

LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN ZIMBABWEAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES: THE CASE OF HARARE AND MASVINGO URBAN MUNICIPALITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study is an analysis of local governance and service provision in the Zimbabwean urban communities using Harare and Masvingo municipalities as case studies. It looks at the patterns of municipal service provision and residents' access to these services. The study hypothesises that there is a general decline of municipal service delivery in Zimbabwe's urban local authorities. The study argues that poor governance of urban local authorities affects the service delivery in the municipalities. The major research objectives of the study were to explore the extent to which residents are involved in the service provision decision-making processes in the two cities of Harare and Masvingo; to give an outline of the challenges faced by each of the two cities' authorities in the provision of services to the public; and to draw lessons from the governance and service provision experiences of the two local authorities. Research methods involved both a theoretical review and an empirical study based on case studies, qualitative and exploratory approaches. The studied municipalities were found lacking in terms of involvement of residents in municipal governance issues and service delivery. Among other things, the study recommends full involvement of all stakeholders in the municipal governance processes.

Keywords: Governance, Harare, Masvingo, Service delivery, Local authority, Urban municipalities.

Contribution/ Originality

This study will contribute insight into both the debate and practice of local governance. It will contribute to the understanding of governance regimes that underlie the provision of services to residents of the selected cases. Through better understanding of the complexity and dynamics of local governance and service provision in the two cities of Harare and Masvingo, the study will provide lessons learnt on potentially the most critical issues as a basis for future reforms and practices in the governance and services provision in urban local authorities.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to [Chatiza \(2010\)](#), since 1980 a number of local government reforms have been instituted and to date there are thirty two (32) Urban Councils which have been established

throughout the country in terms of the Urban Councils Act [Chapter 29:15]. While these are established under the same Act, urban councils in Zimbabwe have been accorded different status as tabulated in Table 1.

The hierarchical organisation of urban councils in Zimbabwe is based mainly on size and functions (Chakaipa, 2010). The lowest on the hierarchy of urban local authorities are local boards established in settlements that have very small populations but have a potential to grow into big urban centres. The second on the hierarchy is town councils which are centres that have grown from service centres in the rural areas to a size sufficient for them to stand alone. Municipalities own land within their boundaries, whereas local boards and town councils do not. The land owning councils can dispose of land to prospective developers and generate revenue.

Local boards, town councils, municipalities and cities have different compositions of the policy making body and management. Town councils and local boards have chairpersons and secretaries, while municipalities and cities have mayors and town clerks as heads of the policy making body and management respectively. According to the Urban Councils Act [Chapter 29:15], town secretaries and town clerks are the heads of administration deputized by different heads of departments. The executive management is responsible for the implementation of council decisions and for the day to day running of council affairs.

Table-1. Categories of urban councils in Zimbabwe

Cities	Municipalities	Towns	Local Boards	Total
Harare	Gwanda	Rusape	Epworth	
Bulawayo	Redcliff	Karoi	Ruwa	
Gweru	Chegutu	Chiredzi	Hwange	
Mutare	Chinhoyi	Norton	Chirundu	
Kadoma	Kariba	Zvishavane	Lupane	
Kwekwe	Marondera	Shurugwi		
Masvingo	Chitungwiza	Plumtree		
	Bindura	Chipinge		
	Victoria Falls	Gokwe		
		Beitbridge		
		Mvurwi		
7	9	11	5	32

(Source: Chatiza (2010))

Part V of the Urban Councils Act [Chapter 29:15] lays out the election system of urban councils. Most urban councils are divided into wards for the purpose of electing councillors. Local boards and town councils are headed by chairpersons, and municipalities and cities are headed by mayors who are elected from among the councillors by the councillors at their first meeting following a general election. In Zimbabwe, local government general elections are held every four years.

The legislation governing the operations of urban councils confers on them a wide range of powers, which include:

- water for domestic, commercial or industrial areas;

- hospitals, clinics, ambulances, maternity and child welfare;
- schools, libraries, theatres and musical and scientific institutions;
- provision of housing and transport facilities;
- construction and maintenance of drains, sewers, bridges, parking;
- cleansing and refuse removal disposal;
- prevention of air, land and water pollution;
- operation of fire brigades and municipal police;
- street lighting;
- public places;
- provision of parks; and
- recreation grounds and open spaces.

Financing and revenue collection in urban local authorities is regulated by the Urban Councils Act [Chapter 29:15] and the parent ministry. The main sources of revenue of urban councils in Zimbabwe are:

- the levying of assessment rates on property;
- receipts from 'trading' accounts like sale of water;
- tariffs or fees for services rendered;
- education and health grants as well as road grants for roads in their areas;
- loans for capital works from central government through the national housing fund in respect of housing, general loan fund in respect of other infrastructure like water and sewerage reticulation, roads and storm water drainage; and
- loans from the open market after obtaining necessary borrowing powers from the Minister.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The state of service delivery in municipal areas directly impacts on residents' lives. In Zimbabwe, since the turn of the millennium, there have been widespread complaints over municipal and local governance service delivery. Several stakeholders (among them municipal residents' associations, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) community, the Minister of Local Government (Dr. Chombo), among many others) have also testified to the fact that there has been a general decline in municipal service delivery and capital development in local authority governed areas. In extreme cases like Harare, Chitungwiza, Bindura and Redcliff, the minister has been compelled at times to dismiss the head of council, head of administration, or senior officials of council, or even all of them. In most such cases, allegations centred around poor service delivery, maladministration, abuse of public funds, abuse of authority or office, fraudulent dealings and corrupt tendencies. Thus the poor state of service delivery and governance in Zimbabwe's urban local authorities prompted us to seek to establish the real state of affairs on the ground, and, whether or not there is a relationship between governance and service delivery in urban local authorities.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

- to explore the extent to which residents are involved in service provision decision-making processes in the two cities of Harare and Masvingo;
- to determine the state and level of service provision in the two cities of Harare and Masvingo;
- to give an outline of the challenges faced by each of the two cities' authorities in the provision of services to the public; and
- to draw lessons from the governance and service provision experiences of the two local authorities.

4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In line with the above research questions and objectives the following hypotheses were formulated as guidelines around which this study involves:

- there is a general decline of municipal service delivery in Zimbabwe's urban local authorities; and
- poor governance of urban local authorities affects the service delivery of these institutions.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

This study is based on the case study approach. A variety of research methods and data sources were used to ensure a balanced analysis and evaluation of the problem. The research included an extensive review of theoretical literature as well as the use of empirical methodology. The scope of the empirical investigation was limited to the cities of Harare and Masvingo in Zimbabwe. The study was largely based on qualitative design with some elements of quantitative to cater for both soft (emotional) issues and hard (numerical) issues. For data collection, interviews (with municipal management representatives), questionnaires and experiential observation were used as the major research tools. The population of this study included municipal managers, municipal workers and residents of the two local authorities. Because of the size of the population, time and other research resource limitations, it was not feasible to include the whole population in the study. Therefore, in this regard only one hundred (100) people in Harare and fifty (50) people in Masvingo were sampled for this study. The following table indicates the distribution of the sample.

Table-2.Distribution of the sample

	Male		Female		Totals	
	Harare	Masvingo	Harare	Masvingo	Harare	Masvingo
Municipal managers	4	2	2	2	6	4
Municipal workers	10	5	15	10	25	15
Residents	30	15	39	16	45	31
Totals	44	23	56	27	100	50

(Source: primary data)

6. THE CONCEPT OF GOVERNANCE

According to [Musingafi \(2012\)](#), there is controversy on the definition and understanding of governance among academics, theorists, politicians, development practitioners and other interested parties. Therefore, it is difficult to come up with a precise and universally accepted definition of governance. Different people use the notion differently, relating it to different cultural contexts. The World Water Assessment Programme ([WWAP/ UNESCO, 2003](#)) argued that some may see governance as essentially preoccupied with questions of financial accountability and administrative efficiency. Others may focus on broader political concerns related to democracy, human rights and participatory processes. There are those who look at governance with a focus on the relationship between the political administrative and the ecological systems. Other approaches see governance entirely in terms of management and the operation and maintenance of infrastructure and service.

[Kasambira and Nyamuda \(2001\)](#) see the work of governance as giving direction to the organisation; deciding how the organisation will be managed; holding the final authority and responsibility for the organisation; planning on how to access and locate scarce resources; and acting as the last court of appeal or decision making body when management reaches a deadlock. These are broad functions that require a wide understanding of governance. According to [Mäki \(2008\)](#) governance deals with the processes and systems by which an organisation or society operates. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as captured by the World Water Assessment Programme ([WWAP/ UNESCO, 2003](#)) is more detailed in that it sees governance as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.

[Bruhn \(2009\)](#) thinks that governance focuses on how decisions which are important to a society or an organisation are made or taken. It helps define who should have power and why, who should have voice in decision making, and how account should be rendered. This definition covers both the two main schools of thought on governance, namely the traditional and the contemporary views, and therefore incorporates all the controversies referred to above.

6.1. The Traditional View of Governance

According to [Musingafi \(2012\)](#), the traditional view of governance is set in such a way that the masses carry the weight of whatever decision made by those at the top of the hierarchy. Rather than governing common pool resources, it is the masses that are governed. They may be involved in choosing the government through elections but this does not mean they are directly involved in policy formulation and public decision making. In most cases their views on common pool resources are disregarded. The attitude is that government knows better than anyone else what the masses need.

According to [Assaduzzaman \(2009\)](#) the situation outlined above leads to excessive political influence and bureaucratic control over local governance. This scenario has been blamed for

conditions of massive poverty, corruption, and economic stagnation, lack of political stability, confused priorities and violation of human rights especially in third world countries (Jreisat, 2004). Werlinas captured by Jreisat (2004) notes that the primary reason for the wealth or poverty of a nation is in its governance not its natural resources. In fact resistance by most developing countries to adapt to contemporary practice has worsened the sorry state in these economies.

6.2. The Contemporary View of Governance

The philosophy behind the contemporary thinking on governance is summarized by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle when he argued that if liberty and equality as is thought by some are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost (Anon, 2000). Thus despite the recently expressed interest in the new governance concept, neither the term nor the concept is new.

Stoker (1998) asserts that although there is still diversity on what governance means, 'there is a baseline agreement that governance refers to the development of the governing styles in which the boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred'. Stoker (Ibid) discussed the theory of governance under the following five propositions:

- governance refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond government;
- governance identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues;
- governance identifies the power dependence involved in the relationships between institutions involved in collective action;
- governance is about autonomous self-governing networks of actors; and
- governance recognizes the capacity to get things done which does not rest on the power of government to command or use its authority.

Peters (2001) as captured in Assaduzzaman (2009), came up with four models of contemporary governance: the market model which claims that the private sector can provide better services than the traditional public sector; the participatory state model which emphasizes on greater individual and collective participation by segments of government organizations that have been commonly excluded from decision making; the flexible government model which argues that the government should be contextual and flexible and finally the deregulated government model which emphasizes that the government should focus on less bureaucratic control, more managerial freedom and recommendations based on societal needs and collective decision making.

7. PUBLIC SERVICES

Public services include water, wastewater, solid waste, heating, transport and other related services that are provided by national and local governments to residents in their areas of jurisdiction. According to Bachmann and MacCleary (2006), the ideal situation requires that

authorities should ensure adequate provision of these services. Nonetheless, many national and sub-national governments are found lacking in as far as provision of these services is concerned. [Bachmann and MacCleery \(2006\)](#) observe that quality public services support the economic development of local areas, while poor levels of service undermine quality of life in these local areas, retard economic growth, and erode trust between citizens and local governments.

Local authorities should therefore make sure that people in their areas have at least the basic services they need, some of which outlined above. These services have a direct and immediate effect on the quality of the lives of the people in that community. For example, if the water that is provided is of a poor quality or refuse is not collected regularly, it will contribute to the creation of unhealthy and unsafe living environments. Poor services can also make it difficult to attract business or industry to an area and will limit job opportunities for residents.

8. LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ZIMBABWE

[Chakaipa \(2010\)](#) defines local government as a decentralised level of government, democratically established, charged with a service delivery mandate, comprised of legal entities with defined powers, charged with jurisdiction over a particular area within the limits set by national legislation and largely self-financing. As observed by Chakaipa (Ibid), the theoretical and conceptual argument for local government is that, as the level closest to the people, it is able to better articulate and respond to local needs. Local government is also better placed to harness both local knowledge and effort in the execution of its mandates. The competencies assigned to local government are not only local in nature but have a direct bearing on the day to day lives of local communities. Local government provides a means for the ordinary citizen to take part in public affairs at local level. Citizens have an opportunity through their vote to exercise a decisive influence on the general direction of local affairs. Thus the *raison d'être* for the establishment of local government by many governments is:

- provision of services at affordable cost to local communities in a more responsive and efficient manner;
- promotion of public participation in government as a means of enabling and encouraging people to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens; and
- to regulate the conduct of individuals and organizations in areas under their jurisdiction ([Chakaipa, 2010](#)).

[Musingafi \(2012\)](#) defines local government as the creation of participatory and democratically elected structures that can identify with the needs of the people at grassroots level and ensure the translation of those needs into actual provision and maintenance of essential services and infrastructure on a sustainable basis. Local government is viewed as the establishment of a lower sphere of governance for the purpose of executing functions that central government is too far removed to carry out effectively. Local government being the level closest to the people is able to better articulate and respond to local needs. It is also better placed to harness both local knowledge and effort in the execution of its mandates. The competencies assigned to local

government in Zimbabwe are not only local in nature but have a direct bearing on the day to day lives of local communities.

Local government in Zimbabwe refers to corporate bodies that may sue or be sued in their own right. Sections 227 to 232 of the Urban Councils Act [Chapter 29:15] and Part xv of the Rural District Councils Act [Chapter 29:13] provide for councils to make by-laws, regulations and resolutions to deal with a wide range of local planning, development, and control concerns of the area under their jurisdiction. Other than parliament, councils are the other institutions which can make laws binding on local residents. These laws have to be adopted within the national legislative framework.

The heading to section 314 of the Urban Councils Act [Chapter 29:15] states that, the minister may reverse, suspend, rescind resolutions, decisions, and so forth, of councils. For example, the minister exercised such powers in the instance when the City of Harare was under a commission. The minister issued a circular reversing the Harare City Council's decision to reinstate the director of housing, director of engineering, and city treasurer. This directive, however, proved to be costly as a lot of revenue was wasted paying suspended staff. It has been argued that for governance function to be effectively fulfilled, local authorities should be seen as a sphere of government (see (Chakaipa, 2010; Musingafi, 2012)). The provision of local government as a distinct sphere of government will elevate councils amongst the family of public institutions. Once this has been done, central government can neither unilaterally abolish local authorities nor change the nature of a particular local authority.

9. SERVICE PROVISION IN URBAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ZIMBABWE

The mandated functions and responsibilities of local authorities in Zimbabwe can be captured as follows: levying and collecting of local taxes for themselves, regulation of business activities within their respective territorial jurisdictions, administration of garbage collection, providing and maintaining of public cemeteries, public markets and storehouses.

Service provision among local authorities in Zimbabwe is a matter of trying to do something in a crisis situation. Local officials are of course well aware of the situation they face across a variety of service areas. The most important services provided by local authorities are water and sanitation, refuse collection, road maintenance and primary health care. The main constraints are the lack of financial resources to make improvement, short supply of functioning equipment and machinery and lack of availability of material stocks, pipes, tanks, lights and other necessary supplies (Chakaipa, 2010).

10. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This section looks at field results of the study.

10.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Of the sampled one hundred and fifty (150) respondents, one hundred and seven (67) were males and one hundred and forty three (83) were females (see Table 2 above).

Figure-1.shows that the majority of those who participated in this survey are aged thirty five (35) and below with the majority being in the age group 25-35.

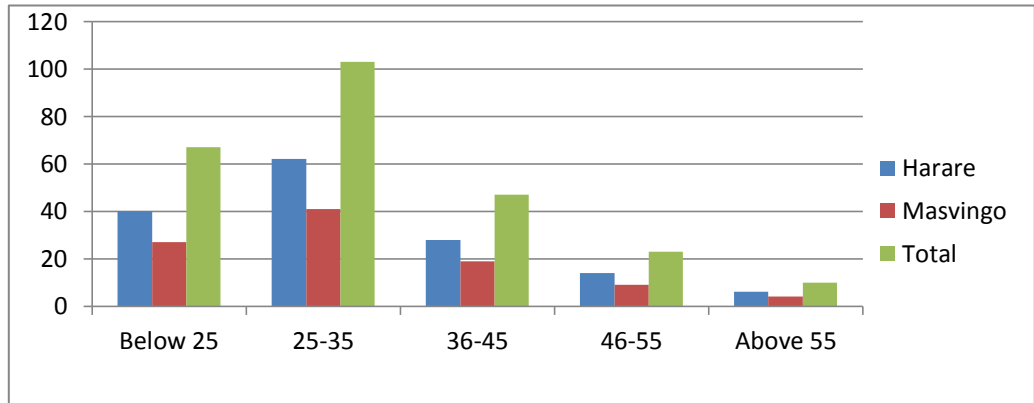


Figure-1.Age distribution of respondents

(Source: Primary data)

10.2 Residents' Involvement in Governance and Service Delivery Decision Making

The first research objective of this study was to measure the extent to which residents are involved in municipal decision making processes to ensure ownership, enlightened and improved service provision. To what extent are residents involved in the formulation and adoption of bylaws and policies that govern their access to services in the cities of Harare and Masvingo?

All the interviews showed that residents in both cities are not fully involved in the service provision decision-making processes. A management representative in the City of Masvingo confessed, 'Currently there is no direct involvement of residents'. This view was supported by all management representatives from both cities. All doubted the feasibility of 'all residents' involvement' in service provision decision-making. The only way to involve residents, according to the interviewees, was through their councillors. Thus, from a general point of view, residents were represented indirectly by their councillors. When the researchers suggested to these authorities that they could also ascertain residents' ideas through involvement of their associations, meetings, suggestion boxes, surveys, awareness campaigns and training workshops, the reply was that suggestion boxes and meetings were already part of the communication channels with residents. All the municipalities have wards and ward committees led by an appointed or elected councillor. It is the responsibility of the councillors to tape residents' views and bring them for consideration at municipal meetings and discussion sessions. The interviewees claimed that residents associations were too militant to be involved in municipal affairs. All interviewees thought surveys were quite acceptable but expensive for the municipalities.

10.3. The State and Level of Service Provision in the Two Cities of Harare and Masvingo

On responsiveness to community queries about services, ratings for the two cities were as in Figure 2.

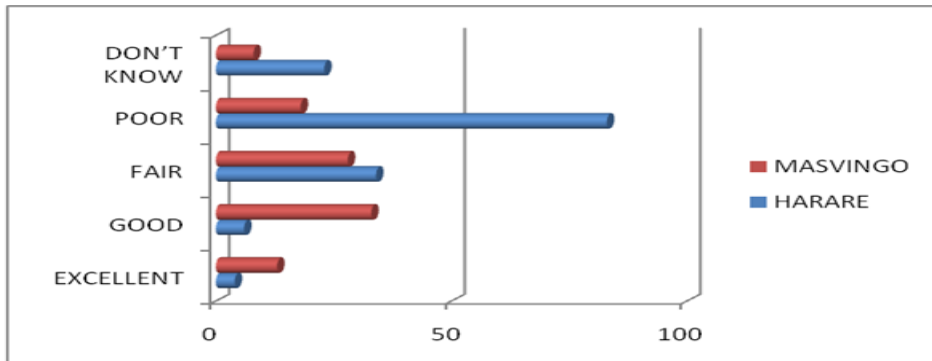


Figure-2. Municipality responsiveness to queries

(Source: primary data)

The general impression was that service provision is on the decline and is dissatisfying to residents. Respondents indicated that their municipalities are failing to meet the needs of the rate payers. Some residents complained that they were not receiving the value of their money. There are many reasons mentioned by respondents from both Masvingo and Harare. Among several reasons for poor service provision, they alleged that there is rampant corruption and nepotism in the municipalities.



Figure-3. Uncollected garbage in Sunningdale

(Source: Primary data)

As residents in the two cities, the researchers also observed that refuse bins are only sparsely located in the city centre. There are no refuse bins in most public places like shopping centres, sports grounds and other recreational centres, bus termini, among many others. The researchers also noted that toilets are inadequate, dirty or not found at these public places. Also very few residents have bins at their houses. This situation results in illegal dumping sites. Residents simply take their solid waste to nearby open spaces (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).



Figure-4.Uncollected garbage in Mbare

(Source: Primary data)

Illegal dumping sites are a common feature at Nenyere, Matapi, Shawasha and Matererini flats as well as in many other places in Harare and Masvingo.

The researchers also observed that in both the two cities, there is inadequate accommodation, inadequate schools, inadequate markets, inadequate home industries and dilapidated social services facilities. Residents complained of rampant corruption within the two cities housing departments. They claimed that residents on the housing waiting list had to pay bribes in order to be given preference in the allocation of houses.

In both cities, the shortage of vending markets results in vendors occupying undesigned spaces and this culminates in running battles with the council police as they try to evict them.

In most parts of the two cities potholes on roads remain unattended. Residents alleged that the municipalities' pothole patching programme is biased towards the low density suburbs. In Harare, residents further complained that some traffic lights had gone for long periods without repairs. They pointed out those malfunctioning traffic lights result in traffic congestion thereby causing accidents.

Respondents also claimed that they sometimes go for a week or even two weeks without water in their houses. Sometimes the municipality simply cuts water supply without giving residents advance communication. This results in residents using contaminated water from open wells and streams which are very far from their residential areas but with high rates of pollution from the industrial areas, grave yards and the scattered dumping areas.



Figure-3. Fetching water for domestic use during water supply interruptions, Mabvuku, Harare.

(Source: Musingafi (2012))

In Harare, sewer pipes burst and blockage sometimes go for weeks without anyone attending to them. Without water in their homes residents also end up using the nearby bushes and open areas for defecation. All this has a ripple effect of widespread outbreak of diseases as in the case of the 2009 cholera outbreak in Harare which ended up spreading throughout the country.



Figure-4. Sewerage system failures in Harare

(Source: Musingafi (2012))

Citizens in both local authorities indicated that they were not satisfied with the services that they are receiving from their municipalities. Some complained about poor billing system, acute water shortages, public market shortages, and inefficiency in refuse removal, suspected corruption and nepotism in the allocation of residential and business stands.

10.4. Challenges Faced By the Two Cities' Authorities in the Provision of Services to the Public

Major challenges in both cities were summarised by one management respondent in the City of Masvingo as follows:

Our major challenges centre on the political environment and the economy of the country. For the past 15 years the economy has been sliding down due to political squabbles. This has resulted in ageing and overused infrastructure (water pipes); inexperienced and underqualified human resources; lack of political will/commitment; and rampant grassroots poverty.

12. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study establishes that residents are not directly involved in the formulation and adoption of service provision policies in both Harare and Masvingo urban municipalities. The argument given is that they are represented by their councillors. Nonetheless, residents feel sidelined and as a result they do not identify with their municipality. Neither do they own decisions taken by the municipality.

The study also established that the governance systems in Harare and Masvingo are poor. This translates into poor service delivery. In fact this study found that both the governance and service delivery systems in the two municipalities are below expectation. Respondents said the systems were characterised by corruption, nepotism and unresponsiveness to residents' problems and queries. Thus the service delivery systems of Harare and Masvingo municipalities are not effective.

Major challenges to service provision in both cities were found to be mainly emanating from the political environment and the economy of the country. For the past 15 years the economy has been sliding down due to political instability. This has resulted in poor services to the public.

From a qualitative view point, this study thus accepts both hypotheses that guide the study:

- there is a general decline of municipal service delivery in Zimbabwe's urban local authorities; and
- poor governance of urban local authorities affects the service delivery of these institutions.

Using the conclusions above as point of reference, this study recommends the following:

- a multi-dimensional stakeholder involvement approach which ensures that all residents have a say in the management and development of municipal governance and service provision should be encouraged;
- the municipalities should, at least, establish clear monitoring and control mechanisms to ensure that malpractices like corruption in the allocation of stands are discouraged; and
- For effective service delivery the local authorities should continuously train their workers in service provision and customer care so that they sell the organisation to residents through improved service delivery.

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