An Institutional Framework for Curbing Corruption in State-Owned Enterprises in Zimbabwe: A Multi-Dimensional Governance Approach

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Abstract
State-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Zimbabwe are critical to the national economy, yet they remain plagued by pervasive corruption, hindering both their performance and reputation. Despite numerous reform initiatives, corruption remains deeply entrenched in these entities, exacerbated by weak institutional frameworks and ineffective oversight mechanisms. This study proposes a tailored, multi-dimensional institutional framework for curbing corruption within Zimbabwe's SOEs, drawing on theories such as X-inefficiency, Institutional Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Expectancy Theory to develop a comprehensive model. The research employs qualitative content analysis of 30 relevant articles, identifying key drivers of corruption, including leadership vacuums, lack of accountability, and the absence of strong institutional frameworks. The study reveals that existing anti-corruption efforts have been largely ineffective due to gaps in policy, legislation, capacity, and political will. By integrating global anti-corruption best practices with localized reforms, the proposed framework aims to enhance transparency, strengthen governance, and promote sustainable anti-corruption practices in Zimbabwe's SOEs. This framework is intended to provide actionable insights for policymakers and contribute to the global discourse on governance reform in public institutions, particularly within developing economies.
Keywords:Corruption, Anti-corruption Framework, State-owned Enterprises, Governance, Institutional Reform, Zimbabwe.

I.   Introduction

Corruption remains one of the most persistent problems to socio-economic development in most developing countries Zimbabwe included, hampering efforts to achieve sustainable growth, equitable development, and good governance. Despite the adoption of various legal frameworks and institutional measures aimed at combating corruption, the problem remains entrenched in both the public and private sectors. This manuscript explores the institutional frameworks established in Zimbabwe to curb corruption, with particular emphasis on the effectiveness of these mechanisms in addressing the root causes of corrupt practices, enforcing accountability, and promoting transparency. In the face of rampant corruption, a number of questions remain unanswered: Why have the current constitutional, legal, institutional, and administrative reforms on the 'war against corruption' failed in curbing corruption?What framework can be used to curb corruption? Despite a constellation of studies on corruption (Zinyama, 2021; Transparency International, 2018; Ndoma, 2021; Kong et al., 2017; 2022;Lukiko, 2024), little has been done to interrogate an institutional framework for curbing corruption in state-owned enterprises. This study is a discourse on state of corruption, its impacts and the current mechanisms being used to curb corruption. Significantly, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of institutional frameworks that can be used to effectively curb corruption.

Background To The Study

The phenomenon of corruption is a universal problem (Rappo, 2023; Mlambo et al., 2019; 2020; 2022; 2023; 2024; Bojang, 2017; Baum et a et al., 2019; 2024) and considered particularlyrife and troublesome in developing countries (Lin et al., 2018; Lima-de-Oliveira, 2019)like that of Zimbabwe (Zinyama, 2018; Transparency International, 2018). It is not surprising therefore that the phenomenon of corruption was a recurrent theme and served as a campaigning tool used by various political parties in Zimbabwe leading up to the Zimbabwe's run-up to 2023 National and Provincial elections (Zinyama, 2021).

Extant literature indicates that corruption remains rife in Africa. Africa as a result of its rich mineral and natural resources is one of the richest continents in the world, yet the least developed. It is in this vein that corruption has been witnessed as one of the major role players when viewing Africa's current lack of development and economic growth post-independence. This trajectory stems from the fact that some African states are still propelled with low levels of economic growth, bad governance structures, weak constitutions, high levels of poverty together with unemployment which makes them more vulnerable to partake in corruption activities (Myint, 2000; Azeez, 2018; Mahmood et al., 2018). Statistics from the Transparency International (2018) posits that about 43 percent of Africans are wallowing in poverty while over US$50 billion worth of illegally syphoned assets flow out of Africa annually.The untamed nature of corruption has become essence Widespread lack of development in Africa is reinforced by extensive corruption schemes which scare off investors and discourage further development. Misappropriated funds account for a 25 percent loss of development resources in Africa (Zinyama 2018; Transparency International 2018). Transparency International (2018) indicated that nearly 80% of African people live on less than US$2 a day. The report indicated that corruption is one factor perpetuating poverty.

Corruption in most developing countries has been most pronounced in state-owned enterprises. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) have a strong presence in the global economy and, in many advanced and developing economies, play a significant role in implementing public policy. SOEs are seen as a way to address market failures, such as natural monopolies, exert better control of natural resources, or promote other policy goals (Murphy & Albu, 2018). In practice, public ownership continues to be important in many sectors, especially transportation, utilities (water, gas and electricity), and exploration of natural resources (oil and mining). SOEs are the primary suppliers of important public services including water, power, transportation, telecommunications, and postal services in both emerging and established economies (Mokaloba et al., 2024). Several economies across the world have depended on SOEs to drive economic growth, create jobs, reduce poverty, contribute considerably to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP), and provide equitable, long-term development (Imran et al., 2019; Chiparo et al., 2022; Ali & Gami, 2017; World Bank, 2018). In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) area, SOEs account for more than 10% of economic activity (Ginting, & Naqvi, 2020). In the People's Republic of China (PRC) SOEs account for about 30% of GDP, 38% in Viet Nam and about 20% - 40% in other Central Asian countries (Kim & Ali, 2017).

However, concerns with poor governance, however, have fueled doubts about whether SOEs can achieve the desired goals or are the best option to address market failures. In particular, corruption, the abuse of public power for private gain, can negatively affect how firms operate. Firms may dedicate efforts and resources to rent-seeking activities, instead of focusing on using resources in the most efficient way. This may be particularly the case when these firms manage large natural resources and when there is weak transparency and scrutiny on the activities of these firms. There are also reasons that could make corruption more prevalent in SOEs compared to private firms (Carothers, 2020). It is easier for corrupt politicians to intervene in publicly-owned firms— especially when transparency and accountability are weak—and they have an incentive to do so, as they will benefit from the rents without bearing the cost (Boycko et al., 2024). Results from empirical studies have shown that current frameworks and models to curb corruption have provided little respite to the growing threat of corruption in SOEs (Fisman & Svensson, 2007; Nguyen & Dijk, 2012; Kong et al., 2017, Richmond, 2020; OECD, 2018).

Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) represent a crucial component of the national economy(Zinyemba, 2018; Mironga, 2022; World Bank, 2022). In Zimbabwe, SOEs are seen as important socioeconomic enhancers in sectors where the private sector is hesitant to participate owing to a lack of funds, a paucity of capital, and a fear of excessive risk (Hedebe et al., 2015). Zimbabwe has 107 state-owned entities that are important to the economic development of the nation as they contribute a fraction to the gross domestic product (GDP). These state-owned entities are put in different categories that include public entities under the categories of authorities and agencies, those under the category of boards, commissions, councils, companies and corporations, financial institutions category, public entities under the category of hospitals and the category of universities and tertiary institutions (Nimani et al., 2023).

According to the United Nations (2020), SOEs play an important role in the economy since they have the capacity to contribute around 42% of GDP, as well as a considerable part of domestic capital formation, industrial investment, and job creation. However, they suffer from terrible mismanagement, inefficient use of productive capital, corruption, decrepit assets, a shortage of credit lines, and a debt overhang, regardless of their contribution to economic progress and prosperity (Madzikana & Mabenge, 2023; Bonga, 2021; Mututw & Ufuoma, 2022; Mutanda, 2014; Rusvingo, 2014; Zinyama, 2018). Hedebe et al (2015) also claim that SOEs in Zimbabwe have turned into havens for corruption and mismanagement of public assets. These issues, according to Muzapu et al (2016), have had a negative influence on service delivery in these institutions.Commentators on SOEs in Zimbabwe have pointed out that there is very little contribution to the economy from State Owned Enterprises (SOE) and the problems have been attributed to mismanagement and a poor corporate culture.

With Zimbabwe's SOEs being central to both economic development and state legitimacy, their pervasive corruption undermines economic growth, efficiency, and public trust (Chigudu, 2021). The corruption risks associated with SOEs are also heightened as many of them operate in sectors with large economic rents or have monopoly power. The potential large rents, especially in an environment of weak transparency and regulatory oversight, makes these companies particularly exposed to corrupt public officials. There have been many SOEs failures globally and Zimbabwe has not been spared (Chigudu 2021). Corporate failures, scandals and fraudulent activities have caused, among other vices, unemployment, reduction of the gross domestic product (GDP) and erosion of investor confidence leading to economic stagnation (Chiduku, 2021). In Zimbabwe, SOEs have recorded net losses as reported by the Auditor General Report (2018) and faced many corporate governance issues such as corruption, nepotism and fund embezzlement. This has, therefore, resulted in poor performance of SOEs which continues to be a burden to the government (Rusvingo, 2014).

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State-owned Enterprises (in developing countries are in trouble as some are into endless scandals yet boards, which are responsible for an oversight role of SOEs exist (Sifile et al., 2017). In some instances, top management of such entities have awarded themselves high salaries, among other forms of malfeasance. This has resulted in the decapitation of these enterprises hence urgent measures need to be implemented to curb such unethical behaviour (Maibeki et al., 2021). Additionally, Zimbabwe SOEs have been threatened largely by growing cases of corruption, funds embezzlement, nepotism and many other scandals which have left them underperforming despite having boards overseeing corporate governance of such SOE. In the face of growing cases of corruption within SOE's the government has implemented various frameworks to deal with such issues (Dandaratsi et al., 2022; Chiduku, 2021).

SOEs, if well managed, have the capacity to contribute at least 40% to the country's GDP (Mashavave, 2017; Chimbari, 2017). In efforts to curb corruption, Zimbabwe has introduced a number of initiatives. These initiatives range from the introduction of the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act which was enacted in 2018. Before this, the ZIMCODE had been in effect since 2014. Its existence did not help unmask and put to rest endless scandals and troubles by SOEs whose presence may be stopped by the existence of concrete and well-composed boards. Other measures include the establishment of the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Unity (ZACC), establishment of corruption courts- JSC established anti-corruption courts in all the country's 10 administrative provinces in a bid to expeditiously deal with graft, the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act (passed in May 2018) which provides for the governance of public entities and provides a uniform mechanism for regulating the conditions of service of members of public entities and their senior employees, being a signatory to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), being a signatory to the SADC Protocol on Corruption (2004), establishment of a Special Anti-Corruption Unit (SACU) - President Mnangagwa's administration established a Special Anti-Corruption Unit, (SACU) in 2018, amongst a host of others.

Despite having such a robust framework (on paper), the battle against corruption is far from being won – key challenges include inadequate resources to anti-corruption institutions, corruption cases taking too long to be concluded, impunity against corruption, centralisation of anti-corruption campaigns, gaps in legislation and delays in cross border investigations. There is evidence of a robust legislative framework to fight the vice but no corresponding effort to deal with high profile cases - 'small fish' being brought to book but the 'big fish' escaping the jaws of justice. The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) stands accused of weak prosecution and accepting political interference in its activities. In other instances, the law enforcement agents are accused of receiving bribes so that they scuttle investigation into corruption cases.

As a result, corruption in state owned entities has remained rife. Such challenges bring to the fore the question: What institutional framework can be used to effectively curb corruption? Thus, it is against such a background that this paper seeks to interrogate current institutionalization of consumption and proffer a framework that can be used to curb corruption in state-owned entities in Zimbabwe.

Problem Statement
Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) represent a crucial component of the national economy (Chiduku, 2021), yet they are beset by systemic corruption that affects their performance and reputation (Zinyama, 2018; Transparency International, 2018; Ndoma, 2021; Kong et al., 2017, Richmond et al., 2019). Despite various reform efforts, corruption in SOEs remains entrenched, fueled by weak institutional frameworksand the lack of effective oversight mechanisms. The problem is compounded by the broader challenges of governance in Zimbabwe, where political and economic crises often intersect to reinforce corrupt practices within public institutions. Extant literature on anti-corruption focuses largely on broad governance frameworks, with limited attention to the unique institutional contexts of SOEs, particularly in developing economies. While there is some scholarship on corruption in public sector entities, little has been done to propose a tailored, multi-layered institutional framework that addresses the specific challenges faced by Zimbabwe's SOEs. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a new, theoretically grounded model for institutional reform in SOEs, one that incorporates both global anti-corruption strategies and localized institutional realities.

Purpose
To develop a framework for curbing corruption in state-owned entities in Zimbabwe.

Specific objectives:
1. To examine the institutional factors (economic, political and organizational) that perpetuate corruption in Zimbabwe's SOEs.
2. To assess the role of governance structures—including transparency, accountability, and oversight mechanisms—in curbing or facilitating corruption within SOEs.
3. To design a comprehensive institutional framework that integrates best practices in anti-corruption with context-specific reforms for Zimbabwe's SOEs.

II. Methodology

This paper draws insights from extant literature to develop an institutional framework for curbing corruption in state-owned entities in Zimbabwe. This study employed a general review of the literature on the state of corruption, causes of corruption, and anti-corruption mechanisms. Qualitative content analysis is a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2014). This type of research design is most appropriate when existing theory exposure is limited.Mayring (2015) argues that content analysis uncovers patterns, themes, and categories important to social reality. The method is ideal as it analyses social phenomena in a non-invasive way, in contrast to simulating social experiences or collecting survey answers.

Using a qualitative content analysis of several published empirical information on corruption, this paper sought to develop a framework for curbing corruption. Data for the study was construed from journal articles, books, papers, and other relevant sources on the research topic that were reviewed. A Google Scholar search was conducted for articles that center on the phenomenon under interrogation. To get relevant articles on the internet, the researcher used the following study focus related search terms: corruption, corruption in state-owned entities, causes of corruption, and mechanisms for curbing corruption. Both classical and contemporary literature were made use of. Generally, the study focused on material published between 2010-2024. Several journal articles were reviewed. Also, the reference lists of studies that were identified by any of the aforementioned methods were searched for additional relevant studies. Studies that examined the impact of corruption were included. A total of 30 articles were utilized. This number is consumerate with content analysis (Nueundorf et al., 2016; Kripperndorff, 2018). The researcher used themes as a unity of analysis. The results and discussion of the findings are presented below.

III. Results and Discussion

Before engaging in a discussion on the institutional framework for curbing corruption, it seems necessary for one to take a position with regard to one's conceptualization of the phenomenon of 'corruption'.

Corruption
There is no universally accepted definition of the term corruption. Various scholars have defined the term differently (see Zinyama, 2018; Transparency International, 2018; Ndoma, 2021; Kong et al., 2017, Richmond et al., 2019). Mafunisa (2007: 261) the concept of corruption can be defined in different ways depending on the point of view or type of approach followed. However, despite the varied nature of the

definitions in existence, they all seem to perceive corruption as any offenses related to the following among others: giving or receiving a bribe as an inducement or reward, dishonestly using a false document, the intentional non-disclosure of/or concealment of a transaction from one principal to deceive, the deceitful non-disclosure or concealment from one principal of a personal interest in a transaction, discrimination, nepotism, and criminal abuse of power by a public officer. In most cases, the term is loosely understood by ordinary and high-profile people and institutions alike. For example, the notion of corruption can be broadly understood as the abuse of public office for private gain. As a result of the varied nature of the definitions, a few of these will be conceptualized here.

On the clarification of corruption, various definitions exist; therefore, setting a precise definition of corruption has been a difficult task in academic literature as it tends to mean different things to different people (Eyo, 2017). To Jain (2001) corruption refers to the act whereby the power of public office is applied for personal gain. In essence, it entails the unauthorized utilization of power or influence by someone in the public or private sector by means to enrich himself and/or herself at the expense of the general populace. Myint (2000) defines corruption as the usage of status or rank by an individual in office for his or her personal gain. Some examples of these corrupt behaviours may include the appropriation of public assets and property for personal use, cronyism, nepotism, embezzlement, bribery and extortion. Basically, corruption means the mistreatment or exploitation of one's position or authority (Clark, 2017). Nevertheless, as noted by Tanzi (1998) this abuse of public power can involve other third parties, in this case, close friends, family members or even colleagues. However, Azeez (2018) contends that corruption can further be broken down into other broad forms such as petty corruption, grand corruption and looting. Corruption activities that take place usually fall under these three broad forms.

Nonetheless this article will not dwell much on the subject of definition as it is not so intended. However, for the purpose of this article, the term corruption will be used to refer to the exercise of authority influenced by the promise or actual presentation of personal gratification as opposed to honest and objective exercise of authority. It is important however to note that the article focuses only on examining the phenomenon of corruption in the public sector, focusing on state-owned entities because of its negative impact on service delivery. Corruption, in all its manifestations, sometimes takes the form of state capture, a process of collusion between the private sector and politicians or public officials for their own private, mutual benefit. Commonly, corruption manifests itself in various forms. This may include but is not limited to the following: - bribery, nepotism, embezzlement, extortion, nepotism, fraud, theft, and conflict of interests (Kanyane, 2005; Mafunisa, 2007; Edwards, 2008; Ruhiiga, 2009). To this end, it is important to identify the causes of corruption that are peculiar to the Zimbabwe public sector to obtain a clear understanding of the nature and extent of corruption in the country.

Causes Of Corruption In State-Owned Entities In Zimbabwe
Evidence from the synthesis of literature pointed towards several challenges that act as catalysts to the sprouting of corrupt tendencies in state-owned enterprises in Zimbabwe.

Leadership vacuum in the fight against corruption
While institutionalized looting of the public treasury became rampant in an environment defined by systemic corruption, legendary docility has increased the rate of incompetence in the handling of public affairs. In its 2019 Global Corruption Barometer, Africa, TI discovered that a high proportion of Africans bemoaned the rising tide of corruption in government activities and its consequences on service delivery (Transparency International, 2019).With the mismanagement of public resources, the implication is that public service delivery is in jeopardy, and the well-being of the citizens is compromised.

In Zimbabwe, the country's legacy of corruption is shocking(Muguchu, 2018). The anti-corruption leadership vacuum has led to rampant corruption. Evidence from a constellation of studies highlights that the country is rich in natural resources, which, unfortunately, the leaders could not transform to substantive wealth for the promotion of the well-being of the citizens. Rather, mismanagement of public resources through a series of corrupt practices such as capital flight, inflation of contracts, outright stealing, and looting of public property, with impunity, among others, are common.Observers have offered different estimates of the economic costs of corruption to Zimbabwe since the attainment of majority rule. An former legislator, Eddie Cross, who has dedicated lots of time to documenting, naming and shaming corruption, puts the figure at $60 billion (Cross, 2018). According to Transparency International (2018) Zimbabwe, the country loses $1 billion annually to corruption. Evidence from a number of studies point towards a leadership vacuum in the fight against corruption. There is evidence of a robust legislative framework to fight the vice but no corresponding effort to deal with high-profile cases - 'small fish' being brought to book but the 'big fish' escaping the jaws of justice. As a result, the lack of political will to deal with corruption scandals that involve high class persons has

reinforced the 'catch and release' syndrome that successive administrations (the old and the new dispensation) have been accused of.

The leadership vacuum in Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) is a significant factor contributing to the pervasive corruption in these entities. A leadership vacuum refers to the absence of strong, effective, and accountable leadership within organizations, particularly in key government institutions such as SOEs, where transparency, oversight, and strategic guidance are often lacking. This absence of leadership— whether due to political instability, mismanagement, or institutional failures—creates an environment in which corrupt practices can thrive unchecked. The leadership vacuum has brought with it several issues that have led to a fertile growth of corruption in state-owned entities.

Weak Accountability Mechanisms

One of the primary consequences of a leadership vacuum in SOEs is the erosion of accountability. When leadership is weak or absent, there is often no one to hold individuals in positions of power accountable for their actions. In the case of Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises, a lack of strong, responsible leadership means that public officials or managers within these entities can engage in corrupt practices such as embezzlement, bribery, or mismanagement of public funds without fear of repercussion (Odilla, 2024).In many cases, leaders within SOEs are either appointed for political reasons rather than merit, which further undermines the establishment of effective governance structures. These politically appointed managers or board members may not have the technical skills or ethical grounding to ensure transparency and accountability, making it easier for corrupt behavior to flourish (Hope, 2024).

Lack of Strategic Direction and Oversight

Effective leadership in SOEs is critical for setting clear strategic direction and ensuring proper oversight of operations. In Zimbabwe, however, SOEs have often suffered from a lack of strong, visionary leadership that can implement reforms, improve efficiency, and address corruption (Mgakwe, 2024). Without clear guidance from top leaders or boards, many state-owned enterprises operate with vague goals, ineffective management structures, and weak internal controls. This environment makes it easier for corrupt practices to take root because there are no clear targets or performance metrics to measure the success or failures of these organizations.

Unclear or Inconsistent Policies

A leadership vacuum can lead to inconsistent or unclear policy implementation within SOEs. In Zimbabwe, SOEs have often operated without clear, coherent, or stable policies regarding their management, operation, and oversight. Without firm leadership, these entities may lack the necessary frameworks for ensuring transparency in financial management, procurement, and reporting (Mthombeni et al., 2024).This lack of consistency allows for discretion, which can be abused by unscrupulous individuals within SOEs.

Over-Dependence on State Funding

Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises are heavily reliant on government funding, but this funding is often mismanaged or diverted due to the absence of strong leadership. In a situation where leaders in SOEs are not held accountable or are unqualified for the job, the financial resources intended for public service can be siphoned off into private accounts, used to pay bribes, or spent on non-essential projects (Mutema et al., 2024).

Political environment and Governance Gaps

In Zimbabwe, political instability has often led to power struggles, not just at the national level, but within state-owned enterprises as well. This instability creates leadership gaps or constant turnover in management positions, which weakens the ability of these enterprises to implement long-term strategies, follow through on reforms, or enforce anti-corruption measures 9Matebese, 2024).Moreover, where leadership is fragmented or uncertain, organizations may lack the organizational continuity needed to fight corruption effectively (Mkhize et al., 2024).

Absence of Strong Internal Controls

A key function of leadership in any organization is to establish and enforce strong internal controls to prevent fraud, abuse, and mismanagement. In Zimbabwe's SOEs, the lack of capable leadership often means that such controls are either insufficient or completely absent. Without leaders who are committed to ethical standards and good governance, internal controls such as audits, financial checks, and reporting mechanisms are often being bypassed or ignored, opening the door for corrupt practices (Arafa, 2024).

Lack of Accountability to the Public

In Zimbabwe, many SOEs operate without any meaningful public oversight or transparency. The lack of leadership means that there is little pressure to make the enterprise serve the public interest, and as a result, these organizations often operate as self-serving entities that benefit only a small elite.This lack of accountability creates a fertile ground for corruption to thrive, as there are few external checks to prevent the misuse of public resources. Furthermore, the public, which is often affected by the poor performance of SOEs (e.g., in sectors like energy, transport, and health), lacks the channels to demand better management or performance from these entities.

Institutionalized Corruption and "Business as Usual" Mentality

In Zimbabwe, the leadership vacuum in SOEs has contributed to the institutionalization of corruption. When corrupt behavior is not addressed or is normalized within an organization, it becomes part of the culture. This "business as usual" mentality makes it difficult to combat corruption because everyone within the organization may be complicit in or turn a blind eye to corrupt practices.The leadership vacuum in Zimbabwe's state-owned enterprises plays a central role in fostering corruption. Without effective, accountable, and transparent leadership, SOEs are prone to mismanagement, and systemic corruption (Mutema et al., 2024; Mthombeni et al., 2024). The lack of oversight and weak governance structures make it easy for corrupt individuals to exploit public resources for personal gain. To address the corruption in these enterprises, Zimbabwe needs a comprehensive overhaul of leadership selection processes, stronger governance frameworks, and a commitment to greater transparency and accountability.

Institutional weakness and corruption

Vulnerabilities to corruption are usually associated with institutional weaknesses (IMF, 2019). In the case of SOEs, some of the key weaknesses include a lack of independent and professional boards and management, weak procurement processes, and lack of transparency. The lack of independent and professional SOE board members weakens the ability to oversight of the companies' operations and management, facilitating bribe-taking and third-party influence over SOE resources.

Inadequate scrutiny in the nomination process, oversight, and unclear objectives make assessing managerial performance difficult. They also make it easier for government officials to interfere in company affairs for political gain. According to one OECD (2018) study of over 300 firms, nearly forty percent of SOEs in which corruption or irregular practices were observed involved a board member, public official, or shareholders. (Transparency International 2018).

In the extractive industry, a sector particularly prone to corruption due to large economic rents, most SOEs have relatively weak governance. SOEs are also heavily involved in cross-border corruption. In fact, SOE officials are the main beneficiaries of foreign bribes. The 2014 Foreign Bribery Report from the OECD indicated that of the observed instances of bribery promised, offered, or given, 81 percent involved SOE officials.

Prosecution hesitancy

Although there is evidence of a robust legislative framework to fight the vice, the drawback has been the absence of corresponding efforts to deal with high-profile cases in Zimbabwe (Zinyama, 2018). According to Muguchu and Maja (2019) the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) stands accused of weak prosecution and interference in its activities. In other instances, law enforcement agents are accused of receiving bribes so that they scuttle investigations into corruption cases. A survey by Ndoma (2021) shows that a majority of adult Zimbabweans are disillusioned by the government's inadequate and piecemeal efforts against the corruption scourge. Some observers see the arrest of Cabinet Ministers as well as erstwhile Cabinet Ministers as a demonstration of ZACC's crackdown on corruption, others are dismissive of this preferring to describe it as selective, convenient, and a 'catch and release' game. Other observers also view the anti-corruption crusade as targeting the small fish, while the big fish are set free. Thus, selective prosecution and the handling of only "small fish" has led to corruption becoming "the new normal". Thus it can be concluded that the prosecution for engaging in corruption has long ceased to be a hindrance to corrupt tendencies as people know that the system can be manipulated in their favor, especially those highly connected to the corridors of power. Such a disregard of the laws and courts presents a fertile ground for corruption. Although some measures ostensibly to address corruption have been implemented, the lack of or the delayed prosecution for most high-level cases or the catch and release has made them mere tokenism. Such tendencies have allowed corruption to flourish.

Inadequate resources among anti-corruption institutions,

Inadequate resources have also become a hindrance to the successful implementation of the anti-corruption framework. Deployments of incompetent leadership to the public sector, low wages, and an absence of meritocratic systems exacerbate bureaucratic corruption (De Waal, 2012; Thornhill, 2012). This is to say that public officials may resort to corrupt practices to supplement inadequate public sector wages. This kind of corrupt practice is rife within traffic officers, police, and in some cases customs officials in the form of bribery and some cases, extortion. The rationale for engaging in this practice is often said to be low wages and taking bribery is viewed as a supplement to their salaries. The critical problem that has overwhelmed most government institutions relates to the issue of capacity constraints (Manyaka & Madzivhandila, 2013). Other causes of corruption in state-owned enterprises include impunity against corruption, centralization of anti-corruption campaigns, gaps in legislation, and delays in cross-border investigations among others.

The Significance Of Combating Corruption In The Public Sector

Kroukamp (2006:207) points out that "corruption is especially harmful in developing countries such as Zimbabwe due to the effect that these countries tend to have fewer resources and need to use these scarce resources in the most effective way as well as a lack of confidence in the government". Flowing from this perspective, it can be argued therefore that the overall goal in the fight against corruption in the public sector is to improve service delivery. This can be achieved by bringing sustainable reduction in corrupt behaviour and improving good governance. In fighting corruption effectively and efficiently, the government will also save a lot of money meant for public service delivery. Zimbabwe public sector losses a huge amount of public funds every year (Corruption Watch, 2022). According to Transparency International (2018) Zimbabwe, the country loses \$1 billion annually to corruption. It is also worth noting that corruption does not only undermine the development goals of the country but it hits the poor the most as resources meant to assist them out of their needy conditions are diverted to the benefits of the few elites. Under these circumstances, structural inequalities are reinforced and the rich get richer as the poor get even poorer. This is a condition that is not conducive for social and political stability. Structural inequality also leads to many being denied access to education, to information, and therefore to knowledge about their rights that could enable them to challenge abuse of power and or authority. Thus, it has been argued by Uslaner (2007) that the roots of corruption lie in the unequal distribution of resources in a society. What is clear from Uslaner's argument is that corruption thrives on economic inequality. That is, economic inequality provides a fertile breeding ground for corruption – and, in turn, it leads to further inequalities (Uslaner, 2007). In light of the above, the following interventions are suggested.

Institutional Framework for Curbing Corruption

Addressing corruption in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Zimbabwe requires a multifaceted approach, as corruption in these entities can deeply impact the economy, governance, and social trust.

Strengthening Transparency and Accountability

An institutional framework for curbing corruption, especially in a resource-constrained country is a product that starts with robust strategies for strengthening transparency and accountability that are constantlymonitored and evaluatedfortheir effectiveness. The robust framework of public disclosure and transparency, independent audits, and protection for whistleblowers. The Government has to do more in terms of creating an enabling whistle-blowing environment since the country does not have a policy and legal framework on this. Such a framework will allow corruption witnesses confidence to testify against corrupt persons.

In the design, responsible authorities ought to embrace stakeholder (government, healthcare private and public agencies, and the local community) views and map out the existing institutional configuration that should have a buy-in (collaboration), in the planning and execution of the anti-corruption strategies particularly in the design of best practices for promoting transparency and accountability. Further, the development of transparency and accountability measures within state-owned enterprises should, as much as possible, tap from best practices in corporate governance from other countries. Finally, building transparency and accountability should be pivotal to current and future efforts at curbing corruption. This is achieved through the capacity building of state-owned enterprisesby adopting good practices of corporate governance.

Oversight mechanisms and institutions should be effective in the application and enforcement of requisite statutory accountability measures with a view to apprehending and punishing unethical behaviors (Fagbadebo, 2020). This will serve as a deterrent against the rampant impunity in the abuse of power. This requires the reinforcement of checks and balances, with a truly independent judiciary capable of restoring sanity in the exercise of state power

In a nutshell, the framework derives anchorage from a constellation of theoretical perspectives, rich in insights on designing and executing measures to respond to growing problems of corruption in government-

owned enterprises. The framework also takes into consideration of resource constraints, the cultural context, and stakeholder views and fosters collaboration, trust, and community engagement. By considering strengthening transparency and accountability, institutional reforms and strengthening the governance framework, reforming the legal and regulatory environment, public sector and administrative reforms, political will, and leadership commitment, improving public sector financial management and procurement systems, civil society engagement, and public participation, enhancing the role of the media, economic and structural reforms to limit rent-seeking, and building international partnerships, the framework aims to promote effective means of curbing corruption in state-owned entities in Zimbabwe.

Research and Development

Findings from the study underscore the importance of research and development in advancing mechanisms for curbing corruption in state-owned enterprises. In this study, research entails a systematic scientific inquiry to establish new facts or validate those that already exist. Research plays a crucial role in development. Such sentiments concur with Kariuki and Misaro, (2013) who posit that research should lead to the generation of new knowledge. Therefore, research and development are not treated separately in this study since they affect each other.The study revealed a significant gap in research related to optimizing mechanisms for curbing corruption in state-owned enterprises within the Zimbabwean context. Evidence from the synthesis of literature demonstrates that there is a dearth of research output on best practices for fighting corruption which has hindered efforts to effectively deal with the growing challenge of corruption in public entities.

Anti-corruption is one field that should be thoroughly researched as it is an emerging subject and has suddenly but reasonably become an important measure of good governance in the public sector. The government needs a reasonable budget to fund scientific research into corruption. The World Bank (2022) further argues that in dealing with corruption, one of the most serious challenges faced is the lack of reliable information in the form of consolidated statistics on its location, extent, and type. The research will be very instrumental in informing the government which areas are more problematic and possibly what should be done to prevent corruption. The public sector will be at a better position to develop anti-corruption programmes which address problematic areas and afford a better opportunity to tackle the challenges of corruption more effectively and efficiently as desired for improvement in service delivery from a scientifically informed perspective.

Without truly comprehensive scientific research, the public sector will continue working in the dark or under general assumptions which will not produce the desired results and will also results in further loss of taxpayers' money committed to wrongly targeted programs. A corruption information management system needs to be established so that all the cases of corruption could be registered into a central system. This will enable the public service to monitor trends in corruption, vulnerable departments and areas so that a shaper response plan could be developed to tackle corruption.

Research should drive the establishment of effective mechanisms for optimizing efforts to curb corruption, leading to new knowledge, systems, and processes that can transform practices and effectively deal with corruption in state enterprises. Thus, it can be said that future pathways in dealing with the growing challenge of corruption should be informed by research.

Robust and precise regulatory and policy frameworks

The resentment against corruption and the determination for good governance requires effective anti-corruption policies and concerted efforts to explore the possibilities offered by information technologies (The World Bank, 2018). Precise regulatory and policy framework reforms are critical in the fight against corruption especially in state-owned enterprises in Zimbabwe. These frameworks provide essential guidance for operations and protect the interests of all stakeholders. A synthesis of extant literature emphasizes that effective policies, codes of practice, and regulations are crucial for developing best practices in effectively dealing with the growing challenge of corruption. The study highlights that many challenges faced by the anti-corruption unity—such as limited/inadequate resources, poor human resources, inadequate stakeholder support, interference, among a host of others—should be addressed through robust policies.

Effective policy frameworks are public documents that outline institutional goals and operational guidance. However, evidence from the literature pointed out that there is a lack of an effective policy framework which has impeded anti-corruption efforts.Although there is evidence of a robust legislative framework to fight the vice, there is no corresponding effort to deal with high-profile cases - 'small fish' being brought to book but the 'big fish' escaping the jaws of justice. Thus, despite having a relatively sound legal framework to deal with corruption, Zimbabwe's existing policies suffer from a lack of harmonization and enforcement. Conflicts between laws, also provide gaps in legislation which corrupt individuals wiled to their advantage and wiggle free from prosecution. Further, the Government has to do more in terms of creating an

enabling whistle-blowing environment since the country does not have a policy and legal framework on this. Such a framework will allow corruption witnesses confidence to testify against corrupt persons.

Education and Training
Education and training are critical strategies for developing best practices in the fight against corruption. They are seen as a means to impart knowledge and skills related to curbing corruption, especially in state-owned entities. Government officials need to be "educated about corruption and its consequences" (Van der Merwe, 2006:42) Training public sector employees on the whole concept of corruption and ethics will contribute to building a strong and informed constituency against corruption. Such a program has been effectively deployed in South Africa. The DPSA has developed a training program targeting three categories of employees in the public service namely; training for general employees, training for anti-corruption practitioners and training for investigators (DPSA, 2010). This is a positive step in the right direction towards promoting and encouraging ethical behaviour in the public sector. Programs designed to fight corruption should adopt a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating the latest research and practices, and be subject to evaluation by experts. Educational materials should be available in relevant national languages and include electronic resources for distance learning.

Active community push for transparency and accountability
It is also the role of the community to put the government, especially state-owned entities to task in terms of transparency and accountability. According to Kirby (2019), it is pertinent that members of the public should be vigilant and demand accountability in government. The public sector should consider a mass public anti-corruption campaign to empower the general public on how to identify and report corruption because public servants alone cannot win the war against corruption. After all, it is the ordinary citizens who bear the brunt of corruption. The members of the public should be educated on the concept of corruption and its consequences as well as how to report it. They should also be made aware of the relevant legislation that could help them in the fight against corruption. If the members of the public are empowered, it will make it difficult for corruption to thrive in the Zimbabwean public sector.
In the face of a docile civil society, spontaneous public protests to challenge the abuse of power should constitute a new oversight mechanism to ensure the promotion of good governance. In recent times, spontaneous public protests against failed accountability in Sudan and police brutality in Nigeria showed that when the formal institutions of government fail in their oversight responsibility, coordinated and sustained public protest could force the government to do the needful (Kirby, 2019; Gladstone & Specia, 2020). While the Sudanese public protest led to the fall of its brutal leader, Al Bashir, sustained public protest in Nigeria forcing the government to disband the cruel police unit known for its use of brutal force against innocent citizens (Aina, 2020). With African leaders' penchant for abuse of power, sustained public protest has remained a new mechanism to enforce accountability. Thus, it can be construed from the above that, a docile society is a fertile ground for rampant corruption. There is a need for society, to take an active role in ensuring that institutions set up to deliver service adhere to best practices of corporate governance.

Court International Collaboration
There is a need for international assistance to effectively win the war against corruption. The international community can play a significant role in fostering the required credibility as well as providing the necessary resources and expertise required to bolster and energize the fight against corruption. Further, some corrupt activities transition country boundaries requiring international cooperation. To date, the new government has been working single-handedly, with little or no assistance from the international community. This is the case even though international organizations, such as the UN and the EU, as well as individual governments, have been working with civil society to root out corruption. Although the government of Zimbabwe has not collaborated with the international community, it has received funding for anti-corruption initiatives. For instance, the SECCs were established with funding from the EU and the International Commission of Jurists. The international community can assist in ensuring that the Zimbabwean anti-corruption mechanisms are in compliance with international law and practice. They can assist also with technical know-how and training of anti-corruption personnel. More importantly, the international community can assist the reformed institutions with funding to insulate them from government interference and ensure their independence.

Renewed political will
Zinyama (2018) argues that there is a need to regenerate the political will to fight corruption which has become endemic in Zimbabwe's state-owned entities. Political will to combat corruption is a necessary prerequisite for successful anti-corruption work. Leadership commitment in the public sector is a pre-requisite

for a successful programme or intervention in the fight against corruption. Any attempt to attain leadership commitment will equally require a strong political will to campaign for zero tolerance on corruption and hold public sector leaders and officials accountable on the fight against corruption.

Efforts to combat corruption are most effective when there is a strong message and action of zero tolerance for corruption at the political level. In Zimbabwe's public sector, political office-bearers in all spheres of government need to speak and act harshly against corruption. This should be adopted as a sustainable political action until such time that it is firmly implanted in the conscience of the public service and translate into a notable reduction or total eradication of corruption. The efforts should focus more on prevention and detection as deterrence for corrupt behavior. For this reason, there is a need to strengthen accountability tools and processes. This is especially because inadequate accountability measures are among the reasons cited for the persistent and constant unethical behavior that continues to overwhelm public sector institutions.
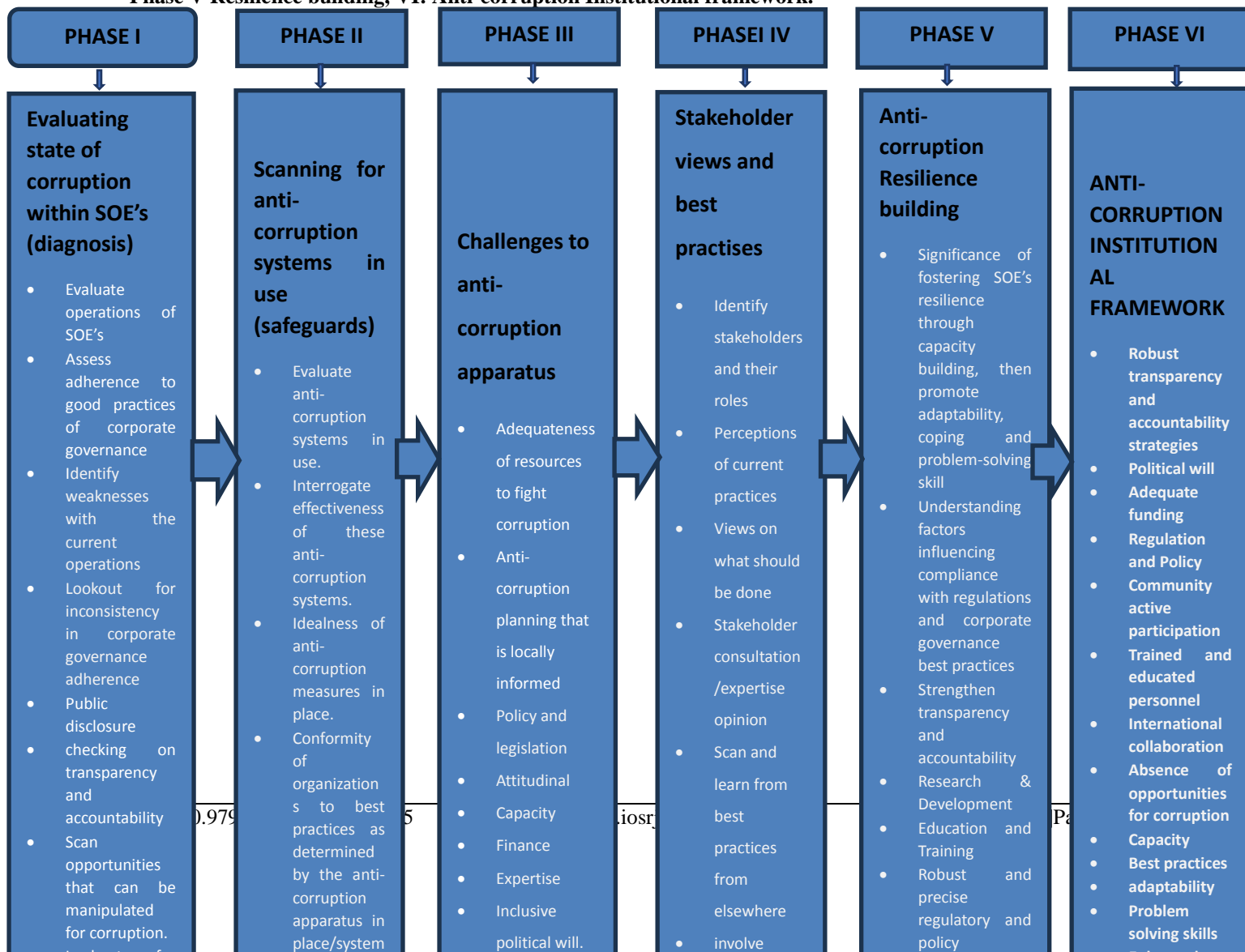
Reducing opportunities for corruption

Prevention and detection efforts should be increased and strengthened to be deterrent enough without losing focus on ensuring speedy investigative and resolution capacity for both reported and detected cases. People tend to engage in corruption because they know they can beat the system. However, if the system is strong people are less likely to engage in corruption because chances of being caught and punished are more likely.

Improved capacitation of anti-corruption frameworks (improved funding)

Funding is a key institutional element for capacitating any anti-corruption framework or mechanisms. The study reveals that financial constraints prevent anti-corruption efforts from being effective. Inadequate funds hinder the ability to hire or train experts and provide necessary support.

Institutional framework for effectively curbing corruption in state-owned entities in Zimbabwe
Phase I: Evaluating state of corruption in SOEs, Phase II: Scanning for anti-corruption system in use, Phase III: Challenges to anti-corruption apparatus, Phase IV: Stakeholder views and best practises, Phase V Resilience building, VI: Anti-corruption Institutional framework.

PHASE I	PHASE II	PHASE III	PHASE IV	PHASE V	PHASE VI
Evaluating state of corruption within SOE's (diagnosis)	**Scanning for anti-corruption systems in use (safeguards)**	**Challenges to anti-corruption apparatus**	**Stakeholder views and best practises**	**Anti-corruption Resilience building**	**ANTI-CORRUPTION INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK**
• Evaluate operations of SOE's • Assess adherence to good practices of corporate governance • Identify weaknesses with the current operations • Lookout for inconsistency in corporate governance adherence • Public disclosure checking on transparency and accountability • Scan opportunities that can be manipulated for corruption.	• Evaluate anti-corruption systems in use. • Interrogate effectiveness of these anti-corruption systems. • Idealness of anti-corruption measures in place. • Conformity of organizations to best practices as determined by the anti-corruption apparatus in place/system	• Adequateness of resources to fight corruption • Anti-corruption planning that is locally informed • Policy and legislation • Attitudinal • Capacity • Finance • Expertise • Inclusive political will.	• Identify stakeholders and their roles • Perceptions of current practices • Views on what should be done • Stakeholder consultation /expertise opinion • Scan and learn from best practices from elsewhere • involve	• Significance of fostering SOE's resilience through capacity building, then promote adaptability, coping and problem-solving skill • Understanding factors influencing compliance with regulations and corporate governance best practices • Strengthen transparency and accountability • Research & Development • Education and Training • Robust and precise regulatory and policy	• **Robust transparency and accountability strategies** • **Political will** • **Adequate funding** • **Regulation and Policy** • **Community active participation** • **Trained and educated personnel** • **International collaboration** • **Absence of opportunities for corruption** • **Capacity** • **Best practices adaptability** • **Problem solving skills**

9.7 BRIEF REFLECTION ON RESEARCH FINDINGS AND HOW THEY SPEAK TO SOME OF THE THEORIES RELEVANT TO THIS STUDY

Brief Reflection On Research Findings And How They Speak To Some Of The Theories Relevant To This Study
Framework for curbing corruption in SOEs
 The framework addresses the question: What measures should be implemented to curb corruption in SOE? The first stage involves a critical examination of the current state of corruption in SOEs. This phase aims to:
1. Establish knowledge of various forms of corruption, the opportunities for corruption and its impacts in SOEs.
2. Explore causes for corruption.
 These critical elements are informed by a set of guiding theories, which form the outer layer of our model. The core elements, represented in the center of the circle, are influenced by these theories.

Guiding Theories
1. *X-inefficiency theory*: This theory suggests that government officials involved in policy-making and policy-execution create in a socio-economic system in order for the officials to benefit personally from their positions.
2. Institutional Theory: This theory examines how rules and their enforcers can either promote or hinder corruption.
3. *Stakeholder Theory*: This theory is used to understand stakeholder interests and design strategies to promote sustainable afforestation as an on-farm economic activity.
4. *Expectancy Theory*: This theory provides insights into the motivations of individuals to involve themselves in corrupt activities in SOEs.

These theories guide the development of an institutional framework for curbing corruption in state owned entities.
Evaluation of Potential Barriers
The second phase involves evaluating potential barriers to effective curbing of corruption:
1. Policy
2. Legislation
3. Attitudinal factors
4. Capacity building
5. Passive communities
6. Finance
7. Perceptions
 Effective management of these barriers is crucial for promoting effective means of curbing corruption in the public sector. This phase also involves synthesizing the critical elements to influence the nature of anti-corruption systems. The goal is to align these elements, considering enablers such as funding, legislation policies, and best practices and corporate governance, to develop an institutional framework for curbing corruption. This phase addresses the research question: What institutional frameworks can be adopted to curb corruption in state owned entities?

After Development of the institutional framework
 Identifying and analyzing the critical elements, the next phase is to develop framework for curbing corruption by integrating theoretical perspectives into practical implementation strategies. This phase includes:
1. Setting objectives and addressing relevant considerations.
2. Fostering collaboration and trust among stakeholders.
3. Implementing and evaluating the framework, including continuous data collection, analysis, and monitoring.
 Ongoing evaluation and adaptation are essential for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of the measures adopted.

Key Stakeholders in the anti-corruption framework
 Effective anti-corruption requires the involvement of several key stakeholders, each with specific interests and contributions:
1. Government
(a) Interest: Protecting and enhancing service delivery.
(b) Role: Developing a national anti-corruption strategy, involving relevant ministries,.

(c) Support: Providing adequate funding, implementing supportive legislation, and facilitating community participation.

2. Community

(a) Interest: service deliver.

(b) Role: active role in whistle blowing.

(c) Support: Programs to empower and involve communities,

3. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

(a) Interest: Funding and ensuring service delivery, protecting human rights and preventing human rights abuses perpertuated by corruption.

(b) Role: Raising awareness, strengthening legal frameworks, conducting research, and facilitating best practices.

(c) Support: Funding, infrastructure development.

4. Private Sector

(a) Interest: Financial investment.

(b) Role: Providing funding, supporting research, and ensuring quality control.

(c) Support: Encouraging investment, securing favorable policies.

IV.   Conclusion

The main research question of the study was: What framework would be suitable for curbing corruption in state owned entities? Based on this objective, the above model was developed. This research will contribute to the field of public administration, institutional theory, and anti-corruption studies by providing a comprehensive, context-specific model for curbing corruption in SOEs. It will challenge the conventional, one-size-fits-all approaches to anti-corruption reforms and offer a nuanced framework that considers the specific institutional and political challenges in Zimbabwe. The findings will also have broader implications for other developing economies with similar governance challenges, offering insights into how institutional design can mitigate corruption in state-owned entities. The practical contributions of this research will be of value to policymakers in Zimbabwe, offering actionable recommendations for SOE reform, improving governance structures, and strengthening anti-corruption initiatives. Moreover, it will inform international development organizations and scholars interested in governance reform in post-colonial states and transitional economies.

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