

REMUNERATION CHALLENGE:AN OBSTACLE TO CONDUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSAND A TRIGGER FOR POOR SERVICE DELIVERY IN A LOCAL AUTHORITY IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract: Zimbabwe's major local authorities are failing to remunerate their workers as per agreed contracts of employment. This has often seen a lot of work stoppages by council workers as they embark on industrial action or threaten to do so as a way of forcing management to accede to their demands of being paid salary arrears albeit deteriorating service delivery. The study was a qualitative survey and participants were drawn from local authorities' such as officers, senior administrators, councillors, workers' union members as well as labour experts and officers drawn from the Ministries of Public Service, Labour and Social welfare and that of Local government, Rural development and National housing. The study established that the weaning of local authority from government financial support had brought untold suffering to the council workers whose welfare had worsened as well as the rate payers who were subjected to poor service delivery. Workers were disgruntled with the huge salaries and perks that management awarded themselves yet they were owed several months' salary arrears. A lot of corrupt and fraudulent activities coupled with rate payers, some companies and government departments defaulting payment of rates, were contributing to serious financial deficits that affected councils operations including the remuneration of workers. The economic situation punctuated by liquidity crisis was also adversely affecting the councils' cash inflows. The study recommended that there was need for; a culture paradigm shift on how council should conduct its affairs, conducting audits to expose shoddy dealings and irregularities as well as incorporating residents into task forces that should address issues of rates defaulting in order to boost revenues.

Key words: employment relations, local authority, low revenue inflows, motivation, remuneration, service delivery

1 Introduction

Storms of massive conflicts especially over the past four years, have been brewing in most local authorities' particularly in major towns and cities in Zimbabwe. Councils are failing to raise staff salaries on time and appear unable to stop this trend which is now synonymous with rampant cases of collective job action. Such actions worsen the already dilapidated service delivery in almost all local authorities. This study sought to find out the teething problems regarding remuneration challenges in local authorities. The background of the study, the statement of the problem and sub-problems have been shown as the initial parts of this paper. The related literature, methodology, findings, conclusions, recommendations and references used, make up the rest of this exciting and essential study.

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1.1 Background to the study

Zimbabwe's major local authorities are owed more than US\$500 million in bills by residents, government, industry and commerce, a situation that has seen almost all of them failing to provide basic services and paying salaries (Kakore, 2014). Government and residents have emerged as the biggest debtors. The accumulation of debt has resulted in councils being financially incapacitated. That has culminated in local authorities failing to; pay employees, complete water and sanitation projects, maintain traffic lights and improve the sorry/poor state of the roads.

In 2015, the City of Harare, which runs the affairs of the capital city, Harare, was taken to court over outstanding salary payments (Matenga and Mbanje, 2015). The Harare Municipal Workers Union, instructed their lawyers to take legal action over unpaid salaries. According to Matenga and Mbanje, (2015), in February 2015, the council wrote a letter to their lawyers which read as follows;

'We instruct you to do an urgent chamber application to the High Court to make City of Harare pay all the outstanding salaries and bonuses of our members in terms of S.I 135 of 2012 clause 14(2) which states that salaries shall be paid not later than the last business day before the twenty-eight of each month, and clause 31(1) which states that an employee who is in the Harare Municipality service on the first working day of December of the previous year or after in any year shall if his/her service in the year is continuous be paid bonus at the same time he/she is paid his salary for the month of November the following year. Your urgent action is highly welcome. We are owed net salaries for November 2014, December 2014 and January 2015 amounting to \$20, 1 million, bonuses for 2014 amounting to \$4, 2 million while outstanding back-pay for January to December 2013 stand at \$2 million. Total amount due and claimable is \$26, 3 million.'

Such legal suits have become the order of the day even in other cities and towns like Bulawayo, Mutare, Chitungwiza, Masvingo and Gweru, just to mention a few. Rate payers through the Resident's association of their respective town/city, have normally held demonstrations over poor service delivery and rampant corruption. For time immemorial, the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA) has repeatedly noted with concern about the Harare city council's failure to uphold principles of transparency and zero tolerance to corruption and abuse of public funds.

In a bid to improve revenue collection, most urban local authorities including rural district councils, have since the mid of 2017 engaged debt collectors to promote dialogue between council and the ratepayers as a way of enhancing collection of monies owed by ratepayers and other debtors.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Since a government directive in July 2013 ordering municipalities to cancel all debts owed by residents backdating to February 2009, the local authorities have since then been thrown into financial turmoil. Local authorities are struggling to pay salaries and other benefits and the situation is more pronounced in major towns and cities such as Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare, Chitungwiza, Masvingo and Gweru where operations, are wholly funded by residents in the wake of donor fatigue. In most of these towns and cities, council employees have not been receiving their salaries on time and some have arrears of even up to 6 months.

1.3 Research questions (Sub-problems)

The study intended to address the following ;

1. What is the magnitude of remuneration (salary) arrears in local authorities?
2. Which are the major causes of remuneration delays and arrears?
3. How effective are current strategies being used in attempting to address remuneration arrears?
4. Which measures should be put in place to improve the remuneration of council workers?

1.4 Relevant Literature

1.4.1 Definition and factors of remuneration management

Remuneration is one component of reward management which looks at compensating somebody for services rendered or for work performed or done as per agreed contractual terms (Robbins, 2010, Cole, 2006). Remuneration is a method of promoting morale, increasing motivation and foster team cohesion (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004). Remuneration is affected by the following factors according to Beach (2002) and Bates (1999) cited by Jubenkanda (2004);

- ✓ Prevailing rates
- ✓ Ability to pay
- ✓ Cost of living adjustment.
- ✓ Productivity

- ✓ Bargaining power of or workers committees and unions
- ✓ Job evaluation or Internal rates
- ✓ Legislation
- ✓ Individual and/or team performance

✓

1.4.2 Remuneration and motivation theories

Remuneration is positively related to motivation of employees. This is evident in the following two theories

1.4.2.1 Herzberg's 2 factor theory (motivation-hygiene theory)

He believed that man had two levels (Cole, 2006). Firstly, man wants to avoid pain or dissatisfaction. He called these hygiene factors. Secondly there is the psychological level in which man wants to grow in all aspects of conscious and unconscious experience as well as thought. He called these motivation factors. These factors (levels affected job satisfaction and attitude. He conducted a study that included over 200 engineers and accountants by asking them about times when they felt very good or very bad about their jobs. He collated these as shown in Figure 1 below

Hygiene factors	Motivation factors
(Leads to extreme dissatisfaction if absent or in bad state)	(Leads to extreme satisfaction if present)
Company policy and administration Remuneration Supervision Interpersonal relationships Security Safety Working conditions	Recognition Achievement Work itself Responsibility Advancement Growth

Figure 1 Herzberg's 2 factor theory (Source: Cole, 2006)

The study by Frederick Herzberg found out that hygiene factors led to dissatisfaction and motivation factors led to satisfaction. To increase motivation, managers and employers should ensure factors contributions to job satisfaction should always be present and to avoid dissatisfaction, there was need to maintain hygiene factors or improve them but they do not improve motivation though. *In the case of Zimbabwe local authorities, they were failing to maintain remuneration payments and that results in job dissatisfaction.*

1.4.2.2 Equity theory by Adam and Jacobs

Adams and Jacobs cited by Robbins (2010), said that workmates tend to compare each other with those who hold similar job positions or perform similar tasks. They compare whether they are fairly treated and if there is consistency (equity). If they feel there is equity, their work effort is sustained and could be of poor performance if they feel otherwise. According to Adams and Jacobs, there are challenges faced when attempting to ensure equity at the workplace such as;

- (i) Is the environment supportive or conducive e.g. working conditions?
- (ii) Business recession which can be epitomized by threats of closure, shutdowns or downsizing etc.
- (iii) The nature of leadership skills of managers such as do they understand their subordinates fully.
- (iv) The corporate or organizational culture especially on the level of common understanding or shared vision.

1.4.3 Improving job satisfaction

Remuneration should be complimented by the following to enhance job satisfaction (Robbins, 2010)

- (i) Managers (supervisors) should give autonomy i.e. remove some controls but retain accountability as manager.
- (ii) Supervisors should empower subordinate.
- (iii) Need to reconsider job redesign in order to enhance job enrichment and enlargement.
- (iv) The system should provide regular feedback.
- (v) Need to introduce challenging/difficult tasks.
- (vi) Coaching subordinates to guide them to be experts.

1.4.4 Improving rewards

An organisation can improve its remuneration management (Cole, 2006) by

- (i) Recognising performance.
- (ii) Providing fringe benefits.
- (iii) Awarding competitive remuneration (compare with rivals).

1.4.5 Improving commitment

Employees loyalty and commitment to their work and organisation can be improved (Jubenkanda, 2004) by

- (i) Improving organizational culture (shared vision and mission).
- (ii) Encouraging team work.
- (iii) Encouraging the Involvement and participation of subordinates.
- (iv) Putting in place effective induction programmes.
- (iv) Training forums like workshops and seminars to discuss issues freely
- (v) Use of suggestion box
- (vi) Recreational activities e.g. to improve social affiliation – sports teams, get together parties etc.

1.4.6 Remuneration and service delivery

Remuneration effectively motivates workers to increase service delivery and productivity. Usually organizations need to employ a package of tools that incorporates wage increases as well as monetary rewards (fringe benefits). While providing incentives such as bonuses is the usual traditional practice, it is equally important that employers institute changes that improve morale and job satisfaction by creating an empathetic work environment where workers' needs are addressed or honored. Providing training and opportunities for advancement motivates workers to increase productivity while increasing their sense of value to the company. Open communication, fairness, security, and rewards aimed at successful teamwork also complement a balanced managerial style that encourages both loyalty and higher productivity.

1.4.7 Zimbabwe's local authorities' scenario based on media reports

1.4.7.1 Government directive plunged Councils into crisis (Tshuma, 2013)

According to Tshuma (2013), government had in July 2013 ordered councils to write off debts owed by individual ratepayers from February 2009 to June 2013. Government's argument was that the dollarization era had become apparent that the country's tottering economy had not been operating optimally and in the process relentlessly unleashing severe hardships on citizens. The directive was meant to cushion individual ratepayers from the severe effects of the economic challenges experienced during the aforementioned period. Thus, from 2009, ratepayers had not been able to meet their obligations in terms of payment of taxes, rentals, levies and related charges resulting in an enormous and crippling debt burden frustrating the majority of the population.”. *“Given the above circumstances, all local authorities are in terms of Section 133 of the Rural District Council Act (Chapter 29:13) as read with Section 303 of the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15) directed to write off debts in respect of rentals, unit tax, development levies, licences and refuse charges owed by individuals ratepayers as at 30 June 2013. In the same vein, money owed by residents for rates, stands prescribed in terms of the Prescription Act (Chapter 8:13) as from February 2009 to 30 June 2013.”* reads part of the directive

Prior to the directive, Harare was owed over US\$400 million by corporates and residents, Bulawayo (US\$100million) while Mutare was owed US\$20 million. In Masvingo, government alone owed the council US\$11 million while US\$7 million was owed by residents Tshuma (2013). According to Tshuma (2013), a lot of economists and several experts said that while government had every reason to sympathise with residents and help them out in those difficult economic times, it should not have rewarded defaulters and encourage the dependency syndrome, which had destroyed the country's economy. By not giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, government was leaving a trail of disaster in its wake. They cited similar dispensation given to defaulters that had severely affected the once thriving public enterprises such as Air Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe United Passenger Company, the National Railways of Zimbabwe, Cold Storage Company, TelOne and other parastatals that were on the verge of brink by then.

1.4.7.2 Liquidity crisis and service delivery in Zimbabwe's local authorities

According to Mabika (2015), the cash shortage in Zimbabwe local authorities had reached unprecedented levels. Local authorities were failing to pay salaries and allowances as expected and creditors were accumulating. This situation had developed because revenue collections were low, compounded by traditional sources of revenue that had gone dry and Government had also stopped its financial assistance to local authorities. The liquidity crisis has had a negative effect on service delivery. There is no more service being offered by local authorities and the single major reason is liquidity. Local authorities were operating without enough technical staff in both Engineering and

Health Departments (Sithole, Chirasha and Tatire, 2013). Qualified and experienced staff left due to non-payment of their monthly salaries as local authorities were failing to pay their staff. Computers were limited and local authorities continued to use manual systems in most departments. Local authorities could not afford to purchase computer hardware and software for their operations. This was compromising service delivery at a time when e-government was the in-thing in business.

1.4.7.3 City of Harare contemplating slashing salaries

In a Sunday mail article of August 13, 2017 by Debra Matabvu, the Harare city council was in the process of slashing the salaries of all workers to reduce the wage bill which was gobbling a big chunk of the its revenue. The looming salary cut followed a survey by an independent commission that was tasked to look more into the city's salary structure. According to the Commission, salaries being paid to municipal workers were above market averages, with a council housekeeper/cook earning a monthly basis of US\$752 while a patrolman pockets US\$622. Farm guards get US\$552. A clinic matron was earning US\$1 400, a figure which was much higher than the US\$600 paid to those at Government institutions. The local authority had over 9 000 workers and spent between US\$10 million and US\$12 million monthly on remuneration. The decision to cut salaries had its own share of controversy. Majority of top executives tried to resist changes to their mega salaries and allowances. Council had been failing to pay salaries on time and was in five months arrears. According to the Mayor, the high wage bill was a burden that needed lessening. He said;

“We hired an independent commission to look at all council employees’ salaries and compare with salaries on the job market. We will be guided by the commission’s report on how the exercise will be done. The issue must be resolved as soon as possible because salaries are chewing the bulk of our revenue at the expense of service delivery.”

But a workers union representative said, *“We have people who are sleeping on the wheel. They are failing to use available business opportunities. Council has a lot of business opportunities which can be harnessed to generate revenue. These opportunities are not being used but they think of cutting wages when there are other avenues or alternatives like reducing the number of a heavy unjustified top management.”*

1.4.8 Other studies

Nyakabwe (2015) established that the causes of salary delays and arrears at Chitungwiza Municipality comprised of economic hardships, corruption, low revenue inflows, industrial decline and government policies, the effects of non-payment of salaries included financial effects, social effects, low productivity and brain drain, poverty, low staff morale, labour unrest, employee disenchantment and the survival strategies employed by employees consisted of income generating projects, moonlighting, borrowing, unpaid leave and fabricated leave, stealing of company hours, engaging in corrupt activities among others.

Mabika (2015) suggested that transparent and innovative management was another solution that could improve liquidity in local authorities. He found that the crop of current managers who were paying themselves hefty salaries that range between US \$8 000 and \$50 000 cannot help the liquidity crisis. He found that most managers were also corrupt to the point that they do not have the plight of local authorities at heart. He proposed a change in management as a better way to improve service delivery in local authorities.

2 Research Method

The process of planning and actual collection, presentation and analysis of data was done as follows;

2.1 Research Design

The study used the survey design as participants were selected on the basis of their experience with local authorities and the researcher wanted to rely on primary data (Leedy and Omrod, 2015).

2.2 Target population and sampling technique used

The target population was made up of local authorities’ officers, senior administrators, councilors, workers union members, labour experts and officers drawn from the Ministries of Public Service, Labour and Social welfare and that of Local government, Rural development and National housing. A combination of quota and snow balling sampling techniques was used in order to accommodate all major stakeholders and also referred to other participants with better position of the subject matter by those who had already been approached initially.

2.3 Sources of data

The library analysis (desk research) and use of unstructured interviews (triangulation). Due to lack of studies on the subject matter, the researcher had to resort to the use of secondary data by referring to newspaper articles.

Unstructured interviews were used since the subject matter was a very sensitive issue and likely to attract diverse views from participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2014).

2.4 Data presentation and analysis

The Content analysis method was used which involved the categorization of data, classification, coding and summarization of findings in thematic form.

2.5 Research ethics

In line with best practice, the researcher observed ethical issues such as the need for; informed consent, confidentiality and integrity during the entire study (Creswell, 2003).

3 Analysis of data

3.1 Major Findings

(i) Remuneration arrears prevalent among local authorities

Almost all local authorities were in huge remuneration arrears with some stretching to over several months as at end of September 2017. One employee said ‘we are owed 6 months’ salary in arrears and all overtime payments were suspended two years ago but this is an unfair labor practice since our contracts entitle us to overtime payment’

(ii) Bureaucratic tendencies and political interferences in restructuring exercise

One town clerk said ‘As much as we might talk of restructuring or retrenchments, it is easier said than done as there is political interference and thereby the decision is more political rather than being rationale or for economic purposes’. A lot of efforts to retrench workers in light of remuneration challenges, were being derailed by what appeared to be political interference as approval was not usually forthcoming from the parent ministry of local government.

(iii) Delays in payment of severance package

Some of the retrenched workers have not been paid their severance packages for more than a year.

(iv) Government directive to write off all debts

The 2013 government directive to councils that they were to write off debts owed by individual ratepayers from February 2009 to June 2013 was the major catalyst to the worsening of local authorities financial woes.

(v) Corruption and financial mismanagement

Corruption and financial irregularities were rampant in local authorities and that reduced the revenue base for their operational activities. One councilor said ‘This is the most teething problem inherent in all local authorities as council resources are abused for personal gain. This is why in almost 80% of major local authorities there have been a Commission appointed at one time or another to run the council affairs after suspension or dismissal of the incumbent executive’

(vi) Mismanagement and lack of maintenance of property

The gross abuse of council property and lack of maintenance were making some councils assets lose value or redundant yet tenders are awarded to service providers who are not selected on merit but because of corruption, yet they do shoddy work.

(vii) Staff turnover

There was high staff turnover including skilled manpower due to frustration emanating from remuneration challenges and this affected service delivery.

(viii) Depressed economy

The deteriorating macroeconomic situation in the country had incapacitated a lot of rate payers, government departments and companies to honor their obligations to local authorities. One Town treasurer said ‘Our major problem is that the economy is underperforming and that is affecting our own businesses which are supposed to augment our income and also most rate payers have become jobless and defaulting payment of rates’

(ix) Clashes between workers and Residents associations

The Residents associations and workers unions including their mother body, Zimbabwe Urban Councils Workers’ Union both blamed local authorities’ management but with contrasting views. Some Residents associations wanted councils to reduce their large number of workers yet the workers wanted that effected on management who awarded themselves huge salaries and other fringe benefits.

(x) Allocation of residential stands as settlement for salary arrears

Some authorities had agreed with workers to compensate them with pieces of land although in most cases the stands were in undeveloped areas with hardly any proper infrastructure. One disappointed worker said ‘*I have my own house and it does make sense to force me to accept a stand, more so which is in an area which is not developed. There is a lot of inconveniences, for example, there are no schools, clinics and shopping centers*’

(xi) *Loss making income generating projects*

Most income generating projects meant to augment revenue of local authorities have folded due to the liquidity crisis, mismanagement and being uncompetitive. One councilor said ‘*We used to run viable beer retailing business but this is now history and the properties have become a hive of criminal activities since they cannot be used for any meaningful business venture as they are in dilapidated state. Such business should have been helping the council to raise revenue that could be channeled towards wages of workers*’

(xii) *Inflated and unjustified bonuses*

There were worrying cases of council bosses who were receiving inflated performance bonuses and this was done without the approval of council

(xiii) *Engagement of debt collectors as agents for collecting rates arrears*

A number of local authorities had engaged debt collectors to promote dialogue between council and the ratepayers in order to enhance debt recovery rate.

(xiv) *Pilferage*

Pilferage or theft was rife among workers as they steal council assets or go into illegal deals in order to make ends meet and report for duty as they have no other alternatives to survive due to erratic salary payments.

4 Conclusion

Based on the sub-problems (research questions) of this study, the following conclusions were made for each as follows;

4.1. *Magnitude of remuneration (salary) arrears in local authorities*

The problem was so manifest that workers at times went for some months even without payment and almost all local authorities were affected

4.2. *Major causes of remuneration delays and arrears*

Corruption, management huge salaries and perks, default payments by rate payers including government units as well as unjustified salaries which were well above market average for majority of workers, were suffocating councils’ budgets.

4.3. *Effectiveness of current strategies in addressing remuneration arrears*

Staggering of payments was one option though heavily criticised by unions who wanted once off payment of arrears. The parcelling out of stands to clear salary arrears was a contentious issue as the land was ill prepared without any proper facilities and ancillary services such as schools, clinics, shopping centres etc. Therefore the strategies were ineffective.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that there are serious remuneration challenges facing local authorities with hardly any sustainable solution to ameliorate them unless if there were drastic measures taken as suggested below.

5 Recommendations

These were meant to help local authorities and key stakeholders on the measures that should be put in place to improve the reduction of remuneration arrears.

5.1 *Commensurate salaries and perks for top management*

Transparent and innovative management is another solution that can improve liquidity in local authorities. The crop of current managers that is paying itself hefty salaries that range between US \$8 000 and \$50 000 cannot help the liquidity crisis. The current managers are also corrupt to the point that they do not have the plight of local authorities at heart. Hence a change in management for the better can improve service delivery in local authorities by reducing their high remuneration.

5.2 *Residents’ engagement and inclusivity*

Engagement of residents is important if local authorities are to improve liquidity and enhance service delivery. The residents need to be informed and also make input so that there is ownership of decisions especially towards payments to local authorities. Once there is inclusivity, revenue flows can improve as residents should then own up their obligations and pay local authorities in time.

5.3 *Tapping into the informal sector*

Providing business stands to the informal sector so that the players pay rates and other levies that should boost councils' coffers.

5.4 Performance management system

Salaries should be based on merit and the best practice is to use a performance management system that should be results oriented e.g. Results based management system. This should promote a culture of commitment and seriousness of purpose, accountability and transparency.

5.5 Downsizing

Restructuring the work force by downsizing operations of non-critical areas or where there is over staffing. This should be able to reduce the wage bill.

5.4 Independent Audits by competent auditors.

This should curb frauds and embezzlement of funds and other shoddy deals perpetrated by both workers and management due to their exposure and should be done at least once every year.

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