



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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To: The News Editor

STATEMENT ON THE AUDITOR-GENERAL'S PERFORMANCE/VALUE FOR MONEY AUDIT (VFM) REPORT ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SEWERAGE SYSTEMS BY URBAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES UNDER THE MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, PUBLIC WORKS AND NATIONAL HOUSING.

The Value for Money (VFM) Audit Report on the Management of Sewerage Systems by Urban Local Authorities under the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing is out.

The purpose of a performance audit report is to evaluate the 3Es which are the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of government programmes and activities. The report assesses the management of the sewer reticulation systems in the country as well as proffer recommendations for improvement where necessary.

A sample of six (6) out of thirty two (32) Urban Local Authorities were selected for the audit covering the period from January 2013 to June 2017. These are Bulawayo, Harare, Masvingo and Mutare City Councils as well as Chitungwiza and Marondera Municipalities.

Urban Local Authorities are mandated to manage sewage and sewerage systems under the Urban Council's Act (Chapter 29:15. This involves the collection, conveyance, treatment, and disposal of sewage or storm water. Urban Local Authorities are under the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing and are responsible for the overall planning, designing, construction, sustainable operation, maintenance and management of sewer systems.

The management of sewer systems directly impacts on hygiene and sanitation and directly feeds into local authorities' ability to provide potable water to residents. Failure to manage sewer systems has deadly consequences as evidenced by the death of 560 people and infection of 590 753 from water borne diseases in 2013. Poor sanitation also impacts negatively on the country's economy costing US\$194 million annually which is equivalent to 1.3% of our annual Gross Domestic Product. This translates to an average of US\$16.4 per capita annually.

Most Urban Local Authorities recharge their surface water sources with treated sewage effluent, thus waste water is a critical component of the water supply system. The Environmental Management Agency revealed that the best classification that sewage effluent can get is the yellow class under its effluent pollution classification system. The classification ranges from blue which represents clean effluent, green is fairly polluted effluent, yellow is toxic effluent and red is extremely toxic effluent. Sadly, most of the local authorities fall in the red class which poses a threat not only to the environment but to human health as well.

The following criteria was used to select these city councils and municipalities for the audit:

- High cases of sewer blockages and outbreak of water borne diseases in Harare, Chitungwiza and Marondera.
- The existence of comparatively better sewer systems in Bulawayo, Masvingo and Mutare.
- High population sizes in all six local authorities.

Audit Findings

- All six Urban Local Authorities had sewer systems in place for the management of sewer. However, these were not being maintained on a regular basis to ensure that they were properly functioning. There was evident lack of proper planning, scoping, inspection, maintenance and evaluation of sewer projects leading to increased rates of sewer blockages.
- In a number of cases there was a correlation between population size and the frequency of sewer blockages. The bigger the population size, the higher the number of sewer blockages. Resultantly, Harare experienced more blockages, followed by Bulawayo, Chitungwiza, Mutare, Masvingo and Marondera as shown in the table below.

Schedule of Sewer Blockages Reported

Year	Name of Council					
	Harare	Bulawayo	Chitungwiza	Mutare	Masvingo	Marondera
Yearly Average	26 709	21 700	7 256	3 740	2 812	1 452
Population	1 542 813	699 385	340 360	184 205	76 290	57 802
Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	6

- Urban Local Authorities were taking a long time to attend to sewer blockages contrary to the Urban Local Authorities' Service Level Benchmarking Standards which stipulate that they must take between 8 to 24 hours to attend to sewer blockages. In most cases local authorities took 2-3 days to attend to these due to non-availability of vehicles and delays in the procurement of materials. Bulawayo and Mutare City Councils and Chitungwiza Municipality were taking time to procure materials. The delays ranged from 2 to 347 days. In the case of Bulawayo the rate of repair within 24 hours was 94.1% in 2013 but had drastically dropped to 30.9% by 2017. What exacerbated this situation in some instances was the lack of manpower to do the work. For example, Bulawayo has not increased the number of plumbers since 2013 and the whole of Masvingo was being manned by one Sewer Rodding Team.
- Local Authorities failed to complete sewer infrastructure rehabilitation projects on time, in some cases they commissioned incomplete projects and implemented some without proper scoping leading to delays in the completion of projects by an average of two years negatively affecting local authorities' ability to fulfill their mandates. Lack of supervision and enforcement of contractual agreements such as duration of work and termination of contracts in cases of nonperformance by contractors was evident. Similarly, lack of due diligence by engineers resulted in variations and disagreements in the costing of projects which also impacted negatively on the time taken to complete projects. This increased pressure on temporary connections resulting in more blockages thus exposing residents to water borne diseases.
- Asbestos cement pipes in most Urban Local Authorities had outlived their 40 year lifespan leading to numerous sewer blockages and spillages into the environment. At the time of audit the pipes were overdue for replacement by between thirty seven (37) to eighty (80) years resulting in frequent blockages. Local Authorities did not have the capacity to rehabilitate their systems. The few that were rehabilitating were doing so under funding by the African Development Bank a development that can be detrimental to public health if the donor decided to pull out of the project. The percentage of the sewer reticulation network rehabilitated was below 50% when the Urban Local Authorities were visited and only 3 080 km which translated to 0.93% of the sewer reticulation network had been rehabilitated.
- There was no evidence of regular inspection and maintenance of sewer reticulation systems by Urban Local Authorities. Engineers admitted to reactive rather than regular scheduled maintenance. This resulted in local authorities' inability to identify weaker parts of sewer reticulation systems. Local authorities still rely on physical inspections rather than online surveillance which ensure increased coverage and efficiency. Moreover, local authorities lacked the critical skilled labour for this function. Except for Marondera, the rest of the audited local authorities lacked critical staff especially engineers.
- Five (5) Local Authorities were cash strapped collecting only 46.4% of the anticipated revenue due to resident's failure to pay rates. This led to poor service delivery thus adversely affecting the management and maintenance of sewer systems.

Audit Recommendations

The Auditor-General recommends that local authorities implement the following to ensure improved service delivery and the protection of public health:

- Provide vehicles and shorten procurement processes of materials so as to ensure that repairs are done within 24 hours from the time of reporting.
- Uphold contractual agreements with contractors such as duration of the contract and payment of stage certificates. Similarly, penalties and charging interest on contractors who fail to complete work on time should be considered. Where applicable legal action should be taken on contractors who fail to complete work on time.
- Ensure timely rehabilitation of sewer systems and adhere to routine inspections and maintenance schedules so as to preserve the life span and reduce health hazards to the public. This may reduce the number of sewer blockages and ensure the treatment of sewage waste before it is pumped into water bodies where potable water is drawn.
- Procure equipment such as line cameras, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) gadgets and optic laser leak detectors to facilitate online monitoring of sewer reticulation systems.
- Conduct awareness campaigns and promotions that encourage consumers to pay their bills to enable local authorities to improve service delivery. This may also motivate consumers to pay bills as some indicated that they were not paying in protest of poor service delivery. The involvement of Central Government in the financing and rehabilitation of sewer systems will improve sewerage management.

The Report was tabled in Parliament on the 7th of October, 2020 and is now a public document which can be accessed from the Office's website www.auditgen.gov.zw.

Attached to this press release is the Report on the Management of Sewerage Systems by Urban Local Authorities under the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing for further information.

For more information or clarification contact the undersigned.

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