

Virtue Ethics as a Catalyst for Good Governance and Efficient Service Delivery in Zimbabwean Local Government Systems

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ABSTRACT Good governance is a crucial management process that encompasses a broad spectrum of principles intended to cement the relationship between the government and the governed. This paper seeks to establish that the key to initiating good governance practices within local government institutions lies in first sowing the seeds of virtuous ethical traits among municipal officials, in order to ensure effective service delivery. It argues that improved service delivery through implementing virtuous ethics will not only advance mutually, the performance and representation of the public service, but will also resuscitate the citizens' interest and trust in local government institutions. The paper revealed that the essence of good governance can only be achieved by maintaining upright morals among public officials. It further concluded that without a re-awakening of the culture of virtuous ethics, the actualization of good governance will not prevail. A qualitative research design through the use of document analysis was used to collect data.

INTRODUCTION

The promulgation of good governance can be attributed to the solid foundation of upright ethical standards. Virtuous ethical principles are a crucial mainstay that is intended to prevent local authorities from being plunged into the deep waters of administrative incapability's and mal-administrative practices. Such mal-administrative practices include corruption, poor service deliveries, bribery, financial fraud, and nepotism. These Machiavellian practices are a consequence of the malfunction of government institutions in ensuring the effective upholding of good ethical standards. Koenane and Mangena (2017) asserts that it is only reasonable for citizens to expect professional behavior from public officials and for this to happen, an ethical foundation or moral framework in government needs to be established. In this regard, virtue ethics can be characterized as the core agent that encapsulates the promotion of good governance within the public sector.

Objectives

This study seeks to examine the extent to which virtuous ethical standards contribute to the upholding of good governance practices in local government. It seeks to determine the challenges being faced by local government institutions in Zimbabwe, as well as establishing how

virtuous ethics can be implemented as a panacea to rectify those challenges. The study also aims to identify the main strategies that can be implemented to ensure the upholding of virtuous ethical standards within public officials.

METHODOLOGY

Downe et al. (2016) are of the opinion that the mainstream of research pertaining to ethics is statistical and cross-sectional in character and what remains deficient is research that moves from statistical associations to clarify casual mechanisms. In this regard, the qualitative research method, through the use of document analysis was used in order to penetrate the significance of the topic being researched. The analytical approach was engaged in order to acquire insights through discovering meanings and understanding behind the concept of virtuous ethics. The use of this research methodology also appeared defensible putting into consideration the nature of the subject under discussion.

RESULTS

The Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct in Local Government Institutions

From the research conducted using document analysis, it is worth noting that consider-

able confusion exists behind the meaning of the terms “code of ethics and code of conduct”. According to Disoloane (2015), these codes must be present in local institutions for the reason that they promote positive work ethics as well as ensuring that municipal officials operate in a principled manner. The existence and practice of ethics guarantees that honorable ideologies are observed and maintained. In order to give a vivid understanding of ethics, a clarification of both the code of ethics and code of conduct is essential.

Surbhi (2016) states that the primary difference between these two codes lies in the fact that a code of ethics is generally a composition of principles which influences a judgment, while a code of conduct refers to procedures that relate to employees’ actions. A code of ethics is composed of principles intended to direct public officials to conduct their undertakings truthfully and with uprightness. It assists public officials in perceiving right from wrong.

Disloane (2015) is of the view that a code of conduct outlines the general values of appropriate behavior. A code of conduct ought to be complemented by comprehensive and detailed codes of ethics, which provide the facts that are essential in acknowledging the objectives set out by the codes of conduct. Surbhi (2016) reveals that the code of conduct establishes definite rules and regulations that an employee must abide with. Employees are liable to the adherence of the code of conduct and are also held responsible for its infringement.

From the above assertions, it is evident that both the code of ethics and code of conduct occupy a fundamental role in supporting good governance in local government institutions. Adopting these codes in Zimbabwean municipal authorities proves to be a fundamental remedy that will assist municipal officials in encompassing an enhanced perspective of what is right and wrong. Such an understanding will assist public officials in making upright decisions concerning their daily municipal undertakings. Municipal officials are by and large expected to be the principled leaders of society; therefore applying moral standards through the code of ethics and a code of conduct is more likely to nurture virtuous municipal leaders.

Aristotle’s Virtuous Ethics Theory

According to Macaulay and Lawton (2016) Aristotle provided the classic western clarification of public virtue, relating the conception of a

moral and a political life. For Aristotle, virtue is a quality that can be alienated into two types, that is, moral and intellectual. Macaulay and Lawton (2016) further elaborate that virtue is the means by which people become fully human because it allows people to fulfill their particular human end. Aristotle’s virtuous theory therefore prioritizes the good over the right, a peculiarity that remains fundamental to virtuous ethics today.

Koenane and Mangena (2017) echoes the same sentiments and elaborates that Aristotle’s virtue theory can be described as taking on a significant way of life, an attitude, or moral outlook representative of an individual’s life orientation. For Aristotle, virtue is not instinctive in any person; thus no one is born virtuous. Virtue in Aristotle’s theory is obtained through practice. It is a character which becomes second nature or habit. In this regard, Aristotle’s virtue theory asserts that a good government is one whose eventual end achieves the good for its citizens, allowing people to thrive. A good government can be distinguished by its capacity to promote and attain as its ultimate goal, the well-being of people. In Zimbabwe however, Aristotle’s virtue theory is still yet to be recognized as most local government institutions are characterized by their obsession over the profit motive at the expense of the promotion of effective service delivery. Moral decadence among municipal councils in local authorities in Zimbabwe can be highlighted as the cause of rampant immoral practices within the local sphere of governance, thereby making it impossible for good governance to prevail.

Due to this impending situation, Okechukwu (2012) asserts that public officials need to be virtuous individuals; they have to inculcate virtues in their institutions order to formulate good policy decisions. From Aristotle’s standpoint, virtuous public administrators have the proficiency and nature to use their position to advance the well-being of the population through the provision of good governance. Public sector officials need to be grounded in ethical values and principles. A deeper understanding of ethical principles in Zimbabwean local authorities will assist public officials in confronting the challenge of ethical problems such as corruption, financial fraud and nepotism. In this regard, it is evident that adopting ethical principles in local government institutions allows public officials to make decisions that priorities public interest rather than self-interest.

Good Governance in Zimbabwean Local Government Systems

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2017) defined governance as an extensive notion covering all facets of how a country is governed, including its economic policies, regulatory framework and obedience to the rule of law. Gildenhuis and Knipe (2000) state that good governance on the other hand, is implied by several principles and these include public participation, transparency, accountability, the rule of law, efficiency and effectiveness, responsiveness, equity, and strategic vision. In order to ensure the good quality of life for all citizens, there are principles with which government must comply with in order to meet the ultimate goal of citizen satisfaction. It is thereby evident that for good governance to materialize, it is fundamental to instill a culture of virtuous ethical standards among municipal officials.

Virtue must not only be seen as a theoretical construct, but must be prominently replicated in practical actions of the virtuous personnel. In this regard, the realistic manifestation of venerable conduct among local government officials in Zimbabwe's local government institutions is a vital step in efforts to rectify the unparalleled moral decay that has often distinguished the country's local government institutions. The ethos that guides the behavior of municipal officials in the communities should also have an impact on the quality of service delivery they offer to the people.

The IMF (2017) elaborated that inefficient governance presents greater inducement and more prospects for corruption to occur. In Zimbabwe, the propagation of ethical codes of behavior, public accountability and the dissemination of pieces of legislation including the amended constitution (May 2013) to avert immoral conduct is likely not to achieve the desired results. This is mainly due to the fact that it is vital to first instill within the municipal officials particular dispositions, attitudes and qualities to direct human behavior. Thus, the execution of virtues such as honesty and truthfulness in municipal officials in Zimbabwe's local sphere of governance is fundamental in restraining the moral paralysis in local government institutions.

It is worth noting that the lack of discipline in the political affairs of a country can by no means be detached from the manner in which

crucial sectors of the economy such as local government carry out its activities. In this regard, it can be suggested that Zimbabwe has to ensure a role model character in its political affairs. This will guarantee that other government sectors can imitate such virtuous traits and ensure the implementation of good governance practices within their various institutions in order to avoid moral decay in the performance of the public sector.

Masaka (2011) further highlights that if all stakeholders in Zimbabwe's economy were to adopt virtuous character traits, then possibly the intensity of immoral behavior could be diminished whilst good governance is encouraged. Intensive efforts to implore people to instill in them admirable character traits could assist in fostering good governance as well as desirable conduct in local government officials.

The Amended 2013 Zimbabwean Constitution as a Vehicle for Promoting Good Governance and Virtuous Ethical Standards in Local Government Institutions

While efforts to uphold and implement ethics and good governance practices within African states such as South Africa are well established; Zimbabwe took its first major step in this regard through the introduction of the amended Zimbabwean constitution in May 2013. For the first time, the Zimbabwean constitution (2013) incorporated the principles of good governance and advocated for the upholding of ethical standards.

Zvoma (2013:9) states that in order to make sure that every citizen can have absolute assurance in the integrity of public institutions; section 194 of the new Zimbabwean Constitution (2013) reveals the standards and principles to be cherished and adhered to by public administrators in all sectors of government including organizations and agencies of the state, and government-controlled entities and other public enterprises.

Section 194 of the Zimbabwean constitution (2013) reacted to the essential doctrine of ethical service, which is an imperative foundation of good governance. In this regard, it is evident that the implementation of the new Zimbabwean constitution, amendment (No.20) in May 2013 offered a ray of hope for improvement in the quality of service delivery for most Zimbabwe-

ans. This is elucidated by the fact that the new constitution emphasizes on the upholding of the principles of good governance as well as maintaining a standard of effective and efficient service delivery in the local sphere of governance.

It can be noticed however, that despite efforts by the Zimbabwean government to fully embrace good governance by enforcing it as one of its constitutional mandates, huge disparities are still evident in the delivery of services to the public and the rate of corruption is still on the increase. This alone makes evident the fact that it is misleading to assume that the implementation of new laws or policies will automatically serve to deter bad governance practices.

DISCUSSION

According to Macaulay and Lawton (2016) there is a huge gap between implementing certain policies or formulating certain laws and ensuring that these policies and laws are actually put into practice. Hence, it is not enough to include the principles of good governance and ethical standards in the Zimbabwean constitution as a measure directed to embrace good governance. Koenane and Mangena (2017) are of the view that measures must be taken to ensure that these principles are not only implemented but are also put into practice. These measures must be executed through ensuring the upholding of virtuous ethical standards in order to curb the escalating rates of poor service delivery as well as mal-administrative practices that have eroded Zimbabwe's local government institutions.

Locke (2013) states that it could be argued however, that the realization of the new constitution faces a raft of problems. In order to effectively carry out the constructive reforms implanted in the new constitution, Zimbabwe will need to ensure a new era of constitutionality characterized by the upholding of virtuous character traits. It should thereby be noted that although the Zimbabwean constitution (2013) provides for the promotion of ethical conduct and the upholding of the principles of good governance, Zimbabwe has to go further and ensure that municipal officials adhere to virtuous ethical standards.

The researcher argues that the principles of good governance as well as the ethical standards stated in the constitution provide and

guarantee the end result of ultimate service delivery and good governance practices for the common man on the street at all levels of government, yet the policies that most officials tend to pursue in practice have not accommodated the mandates set out in the newly amended Zimbabwean constitution (2013).

The implementation of the new Zimbabwean constitution (2013) can thereby be held in high esteem if the constitutional mandates that promote good governance stem out as the fundamental framework that is supposed to be implemented both in practice as much as it is in theory through embracing virtue ethics. The implementation of the new constitution does not guarantee or bring about change if it is not implemented according to the statutes highlighted therein.

According to Masaka (2011) it can thereby be deduced that the emphasis on the public service has been on ensuring a service provision institution that would not only be receptive, transparent and accountable, but also well prepared to handle the extra demands of an ever-changing economic climate through upholding virtue ethics.

CONCLUSION

The issues pertaining to poor service delivery and good governance portrays an irresistible challenge that requires robust interventions in most municipalities. Reports of poor service deliveries have been attributed to the corrupt and unethical standards of behavior by municipal officials in most local government institutions in Zimbabwe. This is mainly because good governance is a fundamental component that should not only be supported by literature and legal documents, but rather, a mentality of upholding effective virtuous ethical practices should be cultivated into municipal officials in order to ensure good governance.

Adopting a culture of virtuous ethical traits within local government institutions can be viewed as the appropriate antidote that can ensure the permanent eradication of mal-administrative practices whilst ensuring the effective upholding of good governance practices. This will not only restore the citizen's sense of local identity, faith and ownership with local municipalities, but it will also offer a framework whereby citizen minded municipal officials are able to

take over municipal business bearing in mind virtuous ethical traits that will ensure the effective implementation of the principles of good governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Public servants are often exposed to greater public scrutiny and increased demands from the citizens. In this regard, public servants play a pivotal role in upholding and maintaining upright ethical standards. The following recommendations have been highlighted as a gateway to ensuring the upholding of virtuous ethical standards in Zimbabwean local government system, as well as maintaining a culture of good governance and efficient service deliveries.

In order to ensure virtuous ethics and good governance in local government systems, it would be beneficial to incorporate the upholding of upright moral standards into the education system by adding ethics and ethical standards to the curriculum of primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe. This will equip children with adequate knowledge pertaining to up right morals at a tender age, and would eventually cultivate virtuous leaders of tomorrow.

Municipal Officials must also aim to ensure accountability and transparency in all municipal undertakings. All decisions except those restricted by law should be released for public inquiry. This will eliminate any prospects for the manifestation of corruption as well as other mal-administrative practices.

It is also recommended that municipal authorities in Zimbabwe must encourage whistle blowers in order to ensure that a standard consisting of virtuous ethical traits is maintained in local government institutions. The citizens need to be educated pertaining to their right to disclose information relating to unethical behavior by municipal officials without fear. Disclosures by whistle blowers must also be treated in confidentiality. In Zimbabwe, the fear to disclose un-

ethical behavior by municipal officials has often culminated in further deterioration of good governance and moral standards in the public sector. In this regard, the citizens need to be assured of their right of protection as whistle blowers.

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