



The Challenges Associated with Corruption towards Public Service Delivery in Communities: A Case of South Africa

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the challenges associated with corruption towards public service delivery. Corruption is perceived as an abhorrent act committed by individuals or groups and has a particularly negative impact on other individuals, organizations, and communities. In South Africa, corruption cases are rampant, with authorities suspicious of specific organizations, regional leaders, and civilians. These activities can take place in the form of bribery, purchasing, and offering positions, and debasement in social help that negatively affects public service delivery. This study was conducted through a desktop study from which information has been obtained utilizing literature through scholarly journal articles, daily papers, government archives and other relevant documents related to the study. The study found numerous challenges associated with corruption towards public service delivery. The foremost conspicuous challenge found was the cost overrun. This challenge is taken after by three other imperative challenges such as destitute quality of work; destitute finance utilization; and delay in project completion. Moreover, these challenges are intertwined. For example, poor-quality work can lead to rework, project delays, and cost overruns. Practically, underutilization of funds is both a cause and a consequence of delays in project completion and cost overruns. Therefore, the paper concludes by stating that corruption plays a huge part in adversely affecting public service delivery in most communities in South Africa. As a result, the paper suggests that strategies that can address the challenges of corruption in public service delivery include capacity building, finding qualified and talented professionals, organizing audit forms and compliance, and enhancing accountability and transparency. This includes improving collaboration and communication between partners who are involved.

Keywords: *Corruption; Public Service Delivery; Communities; Participation; South Africa*

1. Introduction

Corruption can be a dishonourable act by an individual or group whose impact is highly negative on other individuals, organizations, and societies (Adamu & Mohammed, 2022). However, corruption is rampant in South Africa, with certain organizations' authorities, regional leaders, and civilians suspected. These activities can take the form of bribery, the purchase, and solicitation of positions, welfare insults, etc., and adversely affect the delivery of public services. According to Dikmen and Çiçek (2022), corruption in South Africa can occur across all the spheres such as local, provincial, and even national. Corruption can take many forms in society, including obstruction of justice, money laundering, bribery and embezzlement, absenteeism, deception, drug trafficking, influence dealing, illegal wealth, abuse of power, and informal payments (Husmann & Naher, 2020). According to Mwesigwa (2021), among the several challenges facing public service agencies in South Africa, corruption is still one of the most prevalent and least faced. Additionally, corruption is used as a prime target in many ways, especially when viewed from the side of bribery to win an election; Win lawsuits; win government scholarships for one's education, benefit from tax breaks and exemptions, take advantage of tax holidays, and more. This paper is divided into 6 (six) sections. The first section introduces the and clearly provides the purpose of the study.

The second section is the literature review of the study which is divided into 4(four) sub-sections namely: theoretical framework guiding the study; the determinants of corruption; the nature of public service delivery as well as the challenges associated with corruption towards public service delivery in South Africa. The third section provides the methodology which was adopted to solicitate information relevant and required for the completion of this paper. The fourth section provides a discussion of the findings from literature review since this study was conducted on a desktop method. Last but not least is the conclusions that corruption poses challenges to public service delivery and recommendations that put in place specific mechanisms such as transparency, the introduction of participatory management, and appointing specific experts to deliver public services in South Africa can address those challenges. The last section is the list of references from which the information used in the study was solicited.

2. Literature Review

This section provides a discussion on the theoretical framework guiding the study; the determinants of corruption; the nature of public service delivery as well as the challenges associated with corruption towards public service delivery in South Africa.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theories relevant for this study, were drawn from the work of Ighodaro and Igbinedion (2020) and are: the public choice theory of corruption; the organizational theory of corruption; the bad apple theory of corruption; and the transaction theory. According to Adamu and Mohammed (2022), public choice theory suggests that people will become corrupt whenever the benefits of corruption outweigh the disadvantages. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, anyone who commits corruption should be severely and indiscriminately punished. Organizational culture theory believes that non-corrupt humans can become corrupt when they are in a corrupt surrounding, suggesting that corruption is the cause of corruption (Adamu & Mohammed, 2022). So, to be uncorrupted in a particular organizational culture is to betray the group. According to Adamu and Mohammed (2022), in Bad Apple's theory of corruption, corruption at the individual level or in related types is determined by the individual's involvement in corrupt practices.

Furthermore, another theory adopted in this study, that is the transaction theory is supported by significant elements of the literature documenting the devastating impact of corruption on the delivery of public services in society (Paldam, 2021). For the purpose of this study, this theory can be interpreted

uniquely, as if corruption creates additional costs that delay the delivery of public services. This means that minimizing corruption will assist in terms of fastening both the process of development and public services delivery in communities in South Africa; However, this is also known as the sand theory because it views debasement as the sand of public service delivery machines in our society. According to Paldam (2021), minimizing the amount of sand will improve the machine's performance. The sand theory thus offers a dual argument for combating corruption, as it suggests that corruption is not only a social disease but also the sand of public service delivery mechanisms in South Africa.

2.2. The Determinants of Corruption

Since the notion of corruption involves aggravating indicators, connections, and procedures, there is no globally considered comprehensive explanation, but quite a few explanations have evolved (Haryadi & Suciyaniti, 2018). Transparency International (2018), an explanation widely adopted in the literature, defined it as a misuse of power delegated for personal benefit. It involves rationalization, opportunity, and need (Karsono & Syauket, 2021). Debasement has been extensively studied by past researchers such (Indawati, 2015), (Sovianti, 2019), (Iskandar & Kurniawan, 2020), and (Karsono, & Syauket, 2021). According to Saputra (2021), needs are the building blocks of the brain that organize processes such as thought, perception, behavior, and changes in pre-existing unpleasant states; However, individuals possess five desires: love, physiology, self-esteem, self-actualization, and safety. Each person has unique desires, some possess few desires, and some have very many (Haryadi & Suciyaniti, 2018). Needs have been studied by past researchers, such as (Saputra, 2022) and (Haryadi & Suciyaniti, 2018). According to Saputra (2021), desires are related to corruption and different people have unique needs because the amount of money that humans spend is also different. When the funds needed to satisfy desires are not met, there is a struggle to be able to attain those needs (Saputra, 2021). The struggle itself arises from the inside and the outside, the inner pressure arises from a need to be realized, and the outer pressure arises from the outside like the organization (Sovianti, 2019). Corruption-related needs this is consistent with the research (Haryadi & Suciyaniti, 2018) and (Sada, 2017).

According to Sundari (2019), opportunity is the state of being likely to commit anything and that action can be good or bad; However, factors of corruption include overdependence on others, carelessness, and motivation to commit good or bad deeds. Second, the opportunity for someone to conduct debasement in South Africa is also influenced by the power they hold (Sundari, 2019). Opportunities have been extensively studied by past researchers such as (Sundari, 2019), (Ghazali, 2020), and (Elmi & Ali, 2017). The factor of who is devoted to corruption results due to the power of independence of accountability (Sundari, 2019). According to Setiawan (2018), opportunities are themselves opportunities unfolding from an action. This opportunity can evolve especially due to vulnerabilities in surveillance systems within organizations, leading to corrupt practices by individuals or groups (Setiawan, 2018). Then someone who has power or authority can easily access to conduct debasement in society. Therefore, the opportunity is associated with corruption. This is consistent with the following research: (Setiawan, 2018).

According to Iskandar and Kurniawan (2020), rationalization is the situation of feeling guilty but not wanting to be pointed out. Rationalization is bad behaviour in organizations and institutions because they always think they are doing the right thing (Iskandar & Kurniawan, 2020). Rationalization metrics include: 1) Unfocused logic and fact. 2) happy to blame individuals or situations. 3) Unwillingness to admit constructive criticism; 4) difficulty in recognizing and confessing the mistakes; 5) Unhappy Mood (Iskandar & Kurniawan, 2020); However, perpetrators do not want to be held accountable for their deeds, even if the action is wrong or bad. In practice, corruption takes many forms in South Africa, including misuse of power, embezzlement of funds, extortion, bribery, and gratification. According to Iskandar and Kurniawan (2020), some of these forms of corruption in society often manifest themselves in a wide variety of activities in both governmental and private institutions; However, most humans due to group or

personal benefit justify debasement although their deeds are illegal actions of it. Rationalization is related to corruption, which is consistent with the following studies: (Iskandar & Kurniawan, 2020).

2.3. The Nature of Public Services Delivery

According to Davids, Masiya, and Mangai (2019), South Africa's constitution stated that, local governments are responsible for ensuring that all citizens have access to public services that meet their basic needs. In other words, they must ensure that communities in South Africa receive at least the basic services they need. According to Davids, Masiya & Mangai 2019, there are numerous services provided by the local government to communities and they are as follows: electricity, water, and gas supply, sewage collection and treatment, street lighting, garbage collection, community health services, parks, road, recreation, and storm water drainage just to mention a few. These services have a direct impact on the quality of life of human beings in South Africa. For example, if the water provided is of poor quality and garbage is not collected regularly, this contributes towards creating an unsafe and unhealthy living environment (Dikmen and Çiçek ,2022). According to Davids, Masiya & Mangai (2019), poor services can also make it complex for businesses and industries to locate in the area and create jobs for citizens but the basic services that people require in rural areas may differ from those required in urban areas. Local governments as they are elected by citizens to represent them are responsible for providing public services as they are the areas of administration closest to the people (Davids, Masiya & Mangai 2019). In practice, local governments can do this by using their resources such as finances, equipment, and staff to provide services, among other things.

According to Davids, Masiya, and Mangai (2019), local government can also procure the provision of basic services in society; However, many municipalities are unable to provide basic services to their communities in South Africa. According to Davids, Masiya, and Mangai (2019), this may be due to challenges of corruption, inability to provide good services at reasonable prices, or lack of funds. It is expected to extend to all and act prudently to increase access to adequate basic services for poor and vulnerable citizens such as women and children (Davids, Masiya & Mangai, 2019). In addition, Article 9 of the 1996 Constitution prohibits unfair discrimination by local governments in providing basic services because of disability, sex, race, or HIV/AIDS status (Section 9 of the Constitution, 1996). As a result, local governments, because of their constitutional obligations and the role they play in bringing public services closer to the people, are often in the limelight of South African citizens who see them as centres of service delivery.

2.4. The Challenges Associated with Corruption towards Public Service Delivery

The issue of corruption is a distinct challenge to public service delivery and calls into question the importance of public institutions in society (Mwesigwa, 2021). Citizens expect decent and quality services, but the level of leakage due to various forms of corruption such as nepotism, fraud, embezzlement, bribery, false accounting, and influence peddling can affect administrative processes (Krylova, 2018). According to Mwesigwa (2021), as in some parts of Africa, such leaks in Uganda were directly related to dominant ethnic clusters (Isaksson, 2015). This ambivalence is evident from a good governance perspective that states good public institutions as a prerequisite for resources to meet their targeted beneficiaries (Mwesigwa, 2021).

It is also important to note that poor planning-technocratic approach and poor budgeting, implementation, monitoring and reporting procedures that leads to some of the challenges in the public service delivery. According to McCall (2014), planning must be done properly in order to avoid situations whereby people are not able to participate because they are not being involved in the planning process. The South African local government model provides for integration between community participation, five-year development plans for the term of a municipal council, budgeting, and performance management. Municipalities are meant to raise their own revenue for the most part. However, there continues to be poor budgeting, implementation, monitoring and as well as reporting procedures in the

process of Integrated Development Planning (IDPs). According to Sebake and Sebola (2014), below are some of the challenges associated with corruption towards public service delivery:

- *Delays Infrastructure Development*

Corruption can have a serious consequence for infrastructure projects across three areas. It is likely to increase prices and inflate project costs in infrastructure provision. Corruption has a tendency of causing a delay in project's completion as well as leading to poor quality infrastructure.

- *Provides Poor Building Quality and Layers of Additional Costs*

Wherever there is corruption, there is more likelihood of mismanagement of funds which results in procurement of poor- or low-quality material and building. Plenty are times where the planned and allocated budget to complete a project becomes inadequate due to mismanagement of funds.

- *It Increases Inequality among Community Members and Government Officials*

Corruption widens the gap between the rich and the poorer. That is, the rich continue to get richer and the poor continue to be poorer. It is quite unfair to have a group of people having higher access to public services while another group is suffering. The Constitution of South Africa of 1996 calls for the need to ensure equity among citizens and their government officials.

- *Hinders Local Economic Development*

Corruptions tends to be a barrier towards achieving local economic development. This is because, resources meant to assists in running projects to achieve local economic development are stolen, misused and underutilised for unethical personal gain.

- *Destroys the Communities' Trust in Their Government and Leaders*

When leaders lead their followers with dishonesty and unethical manner, chances of such relationship lasting are very low. Communities vote for leaders to govern them with transparency, accountability, and transparency.

3. Methodology

This is a theoretical paper conducted using desktop surveys and data from various databases on the discussion of the challenges of corruption to public service delivery in South Africa. The collective strengths of content analysis are employed to achieve the aim of this paper. This paper used articles from scientific journals, books, newspapers, and other government documents.

4. Findings and Discussion

In most developing countries such as South Africa, smooth service delivery has become one of the most challenging in local government (Islam and Mahmud, 2015). Corruptions tends to be a barrier towards achieving local economic development. The study found that local governments encounter serious challenges due to corruption in providing basic public services for communities. The study also noticed that Corruption widens the gap between the rich and the poorer. That is, the rich continue to get richer, and the poor continue to be poorer. This is why most communities complain about the incompetence of their governments towards service delivery. This study also found that electricity, water, sanitation, and poor-quality housing were the main sources of complaints in the communities of South Africa. (Grant, 2014).

According to this study corruption causes South Africa to be one of the countries facing cost overruns resulting in the under-delivery of public services in society (Morena & Amoah, 2021). Cost overrun occurs when the final cost of a project exceeds the budgeted amount. According to Baloyi and Bekker (2011), fraud, project complexity due to lack of expertise, abuse of power, embezzlement, inaccurate material estimates, bribery, and shortage of skilled labor, lead to cost overruns between the decision to purchase the provision of contrast expert judgment and shortage of labor, which in turn leads to inadequate public service delivery in society. According to Lili (2016), certain cost control measures through the challenges of corruption that must be followed are: to allocate team members scientifically like in the face of the uneven technical level and overall quality of the workforce, they should properly consider and allocate human resources, strictly control the pace and quality of construction, eliminate waste, and reduce the cost of on-site construction, and to manage public service delivery in a highly effective manner.

This study also revealed that Destroys the communities' trust in their government and leaders. When leaders lead their followers with dishonesty and unethical manner, chances of such relationship lasting are very low. (Fagbadebo, 2019; Fagbadebo & Mbada, 2021). It was also found that the provision of public services in society is a constitutional obligation under article 152 of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. This imposes an obligation on local governments that their function is to provide a democratic and reasonable government for the community; ensure the sustainable provision of services to local communities; to improve social and economic development; to improve a healthy and safe environment; and encourage the participation of local communities and organizations in local government affairs as given by 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa; However, such goals are often undermined because of unethical behaviour and poor governance by local officials, adversely affecting the delivery of adequate services. This, therefore, advocates that public service delivery in South Africa is still one of the main 21st-century challenges.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to Bester and Dobovšek (2021), Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the poorest regions in the world with rampant generational poverty. South Africa has common features; all governments are involved in corruption cases, even at the highest level (Bester & Dobovšek, 2021). According to Bester and Dobovšek (2021), corruption has become a routine and prevalent component of the top-down functioning of government bureaucracies in almost all African countries. In practice, it is part of the social landscape on the African continent, and South Africa is no exception. The purpose of this paper was to examine the challenges of corruption in public service delivery in South Africa. This was conducted through a desktop survey that extracted information using academic articles, daily newspapers, and literature from other government archives. This paper concludes that several corruption challenges are said to plague South Africa's public service system and delays the process of service delivery at all levels. The most prominent challenge was cost overruns. This challenge is followed by three mandatory challenges: destitute quality of work, poor use of funds, and late completion of projects that leads to strikes in demand of services. This paper recommends that measures that can deal with the challenges of corruption in the delivery of public services includes building capacity, community participation, locating talented and qualified personnel, setting up audit forms and compliance, and improving accountability and transparency. Community members must participate in the processes of integrated development planning.

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