

Towards improving service delivery in local authorities. A case of Chegutu Municipality in Zimbabwe.

¹SifileObert, ²Madzorera Stewart, ³Chavunduka Muchineripi Desderio
^{1, 2, 3} Chinhoyi University of Technology

Abstract: The research sought to establish the state of service delivery in the Mashonaland West town of Chegutu. The following main question was central to the research: How do stakeholders perceive service delivery from Chegutu Municipality? The study raises awareness on the part of service providers, to take stock of existing service delivery and then come up with strategies to improve the services. The study aims to influence policy review regarding service delivery. The mixed method approach was used basing on its ability to combine qualitative and quantitative data that was required in this study. Interviews, questionnaires, observation and focus discussion groups were used to gather data. Analysis was done using chi-square and inductive reasoning from emerging themes. Data analysis was done using SPSS package. The study reveals that stakeholders had a negative perception of service delivery in Chegutu. The study uncovered that lack of funds, failure of Council to collect optimum revenue, the uncontrollable macroeconomic environment, political interference, lack of citizen participation, incompetence on the part of some council workers and residents' unwillingness to pay rates, were major drivers for sub-optimum service delivery in Chegutu municipality. The study recommends that residents should contribute to decision making, pay for services and council should consult residents and should embrace people – friendly policies.

Key Words: Local authority, municipality, service delivery, urban governance, Zimbabwe

I. Introduction

The population of Chegutu stands at 49 832 (Zimstat, 2012) and there has been no significant expansion of infrastructure, such as water and sewage reticulation systems and sectors such as health and education to cater for that growing population which was at 22 726 in 2002 (Zimstat, 2002). The population increase is straining service delivery, resulting in the sewage reticulation system being overloaded, causing numerous sewer bursts, untreated effluent flowing into water courses and causing pollution, heaps of garbage in open spaces and road verges, resulting in an increase in the fly population, unavailability and erratic supply of municipal water (Environmental Management Committee Minutes, 2010). The economic meltdown in the last decade resulted in a galloping inflation and subsequent collapse of service delivery (Makurva, 2012).

The challenges of urban governance in Africa are numerous and diverse. Urban population growth in Sub Saharan Africa has been reported to range between 5% to 10 % per annum, while forecasts indicate that a 60% level of urbanisation will be reached in Africa by the year 2005 (Ndubiwa, 2001). This shift has not been matched by a corresponding growth in infrastructure and improvement in service delivery. Current rates of growth in Africa's urban population exceed the national average population growth rates, suggesting a massive shift of the rural population to urban centres (Ndubiwa, 2001). Major cities in Zimbabwe have attained population growth rates of over five percent per annum. Dating back to 1980, Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe has experienced a phenomenal population increase from 310 360 in 1961, 658 400 in 1982, 1 896 134 in 2002, to approximately three million in 2010 (CSO, 2011). According to In Depth Sunday Mail Reporter (Nov 13-19, 2011), the Harare City Council Director of Engineering services, echoed the same sentiments that the Harare sewer system was being strained by the growing population because it was designed for 1.5 million people and is now catering for more than 2.5 million (in 2015). A similar challenge was being experienced in Kigali, Rwanda where the infrastructure meant for 450 000 people was catering for about 800 000 people and hence overstretched in terms of service delivery (World Bank, 2012). The status of service delivery, by towns and cities in Zimbabwe is almost similar and Chegutu is no exception. The key sectors of service delivery are education, health care, infrastructure, safety nets, water supplies and sanitation, natural resources and environment and these key sectors of service delivery slightly vary from country to country (World Bank Group, 2002).

The cholera outbreak in 2008 and 2009 claimed 248 lives and 700 cholera cases were recorded in Chegutu town. In 2012, 280 cases of typhoid were recorded, while in 2013, 60 cases of typhoid and one case of cholera were recorded (Chegutu Hospital Health Information Office, 2009). The majority of Zimbabwean towns and cities continue to experience diarrhoea epidemics especially in children under the age of five and these epidemics are directly linked to collapse or decline in service delivery in such areas as water supply and

sanitation, sewage reticulation and treatment, waste management, maintenance of a clean environment and promotion of general hygiene.

In Zimbabwe, all local authorities are constituted in terms of the Urban Councils Act Chapter 29:16 and the Rural District Council's Act Chapter 29:13. Urban local authorities are mandated to provide municipal services including water, sanitation, electricity, basic health care, affordable housing and education.

The majority of the urban local authorities in Zimbabwe continue to experience numerous challenges in maintaining an efficient service delivery, in key areas such as water, sanitation, health, shelter, and infrastructure such as roads, sewage reticulation and Chegutu is no exception (Makwara, 2000). Sub-optimum service delivery, as evidenced by collapsed infrastructure, such as water and sewage reticulation systems, pollution of water bodies with sewage and industrial effluent and gross inefficiency in the management of waste, has contributed to disease outbreak, particularly diarrhoeal diseases. The study thus seeks to determine factors contributing to poor service delivery, which is below optimal level and expected standards and to strategise on improving and sustaining service delivery to the satisfaction and expectations of all stakeholders.

This study seeks to make academic contributions to the body of knowledge on policy making in urban municipalities and raise awareness on the part of service providers to take stock of existing service delivery and then come up with strategies to improve the service. The study will give insight to service providers on the contributing factors, leading to decline in service delivery, as well as influence policy review regarding service delivery, to create room for improvement. The study seeks to improve the work and living environment and hence promote good health amongst the citizens of Chegutu.

II. Literature Review

The successful marketer will try to understand the target markets' needs, wants and demands. Needs are the human basic requirements such as water, food, shelter, while demands are wants for specific products backed by the ability to pay (Lipsey and Chrystal, 2009). Key service delivery sectors such as water supply, sewerage reticulation and treatment, housing, waste management - are all basic needs and very essential in life. If residents are denied these basic needs, their environment becomes inhabitable and they are subjected to a lot discomfort and prone to waterborne diseases (Mukuruva, 2012). The services provided by local government authorities will only be perceived as addressing their needs, if they have value and provide satisfaction. Value is defined as a ratio between what the customer gets and what he gives (Lipsey and Chrystal, 2009). Relationship marketing aims to build a long term mutually satisfying relations with key partners, customers, suppliers, distributors, in order to maintain their long term preference and business (ibid). And it therefore follows that local government authorities must establish and maintain sound relationships with the citizenry by providing high quality services.

The local councils should allow for full participation of the community in these development plans (USAID, 2010). Access to health services is very low for the urban poor, considering that the clinics and hospitals do not have the capacity to adequately care for the needs of the patients (World Bank Group, 2002). African cities cannot be ushered into the present century, without systematic improvements in accountability and service delivery at local level (ibid).

It has been observed that residents are not paying for these services, resulting in municipalities being owed billions of dollars and the debt continues to rise. People are either not willing to pay for services or they are unable to pay as a result of job losses and recession (Morale, 2010). High rates of corruption mean that cities are robbed of treasures that must accrue to them to finance infrastructure and services (Chirisa, 2012). There is overwhelming evidence that ratepayers are evading due payments, denying the towns, the much needed revenue. Municipalities have been seen to have a tendency of satisfying human capital with hefty salaries at the expense of service delivery.

In Zimbabwe, governance of urban areas is the dual responsibility of Urban Councils and the Ministry of Local Government Public Works and Urban Development. The ministry has the overall supervisory role. Chapter 29:15 of the Urban Councils' Act of 1996 provides for the establishment of towns and cities, administration of local boards, municipal and town councils.

Monare (2010) summarises the causes of the malaise in local governance as including blames on poor service delivery on insufficient human and financial capacity to deliver, municipalities failing to manage their powers and weak oversight, supervision, support, intervention mechanisms from other spheres, contestation between the political and administrative, thus between councillors and managers leading to dysfunctionality and instability, too many opportunities for fraud and corruption and breakdown of local democracy, unprocedural suspensions, dismissals, and disciplinary procedures within municipalities. Local authorities are characterised by municipal leaders who are not accountable or transparent to the citizenry vis-à-vis decisions affecting their lives (Mitchison, 2003). Administrative decisions and service delivery are not equitable or efficient in most municipalities in South Africa for a myriad of reasons which range from political, interference, to human and

financial incapacity. Poor governance manifests itself in the awarding of tenders and the appointment of inept service providers (Alexander, 2010).

There are many instances where politicians use service delivery as patronage tools and take advantage of their positions to gain support. There are instances where there are mismatches between National and local government strategies and policy frameworks. When situations of this nature occur, they are referred to as common governance constraints because they are inherent to the political system and they seem to occur and repeat themselves in the same manner, in different sectors and countries (Chambers, 2012).

Blair (1998) cites a lack of coherence and cohesion in delivering services. He further blames the provision of sub-optimum services on the fragmentation of responsibilities between so many public agencies. Councils may run the services, but coordination between departments leaves a lot to be desired. Case studies reveal a wide array of examples where there is very little being done to monitor performance, in terms of inputs, outputs or outcomes. In Uganda and Malawi, formal processes for monitoring and supervision are not followed across the chain of service delivery provision. In Malawi, the lack of monitoring and supervision, led to the growth of illegal and unregulated private sector health care, which caused greater health risk for patients (Cammack, 2011). Performance monitoring and oversight can therefore come from both top down (from monitoring authorities) and bottom up (from users and communities).

The lack of human and financial resources in some of the less developed councils, make service delivery problematic. If service delivery is not improved, it could undermine the new local democracy, considering that peoples' expectations remain unfulfilled (Pycroft, 1996). Political interference and manipulation, corruption, lack of accountability and transparency, and inadequate citizen participation, poor human resources policy, failure to manage change, lack of employee capacity, poor planning and poor monitoring and evaluation (Makanyeza, et al, 2013). There is need to institutionalize a system of accountability that makes service providers answerable to consumers and developing a strategy, through a consultative policy, including stakeholders (World Bank Group, 2002). Local Authorities continue to lean on declining central government financing in the form of government transfers, grants, loans, among other factors that worsen their service delivery capacity, because government transfers are unreliable and unpredictable (Ribot, 2002).

Makanyeza et al (2013) posits that strategies to improve service delivery include increasing citizen participation in the affairs of the local authority, partnerships with the community in service delivery, flexible response to service user complaints, value for money and ensuring that service users pay their bills on time, sound human resources policy, strategic public service planning, capacity building and employee motivation, managing change, dealing with corruption and improving accountability, segregation of duties between councillors and officials, partnering other players and outsourcing services.

Ribot (2002) proposes the need to set up regulatory institutions at lower levels of government, whose main thrust would be to strengthen capacities. He also further proposes that there is need for defining the roles and responsibilities of institutions responsible for regulatory policy and strengthening institutional capacities for regulatory quality, resources, training, capacity building. On regulatory and policy tools, consultation and communication mechanisms are adopted to improve transparency at different levels of government.

Local authorities are viewed as being more capable and open to citizen input. After a programme was launched in Mtoko RDC in Zimbabwe, there was significant progress as evidenced by a new paradigm of broad based civic participating in the budgeting and decision making process of the local authority. The implementation of the programme resulted in mounting pressure from civic society to participate in the budget process of the local authority and take charge of decisions that affected their daily livelihoods (Tawanda, 2012).

The past decade has seen a major set of initiatives throughout the world, to reform and modernise local government. There has been a strong international trend towards improvement of local service delivery, both in terms of performance standards set and the mechanism for planning and implementing service improvements (Bovaird and Löffler, 2002). It is argued that local authorities without active civil societies are less likely to provide better services, innovating in their activities, or being responsive to local needs (Grindle, 2007)

The stakeholder theory has taken centre stage in developmental issues that deal with people and have an influence on them (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholder means 'any group or individual, who can affect, or is affected by the achievement of the organisations' objectives (Freeman (1984, p 46). Bryson (1985) proposed a more comprehensive definition for the term, where a stakeholder is defined as any person or group, or organisation that can place a claim on an organisations' attention, resources, or output, or is affected by that output.

According to the theory, the organisation is obliged to focus on its stakeholders in order to come up with the most suitable managerial techniques and on the other hand, it looks at the manner the stakeholders approach the organisation to claim their rights. It has been established that local organisations, attract multiple stakeholders with different interests and amounts of power, derived from their environments (Gomes, 2006). According to the theory, stakeholders fall in the main categories, namely decision makers, central government and councillors. The councillors are identified as decision makers, since they are empowered to make decisions

and those decisions are supported by the skills and expertise of senior officers. Senior officers derive their power from their control over skills and knowledge. Central government and full council have ownership interests and set the agenda which guides the local authority. Central government is also influential due to its power base and resources in the form of funds that are channelled to local authorities. Those who deliver services exert some influence because they deliver the service and control skills and these stakeholders are: employees, voluntary organisations, public and private partners. Senior officers and employees have power to influence since they control the skills. The citizens' power is based on their voting rights, where they elect councillors to make decisions on their behalf.

III. Methodology

A mixed method approach was used. This allowed the researchers to gather data using multiple methods like questionnaires, interviews, focus discussion groups and observation which are quantitative and qualitative as supported by Greene (2007) who asserts that mixed methods research allows for the opportunity to compensate for inherent weaknesses in different methods, capitalize on inherent method strengths and offset inevitable method biases. The population of the study comprised the residents of Chegutu Town totaling 49 832 (in 2014). The researchers targeted Council officials and employees, Residents Association members, Business Association representatives and residents. A random sample calculation of the population was done using a sample size calculator resulting in a sample of 240 (being at 90% confidence level and 5% margin of error). With the size of the population, a general picture from the sample was sufficient to generalize the results. One focus discussion group with 7 residents took place. Ten interviews were held with residents, municipality employees and management. The researchers also used observation of the state of infrastructure to aid in the analysis of data.

IV. Research Findings

Age and gender of respondents

As shown on table 1, there were more female respondents as compared to male respondents. This can be attributed to males going to work. Nevertheless, there were significant numbers of male respondents and this can be attributed to ailing economy where most people are unemployed.

Table 1 Age and gender of interviewed residents

Age	Gender of respondents		Total
	Female	Male	
26-40	61	54	115
41-50	41	31	72
51+	33	20	53
Total	135	105	240

The interviewed stakeholders included the rate payers, pressure groups (Chegutu Residents Association), Chegutu Business representatives and council officials (both appointed and elected officials). The interviewer first asked perception on service delivery in general and later asked on specific category of service delivery (water, sanitation, health, roads and street lighting). There was common consensus that in Chegutu service delivery is below the optimum level.

The question on water supply sought to establish how the respondents viewed the state of the water supply in Chegutu. Over three quarters of the respondents (76.2%) rated water supply as sub-optimum to extremely sub-optimum. Some of the residents in one section of the town complained that council billed them an additional twenty dollars, but their water taps were dry. Responses such as fair, good and very good (23.8%) were attributed to suburbs like Hintonville, where the property owners sank boreholes.

In Ward Five and Eight, there were properties totally without running water. The lack of water supply has been attributed to old and defective pipes. Again these properties have been billed for water, despite going for years without water. An interviewee from the high density area complained that they were relying on shallow wells made by leaking municipal water pipes for their water supply. Plate 1 below shows the shallow ponds where the residents fetch water for domestic purposes.

Plate 1(a) and 1(b): Shallow depressions on leaking municipal water pipes.



Source: Pictures by the Researchers.

As shown in Plates 1(a) and (b) erratic to no water supply has forced residents to resort to unprotected water sources on leaking municipal water supply pipes. According to one council official, water pipe leakages are a result of long life span of the water pipes and vandalism by desperate residents who break the pipes to access water illegally. One of the Residents Association representatives noted that: “In Chegutu there are variations in the distribution of water”. He further noted that, Hintonville low density suburb has water connections but does not receive municipal water supply hence residents rely on wells and boreholes sunk at their respective properties. In expressing his distrust on the running of the Municipal business, the representatives questioned the motive behind failure to exempt Hintonville suburb from water bills as there is no running water in the area.

Plate 2(a) and 2(b): Residents queuing for water at boreholes



Source: Pictures taken by the reseachers.

As shown on Plate 2a and Plate 2b, Chegutu residents are queuing for water at a borehole. As depicted on the pictures above, long queues are the order of the day as municipal water supply is erratic. This therefore is evidence that there is erratic to no water supply in Chegutu, thus residents are opting for borehole water. This impacts negatively especially on those who spend long hours on queues at the expense of household chores and other income generating activities. In most cases, the water from boreholes is insufficient and of questionable quality for domestic purposes hence hygiene at household level is compromised.

The level of sanitation and the level of water supply are closely related. Over sixty percent of the respondents revealed that sanitation levels in Chegutu are sub-optimum. This is evidenced by continued sewer pipe bursts especially in high density suburbs and poor state of public ablution facilities. Whereas twenty five percent of the respondents viewed sanitation levels in Chegutu as fair, whilst fourteen percent viewed it as very good. This is explained by different residential location of the respondents. In low density suburbs (Riffle Range and Hintonville) the properties are on septic tanks and hence challenges of sewer blockages were non - existent. On the other hand, the researchers also asked the Residents Association's perception on level of sanitation. As shown on Table 6 below, sanitation was rated at below acceptable levels in terms of efficiency of the

reticulation system, at sixty percent, while five percent said it was very good and thirty percent rated it as being fair. Rating the sanitation as being fair was a result of Hinton suburb, which is on septic tanks for its sanitation. Therefore there are no blockages, as compared to suburbs connected to sewage reticulation systems. The situation was however different in Wards Five and Eight, where the pipes were old and collapsed resulting in frequent blockages. The blockages, according to one respondent were attributed to overcrowding and subsequent overloading of the system. The system was meant for individual bachelors. The Plate 3b below shows typical recurrent sewer bursts.

At 5% level of significance, $df = 4$, test statistic = 1.735; Since $1.735 < 9.488$ (the critical value), therefore fail to reject H_0 , that water problems lead to poor sanitation. The pictures below show evidence of poor sanitation caused by sewer pipe blockages. The hypothesis test result above is also proved practically by evidence from the observation on Plate 3b below.

Plate 3(a) and 3(b): Broken sewer pipes and blockages



Source: Pictures by the researchers.

As shown on Plate 3 (a) and (b) above, there are frequent toilet blockages and sewer pipe burst resulting in raw sewerage effluent contaminating the environment. This poses a health hazard to the inhabitants with the risk of disease outbreaks such as cholera, dysentery and typhoid. Recurrent sewer bursts reflect overcrowding and mismatch between population and the infrastructure.

Plate 4 (a) and (b): Depicts the deplorable state of public toilets



Source: Pictures by researchers.

As depicted on plate 4 (a) and (b), the public toilets are very dirty and difficult to clean in the absence of running water thus affecting residents who end up using bushes to relieve themselves (as confirmed by one interviewee), leading to disease outbreak.

Plate 5(a) and (b): Show heaps of uncollected garbage on open spaces and road verges.



Source: Pictures by the researchers

As depicted on Plate 5a and 5b, uncollected garbage on open spaces and road verges is a clear sign of failure to efficiently collect solid waste. Therefore, residents have resorted to open dumping of waste resulting in a nuisance that includes odours, the breeding of flies and breeding of rodents thereby making the environment a dangerous place to stay.

The study reveals that most stakeholders (residents, residents association and business representatives) had a negative perception of service delivery in Chegutu. Most of the respondents concurred that service delivery in Chegutu was sub-optimum and the city fathers had to do something to change the situation.

This study validates earlier findings and the growing perception that Local Authorities in developing countries are failing to cope with the growing population and the resultant infrastructural need (water, sewer and roads). For example, this study validates earlier studies carried out by World Bank Group (2002) in Dhaka, Senegal that revealed that access to services such as health, education, power, water supply and sanitation and waste disposal is limited particularly for the urban poor, and where services exist, they are low and the costs are prohibitive. In interviews and focus discussion groups, it was pointed out that there are a plethora of factors driving poor service delivery in Chegutu. The factors were cited as follows: lack of citizen participation, economic factors leading to unemployment, lack of finance and equipment as factors contributing to below optimum service delivery, failure by council to collect revenue and lack of competence on the part of council workers respectively as the major driving factors for poor service delivery, interference by politicians and unwillingness by residents to pay for municipality services.

Other interviewees pointed the following as causes of poor service delivery: lack of citizen participation, political interference, economic factors such as unemployment, residents unwilling to pay for services, lack of skill, council was failing to pursue initiatives such as engaging in income generating projects rather than relying on rates and service charges, failure to allocate and utilize resources according to the budget and other guiding plans.

There is a strong disagreement between what the residents' and Council management's view as the major causes of below optimum service delivery. The Resident Association mentioned lack of citizen participation and involvement in council decision making as the major cause of below optimum service delivery. Contrary to this, all council management interviewed clearly mentioned that they involve stakeholders in decision making and they also include stakeholders' input in council decision making.

However, most Council management mentioned that below optimum service delivery was a result of failure by residents to pay rates on time and in most cases failure to pay rates. This in turn incapacitates Council to purchase required water treatment chemicals and respond efficiently to the bursting of sewer pipes. One of the Council managers had this to say:

"...residents always shift the blame on poor service delivery on us, mentioning that we are inefficient...but the truth is how can we run council efficiently with dry coffers? How can we provide adequate water when the end users are not paying for the services rendered? Hence service delivery is a function of both responsible rate payers and responsible council officials..."

On the other hand, there was common agreement that interference from councillors and politicians contributes to below optimum service delivery. One of the senior council officials gave a recent case on how councillors interfered negatively on service delivery saying:

"...we had agreed as management that water service charges should be at \$20.00 per household...this figure could actually sustain council to provide clean and adequate water to residents...however other councillors refused to agree on this amount and preferred to ask residents on their respective wards not to pay anything to council...this kind of political expediency is unhealthy to efficient service delivery".

Most of the Council management bemoaned lack of financial resources to execute their mandates. Lack of central government assistance to local authorities and unfavourable macro-economic environment were the major contributors for failure by Council. The results validated earlier findings by Hartdegen (2002) that many municipalities encounter financial problems, resulting from inadequate collection of service charges due to widespread non-payment. In addition, Morale (2010) explains that people are either not willing to pay for services or they are unable to pay as a result of job losses and recession. High unemployment levels and poverty have forced residents to fail to pay their rates.

The research established the following impacts of poor service delivery: disease outbreak is the major impact that results from poor service delivery. The impact is related to inadequate water supply. Most of the respondents were quick to point out that the cholera outbreak that bedevilled major towns and cities in Zimbabwe between 2008 and 2009 were a result of poor water reticulation system (Makuruva, 2012).

The negative effect of poor roads (potholed and gravel roads) on motor vehicles was rated as having a negative impact on service delivery. This has a bearing on business attraction and retention in Chegutu. Thus, in order to attract investments in Chegutu, road construction and repair should be given a priority as it plays a key role in ensuring much needed industries are attracted to Chegutu to boost production and reduce unemployment.

In order to come up with concrete, responsive and rational strategies, the researchers interviewed various stakeholders on what they thought should be done in order to improve service delivery. Below are the responses proffered by respondents as strategies:

- Engaging in public private partnership in infrastructure development,
- citizen participation in decision making,
- staff development programmes,
- recruitment of skilled personnel and
- reduced political interference.

V. Recommendations

The study makes the following contributions to Chegutu City fathers, the residents and other stakeholders that segregation of duties between councillors and management of the local authority in order to minimize conflicts and duplication of duties. In order to improve and maintain service delivery at above optimum levels the Municipality should engage in Public Private Partnerships (PPP) in infrastructural development. Without financial injection from the fiscus, the local authority has no wherewithal to improve the road and health delivery services like sewer and water reticulation. Payments for services by residents are then used to retire PPP debts. Without financial injection, the local authority has no wherewithal to improve the road and health delivery services like sewer and water reticulation. Payments for services by residents are then used to retire PPP debts.

Local authorities are a product of political influence because the council is formed by voted councillors. However there is need for the councillors to have independent thought processes that improve Local Authority governance systems that deter interference from influential politicians who seek personal gain from local authority resources through unorthodox means. Instead, empower residents to make some decisions

and deliver their needs. Ensure citizen participation in the affairs of the local authority. Shift the current representative democracy to participatory democracy where the residents sit on the driving seat in planning and decision making.

Promote good governance and ethical business practices. Deal with corruption and improve accountability in all facets of management. Ensure sound a human resource policy that includes the provision of capacity building programmes that improve the level of competence of council officials as well as employee motivation.

The local authority should engage the local community to play their part in paying their bills on time and bring some awareness to the local community on the importance of paying their bills on time. Once bills are paid, there should be evidence of accountability of funds and accounts should be audited timeously to give confidence to ratepayers that their financial resources are being put to good use.

VI. Conclusion

The research shows that poor service delivery and questionable governance systems lead to poor performance of Chegutu Municipality. Participatory leadership which gauges ideas from the ratepayers contributes to a residents – focused council that has accountability and good corporate governance principles. Engaging strategic partners in PPP arrangements was observed to be a cheaper option of improving infrastructure in the town. The research comes handy at a time when the whole country is facing the same problem of poor service delivery.

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