


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 (Bhebe, 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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ronment with disruptive effects on the execution of public policies, programmes and projects. It denotes a political system submerged in complex political-administrative dynamics and interconnection that may either harm or facilitate the implementation of administrative reforms (Onyango, 2020). The term captures neatly the political and economic tabulations that took place in Zimbabwe in the past three decades. Zimbabwe experienced political instability and economic crises characterized by inflation and unpredictable monetary policies. Understanding the implementation of performance contracts in local authorities under such circumstances will facilitate the development of context-specific strategies to enhance performance management for senior administrators.

This chapter is categorised into four sections. The first one reviews the literature on performance management in local government. This is followed by a methodology section that discusses the methodological orientation of the study. Last but not least is the results and discussion section. The chapter ends with conclusions and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local government is undoubtedly a strategic partner in realising national development plans and sustainable development goals (Pandeya & Oyama, 2019). Several countries, both developed and developing, have introduced capacity-building reforms and interventions to revamp and reinvigorate the role and contribution of local government as a strategic partner in the development endeavour (Hall, Shin & Bartels, 2022; Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022; Onyango, 2020). Performance management is one of the popular reforms introduced under the NPM paradigm to monitor the performance of employees within local government. According to Ammons & Roenigk (2015:515) reform initiatives such as reinventing or revamping government and results-based management have also influenced the introduction and implementation of performance management in subnational governments. Performance management has been widely defined in the literature. This chapter uses Ammons & Roenigk’s (2020:19) definition which views it as “the purposeful use of performance information to make decisions, including decisions to improve operations and services.” A renowned performance management scholar, Moynihan (2008: 5 cited by Hall, Shin & Bartels, 2022), defines performance management as the purposive utilisation of performance management data in formulating strategic policy decisions that transform the organisation. Therefore, performance management pushes for a shift from traditional, rigid, ineffective public administration that focuses more on compliance at the expense of results (Ammons & Roenigk, 2015:515). It is a result-oriented approach to organisational management that emphasises results rather than inputs and processes (Beer, Uster & Vigoda-Gadot, 2019; Roenigk, 2020). Beer *et al.*, (2019) consider performance management as a three-phase process involving the following elements:

- *Planning and setting the goals and measurement process:* The stage involves setting organisational, departmental, and individual goals and targets linked to the strategic plan of the organisation, identifying performance indicators and setting a monitoring framework. Since performance management is a transparent undertaking, stakeholder engagement and involvement are critical at this stage. In the local government context, the central government should involve local government managers in developing performance goals, targets, indicators, and monitoring frameworks. The development of performance contracts should be premised on collaboration, cooperation and mutuality. This minimises implementation challenges.

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- *Monitoring:* At this phase, there is a regular, continuous and systematic collection of performance data to monitor and evaluate performance. The main thrust of this stage is to identify timeously performance gaps and develop tailored interventions to address gaps and ultimately improve performance. Regular and systematic monitoring enables management to control deviant performance and behaviours. This promotes learning and continuous improvement.
- *Performance review and lessons learned:* This constitutes the final phase in the performance management process. It comprises the evaluation of final performance at agreed timeframes. It can take the form of an annual performance review. At this stage, those in charge of the performance management process should give feedback to the actors whose performance was evaluated. Through the feedback loop, organisations, departments and individuals can draw lessons that can improve performance going forward.

Since the introduction of performance management four decades ago, subnational governments across the world have devised and adopted digital tools of different forms to measure, monitor and manage performance (Pandeya & Oyama, 2019:877). Performance management systems in local government should be premised on a set of mutually reinforcing elements of performance management doctrine for them to achieve the desired results (Moynihan & Pandey, 2010; Chiware & Vyas-Doogapersad, 2021). Literature provides a wide range of models that guide the development and execution of performance management tools. Fryer, Antony & Ogden (2009:482) developed a framework that emphasises the following:

- Strategic integration of performance management systems and organisational systems, policies, procedures, plans and strategies.
- Leadership buy-in and commitment.
- A positive culture that views performance management as a strategy for transforming organisations and not a way to punish employees.
- Stakeholder engagement, participation and involvement; and
- Regular monitoring, evaluation, feedback, review and learning.

Ammons & Roenigk (2015, p.515-516) sum up the crucial conditions necessary for the effective implementation of performance management in local government as listed below:

- Clearly define the goals.
- Availability and use of performance information that is relevant and can be acted upon.
- Give more importance to the results or outcomes rather than inputs and procedural compliance.
- Involve executive and legislative officials in priority setting, monitoring performance reports, and data-influenced decision-making.
- Involve top executives in performance management, frequently monitor departmental performance, and provide feedback, but intervene in operating decisions only when necessary.
- Provide devolved decision authority, with operating decisions made at the departmental or program level.
- Allow managerial flexibility in using financial and human resources, with accountability for results.
- Provide incentives and sanctions linked to performance results.

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The above-listed elements are mutually reinforcing, and governments should avoid focusing on one or a few, and ignore others. Performance management elements should be administered as a package. These elements are important, particularly for local governments that work as lower tiers of government under the supervision of the central government and, in some contexts, regional or provincial governments. Too much central control undermines effective management of performance in subnational governments. As recommended by Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022), decentralisation reforms should transfer financial, personnel, political and decision-making powers to local government to allow them flexibility and the decision space to make decisions and hold actors to account for their actions and inactions. In light of Kettl’s (1997, p.447–448; cited by Ammons & Roenigk, 2015, p. 516) observation that organisations should create an enabling environment for managers to execute their management roles and functions, the central government should let local governments manage local government affairs. Local government autonomy will enable local government to structure performance management and measurement systems in ways that suit local contextual variables. For effective performance management, local government management should have the decision authority and space to make adjustments needed to attain the envisioned results and outcomes timeously.

Literature on performance management in local authorities highlights several challenges hampering effective implementation. Abane and Brenya (2021) conducted a study in Ghana and discovered that the execution of performance contracts was affected by environmental factors, which include social, economic, and political elements. Financial constraints have been identified as the main challenge in implementing performance contracts in Ghana's local government (Sosu, 2020; SEND-Ghana, 2015). In South Africa, Studies by Ledger and Rampedi (2019), Van der Walddt (2014) and Mamokhere (2019) revealed that financial challenges are compromising the operationalisation of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) in local government. According to Van der Walddt (2014), municipalities in South Africa struggle to implement performance management systems because of misalignment between targets and budgets. Mohangi & Nyika (2023), found that municipalities in many African countries are failing to generate revenue to finance their development priorities. The next section presents the methodological orientation of the study.

Literature has underscored the importance of digital transformation to improve performance management processes in local authorities. Chiwawa & Wissink (2024) recommend adopting digital tools to collect performance data against indicators, monitor progress and report performance towards the set performance targets. Digital transformation has become an undeniable reform for the public sector to revamp and reinvigorate its operations (Kangethe *et al.*, 2022; Chiwawa & Wissink, 2024). Digitalisation enables public organisations to manage performance effectively and efficiently. However, regardless of the documented evidence of the benefits of the digital revolution, most public organisations in Africa are lagging in digital transformation. As aptly captured by Shopola, Mukonza & Manyaka (2024:1), “... public servants lack interdisciplinary approach needed to meet the country’s complex challenges, failure to grasp new problem solving and effective governance solutions and prospects that come with technology.” In light of technology skills gaps in the public sector, Shopola, Mukonza & Manyaka (2024) and Shopola, Mudau & Mukonza (2021) recommend curriculum reviews for public administration training to align the discipline to the rapidly changing technological environment. Such a review will create a talent pool of employees with the knowledge, skills and abilities to leverage digital technologies in reforming the public sector.

Performance Contracts for Senior Administrators in “Unsettled” Political and Economic Contexts**METHODOLOGY**

The chapter is based on a qualitative research approach, which uses an inductive logic of reasoning to generate an in-depth account of a phenomenon (Leavy, 2014). The approach was used to explore and explain people's meanings and perceptions of performance contracts for senior administrators in Zimbabwe's local government. Data was generated through a combination of unobtrusive and obtrusive data collection methods. Unobtrusive data collection methods involve studying a phenomenon without affecting it. Auriacombe (2016, p.6) notes that unobtrusive research techniques are non-reactive and information about the respondent is gathered through public documents. On the other hand, obtrusive methods are reactive and involve direct interactions between researchers and participants (Babbie, 2007). From an unobtrusive perspective, the authors used a literature review and documentary search. Books and journal articles were used in the literature review. For the documentary search, the researchers used newspaper articles, local government strategic plans, the national constitution, performance contracts, and national development plans such as Vision 2030 and NDS1. However, given that performance contracts for senior administrators in Zimbabwe's local government are relatively new, the authors conducted six key informant interviews to get insights from local government top officials regarding their lived experiences with performance contracts. Key informants were purposively and conveniently selected. The primary researcher, who resides in Zimbabwe, made appointments with several local government officials, but some could not make it for the interviews due to competing responsibilities. Resultantly, the researcher ended up having interviews with those that were available. However, the researcher managed to conduct interviews with all levels of local government senior administrators who are on performance contracts, namely Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), directors, and assistant or deputy directors. The key informants also represented all the levels and types of local government in Zimbabwe, that is, city councils, municipal councils, town councils, local boards, and rural district councils.

To ensure anonymity in the presentation of findings, the researchers used the following code:

KI 1 (CEO, RDC) – Key Informant 1 (Chief Executive Officer, Rural District Council)

KI 2 (AD, MC) – Key Informant 2 (Assistant Director, Municipal Council)

KI 3 (D, CC) – Key Informant 3 (Directors, City Council)

KI 4 (CEO, LB) – Key Informant 4 (CEO, Local Board)

KI 5 (AD, MC) – Key Informant 5 (Assistant Director, Municipal Council)

KI 6 (DD, CC) – Key Informant 6 (Deputy Director, City Council)

A combination of content and thematic analysis was used to analyse data generated from documentary searches and key informant interviews, respectively. The researchers used methodological triangulation and thick descriptions to ensure the validity of the research findings. The researchers got ethical approval from the University of Johannesburg, College of Business and Economics Research Ethics Committee. In the next section, the researchers present and discuss the study's results.

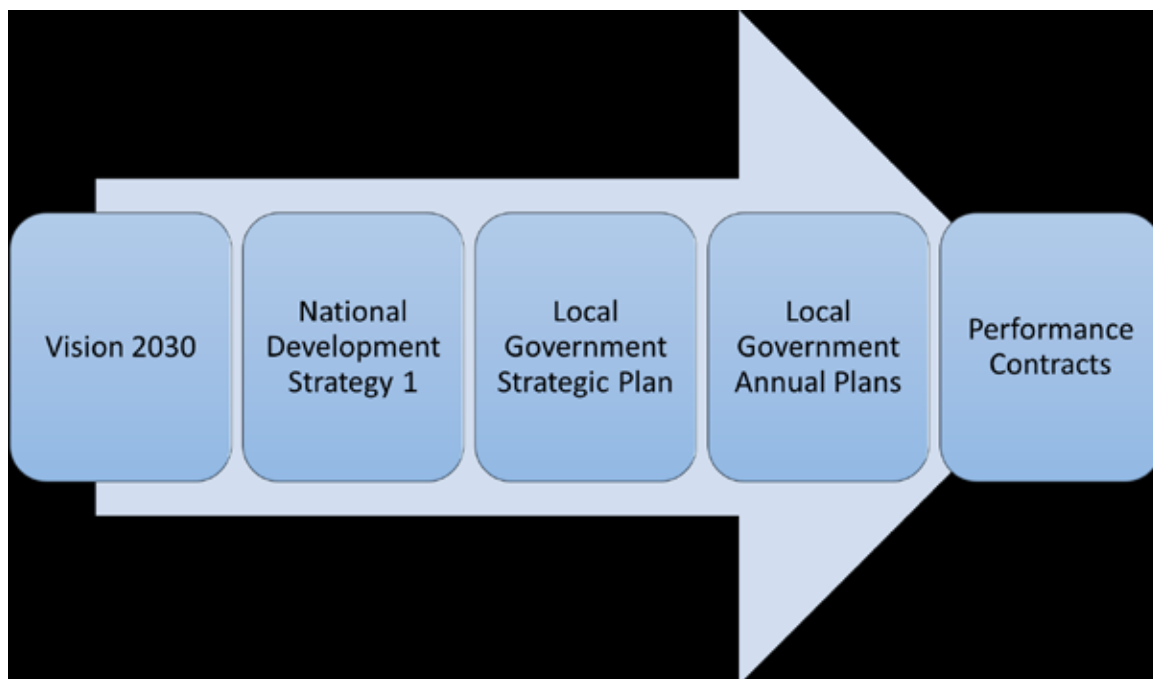
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers present the findings of the study. The section starts with the results of the structure of performance contracts for local government senior administrators and ends with a discussion and analysis of the influence of the unsettled economic and political contexts on the performance contracts in Zimbabwe.

Performance Contracts for Senior Administrators in “Unsettled” Political and Economic Contexts**Structure of Performance Contracts for Local Government Senior Administrators**

Performance contracts for senior administrators are shaped and influenced by the WoGA which seeks to ensure linkage, alignment and coordination between the national vision and national and local development strategies. The illustration below highlights the flow of policies and programmes from the national vision to performance contracts at the local government level.

Figure 1. Flow of Performance Contracts



Source: Researcher's Own Illustration Informed by KIIs

As diagrammatically illustrated above, Vision 2030 sets the development trajectory for the country. The NDS1 then comes in as a five-year development strategy that provides a set of public sector reforms for the country to move towards the attainment of Vision 2030. To facilitate the realisation of Vision 2030 and NDS1, local governments are mandated to develop strategic plans, which are mostly five-year plans, strategically aligned to the preceding national policies and strategies. In implementing strategic plans, local governments develop annual plans with measurable goals, targets, outcomes and outputs. Annual plans inform the performance contracts for both the political heads (Mayors and Chairpersons) and administrative heads (town clerks and in city and municipal councils and CEOs in town councils, local boards and Rural District Councils (RDCs)) (Key Informant Interviews). KI 2(AD, MC) summed up the process followed in developing performance contracts as follows

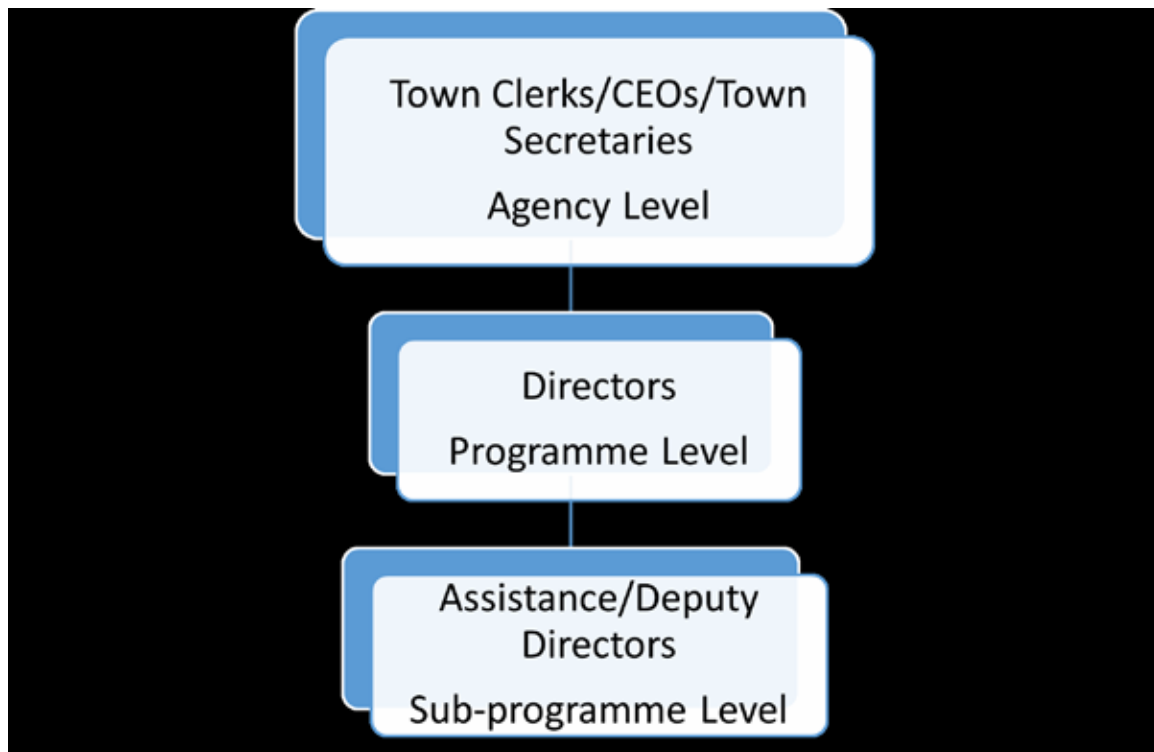
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Performance contracts are done using the integrated results-based management system where the main focus is on results. The entity starts by coming up with a five-year strategic document. From the strategic document, yearly organisational work plans are developed. Performance contracts are then crafted to meet the requirements of the organisation’s yearly work plan.

Mayors and chairpersons sign performance contracts with the President. For some key informants, the involvement of the president in the signing of performance contracts for mayors and chairpersons demonstrates a political commitment not only to performance management but to the transformation of local government (KI 6, DD CC; KI 4, CEO LB).

Participants noted that for local government administrative staff, performance contracts mainly cover three levels.

Figure 2. Levels of Performance Contracts in Local Government



Source: Researcher's Own Illustration Informed by KIIs

Performance Contracts for Senior Administrators in “Unsettled” Political and Economic Contexts**Level One**

It covers contracts for town clerks, CEOs and town secretaries. Town clerks, CEOs and town secretaries sign contracts with their respective mayors and chairpersons. Mayors and chairpersons represent the government. According to KI 3 (D, CC), this level is referred to as the agency level. Performance contracts for town clerks, CEOs and town secretaries, as part of the WoGA and IRBMS, are meant to:

- a) “ensuring that public offices are well-managed and cost-effective in delivering efficient and quality service to the public”;
- b) provide “a basis for continuous improvement as we reinvent Government to meet the needs and expectations of the Zimbabwean people”;
- c) guide “the programmes and management priorities of the Council for the budget year” (GoZ, 2022, Performance Contract Template for Town Clerks).

The contract for town clerks, CEOs and town secretaries is in two parts. Part I shows the council's vision and mission, terms of reference/mandates (various laws guiding the operations of local government), overall functions of local government, key result areas, outcomes and outputs. The key result areas for town clerks and CEOs include a) water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); b) social services delivery; c) roads development and maintenance; d) public safety and security services; e) governance and administration; f) natural resources conservation and management; and g) economic development. Based on the key result areas, town clerks and CEOs expected to achieve the following outcomes: a) improved corporate governance and administration; b) improved WASH; c) improved access to social services; d) improved road network; e) enhanced public safety and security; and f) improved natural resource conservation and environmental management. For performance management and scoring purposes, town clerks and CEOs are expected to provide evidence showing the following outputs: a) works council meetings conducted; b) M&E reports produced; c) stakeholder engagement programmes conducted; e) council equipment recapitalized; f) capacity building programs conducted; and g) projects completed. Part II of the contract provides for a performance management matrix to measure performance. The matrix brings together the outcomes and outcome indicators and outputs in a table to simplify scoring and measurement of performance.

Level Two

This level covers performance contracts between the town clerk/CEO/town secretary and the directors. This level is referred to as the programme level (KI 3, D CC). Key informants interviewed in the study concurred that directors sign performance contracts with their respective town clerks or CEOs. The contract template for directors is almost the same as those for town clerks or CEOs. The only difference is that the performance contracts for directors are narrower as they focus on specific areas of specialisation. For instance, the Performance Contract for the Harare City Council Human Capital Capitals (2022) is derived from the overall functions of the human capital department including:

- a) workforce planning, design and resourcing;
- b) business process management;
- c) remuneration and rewards administration;
- d) human capital development;
- e) employee performance management;
- f) promotion of industrial harmony and employee wellness;

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- g) enforcement of safety and health legislation;
- h) human capital administration;

The main key result area for the Human Capital Director is human capital management and administration, which directly feeds into the town clerk’s improved governance and administration outcome. In terms of outcomes, the Human Capital Director is expected to ensure improved governance and organisational performance. These outcomes will be measured in terms of the following outputs:

- a) safety programme implemented
- b) performance contracts implemented
- c) disciplinary cases for executives concluded
- d) works council meetings conducted
- e) council-wide job evaluation conducted
- f) skills audit and manpower utilisation survey implemented
- g) employees remunerated
- h) school of excellence operationalised (phase 1)
- i) occupational health and safety clinic operationalised
- j) organisational restructuring completed
- k) wellness programmes conducted.

Level Three

This level mainly covers contracts between directors and deputy directors or assistant directors. The level is called the sub-programme level (KI 3, D CC).

The above findings demonstrated that performance contracts in Zimbabwe’s local government fraternity target senior management at the strategic apex. Although some participants expressed concern about the exclusion of the other council employees, performance contracts for senior management are crucial because senior managers are the ones who make strategic decisions regarding the operations of councils in general. It becomes the responsibility of senior managers to develop performance management systems and reporting structures for other local government employees. The literature emphasises the importance of reporting structures in the performance management process (Botlhoko, 2017; Ngqobe, 2021; Mohangi & Nyika, 2023). Ntshakala and Nzimakwe (2016) acknowledged the importance of complementary internal reporting mechanisms to monitor the performance of employees at lower levels. They indicated that reporting the performance of critical outputs and outcomes motivates employees and helps them develop tailored interventions to address performance gaps. The involvement of different levels in implementing performance contracts makes the adoption of digital systems and applications compelling. Without integrated digital platforms, data collection and management and harmonising input from different actors becomes complex. As suggested by Chiwawa & Wissink (2024), public organisations should leverage technology to mainstream performance management processes.

Influence of the *Unsettled* Economic and Political Contexts on the Performance Contracts in Zimbabwe

The question on the factors influencing the implementation and contribution of performance contracts in local government revealed three main themes as presented below.

Performance Contracts for Senior Administrators in “Unsettled” Political and Economic Contexts**Economic Instability**

Participants cited economic instability in the country as an elephant in the room and a major hurdle in Zimbabwe’s endeavour to implement performance contracts effectively. Since the 2000s, Zimbabwe has been experiencing economic challenges characterised by inflation and unemployment (Pasara & Garidzirai, 2020). Between 2008 and 2024, the GoZ through the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development and the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe introduced several fiscal and monetary policies and currency reforms to curb inflation but to no avail. Zimbabwe is experiencing hyperinflation and there is a yawning gap between parallel and official market exchange rates (World Bank, 2023). The inflationary environment affects economic activities in the country and local governments have not been spared. The narratives presented below demonstrate how inflation has affected the implementation of performance contracts.

As a local authority, we develop our budget to finance the implementation of projects in our contracts between October and November every year. The budget is usually approved in January of the following year. So you can see that the gap between budget and time of implementation is wide given the rate of inflation in Zimbabwe (KI 4 CEO, LB).

KI 5 (AD, MC) had this to say

In terms of revenue collection sometimes we will be at around 120% collection but in real terms, the value is less. The prices of goods and services are changing every day. What is planned against revenue collection doesn't match because of inflation. Because of the level of inflation and devaluation, a quarter of what is in the contract will be implemented. This performance management template works in a stable economic environment.

The study found that the economic volatility has affected local government procurement processes. Local government procurement is guided by the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act (PPDPAA) [Chapter 22:23]. KI 3 (D, CC) queried the applicability of section 55(2)(b) in inflationary periods. The section stipulates that “the contract shall not be signed until at least fourteen days have passed following the giving of that notice”. She explained that

The Act introduced lengthy procurement processes which are okay for checks and balances in a normal economy. You know that if you advertise for tenders you will have this duration of time [14 days waiting period] and when you want to award, they introduce what they call a 14-day standstill period. This is a period when you are doing nothing. Most of our prices will be Zimbabwean dollars (ZWL) because that is the currency we collect so by the time you are done, at the award of the contract, the supplier will then tell you that prices have gone up and in terms of that Act you can only do a variation that is not more than 20%. Anything more than 20% you have to redo the tender. So some of the projects we fail to implement not because we don't have the resources but because procurement keeps failing (KI 3 D, CC)

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The preceding narratives show the complexities associated with procurement processes in Zimbabwe's inflationary environment. The prolonged procurement process makes the entire procurement process vulnerable to inflation and devaluation. It makes it difficult for local governments to procure essential goods and services needed in implementing programmes in performance contracts. Participants also complained that some products, for instance, fuel and water chemicals are charged in United States of America dollars (USD) yet local governments generate revenue in ZWL. This affects the implementation of programmes that rely on fuel such as refuse collection.

However, KI 6 (AD, CC) had contrary views. He denigrated economic challenges arguing that they are a scapegoat used by managers to justify failure. He argued that

What I know, with performance management, you can't justify not performing by citing economic factors. Performance is about you being able to innovate and strategise. You must have your own strategies to perform. For example, we have the City of Mutare which has been doing well despite what the macro environment is saying. The question is why they can perform yet they are in the same environment. It becomes the duty of the CEO to innovate and come up with ways to overcome the situation. If we consider the economy we will not be able to assess anyone because everyone will be pointing to the economy or financing. They will just say the situation was bad and there was no money.

KI6(AD, CC) also had contrary views regarding the effects of inflation on budgeting. He explained that

Remember we are in a multicurrency system and like us we were the first to submit a budget in USD, which was approved two years ago. Even now our budget is in USD but when you make payments you can use any currency of your choice. Our budget is locked in USD.

From the above excerpts, it can be argued that the effectiveness of performance contracts in improving service delivery depends on the economic situation in the country. In the case of Zimbabwe, economic instability compromised the contribution of performance contracts significantly. Economic tabulations experienced since the 2000s continue to hound local governments in the country. Inconsistent monetary policies, inflations and unemployment compromised the revenue generation capacity of local governments thereby undermining the implementation of performance contracts. The central government's failure to adequately support local governments has worsened the problem. The findings of the study regarding the influence of economic factors on the implementation of performance contracts are in line with findings elsewhere. For instance, Abane & Brenya's (2021) study demonstrates that the organisation's environmental antecedents (social, economic, political) influence the implementation of performance contracts in local government. Studies by Ledger and Rampedi (2019), Van der Walddt (2014) and Mamokhere (2019) show that municipalities in South Africa struggle to implement Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) due to financial challenges. As Van der Walddt (2014) illustrates, municipalities struggle to implement performance management systems because of misalignment between the planned development targets and budgets. Municipalities in many African countries are failing to generate revenue to finance their development priorities (Mohangi & Nyika, 2023).

Performance Contracts for Senior Administrators in “Unsettled” Political and Economic Contexts**Poor Revenue Generation**

The theme of poor revenue generation emerged as a void and crucial factor hindering the contribution of performance contracts to local and national development. There was consensus among participants that local governments are not generating adequate revenue to sustain effective implementation of performance contracts. KI 2 (AD, MC) attributed revenue collection challenges to the prevailing economic environment characterised by unpredictable monetary changes and tight controls on local government. He explained

The environment is affecting the funding of critical programmes as some government policies are affecting revenue generation. For instance, local authorities do not have any revenue source which is strictly paid in the USD. Local authorities are also not allowed to invoice clients in USD as a way of preserving the value of the dollar whilst suppliers of goods are either demanding USD payments or those who still require payments in ZWL are inflating prices so that they can get the required USD at the black market.

Participants felt that local government should be allowed to generate revenue in USD. According to KI 3 (D, CC)

If the Passport Office is allowed to charge in USD, why can't we be allowed to charge USD for at least those services that require the use of fuel and water chemicals which we have to buy in USD? Why can't we be allowed to at least recover the cost?

Some participants attributed low revenue collection efficiency to residents' and stakeholders' reluctance to pay rates. There was consensus among participants that residents and some government departments owed local governments huge sums of money. Due to the prevailing economic hardship and unemployment, residents have limited disposable income. Consequently, payment of council rates is seen as a luxury rather than a necessity. Economic sanctions on Zimbabwe have limited possibility for external funding for local governments.

Although the central government transfers devolution funds to augment local revenue, participants felt that the transfers were inadequate to finance critical projects (KI 1, CEO RDC; KI 3, D CC). KI 4 (CEO, RDC) also complained that devolution funds come in ZWL, which is easily eroded by inflation. He also expressed concern over delays in the disbursement of devolution funds. Delays in the disbursement of devolution funds in an inflationary environment significantly reduce the value of devolution transfers and undermine the implementation of planned projects. As explained by KI 2 (AD, MC)

The government is also not disbursing devolution funds in time and in a stable currency. This affects the implementation of projects budgeted to be funded from devolution funds. By the time the money is disbursed, it will not be adequate to complete the budgeted programme.

The findings presented above show that the introduction of performance contracts without accompanying capacity-building mechanisms undermines effective implementation. Due to financial constraints and incapacitation, local governments struggled to implement all the planned projects outlined in their performance contracts and key result areas. These findings align with findings in other jurisdictions. Sosu

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(2020) found that most of the challenges undermining the implementation of performance contracts in Ghana’s local government, particularly district assemblies are attributable to financial constraints. The study also highlighted challenges associated with the disbursement of central government funds. Sosu (2020) found irregularities in the transfer of central government grants (District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF)) to local government, a situation that halted the implementation of local government projects and initiatives. Sosu (2020), succinctly argues that “the time the fund is released is a determining factor in whether or not it is possible to achieve all performance targets specified in the action plan.” In support, SEND-Ghana (2015) revealed that most local governments could not effectively deliver their performance targets because of the late disbursement of central government grants.

Brain Drain and Associated Human Capacity Constraints

Due to the prevailing economic hardships and revenue generation constraints discussed above, local governments are struggling to motivate and retain critical resources. According to KI 1 (CEO, RDC) “people work to look after their families and if they feel their salary is in ZWL and as when the Finance Director has got USD you have to buy that USD using that salary. At the end of the day it’s not working for us”. This has resulted in high labour turnover and shortages of critical skills in some departments. The hardest hit being the health and engineering departments. KI 3 (D, CC) explained that “we are facing serious brain drains. Skills flight is now so real. We have lost so many firefighters to Saudi Arabia. We have lost so many nurses some to government some to outside.” In support of the preceding view, KI 6 (AD, CC) noted that

For our departments, the engineering department which is our service delivery department has been affected a lot by the young engineers living. You know they come as graduate trainees, you train them, you give them the job the next thing they are gone. Recently we lost our water engineer, we have lost one of the town planners, we lost a project engineer, and we have lost so many engineers.

Participants also reported staff shortages in the ICT department. The above narrative shows high employee attrition levels that threaten the implementation of performance contracts, programmes and projects. Shortages of engineers in the works department affect key service delivery areas such as water service provision, refuse collection and other related services. The other departments also rely on the works department for implementing their projects. Shortages of engineers and ICT specialists also undermine digital transformation which is critical for organisational survival in the digital era. Leveraging technology in streamlining performance management systems and processes without qualified staff becomes difficult. However, staff attrition is not unique to Zimbabwean local government. Local governments in other countries are grappling with the same challenge. Kimathi (2017) highlighted a range of challenges bedevilling devolved local governments in Kenya, chiefly among them being human resources deficiencies. Kimathi (2017) revealed cases of local governments failing to provide health services due to critical shortages of workers. Ramutsheli & Janse van Rensburg (2015) identified human resources capacity gaps and shortages as some of the major factors compromising the performance of local governments in South Africa. Their study found high vacancy rates in local government. Such gaps undermine the achievement of performance targets as local governments, just like other organisations, depend on human resources for the achievement of set objectives and targets. Without adequate human resources, performance contracts can easily become a source of frustration for local government management.

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Participants had mixed views on how the prevailing political environment influenced the implementation of performance contracts. Some participants argued that the prevailing political context is conducive to the implementation of performance contracts. When asked about the influence of the political environment on performance contracts, KI 6 (DD, CC) said,

The way I see those things are totally divorced from each other (politics and performance contracts). For me, political issues (recall of councillors) at local government don't have any effects on performance contracting because remember we said that the key document in performance contracting is the strategic plan. The strategic plan, which is in line with NDS1, is a five-year plan and you will also have your targets for the year, and these are moving targets and the role of the CEOs is to implement. Political issues then do not have any effect.

The above view demonstrates that political factors, particularly the recall of councillors do not change the strategic direction of the council and the implementation of already agreed annual plans. Once the plans are agreed upon, implementation goes on even after the recall of the mayor. Strategic plans and annual plans bring stability to the implementation of performance contracts. This view was also supported by KI 3 (D, CC) who explained that

In our case, we haven't seen much changes. Yes, the Mayor that signed the performance contract was recalled but councillors agreed that we were part of the process when the strategic plan was being done and we all agreed that this is the direction we want to take so we will stick to it.

Some participants also appreciated the level of political commitment from the President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, towards the implementation of performance contracts. The study found that there is a strong political will to ensure that public organisations comply with IRBM standards and the WoGA. KI 1 (CEO, RDC) noted “Remember this whole thing of performance contracts and dashboards started in the Second Republic. This shows serious political buy in terms of ensuring that we implement performance contracting.” In concurrence, KI 6 (DD, CC) indicated that “Even at the national level, we have ministers and permanent secretaries signing contracts. It's something that was never there before. Even the mayors are signing contracts before the President of the country”. KI 5 (AD, MC) also cited the President's Call to Action for local authorities as an indication of political willingness to improve local government performance. The participant also shared that the President has indicated that the country is supposed to have awards for best-performing local authorities. All these pronouncements were viewed as signs of serious political commitment.

However, some participants questioned the government's sincerity and commitment to supporting local governments in the implementation of programmes and projects planned in performance contracts. Some participants felt that instead of supporting local government, the central government is rather frustrating them using supervision powers (KI 5, AD MC; KI 2, AD, MC; KI 3, D CC). Delays in the approval of local government budgets have been highlighted by participants as an instrument being used by the central government to undermine the implementation of annual plans and the performance of local governments in general. During the period of data collection (February 2024), participants indicated that 2024 budgets were not yet approved. KI 3 (D, CC) revealed that central government directives and controls undermine

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local innovation and creativity needed to survive in a turbulent and *unsettled* economic situation. She gave an example where their proposal to sell land in USD as a way of retaining the value of land was turned down by the Minister of Local Government. She also cited the centralisation of vehicle licenses under the Zimbabwe National Road Administration (ZINARA) and the complexities associated with road financing model. She explained that the money disbursed by ZINARA to local authorities is not enough to cover all the roads within urban local authorities. KI 5 (AD, MC) complained that ZINARA disbursements and support tend to favour rural district councils with shorter road coverage compared to urban councils. KI 2 (AD, MC) attributed the complexities to vertically divided authority. According to him “it looks like local government should not do well. If they perform, it has other connotations. Even if you consider those grants that used to support local government, they are no longer coming. It has been years now.” The implications of vertically divided authority on the functionality of urban councils were supported by KI 3 (D, CC) who explained that

I think the vertically divided authority has its challenges where the support can only be minimal because, at the same time, you have your urban councils that are dominated by oppositions. So when they thrive, it might be misconstrued to say the opposition is doing well.

The participants’ views above show that political settlements have undermined local governance significantly. Central government approval is being used as a strategy of subversion to undermine local governance, particularly in urban councils. The central government is not prepared to see effective local governance in urban areas as this might give political visibility to opposition parties. This explains delays associated with central government approvals.

Recalls of mayors and councillors have also affected the implementation of performance contracts. KI 2 (AD, MC) highlighted that “the political environment in the country has caused a wave of uncertainty on sitting councillors. Councillors are not sure whether they are going to be recalled or not”. High levels of uncertainty and insecurity among councillors will negatively affect the implementation of performance contracts because policymakers form part of the evaluation and oversight process.

The preceding discussion demonstrates how undue political interference in local government operations undermines the contribution of performance contracts to service delivery. Literature also highlights power politics and political interference in local government as a wicked problem hampering effective local governance in most African countries. Sosu’s (2020) study in Ghana highlighted interference among policymakers in local government management. His study showed that some policymakers abused their positions to smuggle in new projects and change agreed action plans at the implementation stage. This was done without the disbursement of additional budgetary allocations, and, as a result, some departments and employees failed to fulfil their performance targets.

Nature of Performance Contract and Assessment Framework

Although participants appreciated the government's shift towards performance contracts, there were concerns over the nature of the contracts. Participants complained that the contracts were rigid and were imposed upon local authorities without any room for adjustments. KI 3 (D, CC), had this to say

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The downside of the contract is that it is a bit structured. When you query certain things or when you want certain things to appear a certain way, there isn't room for that flexibility. It is as given by the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC). At the end of the day, you have to follow a certain format.

Some participants expressed concern over the limited scope of performance contracts. Performance contracts only cover senior management and exclude lower-level employees. According to KI 6 (DD, CC),

There are clear performance areas, targets, and scores for senior managers. They are monitored every quarter. That system is not at the lower level. For junior employees, some kinds of performance checks are done, but in terms of the standard we are saying we need to cascade contracts downwards.

KI 3 (D, CC) supported the above view explaining that

We have a serious appreciation of performance contracts at the top up to the assistant director level but we still have a long way to go to have that same appreciation from section heads going downwards. This affects us when we are working towards targets.

Participants also expressed concern regarding the assessment of performance contracts. The study found that the assessment of performance contracts were done by independent assessors appointed through the OPC. KI 3 (D, CC) complained that some external assessors lack knowledge and some appreciation of the local government context. She explained that

Our experience with last time's assessments was some doctors, I don't know from which institution but then you can feel they lack the understanding of the sector and how it operates. So at the end of the day, you end up giving to what they are saying because that's what they are saying. The assessment becomes an academic exercise.

It can be inferred from the above discussion that proper understanding, monitoring and assessment of performance contracts are critical ingredients for the effective implementation of the contracts. The section also emphasised the importance of flexibility in the implementation of performance contracts. However, if implementation is rigid, people lack an in-depth understanding of the contracts and there are weak monitoring and assessment methods, performance contracts may not produce the desired results. Sosu (2020) argues that “if monitoring and supervision are inconsistent or intermittent, staff may be present at work regularly, but not working for improved service delivery”. This demonstrates the centrality of proper monitoring and reporting systems linked to performance targets and indicators. Consequently, scholars (Sosu, 2020; Mohangi & Nyika, 2023) emphasise training and follow-up capacity-building initiatives to enable employees to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities to effectively implement performance contracts.

The study also revealed gaps in performance data collection and management. KI 1 (CEO, RDC); KI 3 (D, CC) and KI 6 (DD, CC), concurred that there are no systematic and digital systems and tools for effective data collection, management and reporting. KI 1 (CEO, RDC) underscored the need for leveraging technology in collecting performance data to minimise subjectivity and make decisions based on incorrect data. Because of the lack of digital data collection tools, some local authorities were reported to be making ratings that are not backed by data. Without proper data collection systems, the identifi-

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cation of performance gaps becomes problematic. This affects the efficacy of performance contracts as a reform strategy to improve organisational performance and facilitate the realisation of local and national development goals. Kangethe, *et al.*, (2022) hold that public organisations in Africa lag in the utilisation of digital applications in managing performance. The next section presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the WoGA and the IRBMS, the GoZ has demonstrated commitment towards implementing performance contracts. Performance contracts are seen as a way of ensuring alignment between local and national development strategies and strategically positioning the country to become an upper-middle-income economy by 2030. Indeed, if implemented to their logical conclusion, performance contracts could transform local government service delivery and facilitate the attainment of national development goals.

Although performance contracts are still at the infant stage, this chapter demonstrated that the *unsettled* economic and political contexts threaten their implementation. The chapter identified the following challenges: unpredictable monetary changes, inflation, weak local government revenue generation capacity, insufficient and unpredictable devolution funds, brain drain, tight central government controls, political recalls, rigid performance management template, and involvement of consultants with limited appreciation of local government dynamics. Since this study was done within the initial stages of implementation, the OPC in collaboration with local governments, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, and the Ministry of Local Government should take proactive measures to address the identified gaps.

To address the identified gaps and improve implementation, the chapter recommends the following:

- As is the case with other public organisations, the central government should permit local authorities to charge in USD and collect some tariffs in USD, for instance, land sales.
- To enhance the efficacy of performance contracts, it is important to address data collection and reporting challenges by leveraging digital technologies. Local governments and other government departments should integrate performance contracts and digital technologies to manage performance and realise local and national targets. They should establish digital tools to collect and manage data and monitor, track and report progress towards the set targets specified in the performance contracts. By prioritising digital technologies, local governments, and the government in general, will develop timely interventions to address performance gaps. The adoption of digital technologies can revolutionise how public organisations manage performance contracts and performance management in general. With digital tools, local governments can create a more streamlined and systematic approach, that is interlinked, allowing them to achieve unprecedented success. The benefits of digital technologies are widely documented and it is high time local governments embrace them to remain competitive in today's digitalised world.
- Local governments should consider alternative service delivery financing models such as public-private partnerships and crowdfunding.
- Performance contracts should be cascaded downwards to cover all council employees. This helps to promote a culture of performance across all levels.

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- The central government should transfer around 50% of the devolution funds in USD as councils face difficulties in converting the ZWL to USD and councils end up buying inflated goods. In the same vein, a certain portion of ZINARA transfers to local government should be in USD. In addition, devolution funds and ZINARA transfers should be predictable and released in time so that local projects can be implemented as scheduled. Devolution funds should also be linked to the needs and uniqueness of each local government. Those with more responsibilities should receive more. They should be consultative.
- The central government in collaboration with local government and non-governmental organisations should roll out training programmes to raise awareness of performance contracts among council employees. Raising awareness of performance contracts among all council employees enhances the spirit of togetherness in chasing targets.
- To improve the assessment of performance contracts, the OPC should ensure that evaluation panels comprise academic staff and local government practitioners. This is important because some academics lack a practical appreciation of local government dynamics.
- The OPC should continuously refine the performance contracts and include consequences for performance. Good performance should be rewarded and bad performance should be punished accordingly to discourage such performance. The system should be strengthened by passing laws that deal with performers and non-performers.
- The OPC should review the performance contracts in light of implementation experiences so far. The review process should be done in a participatory manner so that the views of the implementing agencies are heard and factored in.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The study explored Zimbabwe’s implementation experiences of performance contracts from a qualitative point of view. There is, therefore, a need for future studies focusing on the same issue from a quantitative point of view. Statistical analysis will help in measuring the impact of performance contracts on local government performance. Comparative studies are also necessary to explore the implementation of performance contracts in Africa.

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