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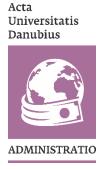
ADMINISTRATIO

Political Accountability Dilemma: Another Pandemic Post Covid-19?

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Abstract: In view of the unceasing global pandemic, centralized governments across the world have been put under the spotlight to account for all the provisions in the states they represent. Early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has dispersed worldwide with many repercussions, such as economic lockdown, that gave rise in important decline of international economic activities and gave escalation in social insecurity. This has disproportionally affected lot of countries if not all, leading to their citizen's incapability to pay and maintain their necessities such as housing and further disrupted public services by government. This has called on to the government to provide basic services reliably and effectively. The study seeks to elevate a discussion on the need to address political accountability as it appears to be a massive dilemma in government. The study argues that the pandemic has created a conducive environment for lack of political accountability. Moreover, as a matter of urgency, accountability in governance should be re-evaluated, where more decisive actions should be taken to avoid another pandemic post COVID-19. The study adopted desk research method, the researcher used secondary data such as published report, books, previous studies, journal articles and other readily available materials to gain broad understanding of accountability dynamics. The study takes cognisance of the stewardship approach to broaden an understanding of accountability and political leadership. As remedy, the study calls for enforcement of harsh accountability mechanisms to avoid another pandemic post COVID-19.

Keywords: Accountability; Governance; COVID-19; Political leadership; Stewardship theory

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1. Introduction and Background

There is an obvious existent of mistrust between the government, its agencies, and the people in Africa, a condition that is seen in the present covid-19 outbreak sweeping the planet, and Africa, as part of a global village, is not excluded. Ojiagu, Nzewi and Arachie (2020) adds that the evident mistrust between the government and its population has prompted many to question the virus's very existence and potency in South Africa. Covid-19 had been a debacle, and such an occurrence will have far-reaching consequences in a variety of spheres of society, notably in government (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). The coronavirus epidemic which started spreading in the early 2020 (COVID-19), also known as coronavirus, is a respirational illness that postures a significant developmental problem since many economies across the world were on lockdown beginning in the first quarter of 2020. In terms of lockdown rules and standards, certain economies, notably South Africa's, are partially unlocked. The World Health Organization (WHO) initially identified the coronavirus illness 2019 on December 31st, 2019, as having originated in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. South Africa detected its first COVID-19 case on March 5, 2020, and the President proclaimed a state of national disaster on March 15, 2020, followed by a lockdown on 26 March 2020 of the same month (Cacciapaglia, Cot, & Sannino, 2020).

According to Diab (2021) the pandemic's vast economic and social ramifications compel us to consider how they affect governments' accountability to their constituents, which is critical to properly responding to the crisis. COVID-19 has shown the need for community-led projects that rely more on bottom-up civil society groups to provide a more efficient response to the pandemic (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). However, according to Leoni, Lai, Stacchezzini, Steccolini, Brammer, Linnenluecke and Demirag (2021) there has been minimal scholarly research on accountability complications within government departments that are accountable for provision of services during the pandemic. This research seeks to address lack of political accountability by the government to citizens which seems to be growing rapidly during this pandemic of COVID-19. In doing so, this study probes the accountability concept during this challenging time, questioning the service delivery and government expenditure during this trying times. The study seeks to elevate a discussion on the need to address political accountability as it appears to be a massive dilemma in government. The study argues that the pandemic has created a conducive environment for lack of political accountability. Moreover,

as a matter of urgency, accountability in governance should be reassessed, where more decisive actions should be taken to avoid another pandemic post COVID-19.

2. Problem Statement

The pandemic's resultant broad economic and social repercussions compel for the address of political accountability of government to its people, which is significant when responding to the crisis (Diab, 2021). Accountability shines a light on democratic way of governing governance. It keeps the public informed and the government exposed, open to questioning. Naturally, the government is accountable for its activities. Within the framework of COVID-19, those entrusted with procuring protective equipment (PPEs) should be held accountable for the budget, methods and procedures followed in procurement, distribution of food packages recipients, and particular choices about COVID-19 management in the nation (Yu, 2021). In the face of high death rates caused by Covid-19, the government was forced to act rapidly to save lives, which necessitated the suspension of the traditional accountability processes in the decision-making process.

Restriction of movement of persons other than important workers, requests for people to stay at home, the closing of all non-essential enterprises, and the restriction of cultural activities were all major parts of the reaction (as they were in most countries). Political accountability is the most probable way for deviations and anomalies to be found and addressed (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). Therefore, the argument of this paper is that, amidst this pandemic, lack of political accountability has found comfort, in the sense that many of the politicians have been found having their hands in the cooking jaw and have not been properly prosecuted and be held accountable for all their actions including all those benefited from state resources. As results, the country is at high risk of facing another pandemic post COVID-19 in the name of lack of political accountability.

3. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

3.1 Stewardship Theory

Decent study should be theoretically based Lebek, Uffen, Neumann, Hohler and Breitner, 2014). Theory helps to create an outlook on a studies concept (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Walker (1998) is of the opinion that theory is a method that a researcher uses to address difficult research problems along the route to discovery. Be that as it may, this paper will be premised and augmented from the theory of stewardship and its ideals. According to Davis, Schoorman and Donaldson (1997) Stewardship theory embraces that if superiors are left unattended, they will act as liable stewards of the assets under their care. Donaldson and Davis (1991) postulates that in general, stewardship principles suggest that when a principal and an agent share the same core values, an internal feeling of responsibility is formed, and accountable behaviour can emerge. The obligation entails not only ensuring that public money is spent efficiently and effectively, but also that the rights, safety, and well-being of service clients are protected. Stewardship theories are a viable alternative to principal-agent theory for changing contractual relationships and guaranteeing responsibility within them (Davis, Schoornman & Donaldson,1991). The choice of the employment of the theory rest on its applicability to the study and how is draws politicians and constituencies at the centre of responsibilities. When accountability systems miscarry, taxpayer money may be misused, putting service clients at risk of grievance, abandonment, or mistreatment, especially if they are ill, fragile, or defenceless (Davis, Donaldson & Davis, 1991). Regrettably, present accountability systems do occasionally fail, particularly in the era of covid-19.

3.2 Accountability

Leadership accountability states that leaders in all realms of human endeavour must account for their acts, be accountable to those who have given them power, and accept responsibility for the decisions and results of their activity (Cordelia, Ngozi & Ebuka, 2020). It refers to a situation in which we must answer for or account for our acts to a higher authority. As a result, accountability necessitates stewardship and a willingness to accept blame. According to Cordery, Sim, Van Zijl (2017) authorities, institutions, and individuals with a mission to serve the public interest must be accountable and transparent. Accountability highlights the importance of democratic government. It keeps the people informed and the government transparent, allowing for questions to be asked. The government is automatically

held accountable for its actions and methods of governance. The term implies virtue, a positive quality in government, organizations, or management, leading to various aspects of accountability, such as fiscal honesty and fraud prevention, good governance, mission adherence, and government effectiveness demonstration. According to Matebese-Notshulwana (2019) the literature, accountability indicates that the government, individuals, and organizations are responsible for operating in accordance with standards and pledges; that they are accountable for their actions; and that they will face repercussions if those standards are not reached.

In the framework of COVID-19, people in charge of procuring protective equipment must be held accountable for the budget, procurement processes, beneficiary nominations for food packages, and particular choices relating the country's administration of COVID-19. Deviations and abnormalities are more likely to be found and addressed when there is public accountability (Ojiagu, Nzewi, and Arachie, 2020). Those who suspect state officials of malfeasance or unlawful behaviour have the right to report them to the Public Protector and other relevant governmental organizations. The Public Protector may undertake an investigation, reach a conclusion, and issue a sanction appropriate to the alleged wrongdoing.

3.3 Transparency

Transparency is linked to the reliability of government organizations and individuals, particularly public officials. Grimmelikhuijsen and Welch (2012) takes the argument that openness is a method of boosting trustworthiness. Transparency refers to the openness with which government, businesses, organizations, and individuals disclose information, regulations, plans, procedures, and activities. The key to having a well-informed public is transparency in government activities and decision-making processes. It has the potential to minimize corruption and unethical activities while also increasing trust in government institutions (Broadbent, 2020). It entails governments making information publicly available so that the public may see and comprehend their activities and choices, and thereby hold them accountable. Transparency serves as both a means and an aim in and of itself, facilitating accountability and guiding a well-run democratic system. Openness of government information, communication or knowledge sharing on the side of people, and accountability or justification of government choices to citizens are three factors that characterize government transparency (Redpath, 2012). Transparency educates

stakeholders and so encourages their involvement in the policymaking process, allowing for accountability (Cordelia, Ngozi & Ebuka, 2020).

During the COVID-19 outbreak, governmental procurement processes were not as transparent as they should have been. Lack of transparency in government organizations, particularly procurement, can lead to fraud and corruption (Munzhedzi, 2016). In public institutions, anomalies are discovered, identified, and corrected via transparency. If the processes are transparent to all parties involved, those in charge of making government decisions are more likely to behave properly. Most wrongdoings, such as bribery, embezzlement, and corruption, take place in remote locations where the public is ignorant of their existence. Several political parties and the media have reported on a wave of alleged corrupt conduct that happened during South Africa's shutdown (EFF, 2020). Allegations of corruption were raised during the purchasing of protective equipment and the construction of homeless shelters. This is due to the abuse of statutory prescripts, which allow for such purchases without public notice, particularly in emergency situations like as the COVID-19 outbreak (Yu, 2021).

4. Accountability Dilemma: Another Pandemic Post Covid-19

Yu (2021) contends that responsibility extends beyond the requirement to account to a higher authority for its authorization and resource allocation. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on governance procedures, particularly political accountability, is so severe that societies cannot directly hold them accountable for government actions and plans (Bosancianu, Dionne, Hilbig, Humphreys, Sampada, Lieber & Scacco, 2020). One method of holding them accountable is through elected representatives in national and provincial legislatures, as well as local councils. These are elected leaders tasked with serving their communities and carrying out the mandates of the people; as such, they must account for all their acts, particularly during the epidemic. Unfortunately, not all legislative processes were physically operational by the end of June 2020. Portfolio committees have had few, if any, meetings, much alone productive ones. Technology, such as Skype and Zoom, has frequently served as impediments rather than aids of efficient communication between members of legislatures (Munzhedzi, 2021).

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) submitted a request to parliament demanding that parliament be physically opened since legislative oversight is not being performed properly and efficiently (Phadi, 2020). Their argument was that some

meetings are cancelled due to connection problems or interruptions of one kind or another. As a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, national and provincial legislatures, as well as local councils, have had reduced functionality and operation. This means that members of the executive in all branches of government will be held less accountable (Ojiagu *et al.* 2020). Legislative monitoring of the executive's implementation of rules such as expenditure of the budget since the lockdown has not been exercised to full capacity

Phadi (2020) suggests that the COVID-19 epidemic has resulted in reduced political accountability in government operations and programs. Position political groups, like as the EFF, have alleged that' some councillors' of South Africa's ruling party were witnessed delivering food packages to members of their political organization as well as their families (EFF, 2020). Such claims concerning the purchase of blankets for the homeless were also reported in KwaZulu-Natal. According to the EFF, the state is unlikely to act against the perpetrators of such corrupt acts. They were suspicious because of the numerous incidents in which governing party elites were not effectively prosecuted or probed, such as the Venda Building Society Mutual Bank (VBS Mutual Bank) and Bosasa (Phadi, 2020). All this material tries to support the researcher's contention that the lack of political accountability, which appeared to have worsened throughout the pandemic, may be fairly predicted as another pandemic that the country will have to cope with after COVID-19.

5. Mechanisms for Facilitating Accountability In The South African Context

The next section explores into several measures aimed at increasing accountability. The Public Protector's Office (PP), the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA), and the Press are all investigated.

The Public Protector's Office was established by an act of parliament in South Africa (Sebola, 2015). The office receives and examines public complaints concerning government agencies and personnel, and it has the capacity to investigate and make recommendations for corrective action (South Africa Info, 2010; Sebola, 2015). According to Sebola (2015), the PP's functions under the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 include scrutinizing any behaviour in state affairs or public administration in any scope of government that is suspected of being inappropriate or resulting in indecorum or bias, reporting on that conduct, and taking

appropriate corrective action. The Public Protector holds public authorities or political office-bearers responsible for allegations based on complaints received from the public and investigated.

National Prosecuting Authority (NPA)

The National Prosecuting Authority has the power to file criminal charges on behalf of the state and to carry out all essential criminal processes' actions (Sebola, 2015). One of the most important democratic norms surrounding the prosecuting power's independence is the administration of national legislation without fear, favour, or bias (Sebola, 2015). On the other side, the NPA's office is frequently linked to conflicts and cases of prejudice, casting doubt on the agency's legitimacy (Munzhedzi, 2016a). As a result, the political nature of the post, according to Sebola (2015), may not ensure its independence. As a result, it appears that the NPA's independence was not adequately protected during the democratic era (Redpath, 2012). The NPA has frequently been linked with a lack of independence from the connected political class (Munzhedzi, 2016a). However, it is important to remember that, while there are certain issues with the NPA, the fundamental goal of the organization is to impose accountability by holding suspected persons accountable for their acts.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA)

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) was formed to provide oversight and hold the administration accountable for actions taken with public monies (Matebese-Notshulwana, 2019). It aims to guarantee resource accountability and financial management in accordance with the provisions of the Public Finance Management Act of 1999, as modified (Munzhedzi, 2016). When carrying out its duties, the SCOPA intends to guarantee that public money is used in an effective, efficient, and cost-effective manner (Munzhedzi & Makwembere, 2019). It promotes openness and accountability in the use of public resources; ensures that public monies are utilized to benefit the public; and ensures that the public receives excellent service (Monyai, Makhado & Novhe, 2016). Despite all of SCOPA's roles and duties, Matebese-Notshulwana (2019) claims that South Africa is still grappling with anti-corruption and anti-power-abuse measures. "South Africa has established and launched a number of key institutional instruments for legislative oversight."

Mass Media

Globally, the media has evolved into a potent tool for holding public leaders responsible for their actions in government. As a result, the media may be seen as one of the tools of public accountability. Many scholars have researched the function of the media and its impact or influence on good governance, including Chiyamwaka (2009) and Mlambo, Zubane, and Mlambo (2020). As a result, as stated by Mamokhere (2020) Mlambo et al. (2019) indicate, in this new era, mass media is becoming a frequently used vehicle to hold governing bodies accountable internationally, including in South Africa. Furthermore, the media may act as a catalyst for democracy as well as a tool of democratic governance, enabling for the monitoring and assessment of effective governance by ensuring openness, accountability, and other key qualities. The media's role is to uncover abuses of power and make public officials responsible for their actions (Dikotla and Mahlatji, 2020).

5. Research Methodology and Design

Research Design

Qualitative methods generally give comprehensive and detailed information to inform research investigation. Headlam and MacDonald (2014) claim that they may illustrate the sentiments of people and what they believe, without disclosing how many people feel or think. Therefore, qualitative research technique was used for this study, as articulated briefly below.

Qualitative Design

Bryman and Cramer (2012) states that qualitative research involves the gathering of social data, focusing on the meaning of the people investigated in order to provide helpful insight into local perspectives. In qualitative research, the researchers utilise the ideas of explanatory or critical social science to emphasise the language of "cases and situations" and cultural meaning (Neuman 2014). The logic of ongoing research, following a non-linear approach, encourages qualitative research (Neuman 2014). The present literature was scientifically examined and summarised. In order to realise the aim of this study, the writer adopted a qualitative study method by using secondary information. This method was undertaken to examine peer reviewed journals, books, public legislation, and internet sources. The study has additionally

incorporated information obtained from generally available publications, reports, newspapers, books, and other sources.

7. Recommendations

The existence of the pandemic, as mentioned in the literature, is a contributing cause to a lack of political accountability by politicians and individuals working in public positions. Despite the existence of many defined institutions and mechanisms, they are nonetheless unable to enforce their tasks and obligations (Broadbent, 2020). To that purpose, the next section identifies lessons for the future in the area of accountability enforcement. Considering the foregoing, the paper suggests the following.

Government Should Create an Enabling Environment for other Actors

According to the governance idea outlined above, government should make room for non-government actors to contribute their knowledge and experience. There are some activities that the commercial sector or even community-based organizations would be better at performing (Munzhedzi, 2021).

Stricter Enforcement of Polices

The analysis has pointed to the fact that policies such as the Public Finance Management Act of 1999 (Act 1 of 1999) and the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act of 2003 (Act 56 of 2003) are not being followed to the letter. These two policies clearly describe the procedures to be followed when procuring government products and services. These laws, notably Section 217 of the 1996 Constitution, also require impartiality in public procurement. Law enforcement authorities should always enforce the law to guarantee compliance (Mamokhere, 2020).

Inclusion of Stakeholders

From the formulation of legislation to the overall management of pandemics, relevant stakeholders such as impacted communities, trade unions, opposing political parties, religious leaders, and academics should be included. These

stakeholders may provide practical solutions that supplement those created solely by the government. This may help avoid circumstances in which the government is brought to court, as has happened in South Africa (Zahariadis, Petridou, Oztig , 2020). There have been several situations in which the government has been brought to court, including instances in which the government was instructed by a court of law to allow the sale of items for the care of new-borns when the country was under lockdown, restricting the sale of many other things.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to address political accountability dilemma which seemed to be worsening during the pandemic, the paper argues that the pandemic has created a conducive environment for lack of political accountability by politicians serving in government offices. Additionally, as a matter of urgency, accountability in governance should be reassessed, where more decisive actions should be taken to avoid another pandemic post COVID-19. Accountability is the hallmark of democratic systems. In the discussion above it was noted that holding politicians accountable especially during this COVID seems to be the most challenge thing to do which may result in accountability being another pandemic to deal with in government post the current pandemic

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