Understanding the Underlying Causes of Corruption and their Implications on Sustainable Service Delivery in Limpopo Province, South Africa

John Mamokhere* and Xolani Thusi†

Abstract

This study intends to understand the underlying causes of corruption and their implications on sustainable service delivery in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Corruption threatens democracy and undermines the provisions of the Constitution. Corrupt practices negatively impact basic services, such as clean water, sanitation, electricity, and employment opportunities. The study uses a qualitative research methodology and the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm to understand the causes of corruption, governance challenges, and poor service delivery. It is found that there is a negative relationship between corruption, governance issues, and sustainable service delivery. The findings suggest that South African municipalities need skilled personnel, oversight, watchdog mechanisms, independent institutions, internal audit, whistleblower protection, and media empowerment to combat corruption and poor governance. Municipalities should adopt e-municipalities (information communication technology) to provide efficient, effective, and sustainable services and further preserve correct financial records.

Keywords: Corruption, Governance, New Public Management, Sustainable Service Delivery, Watchdog, South Africa

* University of Limpopo, Department of Research Administration and Development, Sovenga, Polokwane, 0727, South Africa; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6940-8886; Johnmamokhere@gmail.com.

† University of Limpopo, Department of Public Administration, Turfloop Campus, South Africa; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7316-6165

Background and Introduction

South Africa's local government, established post-apartheid in 1994, is responsible for providing basic services (Jegede & Shikwambane, 2021; Burchardt, 2022). Service delivery is defined in South Africa as the provision of necessities such as water, electricity, sanitary facilities, land, and housing (Molina et al., 2017). Unfortunately, the government's delivery and upkeep of essential services is unstable, seriously disrupting or endangering large populations of citizens. As a result, there have been more "service delivery protests" in recent years from 2004-2022, or rallies that demand better service delivery (Mamokhere, 2023). Similarly, Naidoo et al. (2018) indicate that "globally, local municipalities are facing challenges in meeting their mandate of providing basic services that conform to the expectations of communities." However, the study by Mamokhere (2023) further concurs that there are underlying factors in service delivery protests, such as poor governance, corruption, nepotism, poor governance, political instability, and interference.

Corruption is a powerful, sinister, and immoral practice that often stems from poor governance in developing countries (Underkuffler, 2013). Public accountability in national, provincial, and local municipalities is crucial for reducing corruption in democratic South Africa (Mhango et al., 2018). Service delivery, defined by substantial financial commitments and investments, could lure corrupt groups. Corruption challenges can arise at the procurement stage, such as bribery and bribery schemes, which can hinder access to clean water and sanitation services (Ardigó et al., 2017). The following research objective guides this study:

- The research objective of this study is to identify the underlying causes of corruption and their implications on sustainable service delivery in Limpopo Province of South Africa.

Research Problematisation

Corruption and poor governance are global issues with varying impacts among countries (Skenjana et al., 2019). Its consequences have far-reaching implications, hindering local and national economic development. Studies argue that corruption is

undermining the principles of good governance. The destabilizing impact of corruption erodes trust and weakens democratic governance, as noted by (Mamokhere, 2022; Mamokhere, 2023). Furthermore, Madonsela (2010) emphasizes that corruption hampers economic development and growth by diverting resources from essential developmental initiatives for personal gains. This phenomenon leads to poor service delivery, inefficiency in resource utilization, and increased costs. Addressing corruption becomes crucial for promoting effective governance and sustainable development. Effective service delivery is crucial for residents due to the significant poverty and lack of employment opportunities in South Africa (Thusi et al., 2023).

The problem statement to be addressed in this case study is exploring and analysing the nexus between corruption, governance challenges, and service delivery within South African municipalities, focusing specifically on the Limpopo Province. The study aims to understand the causes of corrupt practices and their collective implication on the provision of public services at the local level. The study further identifies potential resolutions to improve service delivery in the municipalities.

Research Methodology

This study falls within the broader scope of a qualitative research methodology. Sundani et al. (2022) argue that qualitative research methodology seeks to interpret individuals' experiences and understanding of the social world within their social context as well as review existing documents (Sundani et al., 2022). To address the research problem at hand, a comprehensive literature review is carried out using a qualitative research approach. This methodology was chosen to gather valuable insights and a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of corruption and their implications on sustainable service delivery in South African municipalities. The thematic discourse analysis approach was used to analyse the existing or secondary data. The author was not biased in selecting secondary data to ensure validity and reliability, and different keywords were used to search for relevant data.

Moreover, the data collection process employed a scientific search of relevant articles, reports, chapters, books, and internet

sources about relevant studies within the topic. Various computer-based scientific search engines, including Google Scholar, Google, EbscoHost, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and Scopus, were utilized to extract pertinent data spanning from February 2023 to February 2024. Initially, the study gathered hundreds (100) of studies assumed to be relevant. However, only fifty-five (60) were primarily found suitable and cited. Therefore, forty-one (40) studies were found not relevant based on the criteria set in the study. Data were evaluated based on predetermined inclusion criteria and their relevance.

Additionally, purposive sampling was used to select relevant articles. The study's keywords were instrumental in extracting appropriate data sources. The following criteria were utilized to choose articles for exclusion and inclusion in this study guided by purposive sampling:

- Studies reported on the prevalence of corruption practices and poor governance in South African municipalities.

- Studies that reported on the drive and causes of corruption and poor governance in South African municipalities.

- Studies on the impact and implications of corruption and poor governance on sustainable service delivery in South African Municipalities.

- Primary studies that showed originality in the field of the research.

Theoretical Framework – New Public Management

In this study, corruption has been noted as a persistent challenge at various levels of government, but mostly in metropolitans, districts, and local municipalities. Mismanagement of funds, embezzlement, and bribery have hampered development initiatives and service delivery, diverting resources away from where they are most needed. Therefore, New Public Management (NPM) provides the theoretical foundation for this present study. NPM was first applied in Western nations to restructure the management of state affairs and activities in the public sector, focusing on effectiveness, efficiency, and client satisfaction (Munzhedzi, 2021; Mabunda et al., 2023). Critics have argued that adopting private sector techniques may contradict

public principles like impartiality and justice, which have been the topic of controversy about adopting NPM reforms (Lapuente et al., 2020; Mabunda et al., 2023).

In contrast, academics like Fatile (2014) argue that to enhance service delivery, public institutions should adopt private-sector management approaches, including performance assessment and incentive structures. The introduction of new public management (NPM), a major element of the global public sector reform, has seen accounting play a significant role in resource monitoring and control through its regulatory disclosure and auditing roles (Quah, 2001). Implementing NPM principles in South Africa, such as performance-based contracts and precise service delivery targets, may improve service delivery. With the emphasis on the requirement for an ethical, qualified, and accountable public workforce, NPM has gradually merged principles from economics and the private sector into the administration of public funds (Rulashe et al., 2022; Mabunda et al., 2023). Since the 1980s, NPM has substantially impacted public administration practices and disciplines, attempting to solve problems including resource wasting, lack of trust in bureaucracy, subpar program design, and subpar performance (Pollitt, 2003). Many investigations have been conducted on the frequent service delivery demonstrations in South African towns, with general hypotheses examining possible causes. These theories could not, however, have completely grasped the precise fundamental cause. Thus, NPM's significance stems from its emphasis on effectiveness, efficiency, and economics, all of which are in line with the fundamental ideas of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996). To maintain sustainable service delivery, the Constitution also underlines the significance of ethical, responsible, transparent, and professional behaviour among public authorities (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Despite the nation's progressive legal and constitutional structures, IBOK (2014) has already indicated that the core causes of bad service delivery are complicated and multidimensional. Reddy (2016); Masibigiri (2022) and Shava et al. (2023) emphasized that "to date, several government initiatives have been introduced to address service delivery challenges and the dysfunctionality of municipalities, but none have resulted in any measurable improvement in the local governance emergency." Figure 1 shows

how South African municipalities can use New Public Management (NPM) elements to address corruption issues that have caused havoc across the country. Corruption undermines the sphere's ability to achieve its goal of providing services to South African local communities.

NPM Elements and their Applicability	
Government Organisation	Traditional Structures must be broken down into parts that can function independently. Municipalities in South Africa are experiencing corruption as a result of political interference in administrative matters that should be handled by appointed professionals.
Control of public organisations	South African municipalities lack hands-on professional management, clear goals, and performance measurement, leading to corruption and frequent service delivery protests. Local governments must professionalise the sphere, establish clear goals, and be performance driven.
Control of Measurement outputs	South African municipalities should prioritise results and output control over procedures to prioritise service delivery, which would allow the sphere to diagnose the impact of corrupt acts on municipal performance.
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Management Practices	Local government management ought to benchmark their practices to those of the private sector to address issues of corruption and poor service delivery.
Discipline in use of resources	South African municipalities face significant challenges, including corruption, irregular, fruitless, and wasteful expenditures, which represent a lack of discipline in using resources efficiently. Local governments should establish internal control systems that promote the economic, effective, and efficient use of resources.

Figure 1: New Public Management (NPM) Elements and their Applicability

Literature Review

Conceptualisation and Contextualisation of Corruption, Governance and Service Delivery in South Africa

According to various scholars, corruption is a complex and elusive concept that has been challenging to define. It is often described as the misuse of a position for personal gain or the benefit of individuals or groups. This behaviour includes bribery, embezzlement, fraud, and nepotism (Mabunda & Mamokhere, 2023). Corruption often refers to illegal acts that are only brought to light through scandals, investigations, or prosecutions (Benito, Guillamón, & Bastida, 2015). Corruption is described as abusing public power for private benefit (Rodriguez, Uhlenbruck & Eden, 2005). Corruption is the abuse of delegated powers for private benefit (Benito, Guillamón, & Bastida,2015). Corruption undermines governmental institutions and causes misallocation of government funding (Sinha, Gupta, Shahbaz & Sengupta, 2019). Corruption is a major concern in many modern democracies. It degrades democratic institutions, limits public services, and reduces productivity, hindering economic development (Ferraz & Finan, 2007). The consequences of corruption are more than just a moral issue or a matter of principle. Instead, corruption has far-reaching ramifications for government and society, particularly those elements of society that are most vulnerable: the weak and poor

(Quah, 2001). Corruption can manifest in different forms, such as bribery in business, politics, and sports, as well as political corruption involving government officials' misuse of power and resources for personal gain (Mamokhere, 2023; Mabunda et al., 2023). Nye (1967) defines corruption as the "abuse of entrusted power for private gain," while Transparency International (2017) characterizes it as behaviour deviating from public role duties due to private interests. In South Africa, corruption has significant implications for sustainable service delivery. Service delivery is seen as the distribution of essential services, including water, electricity, sanitary facilities, land, and housing (Molina et al., 2017). For instance, in the provision of healthcare services, poor governance and corruption have led to mismanagement of resources, compromised quality of care, and limited access to healthcare for marginalized populations.

Similarly, corruption affects access to clean water and sanitation by distorting procurement processes and perpetuating inefficiencies. In the provision of electricity service, corruption hinders progress by favouring vested interests and obstructing investment in renewable energy, contributing to problems like extreme load shedding in the country. All these challenges require good governance and ethical leadership to be resolved. Mamokhere & Kgobe (2023) indicate that governance "is the process by which authority is used to manage a nation's economic and social resources for development. The World Bank's emphasis is on "good governance". This governance, with the adjective "good," includes four key elements: sound public sector management (efficiency), accountability and free flow of information (transparency), and a legal framework for development (justice, human rights, and civil liberties)."

Prevalence of Corruption Practices and Poor Governance in South African Municipalities

The prevalence of poor governance and corruption in South African municipalities is a source of worry, impeding effective governance and sustainable service delivery (Mamokhere, 2022; Mamokhere & Kgobe, 2023; Mabunda et al., 2023).

Table 1: Whistle-Blower Reports Relating to Local Government received by Corruption Watch from 2012 -2020
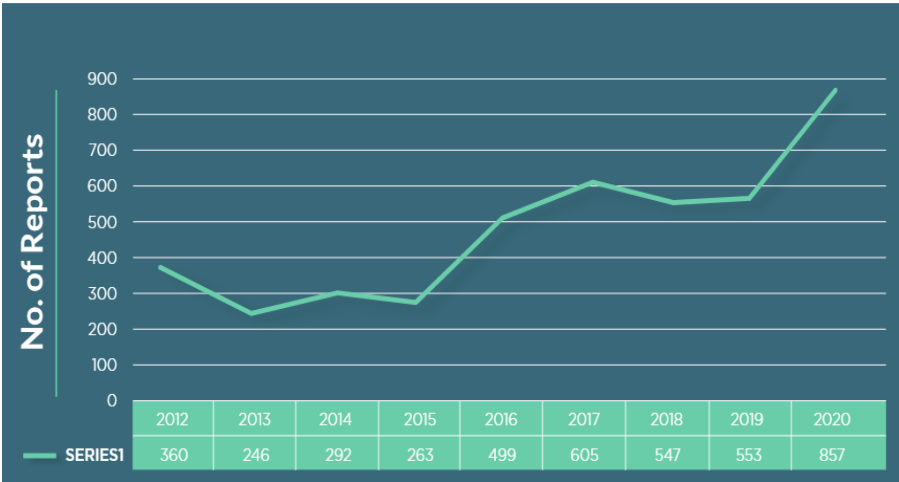
Source: Corruption Watch (2021)

Across the country, according to Corruption Watch (2021), Corruption Watch received a record number of 857 claims from whistle-blowers in 2020 about poor governance and corruption in local government. Provincially, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo municipalities accounted for 11% and 8% of the second and third greatest number of reports, respectively. In South Africa, Gauteng province is the province with the highest prevalence of corruption practices and poor governance, accounting for 41%. Moreover, using Limpopo Province, Polokwane Local Municipality as a case study, it is also reported that the most prevalent type of corruption is bribes, counting 31%, followed by 23% of irregularities in the procurement process, 8% of irregularities in RDP allocation, 5% both in irregularities getting employment and tenders' bribe. The Corruption Watch Report 2021 shows that corruption is prevalent in the country.

Table 2: Repeated Instances of Corruption in Polokwane Local Municipality, Limpopo

TYPE OF CORRUPTION		% OF REPORTS
Bribe		31%
Irregularities in procurement process		23%
Irregularities in RDP houses allocation		8%
Irregularities in getting employment		5%
Bribe for tenders		5%
	LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT/OFFICE	**% OF REPORTS**
POLOKWANE	Office of the municipal manager	30%
	Metro/local police	26%
	Traffic and licensing	13%
	Housing and human settlements	8%
	Public works and infrastructure development	5%

Source: Corruption Watch (2021).

According to the survey, procurement irregularities, bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism were common forms of corruption in municipalities. Furthermore, the South African Auditor-General's Municipal Audit results for 2020/2021 found that irregular expenditure across municipalities totalled R32.06 billion, demonstrating a continuous problem of financial mismanagement and corruption inside these institutions. These numbers highlight the critical need for strong anti-corruption measures and more robust accountability mechanisms to address South African municipalities' prevalent corruption concerns (Auditor-General of South Africa, 2021; Corruption Watch, 2021; Mabunda et al., 2023). Also, "In 2021, the Department of Cooperative Governance reported that 64 municipalities were dysfunctional. This dysfunction is rooted in poor governance, weak institutional capacity, poor financial management, corruption, and political instability. In June 2017, eight municipalities were under administration or provincial intervention.

By June 2021, 23 municipalities were under administration or provincial intervention, which further increased to 33 municipalities by February 2022" (Auditor-General of South Africa, 2021; Mamokhere, 2023; Mabunda et al., 2023).

Underlying Causes of Corruption and Poor Governance in South African Municipalities

Corruption in the South African public sector is driven by various factors, as perceived by different sources. Rose-Ackerman and Coolidge (1995) suggest corrupt groups are attracted to investments and substantial financial commitments in service delivery. Different projects present specific corruption challenges, with bribes being offered or extorted during the procurement stage to secure lucrative contracts. Beneficial ownership schemes are often employed to hide corrupt proceeds. Transparency International (2017) points out that service delivery processes involve complex structures with overlapping responsibilities and weak oversight involving private and public entities. Inadequate regulations, ethics policies, compliance mechanisms, and integrity management systems contribute to enabling corruption. The lack of clear ethical rules, codes of conduct, and training for procurement and service delivery staff also adds to the vulnerability. Ardigó et al. (2017) highlight that those limited resources in service delivery led governments to prioritize tangible goods and services over accountability and control mechanisms. Viewing service delivery as a zero-sum game creates incentives for inferior services or hidden charges for supposedly low-cost services. Mamokhere (2023) and Kgobe et al. (2021) imply that complex structures, bureaucracies, resource competition, and limited oversight make monitoring and implementing accountability mechanisms challenging and costly. This lack of oversight grants significant discretionary power, resulting in arbitrary outcomes and elevating corruption risks in the supply chain. Corruption can be attributed to factors such as poverty, greed, and the insatiable desire to accumulate wealth. Greed plays a significant role in fostering corruption, and it is evident in the lives of many African leaders as they assume office (David, 2012). Satyal (2023) points out that municipal employees who receive poor wage remuneration are more likely to engage in corrupt activities. However, corruption is not solely limited to low-income individuals,

as some who have climbed the socio-economic ladder still engage in fraudulent practices. It is alarming to note that some of the most corrupt individuals in the South African public sector are well-paid top public officials. If top managers in the public sector do not promptly and decisively address crimes, corruption will continue to thrive in the municipalities. Finally, Idonije et al. (2021) acknowledge that corruption poses a serious challenge to the socio-political and economic development of both developed and developing nations, undermining the "No Poverty" goal. Poorer countries tend to have higher levels of corruption compared to wealthier ones. Extensive literature confirms that corruption is particularly prominent during political periods, contributing to the persistence of high poverty levels.

Service delivery is hampered in South African municipalities due to a lack of institutional capacity, which is characterised by problems with nepotism, poor management, incompetence, and inadequate skills (Thusi et al., 2023; Mamokhere, 2023; Mabunda et al., 2023). Managa (2012) asserts that the problem is made worse by the deployment of African National Congress (ANC) cadres. Inadequate capacity and skills within the local government have an impact on municipalities' overall administration, making it more difficult for them to achieve their goals and sustainable service delivery, as defined in the Republic of South Africa's 1996 Constitution. Additionally, Mabeba (2021) highlights that local government is commonly perceived as the most corrupt among different spheres of government, with corruption seen as a select group monopolizing government benefits for their interests. According to the study by Thusi et al. (2023), corruption threatens not only good governance but also democracy and the rule of law, demonstrating unethical leadership and a disregard for good governance ideals. Furthermore, Mngomezulu (2022) underlines that given the contacts between politicians and officials, political intervention in South African local municipalities poses significant issues for the administration of service delivery.

Implications of Corruption and Poor Governance on Sustainable Service Delivery in South Africa

Concerning South African municipalities, this study emphasizes the impact of corruption and bad governance on long-term service delivery. Corruption is a severe issue in Africa that costs the continent's states an estimated 25% of their GDP yearly. Numerous corruption scandals and instances, some of which have been revealed by the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture Mngomezulu (2022), demonstrate the frightening corruption levels in South Africa. The provision of equitable, high-quality healthcare services is hampered in these nations by corruption and poor governance (Naher et al., 2020). Similarly, Mabeba (2021) indicates that "literature can confirm that corruption has a negative impact on the ability of the municipalities in South Africa to provide basic services". Corruption in South Africa significantly hampers poverty alleviation initiatives, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. It diverts resources away from programs aimed at reducing poverty, leading to reduced effectiveness and reach of these initiatives.

Furthermore, corrupt practices hinder economic growth, deter foreign investment, and contribute to income inequality and a lack of job opportunities. Multiple studies have extensively documented the negative impact of corruption and poor governance on poverty in South Africa (Burger, 2012; Nkosi et al., 2019). IOL (2022) and Mamokhere (2023) highlight that corruption in South Africa has caused significant and lasting consequences. The negative impacts include discouraging investments, causing substantial economic losses, worsening poverty and inequality, leading to dysfunctionality in the public sector, triggering service delivery protests and unrest, resulting in human rights violations, and fuelling public frustration. The literature consistently indicates that corruption disproportionately affects the poor (Seopela, 2012; Idonije et al., 2021; 31, Mabeba, 2021). In South Africa, poor governance and corrupt practices by public officials and politicians have contributed to a high unemployment rate. According to Statistics South Africa (2023), the official unemployment rate reached 32.9% in the first quarter of 2023. Decent work opportunities are scarce, and nepotism plays a significant role in employment, as those with connections are favoured for decent job opportunities.

Corruption further reduces employment opportunities, as decisions are often not based on fairness, merit, and equity, leading to denial of opportunities for many citizens (Manyaka et al., 2013; Legodi, 2017). This situation perpetuates inequality and hinders the country's economic well-being. Given all these, Mabeba (2021) indicates that "corruption impacts service delivery in the sense that clientelism, patronage, and bribery compromise the rights of citizens against equal access to municipal services while promoting inequalities that limit constituents' access to basic services like water. Consequently, the poor and voiceless residents are affected the most along the process". In summary, poor governance and corruption contribute to the following issues:

- Poor financial management, e.g., negative audit opinions;
- Number of (violent) service delivery protests;
- Huge service delivery backlogs and inconsistent service delivery.
- High rate of unemployment.
- High-level poverty and inequalities.
- Negative impact on economic growth, e.g., discourage investment/investors in the country.
- Contributes to service delivery protests that undermine democracy's maturity.
- Contribute to existing energy crises such as load-shedding.
- Insufficient municipal capacity due to lack of scarce skills.
- Poor compliance with the legislative and regulatory frameworks for municipalities.

Potential Resolutions to Address Corruption, Poor Governance Issues, and Service Delivery backlogs in South African Municipalities.

Most municipalities frequently experience corruption, financial mismanagement, and noncompliance with financial regulations. As a result, these lead to poor performance, which compromises the provision of basic services. Consequently, this study identifies viable answers to these problems. The following are some of the potential resolutions which can be applied in different municipalities:

Artificial Intelligence Technology for Integrity, Trust and Anti-corruption
Municipalities should use information technology to provide efficient services and preserve correct financial records. However, this is not the case due to their inability to design, implement, and maintain necessary systems and controls. Inadequate information technology governance protocols created control environments prone to exploitation or misuse (AGSA,2022). Corruption presents one of the biggest challenges of our time, and much hope is placed in Artificial Intelligence (AI) to combat it (Köbis, Starke & Rahwan,2022). Governments must prioritise technological advancements to better corruption management (Rashid and Alshmeel, 2022). Artificial intelligence can quickly analyse vast amounts of data, making it a useful tool for combating corruption. Traditionally, revealing corruption has been challenging due to the enormous volume of data involved. However, digitalization and the popularity of big data have resulted in new data management strategies targeted at preventing fraud and misuse in the public sector (Kadyrova et al., 2021). UNDP (2021) recognises the application of artificial intelligence, blockchain technology, and big data analytics in the battle against public sector corruption. Antony & Jenny Shania's (2024) study found that using AI technology to combat corruption in government can be successful and efficient, as it is an unbiased anti-corruption tool.

Meritocratic Appointments
Investing in skills and ability for financial planning, controls, and reporting is crucial for municipalities to provide services and use money from taxpayers effectively (AGSA,2022). The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (2000) prioritises increasing the institutional capacity of municipalities through merit-based recruitment. Section 56 (b) of the Act mandates the appointment of qualified municipal administrators to offer high-quality public goods and services to communities. Compounding the problem has been the continuance of cadre deployments inside South Africa's municipal civil service. This has resulted in a highly politicised local bureaucracy in which ANC party affiliations and allegiance take precedence above technical and administrative competence in the employment of public servants. The ANC's cadre deployment policy, which began in 1997, entails placing party supporters in senior civil

service positions (Nagra,2015). South Africa faces a considerable risk of the ruling party (ANC) misusing its position by selecting and deploying cadres in municipalities. Local governments pose significant risks due to the lack of a merit-based hiring process (Masuku & Jili, 2019). Local government transformation has placed significant pressure on municipalities to efficiently manage their financial resources to fulfill their developmental responsibilities. To achieve this, municipalities must enhance their financial management by appointing qualified and capable officials, such as Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) and internal auditors, who possess the appropriate skills. Municipal officials must emphasize accountability for results, not just budget spending, especially as more resources are allocated to local government. Strengthening the institutions responsible for enforcing accountability of public resources is crucial.

Civil Society Organizations as a Watchdog

South Africa's civil society groups have increasingly become the final line of defense for ordinary individuals in the face of rampant corruption, failed public service delivery, and abuse of power by elected and public officials (Corruption Watch, 2018). South African civil society organisations act as watchdogs to hold the government responsible to citizens. Corruption, maladministration, nepotism, and lack of accountability have risen to unprecedented proportions across Africa. This has hindered effective and adequate public service delivery, socioeconomic progress, and decent governance. Civil society groups can act as watchdogs to guarantee effective governance that meets the demands of the people (Thusi & Mashabela,2023). Increased engagement of civil society organisations can serve as watchdogs to monitor government effectiveness and public needs, leading to improved governance (Mlambo, Zubane & Mlambo, 2020). Civil society organisations organised public demonstrations pressured law enforcement and public prosecutors to investigate the scandals, petitioned democratic institutions to hold former President Jacob Zuma and public officials accused of corruption accountable, and filed lawsuits for remedies when all other avenues had been exhausted to keep the corruption scandals on the public agenda (Corruption Watch, 2018). Although South Africa has made significant progress in combating corruption,

significant hurdles remain to be overcome. These issues demand a collaborative effort from all sectors and collaborations with business, civil society, and the international community. It is extremely crucial that the government fosters relationships with business and civil society, as dealing with corruption cannot be done solely by the government.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the findings, effective governance, and long-term service delivery are seriously hampered by the pervasiveness of bad governance and corruption in South African municipalities. Corruption Watch reports a high number of whistle-blower allegations, with Gauteng province having the highest prevalence at 41%, involving bribery, irregularities in procurement, and embezzlement. The South African Auditor-General's Municipal Audit exposes R32.06 billion in irregular expenditure across municipalities, reflecting ongoing issues with financial mismanagement and corruption (Corruption Watch, 2021; Auditor-General of South Africa, 2021). Factors driving corruption include inadequate regulations, limited resources prioritizing tangible goods over accountability, and political interference. Corruption negatively impacts sustainable service delivery, diverting resources from poverty alleviation, hindering economic growth and investment, exacerbating income inequality, and leading to unemployment and public sector dysfunctionality (Legodi, 2017). It disproportionately affects the poor, triggering service delivery protests and violating human rights. Corruption's repercussions extend to energy crises like load-shedding.

Limitations of the Study and Future Studies

The limitation of this study is the adoption of the research methodology. This study only adopted a qualitative research approach in the form of a document review. So, the study purposefully focused on document review and ignored the empirical data collection and analysis approach due to lack of funding. By adopting this approach, the author has benefited from the following in conducting the study: cost effectiveness, time efficiency, comprehensive coverage, and access to existing

knowledge. Another limitation of this study was the lack of funding support, which would have allowed the author to collect empirical data from government officials and citizens who are affected by corruption practices. Moreover, the study findings have been demarcated to Limpopo Province instead of all nine South African provinces. However, the recommendations proposed in this study can also be applicable or generalized to other municipalities across the world. Future studies will focus on mixed methods, where the author will conduct both surveys and interviews with municipal officials and constituencies to understand their perceptions of the impact of corruption on effective service delivery. Another study will focus on artificial intelligence technology for integrity, trust, and anti-corruption.

Conclusions

In conclusion, corruption and poor governance have emerged as a global problem that threatens sustainable service delivery. It is characterized by the exploitation of authority for personal gain through various means such as bribery, coercion, favouritism, and misappropriation of funds. South African public institutions have experienced the detrimental effects of corruption, leading to compromised service delivery in areas like clean water, sanitation, electricity, and employment opportunities. Corruption undermines democratic principles, denying equal rights and impeding sustainable development efforts. The study suggests that South African municipalities require skilled personnel, oversight, watchdog mechanisms, independent institutions, internal audit, whistle-blower protection, and media empowerment.

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