


Chapter 9

Performance Contracts for Senior Administrators in “Unsettled” Political and Economic Contexts: A Zimbabwean Local Government Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Zimbabweans are interested in seeing how local governments will perform in providing services in the era of devolution and digital transformation. Scholars have begun to examine and evaluate the significance of devolution and digital transformation in a nation with a history of dictatorship and centralised authorities in decision-making processes. To enhance the performance of devolved local governments, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) introduced a performance management system in 2020 as a Human Resources Management reform that mandates all local governments to have performance contracts for senior administrators. The introduction of performance contracts for senior administrators arose from the need to address persistent service delivery and administrative challenges in local governments, particularly urban local authorities. Policymakers believed that the introduction of a performance management system for senior administrators would enhance digital transformation, public value and fundamental principles of local governance, namely, effectiveness, efficiency, economy, accountability, responsiveness, and integrity. There have been relatively few studies investigating implementation experiences since a performance management system that placed senior local government administrators on performance contracts was introduced. Consequently, the topic of performance contracts and how Zimbabwe's unstable political and economic environment affects their execution is covered in this chapter. Data to address the preceding question was generated qualitatively through documentary reviews and

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key informant interviews. Since the performance contract system is relatively new, the authors conducted some key informant interviews to gain insights into the implementation experiences. The chapter found that the unsettled economic and political contexts and sluggish digital transformation pose an existential threat to its implementation. Economic instability, poor revenue generation, brain drain and associated human capacity constraints, political influence and the nature of performance contracts and assessment framework compromise the viability of performance contracts. To improve the implementation of performance contracts, the chapter recommends the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC) review the performance contracts in light of implementation experiences. The review process should be done in a participatory manner so that the views of the implementing agencies are heard and factored in. The chapter also recommends the use of digital systems to enhance the implementation of performance contracts.

INTRODUCTION

Around the 1990s, many countries across the globe adopted public sector reforms through the New Public Management (NPM) paradigms. The NPM (decentralisation, digital transformation, civil service reforms, contracting out, and performance management) became predominant reforms for local government (Kuhlmann, 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Performance management and e-government/e-governance have been some of the widely adopted and implemented administrative reforms to improve the performance of local government in implementing development goals (Ammons & Roenigk, 2015). Performance management systems, particularly performance contracts for senior managers in local government have become a global phenomenon (Ammons & Roenigk, 2020; Chiware & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2021).

In line with the global shift towards performance contracts, Zimbabwe introduced performance-based contracts in 2011, starting with permanent secretaries (Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015). Performance contracts were viewed as an important reform initiative in the country's aspiration to become an upper-middle-class economy by 2030. It was envisioned that performance contracts would enable the government to monitor how the different arms and tiers of government contribute to national development goals guided by the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1).

The government extended the implementation of performance contracts to heads of different departments in local governments and parastatals in 2020 (Bhebhe, 2023). The Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing (MLGPWNH) Circular Number LA22 stipulates that performance contracts will be developed for each head of department. However, data on the implementation of performance contracts for senior administrators in local government in Zimbabwe is scarce. Very little is known about Zimbabwe's experiences with performance contracts in an economic and political context that reflects an *unsettled* setting with disruptive consequences on local government reform. Still, little research has been done to explore and explain how Zimbabwe's unique and *unsettled* economic and political environment has influenced the implementation and performance of performance contracts. This chapter examined the Zimbabwean local government's experiences with performance contracts for senior administrators to understand factors influencing their performance and develop tailored strategies to enhance their implementation and performance.

This chapter argues that the perception that performance contracts will enhance the performance of local government in implementing strategic plans is too simplistic. Contextual factors influence the implementation of public sector reforms profoundly. Zimbabwe's *unsettled* context influences the contribution of local government reforms profoundly. In this chapter, *unsettled* contexts imply an envi-

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