATION				
Formal employment	20	15	10	3
Informal employment	50	70	80	92
Unemployed	30	15	10	5
Total	100	100	100	100
MARITAL STATUS				
Married	70	60	80	50
Not married	30	40	20	50
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: own data

8. Employees' perception of the origins of poor service delivery

The administrative authorities of urban local government were also asked to give a perspective on the causes of poor service delivery. The respondents included town clerks, departmental heads of housing and community services, finance, health, engineering services and administration. The article also solicited the views of general employees. The responses were expressed as percentages (i.e.

out of 100). As Table 4 below outlines, the employees underscored limited local government reforms, centre-local power struggles, limited and insecure revenue, the unfunded mandate, obsolete service provision infrastructure, declining public sector investment, decreasing donor funding and national government debt as some of the major causes of poor urban service provision.

Table 5: Percentage distribution of employees' perception of the origins of poor service delivery by urban area

	Bulawayo	Chitungwiza	Zvishavane	Epworth
Limited local government reforms	80	70	70	60
Centre-local power struggles	100	100	100	0
Politicisation of service delivery	80	70	100	50
Limited and insecure revenue	90	90	80	90
Limited expenditure powers	40	30	20	10
The 'unfunded' mandate	100	100	100	100
Obsolete service delivery infrastructure	100	80	100	90
Declining public sector investment	100	100	100	100
Declining donor funding	100	100	100	100
National government debt	90	100	100	90
Corruption in staffing	10	10	10	20
Lack of managerial capacity	10	20	10	10
Lack of transparency and accountability	10	10	10	20
Lack of training and capacity building	50	60	40	40
Misuse of council funds	10	10	10	10
Lack of public participation	10	20	10	20
Poor coordination processes	10	10	10	10
Poor monitoring and evaluation	20	10	10	20
Lack of political leadership	100	90	100	100
Poor intergovernmental coordination	100	90	80	90
Poor service delivery policies	10	10	10	10
Poor budgeting	10	10	10	10

9. Service consumers' perception of the origins of poor service delivery

The service users were also asked to shed light on the causes of poor service delivery. The objective was to gain users' insight into the challenges encountered in decentralising service provision as well as facilitate comparative observation and improve policy formulation and analysis. The respondents identified declining public sector investment, waning donor funding, misuse of council funds, lack of public participation, lack of political leadership, poor policies, poor budgeting and monitoring and evaluation as some of the key drivers of inadequate service provision.

Table 6: Percentage distribution of service consumers' perception of the origins of poor service delivery

	Bulawayo	Chitungwiza	Zvishavane	Epworth
Limited local government reforms	50	40	30	40
Centre-local power struggles	60	40	50	60
Politicisation of service delivery	60	70	60	50
Limited and insecure revenue	70	60	50	80
Limited expenditure powers	40	30	60	50
The 'unfunded' mandate	100	90	100	80
Obsolete service delivery infrastructure	80	100	90	90
Declining public sector investment	100	90	80	100
Declining donor funding	100	100	100	100
National government debt	100	90	70	100
Corruption in staffing	80	100	100	60
Lack of managerial capacity	90	100	100	60
Lack of transparency and accountability	60	90	100	40
Lack of training and capacity building	30	40	20	30
Misuse of council funds	100	100	100	60
Lack of public participation	90	100	80	70
Poor coordination processes	100	100	90	80
Poor monitoring and evaluation	100	100	90	100

Lack of political leadership	90	100	100	70
Poor intergovernmental coordination	60	80	50	40
Poor service delivery policies	100	90	100	60
Poor budgeting	30	70	80	40

Source: Own data

It is revealing to note that there are similarities and differences between the perceptions of employees' and service consumers on the causes of poor service provision. Both sides agree that the "unfunded" mandate, declining public sector investment, weakening donor funding, and national government debt are major causes of poor service delivery. However, employees who are responsible for the administrative functions of urban local authorities appear to ascribe more blame to external factors than internal factors. In this regard, more blame is placed on factors such as centre-local power struggles, the "unfunded" mandate, politicisation of service delivery, lack of political leadership and poor intergovernmental coordination. Comparatively, service users appear to place more blame on internal factors. In this regard, factors such as corruption in human resources practices, lack of management capacity, misuse of council funds, deficiencies in public participation and poor monitoring and evaluation are blamed for the slippage in service provision.

The respondents were asked to suggest ways of improving urban service delivery. Their proposals which are summarised in Table 5, were wide-ranging, seemingly suggesting that respondents were worried not only about poor services, but also about the impact of inadequate service delivery on the quality of urban lives.

Although there were variations, the most commonly made suggestions were to increase tax raising options, address the 'unfunded' mandate, replace obsolete service equipment, increase public sector investment and donor funding, facilitate for national government to honour debts to urban councils, encourage transparency, good governance and accountability, sanction financial mismanagement, capacitate political authorities (councillors), improve intergovernmental coordination and strengthen participatory budgeting.

Table 7: Percentage distribution of suggestions for improving service delivery

	Bulawayo	Chitungwiza	Zvishavane	Epworth
Increase local government reforms	70	60	30	80
Reduce centre-local power struggles	90	80	100	80
Depoliticise service delivery	70	60	70	60
Increase revenue powers	100	90	100	80
Increase expenditure powers	30	40	50	60
Address the 'unfunded' mandate	100	100	100	100
Replace obsolete service delivery infrastructure	100	100	100	100
Increase public sector investment	70	80	100	100
Source donor support	80	100	100	100
National government pays debt	100	100	100	100
Eliminate corruption in staffing	70	60	90	60
Strengthen management systems	80	70	100	90
Encourage transparency and accountability	100	100	100	100
Increase training and capacity building	50	40	30	60
Punish financial mismanagement	100	100	100	100
Strengthen public participation	80	90	70	90
Improve internal coordination processes	40	70	90	60
Strengthen monitoring and evaluation	100	100	100	100
Capacitate councillors	100	100	100	100
Improve intergovernmental coordination	100	90	100	90
Create better service delivery policies	70	80	100	50
Improve participatory budgeting	80	90	100	30

Source: own data

10. Conclusion

The objective of the paper was to tease out the causes of inadequate urban service provision since the advent of the so-called Second Republic in Zimbabwe which saw Emmerson Mnangagwa takeover as president following the ouster of Robert Mugabe towards the end of 2017. The other objective was to proffer suggestions for improving urban service delivery. The investigation comes against the background of the promises made to the nation by Mnangagwa in his inauguration speech to improve service delivery and turnaround the economy. In seeking to achieve these objectives, the article used questionnaires and the FGDs to solicit data from respondents. The respondents included employees of four urban local authorities, national government official from the Ministry of Local Government, officials from the UCAZ, members of the Portfolio Committee on Local Government, Rural and Urban Development and service consumers.

The article used quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to assess the data (responses), categorise and extrapolate explanations. Among other factors, the respondents identified centre-local power struggles, dwindling revenue, unfunded mandates, misuse of council funds, dearth of political leadership and deficiencies in management systems as the most ubiquitous causes hampering urban service provision. It is difficult to imagine Zimbabwe achieving the Vision 2030 set by the Mnangagwa administration to make the country a middle income society unless local public service delivery fundamentally transforms. The suggestions for improving service delivery include increasing public sector investment, promoting ethics in local government administration, sanctioning financial malpractice and strengthening intergovernmental synchronization.

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