

Navigating The Tides Towards The Attainment Of Sustainable Development. The Case Of Masvingo Municipality, Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

Capacity constraints in developing economies have made the road towards the attainment of sustainable development bumpy, rocky and thorny. Hence, this paper looks into the strategies that municipalities may adopt to address the limited resources challenge in order to meet triple bottom-line factors, social, economic and environmental considerations. An explorative research design and qualitative research method were adopted. Seventeen in-depth interviews were successfully conducted with key informants. The study proposes the adoption of the following strategies horizontal collaborations, creation of Commercial Strategic Business Units (SBUs), attracting public private partnerships, productive use of municipal farms, recycling of refuse and the production of methane gas and manure from wastes for commercial purposes.

Key words: Capacity constraints, Municipality, Sustainable Development, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Sustainable development, a developmental holistic view, has become a topical issue, a straight jacket in any discipline and any business undertaking in the 21st century and beyond, (OECD 2001; Pagell, Wu et al., 2010); OECD, 2012). Savitz and Weber (2006) advocate that, “sustainability is now a fundamental principle of smart management.” Literature is laden with studies that address how organizations can incorporate the triple bottom line factors (social, economic and environmental issues) of sustainable development into their business processes, (Seuring and Muller 2008); Pagell, Wu and Wasserman, 2010). Organizations and institutions make use of their research and development to find innovative ways of meeting social, economic and environmental elements of sustainable development. Rio Earth Summit (UNCED, 1992) Agenda 21 position local governments as key players in the campaign of achieving sustainable development. However, the fulfillment socio-economic- environmental goals require resources and innovative ideas to realize such goals. Gill and Frame (1990) notes that, “the public sector has increasingly come under pressure to improve its service provision often without additional or even shrinking financial resources”. Most developing economies suffer from limited resources base for example capital to undertake huge infrastructure development projects, knowledge and management skills in order to achieve sustainable development goals, (Li and Akintoye ,2003; Askar and Gab-Allah ,2002). The New Partnership for Africa’s development pointed capacity constraints as being the foremost stumbling block to the achievement of sustainable development in Africa, (OECD 2006a). Ahsan et al., (2005) supports this view noting that, “lack of capital to procure wastes transportation equipment in developing economies has resulted in municipal corporations fail to handle increasing quantities of wastes and a significant portion of wastes are not properly stored, collected or disposed in proper places”. The uncollected wastes are ultimately dumped in open spaces, streets, and drains, clogging the drainage system which creates tremendous environmental degradation and pose health hazards, Rahmann and Ahmeduzzaman, (2013).

In Zimbabwe, limited resources hampers municipalities to achieve their visions and ultimately sustainable development, for instance, lack of capital to procure waste/refuse collection trucks, adequate water purification chemicals, rehabilitation of water and sewage infrastructure, improvement of the welfare of citizens, support of local economic activities and investment in green technologies. Municipalities in Zimbabwe heavily rely on the fiscus and rate payers for funding. On the contrary, the Zimbabwean government owes several municipalities huge sums of money needed for the support of municipal operations. Rate payers find it extremely difficult to fully pay up their debts owing to economic hardships. Tariffs and rates hikes by the municipalities are always faced with resentment by

the citizens hence result in lower revenue collection by the municipalities. Zimbabwe is still battling to recover from a decade of economic crisis and persistent drought cycles that bedeviled the nation. Resources are still scarce and the nation is suffering from incessant budget deficit problems. Municipalities in the past were supported by donor funding and non-governmental organizations, however, on a depressing note; the socio-economic and political dispensation that prevailed in the nation a decade ago scared away donors and non-governmental organizations. Despite the limited support from the fiscus, rate payers and donors, public institutions are still mandated to ensure the fulfillment of social, economic and environmental goals. The push comes from the society (citizens); economic growth and the regulatory environment. Instead of squeezing life out of rate payers, crying foul about the limited fiscus support and the crowding out of donor support, municipalities has to find alternative innovative ways for survival. One is inclined towards posing the following research question, “How can municipalities in Zimbabwe navigate these tides; traverse through the valley of death and walk out of the thorny, rocky and bumpy road towards the attainment of sustainable development”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The most commonly used methods in local government’s resource mobilization and improvement of service delivery has been through public-private partnerships, and twinning cities methods. The following literature will be based on the discussions and debates surrounding these methods.

Partnerships

Partnerships have been heralded as the best way forward in the bid to achieve sustainable development. Partnerships are important resource mobilizers, (Li and Akintoye, 2003). The Rio earth summit calls for the development of partnerships for sustainable development, (UNICED, 1992). The eighth millennium development goal highlights that, there is a need to develop global partnerships for development, (Grown, 2005).

Public Private Partnerships (PPP)

The most commonly highlighted strategies that public institutions can adopt in order to improve their limited resources base is the PPP/PFI frameworks. Several strategies which fall under PPP/PFI includes, Built operate invest, service contracts, Built-Operate-(Own)-Transfer (BO(O)T), Joint ventures and Privatization, (Li and Akintoye, 2003).

The UN Defined PPP as new ways employed by public institutions to form agreements with the private sector, who share their resources and their capability to accomplish projects within allocated budget and time, whereas the public sector maintain the task to make available such services to the public in a manner that assists the public and bring economic growth and upgrade the quality of life (Bult and Dewulf, 2007). PPP Model has been implemented in both developing and developed economies to improve economic growth, development of infrastructure and to achieve quality service delivery, Askar and Gab-Allah (2002).

PPP Benefits and challenges

The benefits of PPP’s have been well documented in literature, some of the most notable benefits includes but not limited to the following; less tied up public funding, improved quality of service, generation of additional revenue, acceleration of infrastructure provision, better incentive to perform, PPP projects attracts larger, potentially more sophisticated bidders to the project by the appealing size and scope of the PPP project, transfers certain risk to the private partner, time is greatly reduced, cost reduction as compared to the traditional processes, allows creativity and innovation, enhances government’s capacity to develop integrated solutions, relief of financial burden, reduction in size of (inefficient) bureaucracy, growth encouragement, relief of administration burden, government can better focus and fund social issues such as health, education, pensions and arts, Walker et al (1995); Bing et al., (2005); European Commission (2003); Li and Akintoye (2003); Askar and Gab-Allah (2002).

Whilst there are a number of notable PPP benefits as has been presented above, the implementation of PPP can pose a number of challenges and these includes; PPP negotiations takes longer time periods and are usually costly, contractual paper work is complex, may distort spending and urban planning priorities, may lock in government to existing modes of service delivery and lead to loss of public sector skills, costs of failure are usually shouldered by the government, Berg at al., (2002); Li and Akintoye (2003). Zineldin and Bredenlow, (2003) notes that 70% of all strategic alliances fail this result in reluctance of companies to implement strategic partnerships.

Twinning cities

Twinning cities popularly known as “Sister Cities” or friendly cities has been practiced especially in developed nations where municipalities collaborate with other municipalities to tackle common challenges, share knowledge, experiences and resources, Handley (2006). O’Toole, (2000) points out there three developmental approaches to

twinning cities strategy namely; associative, reciprocative and commercial. Associative refers to philosophy of international friendship, cultural exchange and a general awareness; reciprocative refers to the growth of an educational exchanges system and finally commercial refers to an attempt to take advantage of the associative and reciprocative process to further local economic aims.

Twinning cities comes with notable benefits such as increased trade, increased foreign direct investments, collaborative research, improved tourism, political relationship building, sharing of council best practices, cultural integration and enrichment, fostering of business linkages and educational boost, healthy and social services, sharing of methods of conserving natural resources (Smith and Ballingall, 2003; Carruthers, 2006; Robinson and Vuletich, 2007; Nakamura, Elder and Mori, 2011).

There are a couple of benefits brought home by the twinning method however care should be taken in the choice of cities to twin with as this is vital to the success of the partnership, Smith and Ballingall, (2003). If not properly planned, twinning cities may pose unforeseen challenges such as goal incompatibility, cultural mismatches, exploitation by the sister city, increase in administration cost of the partnership, wastage of ratepayers' funds, (Carruthers, 2006; Robinson and Vuletich, 2007).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An explorative research design was adopted making use of a single case study approach using the qualitative research method. According to Yin (2003) case studies play an important role when seeking to address the "how or why" research questions. Case study allows an in depth study of a phenomenon at hand where no stone may be left unturned. Seventeen interviews were successfully conducted with the assistance of two research assistants so that vital information could be captured and for cross checking of data. Semi structured interviews allowed the researchers gain much more information salient to what the research sought to unfold. Interview guides were used as data collection instruments and information was recorded on note pads (hand written). The respondents included the City Mayor, Town Clerk, Director of Housing and Amenities, Health and Welfare Officers, Procurement Officers, Treasurer, Water and Chemicals Superintendent and Masvingo City Councilor. These are personnel in Departments and Sections which are vital forces behind ensuring that the municipality realizes its vision and mission statements. They are referred to as management in the next sections of this study. Four prominent business people and five the members from the Masvingo Rates Payers Association participated in the study. Masvingo Rate Payers Association the representatives of the ultimate consumers of municipal services participated in the study. Business people in the city of Masvingo were also deemed to be vital sources of innovative ideas that may be incorporated by the municipality as they were knowledgeable about business opportunities and how to exploit them. The use of different sources of information is vital for triangulation which ensures reliability of the study's findings, Yin, (2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Masvingo Municipality (The case study)

The vision statement for Masvingo municipality reads:

"To be a prosperous, sustainable and environmentally friendly city".

Mission statement reads:

"The city of Masvingo shall act as a responsive and collaborative local authority dedicated to working with its rainbow community in providing quality and cost effective municipal services"

Sources of Funds for the municipality

Despite the funding from the fiscus, rate payers and donors the respondents were asked to highlight other sources of developmental resources for the municipality. The following sources were presented;

- a) Zimbabwe National Road Authority (ZINARA) for road rehabilitation.
- b) Leasing of municipality's farms
- c) Rent from Councils shops, revenue from municipal beer halls.
- d) River sand and pit sand sales from the municipal land.
- e) Spot fines.
- f) Interest from revolving fund.
- g) Hiring out of municipal premises and equipment for example community halls, bulldozers and tractors
- h) Fee from ambulance and fire brigade services.

Respondents indicated that funds being generated from some of the above sources were insignificant as most charges were subsidized charges meant to promote and sustain the wellbeing of the community. Innovative ideas were

needed so as to augment the resources gap in order to steer the entity towards the upbringing of its community, economy and the environment.

Respondents were asked to highlight challenges there were facing in the bumpy road towards the attainment of sustainable development. The following challenges were noted;

Rates Collection System

It is worth noting that, despite the emphasis of the researchers to the respondents to think of other strategies that the municipality could adopt in order to close the resources gap, respondents reinforced the need for the municipality to tighten its rates collection system as it was not effective. They highlighted that, some government institutions were failing to honor their debts especially the payment of water bills. The municipality was being owed huge sums of dollars by these government departments in the city in terms of water bills. The municipality had no legal powers to collect dues from these government departments which were the most consumers of water. They were regarded as providers of essential services in the country; hence threatening them by withdrawal of municipal services was not an option for the municipality. The government departments include hospitals, police stations and state colleges in the city, which rely on government hand outs. Therefore, there was a need to tighten the rates collection system instead of selective collection where civilians were hard pressed whilst government institutions were spared.

Political Manipulation

Respondents raised the motion that too much political interferences in the decision making structures of municipalities in Zimbabwe affected effective and efficient operation of municipalities. Municipalities were being used to advance largely political visions using municipals meager resources. A case was cited where the Minister of Local Government made an unequivocal directive to all Zimbabwean municipalities to waive all rates balances dating back to 2009 and to offer access to municipal services to all rate payers who had previously been disconnected because of failure to honor their dues. The directive was meant to gain political mileage in the 2013 harmonized national elections and there was no compensation from government to cover the void. Hence there would always be limited funds to support effective municipal services.

Sprouting of housing cooperatives

The political landscape prevailing in Zimbabwe has led to the sprouting of housing cooperatives being backed by prominent politicians. These have resulted in the additional development of residential stands which were beyond the municipality's immediate plans and existing infrastructure. These additional residential stands require the municipality's intervention in terms of water reticulation system, sewage services and road networks thereby putting further strain on the municipality's scarce resources. This has also made the provision of quality municipal services to the community a nightmare.

Power outages

Power outages has become the norm of the day in Zimbabwe is having an adverse effect on the pumping of sewage and water hence sewage overflows frequently contaminate nearby water sources. The overflows attract heavy fines from the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) authorities. The overflows compounded additional problems in terms of added costs on water purification chemicals. There were no generators or dedicated power line that has been put in place to cater for the periods where there will be no electricity. An idea of applying for a dedicated power line was also raised. However, most responses indicated that there was a need for the purchase of solar generators that will be housed at the pump stations as these would go a long way in reducing electricity costs.

Discharge of effluent

Some abattoirs such as Montana and Caswell meats at times discharge effluent into water reservoirs thereby contaminating these water sources which in-turn increases water purification chemicals costs.

Water purification chemicals

The municipality was hard hit by the pulling out of UNICEF from assisting municipalities in Zimbabwe with water purification chemicals. The unexpected withdrawal of UNICEF was felt by quiet a number of municipalities in Zimbabwe. This has made consistent provision of safe water to the community difficult hence water related diseases such as typhoid were in some cases reported.

Strategies to close the resources gap

Results from management

The researchers asked management about the number of public private partnerships the municipality had and how it was benefiting from such arrangements. Respondents indicated that there were very limited PPP arrangements at the time of the study. This was as a result of skepticism between the business community and state institutions. There

were also rare cases where the private sector actually provided public services, a trend in developing nations where governments jealously guards against the ceding of public services to the private sector for political reasons. This is in contrast with trends in developed and emerging economies where the private sector becomes the long term provider of public services by taking the responsibility for financing, design, construction and the operation of the infrastructure and facilities (Ahadzi and Bowles, 2004).

The municipality needs to take note of the fact that even though PPP arrangement comes with attractive benefits care must be taken to ensure that the municipality retains greater control of the partnership. Private companies in Zimbabwe have a tendency of profiteering at the expense of the community through charging exorbitant rates. The municipality will still be blamed by the community under such a scenario. Li and Akintoye (2003) hinted that costs of PPP failure are usually shouldered by the government.

Respondents also revealed the fact that in the past they used to forge sister relationships with municipalities of other nations for instance Germany and Netherlands. This was a source of knowledge transfer, capital for projects such as building of schools and the acquisition of new technology. This corroborate with Handley (2006) who allude that Twinning cities method is meant for municipalities collaborate with other municipalities to tackle common challenges, share knowledge, experiences and resources. However the political environment that prevailed in Zimbabwe loosened these important relationships.

The municipality had good developmental projects that were reflected in their strategic plans to augment their resource base such as the renovation of their dilapidated and outdated beer hall structures, creation of Commercial Strategic Business Units, construction of recreational swimming pools and construction of more flea markets. However, the main problem was the non-implementation of proposed strategies. Most ideas remained on paper and in theoretical discussions. This corroborates with Pearce and Robson (2009) assertion that a strategy is considered good when it is implemented and most strategies are never implemented hence most strategic failures are witnessed at the implementation stage.

Masvingo Rate Payers Association

Masvingo Rate Payers Association expressed their discontent with the current municipal services being delivered by the municipality. They indicated that the city of Masvingo used to be rated as the cleanest city in Zimbabwe. However, the municipal services standards had deteriorated to unimaginable levels as garbage was now found everywhere, refuse collection trips were very minimal. There are also frequent bursts of sewage pipes and the municipality attends to such issues late. The respondents appreciated the fact that the city population and residential area was expanding at a faster rate than municipality's existing infrastructure and resources. However, they blamed the municipality for improper management of rate payer's funds. They highlighted that the municipality was using the bulky of funds generated from tax payers to pay its workers hefty salaries at the expense of service delivery. One member of the association lamented, "The municipality needs to be dragged to court for its unjustified salary pecks. How can a street cleaner earn more than a school Headmaster? It's impure". Respondents also mentioned that, had it not been for the government's intervention to freeze municipal salary increments this immoral behavior would still be upheld by the municipality.

Masvingo Rate Payers Association suggested that the municipality should come up with Commercial Strategic Business Units (SBUs) to augment its current sources of income in order to develop the city to world class standards. They also raised the fact that there were not constantly involved in the decision making circles of the municipality yet their participation was vital for developmental purposes. This view contradicts the municipality's mission, part of it reads, "..... dedicated to working with its rainbow community"

Business People

Prominent business people in the city of Masvingo were asked to give an assessment of service delivery levels of the municipality and to highlight possible strategies that the municipality could employ in order to improve municipal services.

Respondents alluded that service delivery system had dramatically declined as compared to the past performances. They reiterated that the socio-economic climate that prevailed in the nation a decade ago negatively affected almost all businesses in different sectors of the economy. Even the collection of rates was weakened as the Zimbabwe dollar lost value on hourly basis. However the dollarization era presented a new dawn for the business people and municipalities were better placed.

They indicated that the municipality hired many employees who were being handsomely paid hence putting pressure on existing resources. The municipality lacked innovative ideas for instance its beer halls were old fashioned and in a

dilapidated state. They need to be renovated to suit current fashion trends in order for them to attract patrons. These can be a vital source of funds for municipal development projects. They indicated that in the past the municipality used to get lot money from these beer halls. These beer halls were cashing in a lot of money due to the fact that municipal beer halls enjoyed a monopoly on the market. However, deregulation and globalization has attracted more players in the liquor market hence, for the municipality to survive, it has to renovate its beer halls to meet current innovative retail formats.

Respondents pointed that Kyle Dam which is very close to Masvingo city posed a good business opportunity for the municipality to engage in lake harvesting. This follows Kariba municipality which managed to negotiate a portion of Kariba Dam for lake harvesting in a bid to augment its resource base.

The municipality lack management skills to fully utilize its resources, one respondent whispered, “How can the municipality lease its farms instead of exploiting them. The municipality wants easy money such as rentals, income from lease instead of utilizing them for agricultural purposes”. Other state institutions like universities were quick to realize that the government was operating on shoe string budget therefore heavy reliance on government handout was not sustainable; hence they owned farms which they fully utilized for agricultural purposes and Commercial Business Units (SBUs) to augment government handouts and levies from students in order to advance their mandates.

Respondents indicated that there was a need to utilize sewage works for commercial activities. There were no activities at the municipality’s sewage works which were being done to utilize wastes for commercial purposes. They also highlighted that much could be done in order to make use of wastes in the production of bio gas. This is an opportunity which can be capitalized upon to generate funds, commercial agriculture and employment opportunities.

The sewage works could be effectively used to generate Bio gas through the construction of biogas digesters. Respondents highlighted that biogas has several notable uses, cooking and lighting with methane gas, providing heat to chicks and piglets in poultry and pig farming, cooling of milk in dairy farming, substrate for mushroom production with biogas methane to keep temperature high. Respondents expressed the view that Masvingo Province had limited suppliers of pork which are failing to meet the demand and also the city currently does not have mushroom farmers yet the market is there. Masvingo’s weather condition is conducive for farming business ventures. Therefore, the municipality needs to capitalize on such existing business opportunities as its farms are much closer to the market.

The slurry after digestion can be used as fertilizer, feed for fish, pigs, chicken. It can be used to power specific biogas generators designed to generate electricity from biogas thereby contributing to the current energy deficit particularly the power outages that affects the municipality’s sewage works.

Respondents also highlighted that the council had weak links with the business community this is reflected by the fact it had very limited private partnership arrangements.

From the above discussion one can safely recommend the following strategies;

- a) The municipality should lobby for the full enforcement of its bylaws through the Minister of Local government. This will go a long way in putting the growth of housing cooperatives which are beyond the control of the municipality at bay. In addition the enforcement will also allow the municipality to recover its debts from government institutions which were not honoring their dues.
- b) Need for the maximum utilization of farms instead of leasing them. The farms are lucrative for commercial farming such as poultry and piggery farming. These projects require less capital outlay and management skills to initiate and run them.
- c) Lake harvest in the Kyle dam can be used to generate income and job creation. This strategy is being effectively used by Kariba municipality in which it managed to negotiate a portion of the Kariba dam for lake harvesting.
- d) There is a need to continue soliciting for sister cities as they are vital for resource sharing. Twinning of cities are not only meant to collaborate with municipalities outside the nation’s borders, municipalities in same nation may collaborate in a bid to solve common challenges. One way is to pool procurement resources together (horizontal collaborative procurement) in a bid to benefit from economies of scale, gain stronger negotiation power, better access to resources and markets, reduced workloads and transaction costs (Nollet and Beaulieu, 2005; Ghaderi and Leman 2013).
- e) Forging of partnership arrangements with the private sector, nongovernmental organizations and civil society is pivotal to the achievement of sustainable development. The municipality has a limited number of

essential partnerships yet they are vital in the co-creation of greater value to the community and the nation as a whole. Partnerships needs to be forged first with local business community, as charity begins at home, and this culture will then spill to other business community elsewhere.

- f) The sewage works and refuse dumping can be effectively used for commercial activities such as the generation Bio/methane gas, manure from wastes and the recycling of refuse.
- g) Continuous consultations and educating the public is central to the attainment of the municipality's vision, "a prosperous, sustainable and environmentally friendly city". The cooperation of the community is much needed if success is required. Mandela (2003) notes, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". Therefore, there is a need to carry out awareness campaigns about the need to conserve the environment, the role of the public and what it should do in order to achieve the broader rubric of sustainable development. The spirit of active participation of community should be inculcated at the grassroots level.
- h) The municipality should form a team of strategy implementation champions, who oversee the implementation of strategies. The team will be a special group comprised of members drawn from different departments, who meet regularly to trace and ensure effective and efficient implementation of strategies.

Conclusion

It is of paramount importance to note that sustainable development is not the sole responsibility of municipalities alone. The active participation of the public, private and the civil society is highly called for. It is evident from the study that the municipality has a lot of potential to generate income from a number of non-dependable project revenue streams and joint development activities as has been provided in the recommendations section of the study. The city council is actually sitting upon crucial resources which can be exploited for the benefit of the society, environment and the economy. The dependency syndrome (heavy reliance on the fiscus and donor funding) has proved to be unsustainable. This calls for a total revisit and possibly the erasure of such an ideology in institutions' mindset towards a self sustaining and ownership mentality, a prescription which allows institutions/organizations to continue prospering indefinitely, indeed, a true test of sustainability.

Future Research

The research relied on a single case hence the results cannot be easily generalized to other municipalities and future research should include a number of municipalities to find out how the resources gap could be closed. Future research should also carry out a study to find out the best standards in offering municipal services in order to draw practical lessons for the benefit of municipalities in developing nations which suffer from limited resources base.

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