

CHALLENGES TO PROMOTING ETHICAL CONDUCT IN ZIMBABWE'S LOCAL AUTHORITIES

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Abstract:

Reports of different forms of unethical conduct and maladministration have plagued Zimbabwe's devolved tiers of government, particularly local governments. It has been the case regardless of a multiplicity of legislative, constitutional and institutional frameworks to regulate and eliminate unethical conduct and behaviors. Unethical conduct in Zimbabwe's local government manifests in different ways, including the acceptance of bribes, nepotism, and unauthorized expenditure. Several audit and anti-corruption reports by the Auditor General and the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC), respectively, have flagged high levels of unethical conduct and maladministration that have threatened effective local governance and service delivery. Concerted efforts are required to curb unethical conduct and salvage the local government from imminent collapse. However, research on ethical conduct in Zimbabwe's local government is scarce. Little is known about the challenges to promoting ethical conduct and behavior in local government in Zimbabwe. This article contributes to the literature on ethics by providing an account of the challenges to promoting ethics in Zimbabwe's devolved local governments. The article highlights power politics and political interference, unethical leadership, salary arrears and discontentment as major challenges to building ethics. The article ends with recommendations for promoting ethical conduct and behavior in local government.

Keywords: Ethics, Ethical Conduct, Local Authority, Good Governance

INTRODUCTION

Unethical behavior and practice continue to threaten local government performance in the developed and developing world. Resultantly, over the past three decades, ethics have gained the attention and interests of local government practitioners, policymakers, academics and the members of the public at large (Khanal, Gupta & Bhattarai, 2023). Ethical conduct is one of the fundamental principles and pillars of good governance and a key requirement for effective local government management in Africa. Several studies have underscored the centrality of ethical conduct and behavior in public service (Thonzhe & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2017; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Ababio, 2010). There has been a global cognizance of the importance of ethics in local governance, alongside integrity, rule of law, transparency and accountability. According to Ngubane (2021:1), without a doubt, ethical leadership is the cornerstone of contemporary and worldwide leadership styles that every contemporary leader ought to possess. This global realization is attributable to the omnipresence and an increased role of local government in the provision of public value across the world (Ngubane, 2021). Since many nations have given local governments more authority and responsibility, local governments now play a major role in the delivery of public goods and services. Unethical conduct and practices in local government are considered detrimental and unsupportable in national development as they could result in compromised service delivery and erosion of public



trust (Enaifoghe, Jili & Mthethwa, 2023; Nyikadzino, 2022; Mothabi & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). Local governments as custodians of public money should, therefore, prioritize ethical practices.

Africa has made enormous efforts to set the tone for ethical conduct across the public service. The African Charter on the Principles of Decentralization, Local Governance and Local Development (hereafter referred to as the Charter) Article 14(5) provides that while performing their duties, local public servants must act with integrity and ethics. Article 6 of the Charter also requires national governments to enact laws and set up oversight agencies to ensure that local governments adhere to ethical standards. Good governance is one of the fundamental aspirations envisioned in the Africa Agenda 2063. According to the Africa Agenda 2063 Aspiration 3 (African Union, 2015), by 2063, Africa will have experienced a deepening of its culture of gender equality, democracy, good governance, respect of human rights, justice, and the rule of law. This ambition underscores Africa's desire to have vibrant, competent, capable, professional, accountable and neutral public institutions that uphold ethical standards and deliver public goods and services in an effective, efficient and economic manner. It is in line with the New Public Management (NPM), which emphasizes meritocracy, professionalism, transparency, accountability, integrity and public value in the operations of public bureaucracies.

The African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Administration (ACVPPA), which was adopted at the 3rd Pan-African Conference of Ministers of Public Service and ratified under the 16th Ordinary Sessions of the African Union Summit (Busieka, 2018), demonstrates Africa's commitment to transforming African public administration towards realizing the aspiration of good governance espoused in the African Agenda 2063. The ACVPPA places public bureaucracies at the center of nation-building. Thus, it is important to emphasize the centrality of ethical conduct and behavior among public bureaucrats. Article 3 of the ACVPPA provides for, among others, the following principles that, if followed in letter and spirit, can enhance ethical standards and practices in public administration: "(i) impartiality, fairness and due process in the delivery of public services; (ii) adaptability of public services to the needs of users; (iii) professionalism and ethics in public service and administration; (iv) institutionalising a culture of accountability and integrity and transparency in public service and administration; and (v) effective, efficient and responsible use of resources". Chapter 3 of the ACVPPA also provides for a code of conduct for public service agents. The code of conduct regulates the following pillars: "professionalism (Article 9), ethical behaviour (Article 10), incompatibilities and conflict of interest (Article 11), prevention and combating corruption (Article 12) and declaration of assets (Article 13)". Article 10 details important ethical behaviors expected of public service agents. These ethical standards are of prime importance to devolved local governments, given their proximity to the people. Without a vibrant ethical code, local government can become fertile grounds for unethical conduct and behavior. Devolution reforms may risk devolving corruption and maladministration (Cheema, 2010; Madhekeni, 2020; Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022a)

However, regardless of concerted efforts and Africa's abundant human, natural and financial resources, African bureaucracies have not been able to achieve the desired ends of the state (Busieka, 2018; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Ababio, 2010), and citizens are yet to enjoy the benefits of devolved local government. It is partly attributable to rampant unethical practices and maladministration that have characterized public administration, particularly local government, in Africa (Thonzhe & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2017). As succinctly put by Tshiyoyo (2011:108), cited in Busieka (2018:49), the public service is underdeveloped, unreliable, and nearly non-existent in the majority of African nations; it is also unable to fulfill one of its primary functions, which is to support governmental initiatives. Fourie's (2018) study found widespread unethical behavior and corruption in local government



procurement processes in South Africa. Auditor Generals' reports in Zimbabwe, South Africa and other African countries exposed several cases of unauthorized, irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure in local government (Auditor General South Africa 2016; Auditor General Zimbabwe, 2019). Unethical practices and corruption in Ghana's local government have also been a significant issue (Arkorful, Lugu, Arkorful & Charway 2022). Unethical practices in Ghana have taken different forms, including favoritism, corruption, embezzlement of public funds and manipulation of tender processes (Ghana Audit Service Report, 2020). These unethical practices have had negative consequences on the provision of essential local services like education, health and infrastructural development. Despite reforms in public financial management and decentralization, financial accountability in local government has been little impacted.

Zimbabwe has not been an exception. Faced with the scourge of unethical conduct and behavior across the public service and in local government, Zimbabwe adopted multifaceted approaches to curb and eliminate unethical practices. These include constitutional provisions for the principles of administration, the establishment of audit institutions and anti-corruption commissions, central government supervision of local authorities and several legislative frameworks that regulate ethical behavior. Regardless of reforms to eliminate unethical conduct, unethical practices, and maladministration in Zimbabwe's local government have persisted. The Auditor General's reports (2019) highlighted several governance issues in local government that have compromised public trust (Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). Unethical conduct has been a major challenge affecting local authorities in Zimbabwe, particularly urban councils (Musekiwa, 2017; Mutema, 2016). Reports of ethical violations and corrupt activities of local government officials have been frequently reported in the media (Mutema, 2016; Mukucha, 2022; Nyikadzino, 2022). Local government political and administrative officials have been engaging in unethical activities, such as corruption, bribery, nepotism/favoritism, manipulation of administrative decisions, unauthorized expenditure and mismanagement of funds (Musekiwa, 2017; Auditor General Report, 2019; 2020; Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). Good governance is crucial in local government management, and unethical practices undermine the relationship between local governments and the governed.

The state of ethics in Zimbabwe's local government highlights a yawning gap and the need for more systematic research to promote fundamental values and principles of administration and good governance. The realization of Agenda 2063 Aspiration 3 and other national development strategies call for comprehensive and holistic reforms to revamp and reinvigorate local public administration and enable it to play a central role in the transformation of the country. It is against this background that this study contributes to the body of knowledge of ethics by exploring the challenges to promoting ethics in Zimbabwe's local government. The study also provides insights for promoting ethics in local government.

Ethics/ethical conduct: What does it mean and why does it matter? The concept of ethics has gained prominence in local government and governance literature. Literature has defined ethics widely and differently. Although ethics have become central in local government and governance praxis and research, multiple definitions, interpretations and perspectives exist (Thonzhe & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2017; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Ababio, 2010; Muswaka, 2017; Fourie, 2018). Ethics, just like integrity, is a value-laden term (Fourie, 2018), and there is no definitional consensus (Muswaka, 2017). Conceptually, ethics originated from the Greek word 'ethos', which denotes a set of habits, a distinct spirit of a culture, morality or inner tendency (Enaifoghe, 2023). Ethics are also related to 'mores', a Latin word which provides a foundation for morals and morality. Thonzhe & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2017:138) aptly cite that a system of moral precepts known as ethics is related to the

area of philosophy that deals with values regarding human behavior, including the goodness or badness of the motivations and goals behind particular acts as well as their rightness or wrongness. The English Oxford Living Dictionaries cited in Fourie (2018:727) defines ethics as “moral principles that govern a person’s behavior or the conducting of an activity.” Simply put, ethics denote principles that govern human behavior in terms of what is good or bad and right or wrong. They govern human interactions in different contexts, namely, family, community, church and organization, to mention but a few.

At an organizational level, ethics covers various principles, rules, guidelines, standards, systems and codes of conduct that guide and control how employees at all levels handle internal and external organizational dynamics (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Ababio, 2010; Enaifoghe, 2023). In the context of public organizations, ethics refers to the different standards and procedures that govern how civil servants (bureaucrats) act and behave in discharging their mandates (Fourie, 2018; Enaifoghe, Jili & Mthethwa, 2023; Muswaka, 2017). In the public sector, ethics are sometimes referred to as moral laws (Ngubane, 2021; Mothabi & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). In the context of the preceding definitions, ethical conduct or behavior refers to behaviors that are not only good for a particular individual but also good for other people and the society or community at large (Ngubane, 2021). On the contrary, unethical behavior or misconduct denotes undesirable, wrong and bad conduct, for instance, when a person behaves in a way contrary to acceptable traits or conduct endorsed by his organisation and profession (Thonzhe & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2017; Ngubane, 2021). Commonly cited forms of unethical behavior in local government include, but are not limited to, corruption, misuse of public resources, unauthorized expenditure, bribes, gross mismanagement and breach of established codes of conduct. Unethical conduct is inimical to organizational image and public trust and should be avoided at all costs. Moral and ethical decisions in local government matter because local government policies, given their proximity to the people, directly affect residents' lives and well-being. Ethics are, therefore, an important component of good local governance.

METHODS

This study's findings are based on qualitative data extracted from a literature review and documentary analysis. According to Machi and McEvoy (2012:4) cited in Nyikadzino (2020:32), a literature review is a written argument that supports a thesis position by assembling reliable evidence from earlier research. For this study, researchers used journal articles, books, dissertations and theses that contained information on ethics. Documentary analysis involves gathering data through an analysis of documents (reports, newspapers, laws, policies and other grey literature) that provide useful data on the topic under study (Mogalakwe, 2006:221). Documents such as audit reports, Afrobarometer surveys, the constitution, the Urban Councils Act and the Rural District Councils Act. The researchers opted for unobtrusive methods because of the abundance of literature and reports on ethical violations in Zimbabwe.

Furthermore, unobtrusive methods (literature review and documentary analysis) provide quality data and critical analysis that cannot be obtained from other methods. Data was analyzed through content analysis, where data was coded and arranged in themes. Through content analysis, patterns, trends, themes and subthemes that informed the findings and conclusions of the study were established.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION



This section presents some of the key challenges to building ethical conduct in Zimbabwe's local government.

Power Politics and Political Interference. The devolution system in Zimbabwe is premised on cooperation and coordination between the central government and lower tiers. Ideally, as provided for in Chapter 14 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), different tiers of government must "co-operate with one another, in particular by – (i) informing one another of, and consulting one another on, matters of common interest; (ii) harmonizing and coordinating their activities." Given the nature and scope of ethical violations confronting local governments in Zimbabwe, intergovernmental collaboration and cooperation are indispensable. However, instead of embracing cooperation, the local government praxis in Zimbabwe has been characterized by power politics, political interferences and political settlements that prioritize political expedience at the expense of good governance (Nyikadzino & Nhema, 2015; Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022a; Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022b). The continued dominance of opposition political parties at the local government level (vertically divided authority), particularly in urban councils, has created a toxic and hostile local governance atmosphere. In its political endeavor to control and micromanage local authorities, the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Unity-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), used and abused central government supervisory powers (Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023).

Weak and inadequate laws governing central government supervision of subnational governments and, in some instances, the central government's disregard of such laws, have left local political leaders (mayors and councillors) vulnerable to political manipulations that have often taken place through arbitrary suspensions and, in extreme cases, dismissals (Chigwata, Marumahoko, & Madhekeni, 2022; Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022b). To further weaken local government autonomy in managing local affairs, the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15) and the Rural District Council Act (Chapter 29:13) empower the minister responsible for local government to reverse, suspend, and rescind resolutions and decisions of local government. Such provisions undermine the extent to which local governments can control corporate governance processes (Nyikadzino, 2022). Consequently, as Marumahoko (2020), cited in Nyikadzino (2022), argues, local authorities in Zimbabwe have a fragile governance system characterized by power politics and squeezed central control. Due to tightened central government control, local councilors do not have the powers and autonomy to deal with unethical practices and maladministration perpetrated by senior managers, whose employment is a prerogative of the central government through the Local Government Board (LGB) (Urban Councils Act Chapter 29:15; Nyikadzino, 2022). As provided in section 140 of the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15), "A council shall not discharge a senior official unless the Local Government Board has approved the discharge". It has eroded local autonomy, a local government's degree of freedom in making fundamental political, administrative, fiscal and economic decisions within their areas of jurisdiction (De Visser, 2005), which is critical for local government to deal with ethical decisions decisively (Nyikadzino, 2022). It also limits the extent to which councils can institute disciplinary measures against unethical senior employees. Under such circumstances, corrupt and unethical local government senior managers who are aligned with the ruling party can easily be protected and go unpunished. Thus, without sufficient and real autonomy, local governments cannot adequately and comprehensively respond to ethical violations.

Political interference in local government affairs gave birth to powerful political elites who can wantonly violate and disregard local by-laws and procedures. Local governance in Zimbabwe has been politicized in ways that promote unethical practices and discourage ethical behaviors. A case in point is the widespread land grabs by politically connected land barons (Muchadenyika &



Williams, 2017; Muchadenyika, 2015). Center-local relations complexities and tensions resulted in the mushrooming of politically linked and associated housing developments in most local authorities, particularly major cities. As Muchadenyika & Williams (2017) aptly pointed out, political elites across local governments have usurped local government powers and responsibilities to allocate land for residential, industrial and commercial use. Muchanyenyika & Williams (2017) found that housing cooperatives linked to political elites and parties wantonly pass urban planning rules and procedures. Local government political capture in land allocation and planning has manifested in many unplanned and informal settlements that characterize Zimbabwe's major cities, namely, Harare, Chitungwiza, Bulawayo and Mutare, to mention a few.

Unethical Leadership. Reports of unethical behaviors among councilors, who happen to be the chief policy and decision-makers at local government levels, pose an existential threat to the local government's endeavor to eliminate unethical conduct. Councilors have been accused of meddling in local government administrative processes. Mukucha (2022) highlighted several cases in which councilors were accused of manipulating administrative decisions regarding human resources management and housing policies. Chitungwiza Municipality has been one of the local governments that have been in the spotlight over corruption cases involving councilors. An article by Murwira (2021) highlighted massive corruption and inappropriate behaviors of councilors in stand allocation in Chitungwiza. A ZACC official confirmed cases of corruption in Chitungwiza, explaining that "Yes, we have several that we are investigating. Arrests have been made in some cases, and many more are at different stages of investigation. I will not go into specifics, but suffice it to say several councilors and officials are being caught with their hands in the cookie jar, thereby compromising service delivery" (Murwira, 2021).

Due to rampant cases of corruption, Chitungwiza Municipality was forced to stop allocations of stands. Stand allocation scandals are, however, not peculiar to Chitungwiza Municipality; there are also similar allegations in Gweru City Council, where a councilor was alleged to have allocated residential stands to his children, one of whom is a minor aged five years (Musiiwa, 2020). Madzianike (2023) also reported a case involving five Harare City Council councilors, who were members of the Finance and Development Committee, who were alleged to have allocated themselves, other councilors and senior council officials, a Member of Parliament and unregistered companies commercial and industrial stands without following procedures. Unsurprisingly, the Afrobarometer (2022) survey revealed high-level perceptions of corruption among local government councilors. The survey found that eight in 10 citizens perceive most/all councilors (37%) or some of the councilors (43%) as corrupt. Cumulatively, 80% of the respondents suspected that their councilors were involved in corruption. The preceding discussion shows that councilors have been found wanting in terms of ethical behavior. Zimbabwe lacks councilors who act as true servant leaders who prioritize community needs before their own. Nyikadzino (2022) attributed high levels of corruption among councilors to the caliber and qualifications of Zimbabwean councilors. According to Nyikadzino (2022:46), most councilors in Zimbabwe have nothing to offer but more to gain, and current council members see the role of a councilor as a means of employment and a way to accumulate properties, rather than as a chance to serve the community.

Salary Arrears and Discontentment. Studies have shown an inextricable linkage between salary and the ethical conduct and behavior of civil servants (Khanal, Gupta & Bhattarai, 2023). Although a salary increment alone cannot guarantee ethical behavior, a competitive salary can significantly deter unethical behavior and corruption. This article found that unethical behavior and corruption find fertile breeding grounds in organizations with salary arrears and discontentment. Employees with competitive salaries may champion ethical practices and integrity. According to



Khanal et al. (2023:7), “Inadequately paid civil servants are more likely to engage in illegal and unethical rent-seeking, whereas well-paid civil servants provide less corrupt and more ethical public services.” However, in most Zimbabwean local authorities, salary discontent has had a damaging effect on the ethical behavior of local government officials (Karengazeka, 2019; Kachiko, 2022). Media reports have shown that several local authorities in Zimbabwe are struggling to remunerate their employee competitively. Harare City Council (HCC), the capital city, is one of the major councils struggling to meet salary obligations. An HCC councilor quoted in Chidakwa (2023) revealed that due to the council’s inability to pay employees, employees were earning pitiful wages. In support of the preceding excerpt, Karengazeka (2019) indicated that life for HCC employees has become a nightmare due to non-payment of salaries. An employee quoted in Karengazeka (2019) narrated, “Our situation is very sad as workers because we have gone for almost three months without pay. We have many obligations as individuals, which we are failing to meet due to the non-payment of our salaries. We wonder how our employer expects us to report for work every day under such circumstances”.

Employees in Chitungwiza Municipality (CM) are worse off. It is alleged that CM employees have gone for nearly four years without receiving full salaries (Chidakwa, 2020; Kachiko, 2022). The Mutare City Council (MCC) had also accumulated salary arrears between 2013 and 2021 (Bande, 2022). Rural district councils are not an exception. Tsholotsho Rural District Council was also in salary arrears (Auditor General, 2020). The need for survival against the background of non-payment of salaries has forced council employees to engage in unethical behaviors. For instance, there have been reported cases of CM employees engaging in private or side jobs during working hours. According to Kachiko, plumbers in CM charge residents between US\$20 and US\$50 for attending to sewer blockages, depending on the scope of work to be done. A study by Manyaya et al. (2016) revealed cases in which CM employees ended up abusing council vehicles, tools and resources to earn a living. The MCC's 2023 Client Satisfaction Survey, conducted by Nyikadzino & Murwira (2023), revealed cases where municipal police officers and debt collectors were asking for bribes from defaulters. There were also reports of council nurses in HCC indulging in corrupt activities and focusing their attention on patients who can give them some form of reward (Karengazeka, 2019). Suburban (2021) also reported cases in which HCC’s waste management workers were begging for money or food from residents in the course of collecting refuse. The HCC management acknowledges delays in processing salaries, citing financial constraints. The town clerk for HCC, quoted in Gore (2023), explained that.

For the first time in many years, we are failing to pay salaries on time. For you to fully appreciate the crisis we are currently facing, our collection efficiency is at 35 percent, and we are owed \$317 billion. In summary, low collection efficiency has a significant impact on service delivery by reducing revenue, leading to inefficient resource allocation, inability to meet service demands, inability to invest in infrastructure, and increased debt.

The salary situation in most local authorities in Zimbabwe perpetuates unethical conduct. The situation presents a major hurdle in the local government's endeavor to inspire and institutionalize ethics. Local authorities should confront salary arrears and motivation-related challenges head-on to create a conducive environment for promoting ethical behavior. As Khanal et al. (2023:7) rightfully indicated, government employees who have high expectations but receive low pay may turn to illegal means to obtain greater compensation than what is permitted by law, which can lead to corruption. Thus, underpaid and demotivated employees tend to engage in corrupt and other unethical activities to maintain their living standards.

Insights Towards Building Ethics in Zimbabwe's Local Governments. Effective leadership is widely viewed as an important ingredient in institutionalizing ethics and trust (Emerson, 2018; Kamara, 2017). According to Govender, Jahed & Auriacombe (2023), the implementation of ethical standards and practices calls for strong and effective leadership, direction and control from both political office-bearers and officials. Ethics in Zimbabwean local governments will not be achieved by chance; it requires leadership commitment. Given the complexities associated with building ethics, local governments should, first and foremost, build the necessary leadership capacity through leadership capacity-building programs. Such programs provide local administrative and political leadership with the skills required to design, implement and evaluate reforms on ethics and integrity. Leadership capacity-building programs should also focus on ethics. As Nyikadzino (2022) rightfully pointed out, ethical and servant leaders are indispensable for local governments to build ethics and regain public trust. From a principles-based perspective, councilors should be trained on ethics and how unethical behavior among councilors tarnishes the local government's reputation.

Enforcement of ethics in local government, as is the case with other public organizations, requires political will and commitment. Councilors, as local policymakers, should be exemplary. They should maintain high ethical standards in discharging their council duties. Policymakers should demonstrate their commitment to ethics by creating legislative and institutional frameworks that institutionalize and reinforce ethical practices and behaviors (OECD, 2023). Local governments should develop legal frameworks that provide clear guidelines on how unethical conduct will be investigated, disciplined and, where necessary, prosecuted. The legal framework should promote accountability and transparency and protect whistle-blowers against victimization. Councils should also demonstrate their commitment to ethics by channeling adequate resources towards the implementation of ethics-related programming. Local government managers should also play an influential role in championing ethics. Just like councilors, they should be exemplary. They should serve as role models in ethics by exercising their leadership roles professionally, transparently and in an accountable manner. The interface between managers and political leaders affects ethics profoundly. Therefore, the politics-administration interface should be handled in a way that promotes ethics.

To promote ethical behavior, local governments in collaboration with the parent ministry should strengthen and enforce ethical codes. Codes of conduct for councilors, for instance, are critical in clearly and openly mapping out standards that councilors must adhere to in discharging their duties (<https://www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk/codes-of-conduct>). Councilors who breach the code of conduct should be censured, suspended, and, in serious cases, disqualified. It is imperative to note that the responsive, transparency and accountability challenges are not necessarily a result of weaknesses in the ethical code but rather poor implementation and enforcement thereof (Msenge & Nzewi, 2021). Therefore, the central government, through its supervisory powers, should enhance the enforcement of ethical codes, standards and rules. There is, however, a need to guard their implementation against political manipulations. Without such measures, ethical codes can be manipulated for political gains, especially in contexts of vertically divided authority, as is the case in Zimbabwe.

The central government and local government, in the spirit of cooperative and collaborative governance, should develop and implement workplace ethics training and awareness across local governments. As Vyas-Doogapersad & Ababio (2010:424) aptly pointed out, "education and training are undoubtedly the backbone of sensitizing and creating awareness of a policy issue". Local governments can partner with universities within their respective localities or provinces in implementing such training and awareness programs. The training programs should be

comprehensive and holistic enough to cover all levels, from counselors to low-level employees, and all facets of ethics. Councilors and all employees should be ethically conscious. Such training programs should be accompanied by strong monitoring and evaluation of ethical behavior. Strict monitoring helps enhance adherence to the ethical code of conduct by both councilors and local government officials. As part of monitoring and demonstrating a commitment to ethics, the local government in Zimbabwe should consider the establishment of an ethics office. Such an office helps to ensure strong ethical governance and provides advice on priority ethical matters (Govender, Jahed & Auriacombe, 2023). Through the ethics office, local governments can develop and implement programs and initiatives to ensure compliance with ethics standards, procedures, rules and regulations.

In light of section 276(1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), the central government should capacitate local government and allow them the space to govern on their initiatives the affairs of the people within their areas. Local governments should be empowered to deal with ethical violations at the local level decisively. It should be accompanied by deliberate reform efforts to separate politics and administration, as advocated by the father of public administration (Woodrow Wilson). The focus should be placed on creating powerful institutions rather than individuals. As Majam (2021:50) in Govender, Jahed & Auriacombe (2023:169) recommends, to better fulfill their roles and responsibilities, local governments should be strengthened. Examples of these include safeguarding and maximizing organizational performance and community wealth, managing assets and financial resources, and resolving social and economic issues honestly and morally by building important connections that will benefit communities. They should be given the decision space to utilize their skills, knowledge, competencies, expertise and abilities in designing and implementing policies that will transform their respective localities.

Local authorities in Zimbabwe should conduct employee satisfaction surveys to collect systematic data on employees' perceptions of the working environment and remuneration-related matters. Based on the findings of employee satisfaction surveys, local governments should develop tailored and context-specific strategies to improve the working conditions and remuneration of local government employees. As cited by Vyas-Doorgapersad & Ababio (2010:424), "a policy on attractive remuneration is needed for purposes of creating committed and dedicated public officials". Local governments should handle conditions of service and human resources management processes in a way that enhances ethical conduct. Local government employment conditions, recruitment and selection, promotion, disciplining and other human resources management processes should comply and be consistent with basic principles, such as professionalism, transparency and meritocracy. Adherence to the basic principles of administration and human resources management helps institutionalize ethics and integrity in the public sector (OECD, 2023)

CONCLUSION

Ethical behavior in devolved local government is the backbone of good local governance and improved service delivery. Sound ethical governance in local government promotes effective local government management and governance and ultimately the well-being of local citizens (Govender, Jahed & Auriacombe, 2023). However, although the Government of Zimbabwe has adopted several constitutional, legislative, and institutional frameworks and initiatives to promote ethical behavior (integrity, accountability, honesty, transparency, impartiality, meritocracy and professionalism) in local government and the public service in general, ethical violations continue unabated. Ethical violations in local government are complex and have proved to be a wicked policy problem. This article found three main factors threatening the promotion of ethics in Zimbabwe's local



government, namely power politics and political interference, unethical leadership and salary arrears and discontentment. These aspects directly affect the development and implementation of reforms aimed at eliminating unethical behavior and practices in local government. Therefore, local government practitioners, researchers and policymakers should carefully consider and confront these forces in building and promoting ethics in local government. An understanding of the causes of unethical conduct in local government serves as an important step in developing tailored responses that avoid the recurrence of undesirable behaviors. Practicing high ethical standards in local government is essential and promotes efficient, economic and effective resource utilization. However, it is important to note that promoting a culture of ethics in local government will not be an overnight achievement; it requires collaborative and deliberate efforts. Local government alone will not resolve the challenge; it requires a multisectoral, multi-pronged, comprehensive and holistic approach that covers all the fundamental elements of ethics.

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